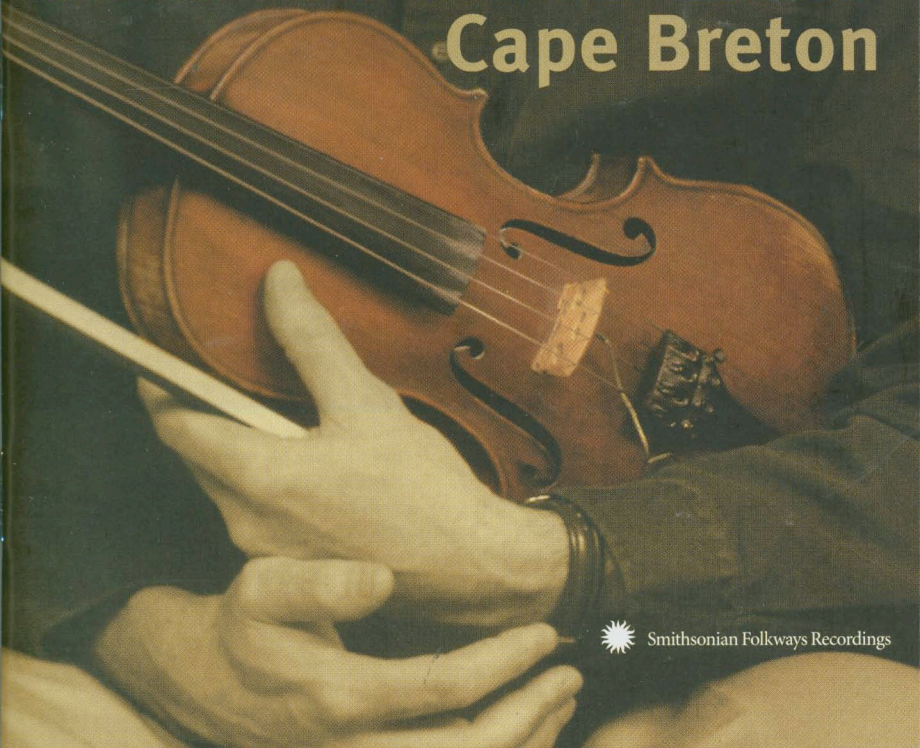


The Heart of

FIDDLE MUSIC RECORDED LIVE ALONG THE CEILIDH TRAIL

Cape Breton



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings



WITH A CULTURE DEEPLY INFLUENCED BY 19TH-CENTURY SCOTTISH IMMIGRATION, CAPE BRETON, NOVA SCOTIA, IS WIDELY CELEBRATED FOR ITS FIDDLE MUSIC. PROFOUNDLY ROOTED IN OLD SCOTTISH TRADITION, THE MUSIC IS INCREASINGLY MOVING TO CENTER STAGE IN THE CONTEMPORARY CELTIC REVIVAL, AS SEEN IN THE POPULARITY OF CAPE BRETON FIDDLERS NATALIE MACMASTER AND ASHLEY MACISAAC. THIS CD FEATURES SOME OF THE BEST KNOWN AND MOST ADMIRED CAPE BRETON FIDDLERS, WITH PIANO AND GUITAR ACCOMPANIMENT IN THE ISLAND'S CELEBRATED STYLE. THE SOUND OF THE ISLAND IS ALIVE IN THESE EXCITING PERFORMANCES, RECORDED LIVE AT DANCES AND CONCERTS IN CAPE BRETON DURING THE SUMMER OF 2000. THIS IS THE REAL THING—MASTER FIDDLERS PLAYING IN THE HEART OF THE TRADITION, ALONG THE CEILIDH TRAIL. EXTENSIVE NOTES, PHOTOS, 72 MINUTES.

Photo by Burt Feintuch

1. Brenda Stubbart, fiddle; Brian Doyle, guitar; Richard Wood, piano. Ceilidh Trail School concert: reels. 3:37
2. Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, fiddle; Wendy MacIsaac, piano. Port Hood Arena dance: strathspeys and reels. 2:44
3. Kinnon Beaton, fiddle; Betty Beaton, piano; Owen D. Gillis, prompting. Mabou Hall dance: reels. 5:33
4. Jerry Holland, fiddle; Allan Dewar, piano. Broad Cove Scottish Concert: lament, strathspeys, and reels. 7:10
5. Buddy MacMaster, fiddle; Joey Beaton, piano. Glencoe Mills dance: jigs. 5:15
6. Wendy MacIsaac, fiddle; Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, piano. Port Hood Arena dance: march, strathspeys, and reels. 6:26
7. Kinnon and Betty Beaton. Mabou Hall dance: jigs. 7:09
8. Buddy MacMaster and Joey Beaton. Mabou ceilidh: strathspeys and reels 9:43
9. Kinnon and Betty Beaton. Brook Village dance: strathspey and reels 2:35
10. Wendy MacIsaac and Jackie Dunn MacIsaac. Port Hood Arena dance: jigs 5:14
11. Kinnon and Betty Beaton. Brook Village dance: reels 8:59
12. Brenda Stubbart, Brian Doyle, and Richard Wood. Ceilidh Trail School concert: strathspeys and reels 6:05

PRODUCED AND ANNOTATED BY BURT FEINTUCH



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage 1 750 9th St., NW, Suite 4300 | Washington, DC 20560-0953
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My Great Friend John Morris Rankin/ The Flax in Bloom/A Northside Reel 3:37

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3. Kinnon Beaton, fiddle; Betty Beaton, piano; Owen D. Gillis, prompting. **Mabou Hall dance.**
New Haven Reel/Mrs. Norman MacKeigan's Reel/ Glenquey Reel/The High Drive Reel/ The Snappy Reel/Miss Jane McInnes-Dandaleith 5:33

4. Jerry Holland, fiddle; Allan Dewar, piano. **Broad Cove Scottish Concert.**
In Memory of Herbie MacLeod/Christy Campbell/ Anthony Murray's/Bridge of Bamore/Arrochar Bridge 7:10

5. Buddy MacMaster, fiddle; Joey Beaton, piano. **Glencoe Mills dance.**
The Way to Judique/Compliments to the Boys of the Lough/The Canadian Club Jig/The Hills of Glenorchy/Walking the Floor 5:15

6. Wendy MacIsaac, fiddle; Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, piano. **Port Hood Arena dance.**
Pipe Major George Ross's Welcome to the Black Watch March/Duke of Athole Strathspey/Tibby Fowler of the Glen/ Traditional Strathspey/Creignish Hills/ Sandy Cameron/The Straw Man 6:26

