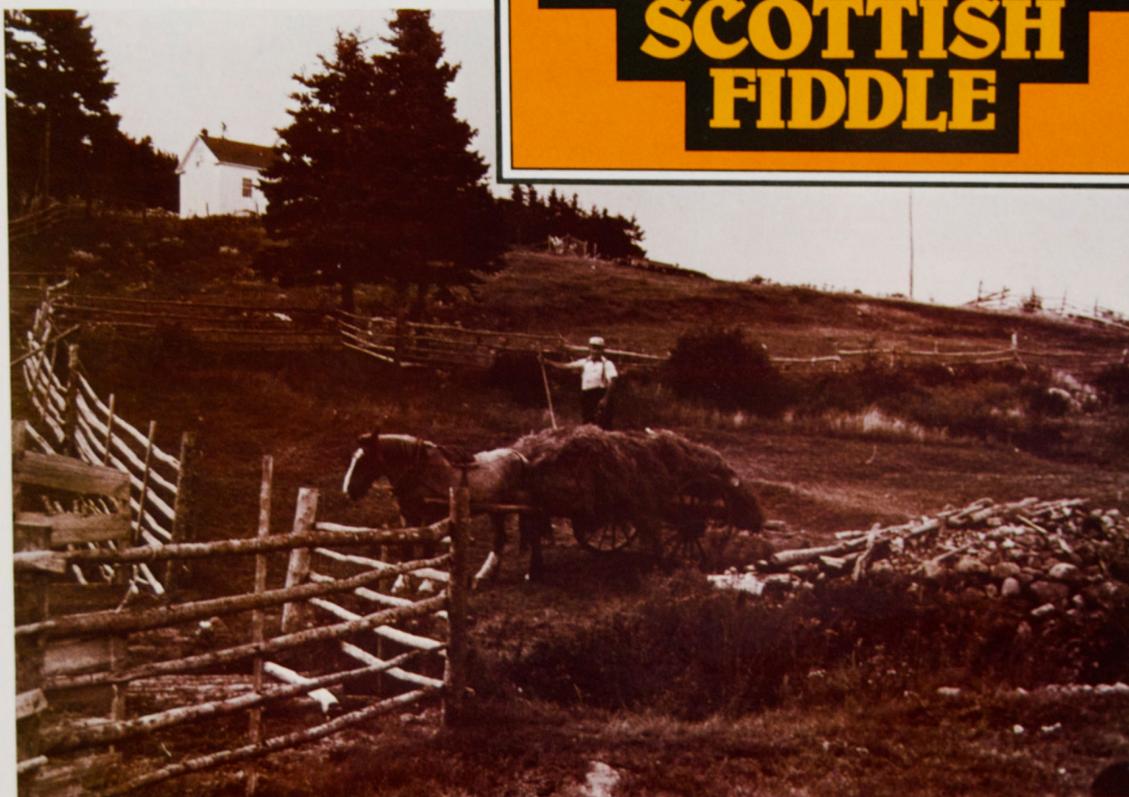


# THE MUSIC OF CAPE BRETON

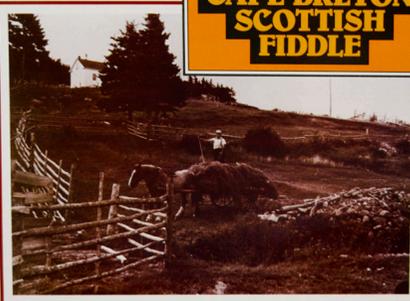
Volume 2

## CAPE BRETON SCOTTISH FIDDLE



THE MUSIC OF CAPE BRETON

Volume 2  
**CAPE BRETON  
SCOTTISH  
FIDDLE**



## Cape Breton Scottish Fiddle Volume 2

Produced by John Shaw, Rosemary Hutchison and Tony Engle.

Recorded by John Shaw and

Rosemary Hutchison, August-September 1976.

Remastered by Tony Engle.

Photograph by Ron Caplan.

Notes and booklet by John Shaw.

Sleeve design by Tony Russell.

First published by TOPIC 1978.

- 1 Strathspey, Hornpipe & Reel: **The Sow's Tail/Londonderry Hornpipe/Duncan on the Plainstones**  
THERESA MacLELLAN (acc Marie MacLellan)
- 2 Strathspeys & Reels: **The