7. Kinnon Beaton, fiddle; Betty Beaton, piano. **Mabou Hall dance.**
Kitty of Oulart/Traditional/Inverness Jig/ Memories of Mac/Little House Round the Corner/ Money in Both Pockets/The Jumpy Jig 7:09

8. Buddy MacMaster, fiddle; Joey Beaton, piano. **Mabou Hall ceilidh.**
The Rosebud of Allenvale/Tom Dey/Miss Dale/ Maggie Cameron/The Devil in the Kitchen/ Margaree/St. Kilda Wedding/Elizabeth's Big Coat/Bridge of Bamore 9:43

9. Kinnon Beaton, fiddle; Betty Beaton, piano. **Brook Village Hall dance.**
Thomas MacDonnell's Strathspey/ Traditional/Mrs. Norman MacKeigan's Reel/New Haven Reel 2:35

10. Wendy MacIsaac, fiddle; Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, piano. **Port Hood Arena dance.**
The Short Grass Jig/The Braes of Elchies Jig/ Traditional Jig/Gallagher's Jig/The Pibroch of O'Donal Dubh 5:14

11. Kinnon Beaton, piano; Betty Beaton, piano. **Brook Village Hall dance.**
Michael Rankin's Reel/Pretty Marion/Wesley Gillis Reel/The Marquis of Tullybardine/The Black Cock's Will/Colonel Thornton/Over the Isles to America/Johnny Muise's Reel/Tom Rae/Brenda Stubbart's Reel/The Weasel 8:59

12. Brenda Stubbart, fiddle; Richard Wood, piano; Brian Doyle, guitar. **Ceilidh Trail School concert.**
Traditional Strathspey/The Devil in the Kitchen/ Calum Crubach/Donnacha's Favourite/ The Mortgage Burn/Morgan MacQuarrie/ The Grey Bob 6:05



Travel along Route 19 in the short season
that is summer on Cape Breton Island,
and fiddle music seems to be everywhere.

Route 19 is, thanks to tourism and highway officials, the "Ceilidh Trail." It runs through Inverness County, on the western side of the island. "Ceilidh" is a Gaelic word, originally signifying a neighborly gathering. These days a *ceilidh* is likely to be a musical event. Along the Ceilidh Trail, you can't help but notice the extraordinary presence of old music. You hear Cape Breton Scottish violin music, as people sometimes call it, at dances in local halls. A sign at the new community center in Judique welcomes you to "The Home of Celtic Music" and invites you to visit the new Celtic Music Interpretive Center. Gift shops, hardware stores, groceries, and other shops sell tapes and CDs, nearly all self-pro-

duced, of local musicians. Go into the bank in Inverness (population 1,400), one of the two largest towns in the county, and you might hear fiddle music in the background instead of Muzak. Pick up the weekly paper, the Inverness *Oran* (the Gaelic name of which translates as "song of Inverness"), and in the summer there's more coverage of local music than sports. Nearly every summer weekend offers a local music festival. The sign welcoming you to Inverness features a fiddle, as does the sign welcoming you to Mabou, twenty minutes south. The local appetite for the fiddle seems insatiable. A few years ago, I went to an evening event where about a hundred people had bought tickets to hear an ethnomusicologist interview two local fiddlers. That's when I knew I'd found paradise.

Of course, it's not paradise, but it's an exceptionally musical place, a place where people value their music, find it useful, and benefit from it. In July 2000, Smithsonian Folkways sound supervisor Pete Reiniger and I spent eight days with a van full of recording equipment, documenting Cape Breton fiddle music. The idea was to record the music in the heart of the robust Cape Breton tradition, at

dances, local concerts, and other music events in Inverness County, along the Ceilidh Trail. This is not the pristine sound of studio recordings. It's the sound of real people playing music hard, of people moving their bodies to the music's pulse in halls and on stages in small communities. There's a drive and an energy in these recordings that comes from playing for people, not for microphones. It's the sound of the music when it's at home. At a time when Cape Breton fiddle music's increasing popularity leads some to worry that it's losing its traditional sound, we wanted to document the music in local settings. We were lucky—we recorded extraordinary musicians playing from the heart, playing in the hotbed of the music. This is the real thing.

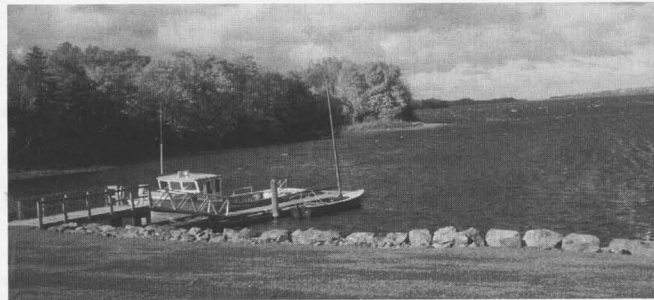
Cape Breton is an island, part of Nova Scotia, one of Canada's Maritime Provinces. A causeway connected the island to the Nova Scotia mainland in 1955, but even with the ease of access that provides, Cape Breton has maintained a very strong sense of its cultural distinctiveness. About 50,000 Scots from the Highlands and islands settled in Cape Breton in the first half of the 19th century,

displaced by the decline of the kelp industry and the Clearances. These were poor, Gaelic-speaking, Catholic Scots who crossed the Atlantic to Cape Breton, where they joined Native people and descendants of earlier French fishermen. Industrial development abetted cultural diversity in Cape Breton, but the island, especially Inverness County on the western side, is very strongly inflected by that Scottish emigration. Many people would agree that Inverness County is both the center of the Scottish culture and the heart of the music. At the same time, Inverness County has strong Acadian (French-speaking, that is) and First Nation communities. The music we documented is now played by people of various backgrounds across much of the island.

This is a beautiful place. In Inverness County, settlements dot a landscape defined by the sea, hills, forests, fields, and meadows. It is a place of small but strong communities, where the parish matters, and nearly everyone seems to know nearly everyone else. But life isn't necessarily easy here. The county's population of about 21,000 is declining. The old industries no longer thrive, and not

much has replaced them. The Inverness coal mines are gone, and the fishery, like most fisheries in North America, is facing many sorts of challenges. In fact, Cape Breton's economy has never been able to support its population. On the edge of North America, isolated by distance from markets, Cape Breton is geographically and economically on the margins. And, as a number of people have pointed out to me, you can't eat scenery.

The descendants of Scottish settlers form the majority culture along the Ceilidh Trail. There are so many MacDonalds, MacMasters, Beatons, MacDonnells, and so forth in Inverness County that people often have elaborate nicknames to distinguish them from others whose names are virtually identical. Until this generation, Gaelic was the primary language in parts of Inverness County. The story that Cape Bretoners tell about their music begins with Scottish emigrants carrying it to the new world, where, thanks to geographic isolation, it changed less than it did in Scotland. As a result, Cape Bretoners talk about their music representing a purer and older Scottish style and repertoire than the



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music played these days in Scotland. It's a compliment to say that a musician has a lot of Gaelic in his or her style. The music is a primary emblem of identity here, the closest thing to Gaelic now that the language itself is debilitated.

This is an unusually creative place. Not long ago, Alistair MacLeod, a fiction writer who grew up on the island and spends his summers there, won the International Dublin Literary Prize, the world's richest award for fiction. Potters, poets, and painters abound, and although fiddle music is the best known music from Cape Breton, there are any number of other thriving music scenes across the

island. Some people say that it takes creativity to live on the island, that many people have had to master more than one set of skills, more than one occupation, so as to make a life. When you talk about Cape Breton creativity, though, the subject must turn to the fiddle.

At a time when the transnational Celtic revival is tending to blur regional styles, Cape Breton music has held on to its distinctiveness. Rooted in emigration and incubated by relative isolation, the music is strongly tempered by its roots in Scots Gaelic culture. At the same time, it's a music that has been able to change. I don't know how to measure change in this case,

but to me it's evident that this music has remained vital thanks in large measure to the way the musicians, always tempered by their communities, have been able to embrace creativity while not losing the music's traditional essence.

That essence is not one thing. It includes a distinctive repertoire of musical forms—strathspeys, reels, jigs, airs, marches, hornpipes, clogs, and other genres. The repertoire includes tunes with a notion of tonality distinctive in fiddle traditions—modal and gapped scales, many of which derive from

old Scottish fiddle and pipe tunes, music that nearly slipped beyond the margins in Scotland (see Dunlay and Greenberg for the best discussion of this). Typically, musicians play tunes in groups, staying on the same tonal center (they'll say it's "on A" or "on D," for instance). Twice through the tune, then on to the next is the norm. The music's core values include a premium on a musician's ability to "drive 'er," to play hard-driving dance music with remarkable focus, energy, and—although I'm repeating myself here, there's no other word for it—drive.

The bow pushes the music, with the fiddler rarely taking more than one note per stroke. The down-bow, stronger than the up-bow, emphasizes the strong beats. In the bowing and the fingering, there is a lot of what some fiddlers call "dirt." It's not a pure, sweet sound that people like so much as it's a complex sound, with drones, bow cuts (sometimes called "triplets" or "trebles" in other traditions), many sorts of trills, rasps, and other techniques, carefully practiced and developed, that add dimension and texture to the music. Most Cape Breton fiddlers cradle their instrument across the palm of the left hand, bending the hand back, the antithesis of contemporary classical technique. In that position, they use their little fingers to double or ornament notes, in many cases avoiding open strings whenever possible. Although some musicians say that this grip makes it difficult to play out of the first position, I believe that this makes much of the style possible.

The feet are part of the music, too. No one plays without beating the floor in time with the tune. You hit every beat in strathspeys. For reels, you hit on one and three, and so forth through the genres. One of the reasons fiddlers today tend to prefer

electronic transducers to amplify their fiddles, one musician told me, is that microphones pick up too much of the foot sound.

And the piano accompaniment is an essential part of the sound. Listen to the piano. The left hand is the rhythmic foundation, playing bass notes and runs. The right hand adds chords, in many inversions, often syncopated. Some accompanists play the melody, or fragments of the melody, with their right hand. A couple of generations ago, the piano style was more rudimentary, more in the oom-pah school. But a number of innovators inspired today's deeper, more complex, more syncopated style with its walking bass runs, sweeping glissandos, an uncanny ability to complement the fiddler's melody. One young piano player told me that, by virtue of having played with many fiddlers representing at least a couple of generations, he thinks he's heard all the tunes. I doubt anyone has heard all the tunes, but I understand his point—you need an expansive understanding of the repertoire to be able to tailor your accompaniment to individual tunes. The piano accompanists represent—



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ed on this recording—Betty Beaton, Joey Beaton, Allan Dewar, Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, Wendy MacIsaac, and Richard Wood—exemplify the range of individual voices in piano styles, but they all share this: each time they play, the result is a dazzling stream of creativity, marrying their complex personal style to the melody. These days, nearly all the pianists prefer electric keyboards, which, to my ears, further adds to the distinctiveness of the sound—the keyboard has both a crispness and a characteristic not-quite-a-piano quality. Add the keyboard and the fiddle transducers, and the sound is strong and assertive.

Now put the music in context. Understand first that a sense of place is very strong in Cape Breton in general and in Inverness County in particular. Music is intimately connected to locale here. For many, it embodies Scottish ancestry, a history of making a life in a challenging place. To that historical sense of identity, though, factor in a nearly palpable contemporary identity, a pride in place. At some point in recent history, Frank MacDonald, who writes about music in the *Oran*, stopped referring to fiddlers as “Scottish.” They became “Cape Breton,

fiddlers,” and that, he told me in an interview, stands for the increasingly strong consciousness of, and pride in, place. The fact that so many people have to leave the island for better economic prospects elsewhere, and that from an early age you know that this might be your destiny, also contributes, MacDonald says, to the deep affection many Cape Bretoners feel for their part of the world. In fact, in the Cape Breton communities in the Boston area, in Toronto and Windsor, you’ll find the music played in clubs, people dancing up a storm to visiting musicians from Cape Breton or to transplants. If everyone who had to leave would return, one musician told me, the island would sink.

Social ties are strong in Cape Breton communities. People feel connected. Musicians are your neighbors. They may well be your family, too. Many of the musicians on this recording grew up in musical families, went to, and then played for, dances in their communities, came to understand music as part of neighborly life. To account for the extraordinary presence of local music, Cape Bretoners claim that music is in the genes or in the blood. Genetics may or may not be

involved, but what’s clear is that hearing music early and seeing it function in community life can make musicking a natural part of life.

The music never lost its association with the dance. During the season, you can dance in Inverness County on Mondays at Brook Village, Wednesdays at the Normaway Lodge, Thursdays at Glencoe Mills, Fridays at Southwest Margaree, and Saturdays at West Mabou (which runs year-round). To that schedule, add dances associated with festivals and other events. There was a time when the local schools sponsored the dances. Now, it’s typically, but not always, the parish. These are square dances, but they are unlike the widely familiar U.S. western squares. The fiddle, backed by the piano, drives the music. These days no caller or prompter directs the dancers. What was once a four-couple square formation has become more amorphous, absorbing any number of couples. In Inverness County, the Mabou template is most common, although different dances have been associated with various locales.

To dance, say, at West Mabou, requires learning three figures. The first, danced

to a group of jigs, is simple. In it, you hold hands in a circle, go in and out, then dance—doing a kind of two-step—with the person on your corner. Repeat the sequence until the dance ends. Jigs accompany the second figure, more complicated. Hold hands in a circle, go in and out. Dance that two-step with your partner. Promenade with your partner, counterclockwise. Back to the circle, and repeat the pattern, this time promenading clockwise. Repeat until finished. The third figure requires reels. Rights and lefts around the circle. Swing your partner. Rights and lefts in the opposite direction. Promenade. Form a line that folds back on itself; couples go through the middle, split, form long opposing lines of men and women. Holding hands, the lines move in and out. Retrieve your partner, and either swing or hold hands and stepdance. Stepdance throughout the three figures if you can. And because the four-couple set is mostly gone, and the sets are likely to have different numbers of couples, when you’ve finished the figure you clap, signaling the musicians that you’ve finished. Older musicians lament the passing of the four-couple set, and some prefer

an older model when the stepdancing was limited to certain moments in the dance. It was, some report, more graceful then. Younger musicians and dancers often prefer the exuberance of today's fashion.

Regular dances, a strong parish presence, and knowing your neighbors seem to add up to an unusually high amount of what sociologist Robert Putnam calls "social capital." For Putnam, social capital is the glue that holds people together in community. In his recent book, *Bowling Alone*, he finds it in civic culture, in local organizations ranging from churches to bowling leagues. In Inverness County, music brings people together, stands for identity, supports the parish or perhaps the local youth baseball league, and in general encourages and maintains community. Even if there were bowling alleys along the Ceilidh Trail, it seems highly unlikely that you'd find people bowling alone.

Now think about visitors. Many of the people you run into at music events are home for a visit, having left the island for better prospects elsewhere. Family and place pull people home, especially during the summer. At a small concert a few years ago, I heard a woman introduced as having

made more than forty summer trips back home. A year or so later, I walked into a dance at Southwest Margaree with Dougie MacDonald, a fine young fiddler. I asked how many of the perhaps two hundred dancers were local, and Dougie said about half. I trust his estimate, because many Cape Bretoners have a very finely tuned sense of locality.

Increasingly, there's a lot at stake when it comes to that other half of the dancers, the visitors, that is. Cape Breton fiddle music is proving to be an economic resource. In a place where the old industries are in decline, where the scenery attracts visitors but only during the short warm season, where the distance from markets is large and the work force not well trained, music is increasingly looking like more than a cultural resource. Referring to the entire island, Michael Gurstein writes that the domain called "Tourism and Culture," which includes music, has now become the primary economic resource of Cape Breton and the largest employment sector.

An ad targeted at visitors to Nova Scotia reads, "In New Orleans They Mardi Gras, In Cape Breton We Ceilidh." A few years

ago, fiddler Buddy MacMaster was pictured on the cover of the annual Nova Scotia tourism guide published by the provincial government, and images of Cape Breton musicians are increasingly familiar in publications pointed at tourists. It's not that tourism officials huddled somewhere, though, and decided that fiddle music would draw visitors. Instead, in recent years a couple of models of economic success—off-island, that is—began attracting visitors to the island to hear music, and it appears that the tourism machinery swung into action, trying to catch up. Two young Cape Breton fiddlers have had very significant economic success, first in Canada, then in the United States and Europe. The virtuoso fiddler and very personable Natalie MacMaster, from Troy, has become a sensation in the transnational "Celtic" revival. Her promotional materials claim that no other Canadian artist performs as much as she does. Ashley MacIsaac, a remarkable young fiddler originally from Creignish, was "discovered" by U.S. artists Philip Glass and JoAnne Akalaitis, who have summer houses in Inverness County, and who brought MacIsaac to New York,

where his off-island career began. MacIsaac's mid-1990s release, *Hi: How Are You Today?*, which fused traditional fiddle music with a variety of contemporary musics, went platinum in Canada and had significant college radio play in the United States.

Both Ashley and Natalie (everyone refers to fiddlers by their first names in Cape Breton) are the object of intense interest and fondness at home. And many people will tell you that they have inspired a generation of young musicians to take up the fiddle. Where parents once sent their children to hockey camps, thinking about the possibility of economic success in sports, now many encourage their children to play the fiddle. One revival of the music dates to the 1970s, when the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation aired a television documentary called *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler*. That inspired a strong resurgence of interest in the music. These days, it's Natalie and Ashley, it seems, who have raised the music's profile. And, as I've said, the music seems to be everywhere. To most, this seems a very good thing. But some worry that popularity leads to change, and that the music's essence might be lost.

This recording is a snapshot of a week on the Ceilidh Trail. Because we recorded in public venues, in settings where Cape Bretoners come to hear their music, the album naturally features many of the best known, most admired, and most influential Cape Breton fiddlers and accompanists. These are musicians profoundly rooted in their culture, representatives of a tradition that runs deep. At the end of our eight days, we'd recorded about thirty hours of music. I had the pleasure of listening to every minute of it to select nearly seventy-four minutes to feature here. All the recordings will be deposited at the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. As a body, they offer a record of what the music sounded like, at least in public venues, in the summer of 2000. It is important to note that *The Heart of Cape Breton* features the public face of a world of music. Other Cape Breton musicians, mostly older and less in the public eye, are documented on a series of recordings on the Rounder label, pro-

duced by Mark Wilson, a field-recorded effort that complements this recording.

For me, this project was a dream come true. A scholar of traditional music since the 1970s, and a musician myself, I came late to Cape Breton, first visiting in the mid-1990s. Over time, I got to know many of the musicians, who, like many other Cape Bretoners, were inspirational in their devotion to the island and the culture. The music moves me deeply. The place, with its beauty, its hospitality, and its huge challenges, exerts a powerful draw. It was a privilege to record Kinnon Beaton, Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, Jerry Holland, Wendy MacIsaac, Buddy MacMaster, and Brenda Stubbert; their accompanists, Betty Beaton, Joey Beaton, Allan Dewar, Brian Doyle, Richard Wood; and the many other musicians we encountered in that long week in the heart of Cape Breton. That potent Cape Breton combination—music that moves people while holding fast to its rootedness—is something I admire, and I am deeply appreciative of this place, with a remarkable music of its own.

THE MUSICIANS AND THE MUSIC

1. Brenda Stubbert, fiddle; Richard Wood, piano; Brian Doyle, guitar. Recorded July 25, 2000, at the Ceilidh Trail School, Inverness.

My Great Friend John Morris Rankin (Brenda Stubbert)/The Flax in Bloom/A Northside Reel

This wonderfully driving set of reels features one of Cape Breton's finest fiddlers. Born in 1959, in Port Aconi, on the island's north side, Brenda Stubbert lives in Florence. A favorite along the Ceilidh Trail, she often plays for dances, concerts, and other events. The Stubbert household was full of music when Brenda was growing up. Her



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father, Robert Stubbert, is a well-known fiddler whose music is strongly inflected by the Irish music that he heard from Joe Confiant, a North Sydney fiddler. Robert was friends with the late Winston "Scotty" Fitzgerald, probably the most influential Cape Breton fiddler of all time. Brenda's uncle Lauchie Stubbert also played. By the time she was nine, she was playing the piano in public. A year or so after that, she was playing the fiddle. From the beginning, she composed tunes, and she's very

highly regarded for her compositions, many of which have entered the repertoire. She has recorded four albums over the years, and a book of her compositions is available.

Reels are lively, even-tempoed dance tunes, a form common to Scotland, Ireland, England, and parts of North America. Brenda opens with one of her recent compositions, named for the late John Morris Rankin. Fiddler and pianist Rankin was a member of

the very popular Rankin Family Band from Mabou. He died on January 16, 2000, in a road accident—he was forty years old. The second tune is familiar in Irish tradition, and Brenda often plays the third in groups of reels. It's published in her book of tunes. The Cape Breton tradition is expansive. Many composers from the island have added new tunes to the repertoire, and musicians have been happy to adapt tunes from various other sources.

Brian Doyle is a fine guitar player. He's the great-nephew of the late Angus Chisholm (1908-79), a noted fiddler. His uncle, Cameron Chisholm, is a highly regarded fiddler, and his mother, Maybelle Chisholm McQueen, is a legend among piano players. Brian plays a range of styles; he's increasingly known for his work accompanying fiddlers and for flatpicking fiddle tunes, along with his role in Greyloch, a rock band. Brian and Maybelle accompany Brenda on her most recent recording, *Some Tasty Tunes*.

Richard Wood is a young musician from Prince Edward Island. A hot fiddler, he's also a fine stepdancer and pianist. Frequently a staff member at the Ceilidh Trail School, he was teaching fiddle the week we visited; he joined Brenda on piano for a portion of the concert we recorded. For more on Wood, who has recorded a number fiddle albums and toured widely, see his web site (<http://www.peisland.com/richardwood>).

The Ceilidh Trail School of Celtic Music, established in the mid-1990s and directed by Janine Randall, offers instruction in Cape Breton musical traditions. Students from the island and from around the world spend a week studying with master musicians. We recorded this performance during one of the school's daily afternoon instructors' concerts, attended by students and people from the community.

2: Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, fiddle; Wendy MacIsaac, piano. Recorded July 26, 2000, in the Port Hood Arena.

Traditional Strathspey/Stumpie/Primrose Lass/A Bright May Morning

Jackie Dunn MacIsaac (pictured on the right) and Wendy MacIsaac (pictured on the left) frequently play together, switching between fiddle and piano. Born in 1969, Jackie grew up in Antigonish, on the mainland, in a family very devoted to the music. Her uncle, Dan Hughie MacEachern, was a very respected composer and musician. Her mother



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taught stepdancing. When she was eight, Jackie began taking fiddle lessons from Stan Chapman in Antigonish. Chapman, a school music teacher by day, has taught many budding fiddlers, including Jackie, Wendy MacIsaac, Natalie MacMaster, and Ashley MacIsaac. She'd started piano lessons at age five, and she continued those through univer-

sity. And although she may have lived in Antigonish, she spent much of her time on the island, first absorbing, and now performing, the music. In an interview, she told me: "I was pretty well at all the concerts in the summer. I was always asked to Glendale, because of my mother's connection, and Broad Cove. My mother did the circuit all her life, dancing. And when she stopped, I kept going, I guess. There weren't very many young people playing until I got into my twenties." A school music teacher in Port Hood, Jackie Dunn MacIsaac is one of the most active musicians, as a fiddler, piano player, and stepdancer, on the scene.

We recorded this track at a dance in the hockey arena at Port Hood. This was a new dance series, slow to get off the ground, perhaps because the arena is not an ideal dance venue—hard concrete floors instead of the springy wooden floors dancers prefer, a very reverberant space. Jackie played this group of tunes as the dancers were arriving. The group includes two strathspeys, the second of which, "Stumpie," may have been published, according to Kate Dunlay and David Greenberg's *The Dungreen Collection*, as early as 1734. Strathspeys are generally in 4/4 time. They inevitably include dotted rhythms. In Scotland, the tendency has been to play them at a slow tempo, and some refer to them as slow reels. But in Cape Breton, strathspeys are often dance tunes, accompanying step-dancers. In most cases, Cape Breton musicians play strathspeys hard, their feet pounding to every beat, and the drive and dotted rhythms add up to very compelling performances. Two reels follow, including the popular "Primrose Lass."

3. Kinnon Beaton, fiddle; Betty Beaton, piano; Owen D. Gillis, prompting. Recorded July 25, 2000, in the Mabou Hall.

New Haven Reel/Mrs. Norman MacKeigan's Reel (Dan R. MacDonald)/Glenquey Reel/The High Drive Reel (Gordon Duncan)/The Snappy Reel (John Campbell)/Miss Jane McInnes-Dandaleith (William Marshall)

Kinnon and Betty Beaton really know how to drive the dancers. Kinnon was born into a very musical Mabou family in 1956. His father, the late Donald Angus Beaton, was a very popular dance fiddler and composer. His mother, Elizabeth, is a fine traditional piano player. Joey, his brother, is well known as a piano player, and many other members of Kinnon's extended family are accomplished musicians, including one of Kinnon and Betty's daughters, Andrea. Growing up in Mabou, Kinnon had the Rankin family as neighbors. Dan R. MacDonald, one of the most prolific of the modern Cape



Gary Samson

swing, that is irresistible. There is a Beaton family tradition of composing fiddle tunes. Kinnon recently published a book of more than six hundred tunes, including fifty-one from his father, sixteen from Andrea, and many of his own compositions.

Betty Beaton is an elegant accompanist. Also born into a musical family—she's Buddy MacMaster's youngest sister—she began playing the piano early at the family home in Judique. A former schoolteacher, she has accompanied many of the island's greatest fiddlers, and she and Kinnon play together like clockwork. Listen to the way she occasionally doubles the melody with her right hand while keeping a solid beat with the left. The Beatons live in Long Point, and they operate a clothing store in Port Hawkesbury. Especially during the summer, their schedule is daunting, as they play late dances or other events seemingly every night.

We recorded this track—a third figure—at a dance in the hall in Mabou, across the street from where Kinnon grew up. It was a special dance, part of a week-long festival in Mabou. We were all surprised when Owen D. Gillis, a fine dance prompter, appeared, hired by the festival organizers. Gillis, who lives in Inverness, has years of experience calling for dancing. In fact, he told Kinnon that night that he had called to Kinnon's

father's playing. These days, it's very unusual for dances to include calling or prompting; this recording documents an art that has nearly vanished in Cape Breton. Kinnon and Betty play a set of reels on D, feet keeping the beat, Gillis hollering the calls, the dancers having a ball. This group of tunes typifies Kinnon's repertory in that it includes tunes from many sources, new and old. Kate Dunlay, who has been terrifically helpful in researching tune titles, points out that the last reel is by William Marshall (1748-1833), a prolific Northeast Scotland composer of fiddle tunes.

4. Jerry Holland, fiddle; Allan Dewar, piano. Recorded July 30, 2000, at the Broad Cove Scottish Concert.

In Memory of Herbie MacLeod (Jerry Holland/Fiddlesticks Music Pub., SOCAN)/Christy Campbell/Anthony Murray's/Bridge of Bamore/Arrochar Bridge

Jerry Holland is among the most influential Cape Breton musicians. A very gifted player and composer, he was born in 1955 in Brockton, Massachusetts. His father, originally from



New Brunswick, played the fiddle and was active in the then-thriving Maritime music scene in the Boston area. After he heard virtuoso Cape Breton players such as Alec Gillis, Winston Fitzgerald, and Angus Chisholm, his father developed a powerful commitment to Cape Breton music, and he encouraged his son to play. Jerry was a prodigy as a fiddler and stepdancer, and early on he was playing at dances and parties in the Boston area, mentored by Chisholm and by Bill Lamey, a very accomplished Cape Breton musician who had settled in the Boston area. He won the old "Ted Mack Amateur Hour" televised talent show when he was a young teenager, fiddling

and dancing at the same time. By 1974, he was playing regularly as a member of the Cape Breton Symphony on television shows broadcast across Canada. The Cape Breton Symphony was a group of fiddlers. Membership changed over the years, but the core included Winston Fitzgerald, John Donald Cameron, Wilfred Gillis, Joe Cormier, and Jerry. He was playing, he told me, with his idols. At twenty-one, he moved to Cape Breton, where he has remained. Currently, he lives in Bras D'Or, but he has lived in Inverness County and elsewhere around the island.

Jerry is an exquisite musician with a very distinctive touch that ranges from delicate to hard-driving. He is a prolific composer, and his tunes have entered the repertoires of many other musicians on the island, as well as abroad. Two books of his compositions are in print. A carpenter by trade, he performs around the island, and he is very much in demand abroad, playing concerts and teaching in North America and Europe.

Allan Dewar is a piano player from the Antigonish area. Largely self-taught, he says that John Morris Rankin was his strongest stylistic influence but that his playing reflects many others as well. He has played with many Cape Breton and Irish musicians, and currently he tours with Natalie MacMaster.

This group of tunes comes from a performance at the 44th annual Broad Cove Scottish Concert, on the grounds of St. Margaret of Scotland's Parish in Broad Cove, near Inverness. The longest-running weekend festival, the event reportedly attracts audiences of up to 8,000 for a concert that runs through the afternoon into the evening. Jerry and Allan play a beautiful group of tunes, in what many Cape Breton fiddlers call "high bass" tuning. The fiddle is tuned AEAE, which adds resonance and volume because of sympathetic vibration; scordatura tunings such as this were once more common in various violin styles, including Cape Breton fiddle music. The first tune, a lament or waltz, is a recent composition of Jerry's, in memory of a friend and music enthusiast who lived in the Boston area. The two strathspeys and two reels that

follow are very widely played in Cape Breton, real favorites, and Jerry's rendition, in high bass, is a powerful statement of traditional values.

5. Buddy MacMaster, fiddle; Joey Beaton, piano. Recorded July 29, 2000, at the Glencoe Mills dance.

The Way to Judique/Compliments to the Boys of the Lough (Frank Ferrel)/The Canadian Club Jig (Frank Ferrel)/The Hills of Glenorchy/Walking the Floor

Hugh Allan "Buddy" MacMaster has had so many accolades that it's hard to know where to begin writing about him. Buddy is revered for his music in Cape Breton and beyond. Across the island, he stands for the tradition. He is surely the single most influential musician on the island, and he has inspired many of the current generation of players with his technique, his repertoire, and his kindness.

Buddy was born in 1924 in Ontario, moving with his family to Judique in Cape Breton in 1928. His family spoke Gaelic; his mother would lilt, or sing, the melodies for fiddle tunes, and Buddy began to play the fiddle as a boy. His house and his community were both filled with music. Around 1938 he played his first dance, or at the least the first dance for which he was paid. This was fifteen miles away, in Troy. And it seems that he never looked back after that. He made a career working as a station agent and telegrapher on the railway, on the island



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and off, and he has wonderful stories to tell about playing the fiddle in the Canadian National Railroad stations. All the while, he played for dances and concerts, and he became a master of late nights, little sleep, and early drives to work. His first radio broadcast was from a furniture store in Antigonish in 1948, and in the 1970s he played regularly on national television as one of the fiddlers on the CBC "Ceilidh Show." He was one of the earliest Cape Bretoners to be asked to teach in Scotland, and from the 1980s onward (he retired in the late 1980s) he has maintained a very busy schedule, playing everywhere from local dances to international festivals abroad.

Born in 1949 into a very musical family, Joey Beaton, from Mabou, is one of the island's premier piano accompanists. Joey has recorded with many of the island's fiddlers, including Ashley MacIsaac, Buddy MacMaster, Stephanie Wills, Brenda Stubbart, and his wife, Karen Beaton. In the 1970s, he played on an album featuring his parents and his brother Kinnon—*The Beatons of Mabou* (issued on the Rounder label) is a classic. Karen organizes, and Joey hosts, Tuesday-night *ceilidhs* featuring traditional players in the Mabou Hall. A composer and a strong traditionalist, he has done an extensive set of interviews with fiddlers, pianists, stepdancers, and pipers. Those are a very important resource for research, available at the Celtic Music Interpretive Center in Judique.

Buddy MacMaster and Joey Beaton first played at the Glencoe Mills dance in the mid-1960s. The Thursday-night dance at Glencoe Mills is probably the most famous of all the Cape Breton dances, and Buddy is its mainstay. It's several miles off the paved road; the gravel leads you past farms, traveling along ridges, coming to an intersection featuring a lovely, well-maintained wooden church and graveyard, with the parish hall across the road. The hall itself served for a time as a school, and as small as it is, it's expanded from its original footprint. Benches and chairs line the walls. The stage is so small, the hall typically so crowded, that we were unable to put a microphone on a stand

to record Buddy's fiddle. As a result, this track is recorded directly from Buddy's contact mic, held to the fiddle by a rubber band.

Buddy and Joey play a group of jigs—dance tunes in 6/8—for a first figure. Buddy has a very distinctive, very powerful approach to playing jigs, and Joey's strong piano provides excellent backing. "The Way to Judique" is a tune made famous by a Winston Fitzgerald recording. Boston-area fiddler Frank Ferrel composed the next two tunes. Jigs were not prominent in the older Scottish repertoire, but they figure very significantly in Cape Breton dance music. As a result, many new jigs have entered the repertoire, composed by Cape Bretoners and other musicians or adapted from other repertoires, especially Irish music. The fourth jig, "The Hills of Glenorchy," is an old Scottish tune, one of Buddy's trademarks, and that's followed by a tune that almost certainly derives from Ireland. Buddy played the dance, which began at 10 p.m. and ran until 1 a.m., after having played for about three hours in a bandstand in a park in Inverness. J. Scott Skinner (1843-1927), the composer and fiddler from the Northeast of Scotland, wrote a strathspey called "The Iron Man," and whenever I think about Buddy's endurance and dedication to the music, that title comes to mind.

6. Wendy MacIsaac, fiddle; Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, piano. Recorded July 26, 2000, in the Port Hood Arena.

Pipe Major George Ross's Welcome to the Black Watch March (William Lawrie)/Duke of Athole Strathspey/Tibby Fowler of the Glen/Traditional Strathspey/Creignish Hills (Hugh A. MacDonald)/Sandy Cameron/The Straw Man

Wendy MacIsaac is a powerhouse of a player. Here she plays a long group of tunes, building momentum and excitement. Born in 1971, she grew up in Creignish, where she lives now. Her family is musical—her father's father played the fiddle, and her mother's

family, known as the "White Millers" (they ran a mill), included many stepdancers. Her mother has taught stepdancing, and her father occasionally plays the fiddle. At age twelve Wendy began lessons, along with her cousin Ashley and another friend, going to Antigonish to work with Stan Chapman. Eventually, Chapman taught in Creignish, and Wendy had two or three years of lessons. Her friend Stephanie Wills, a very accomplished fiddler and piano accompanist, gave her the basics on the piano. There was no music taught in Wendy's school in those days, but traditional music was all around her—on the radio, at summer festivals, in concerts in Creignish, and at dances along the Ceilidh Trail. The parish priest was a fiddler, and he hosted music and pizza parties. These days, she performs locally at dances and concerts, frequently playing with Jackie Dunn MacIsaac—the two are great favorites at the West Mabou dance. A versatile musician with a strong commitment to the tradition, she tours with the Gaelic singer Mary Jane Lamond as a member of the band. And recently she has been playing with a group of friends as Beolach, a group featuring fiddlers, piano, percussion, guitar, pipes, and whistles.

This group of tunes, recorded in the same setting as track 2, opens with a march, a form long established in Scottish and Cape Breton music. These days Cape Breton fiddlers play marches for listening, not for dancing (and certainly not for marching!). Three strathspeys follow, the tension and energy building. The reels include a composition by Hugh A. MacDonald, a musician from the Antigonish area who recorded some tunes in the first half of the 20th century, and "Sandy Cameron," which the Dungreen Collection identifies as a pipe tune. "The Straw Man," also in the Dungreen Collection, is also known in Gaelic as *Bodach Fodair*, and the Dungreen Collection notes that the second part of the tune was published in 1786, as part of another tune. The three reels rock. And listen to Jackie's strong, creative piano accompaniment.

7. Kinnon Beaton, fiddle; Betty Beaton, piano. Recorded July 27, 2000, in the Mabou Hall.

Kitty of Oulart/Traditional/Inverness Jig/Memories of Mac (Jerry Holland/Fiddlesticks Music Pub., SOCAN)/Little House Round the Corner (J. Hand)/Money in Both Pockets/The Jumpy Jig

Kinnon and Betty play seven jigs here for a first figure at the dance in the Mabou hall. The first is also sometimes known as "The Donnybrook Boy." Johnny Wilmot recorded the third in 1964, and Paul Cranford points out that the last tune, generally called "The Jumpy Jig" in Cape Breton, appears to be related to a tune called "Paddy O'Rafferty's."

8. Buddy MacMaster, fiddle; Joey Beaton, piano. Recorded July 27, 2000, in the Mabou hall.

The Rosebud of Allenvale (J. Scott Skinner)/Tom Dey (J. Scott Skinner)/Miss Dale/Maggie Cameron/The Devil in the Kitchen/Margaree/St. Kilda Wedding/Elizabeth's Big Coat/Bridge of Bamore

The Tuesday-night *ceilidhs* in the Mabou Hall run through the summer. A guest fiddler performs with Karen and Joey Beaton; the hall fills people from the area and visitors. Buddy played that night, and perhaps two hundred fifty people were treated to a fine night of music. His sister Loraine MacMaster MacDonnell joined him on piano for one group; Harvey MacKinnon stepdanced to another group of tunes. Karen played with Joey's accompaniment, and the two fiddlers played together. This group of tunes was a highlight of the evening. Buddy opens with a slow air composed by J. Scott Skinner. He moves through four strathspeys. The last of the strathspeys is "The Devil in the Kitchen," well known among Scottish and Cape Breton musicians. Originally composed for the Highland pipes, it has become a standard in the repertoire. Cape Bretoners, naturally, tend to play it with a great deal of propulsive energy. Then he rips into four reels. A Cape

Breton place name, Margaree, is attached to the first reel, which is also occasionally called "Donalbane." "St. Kilda Wedding" is a classic Scots tune, frequently played in Cape Breton. "Elizabeth's Big Coat," sometimes listed in Gaelic as *Cota Mór Ealasaid*, is associated with Mabou. And "Bridge of Bamore" is, Buddy says, a very old tune. Some fiddlers play it in high bass tuning, as Jerry Holland does at the end of track 4.

9. Kinnon Beaton, fiddle; Betty Beaton, piano. Recorded July 26, 2000, in the Brook Village Hall.

Thomas MacDonnell's Strathspey (Donald Angus Beaton)/Traditional/Mrs. Norman MacKeigan's Reel (Dan R. MacDonald)/New Haven Reel

Kinnon's father composed the first strathspey in this group of tunes for stepdancing, we recorded at the Monday night dance in Brook Village. At some point in the evening at most square dances, the fiddler will launch into a group of tunes—one or more strathspeys, followed by reels—for stepdancing. Typically, one dancer will take the floor, with many of the other dancers becoming an audience, standing to watch displays of individual virtuosity. Occasionally, a couple of people, or perhaps a group of family members, will dance together, in a line. The stepdancing invariably begins with a strathspey, the only time strathspeys accompany dancing these days. The dancing itself tends to stay close to the floor—that is, dancers don't raise their feet high off the floor. Hands and arms are loose at the sides. Dancers do not use taps on their shoes, although a good dancer will hit the tune's beats with his or her feet. These days, there is considerable interest in Cape Breton stepdancing, and, like the fiddle music, it's understood by some to represent an older form of Scottish traditional performance. Dancers dance until they're finished, cuing the musicians to stop. You can hear the applause here.

10. Wendy MacIsaac, fiddle; Jackie Dunn MacIsaac, piano. Recorded July 26, 2000, in the Port Hood Arena.

The Short Grass Jig/The Braes of Elchies Jig/Traditional Jig/Gallagher's Jig/The Pibroch of O'Donal Dubh

Five powerful jigs from Wendy, with Jackie's strong piano underneath.

11. Kinnon Beaton, piano: Betty Beaton, piano. Recorded July 26, 2000, in the Brook Village Hall.

Michael Rankin's Reel (John Morris Rankin/Ole Sound Productions Ltd., SOCAN)/Pretty Marion/Wesley Gillis Reel (Kinnon Beaton)/The Marquis of Tullybardine/The Black Cock's Will/Colonel Thornton/Over the Isles to America/Johnny Muise's Reel (Jerry Holland, Fiddlesticks Music Pub., SOCAN)/Tom Rae (Dan R. MacDonald)/Brenda Stubbett's Reel (Jerry Holland/Fiddlesticks Music Pub., SOCAN)/The Weasel (John Morris Rankin/Ole Sound Productions Ltd., SOCAN)

This recording of a group of eleven reels conveys much of the excitement of a long third figure at the Brook Village dance. The tunes range widely, from old Scottish reels to contemporary compositions. Kinnon's "Wesley Gillis Reel" is being played a lot these days, and the tunes by Dan R. MacDonald and Jerry Holland are among their most popular compositions. Kinnon is playing hard; you can hear the wood of his bow. Listen to the dancers enjoying themselves. No one plays dance music better than Kinnon and Betty.

12. Brenda Stubbett, fiddle; Richard Wood, piano; Brian Doyle, guitar. Recorded July 25, 2000, at the Ceilidh Trail School, Inverness.

Traditional Strathspey/The Devil in the Kitchen (W. Ross)/Calum Crubach/Donnacha's Favourite (Paddy O'Brien)/The Mortgage Burn (Gordon MacLean)/Morgan MacQuarrie (Brenda Stubbett)/The Grey Bob

Here, to close the recording, is a masterful performance of hard-driving strathspeys and reels. Brenda begins with three strathspeys. The first is almost certainly an old Scottish one, as is the third, which is sometimes published in 19th-century tune books as "Miss Drummond of Perth." Her take on "The Devil in the Kitchen" is quite different from Buddy MacMaster's on track 8, illustrating how musicians make tunes their own. The four reels here are excellent examples of driving dance music, and they include old tunes and recent compositions, one of which is Brenda's. You can feel the tension mount in the strathspeys, and then she tears into the reels.

RECORDING IN THE HEART OF CAPE BRETON

Pete Reiniger

In July 2000 I shipped equipment from the Smithsonian in Washington to Burt Feintuch's home in New Hampshire. I then flew to New Hampshire, where Burt and I loaded up a rented van and headed for Cape Breton. This was a destination I had long hoped to reach. The van became a control room for our remote recordings. With Inverness as our base of operation we taped dances and concerts at various parish halls and at the Ceilidh Trail School, Broad Cove Concert, and the Doryman bar in Cheticamp.

With permissions in hand from the artists, we arrived at a different venue each day to set up. Basic set-up started with splitting inputs from the musicians' portable PA system. Each group had its own powered head and speakers, and they were all different. Most of the fiddles had an electronic pickup. I tracked a feed from the pickup and miked the fiddle with a Neumann TLM 103 large diaphragm microphone. I used an AKG C414 to capture the foot-tapping sound integral to Cape Breton music. In my mind I must

have been thinking acoustic, so I neglected to bring along any direct boxes, necessary for recording the electronic signals that fiddle transducers and electric keyboards produce. Upon realizing my folly, we made a mad dash to a music store in Sydney, where I bought two DIs. This was extremely fortuitous, as we only encountered two acoustic pianos while we were there. All the others were electronic.

We set up ambience mics for capturing the sound of the audiences. But at the dances the audiences are really participants. So there was not so much applause as there was rhythmic clapping to signal the players when to stop a set, along with the general sound of people having fun. In those instances where there was a guitar player, I used a Neumann KM 84 microphone as well as the guitarist's pickup.

In the van was a Mackie 8 bus mixing console, 16 tracks of Tascam DA 38, a Panasonic SV 3800 DAT recorder for a reference mix, and a pair of powered near-field monitors. Once everyone was set up and the dances began, we let the tape roll. Our interest was in capturing the sounds of Cape Breton performances in a non-intrusive manner, and we hope the results provide the listener with a feel for this wonderful music in its true context.

Burt came to the Washington area twice, once for the mixing and once for the mastering. In mixing, I blended the acoustic sound of the instruments with the sound of the pickups. In only one instance was the ambient sound so extreme that I could not use the fiddle microphone track at all and had to rely entirely on the fiddle pickup. Unfortunately there was no way that all of the wonderful music we heard would fit on a single CD. I hope you'll enjoy that which did.

August 2001

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A NOTE ON BUYING RECORDINGS OF CAPE BRETON MUSIC

Much of the finest Cape Breton music is available on locally produced recordings, and it can be difficult to find those albums. A number of mail-order sources are very helpful for recordings and books. Among them are the Compact Disc Depot, in Sydney (www.compactdiscdepot.com, 888-562-4523), Cranford Publications (www.cranfordpub.com, 888-860-8073), and Charlie's Downhome Music, in Cheticamp (www.capebretonisland.com/Music/Charlies/, 902-224-3782). Many of the musicians also have their own web sites.

RECENT RECORDINGS BY THE FEATURED MUSICIANS

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Burt Feintuch is a folklorist at the University of New Hampshire, where he directs the Center for the Humanities. From 1990 to 1995, he edited the *Journal of American Folklore*. A fiddler himself, he has done field research in many musical communities in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Credits

Compiled, produced, and annotated by Burt Feintuch

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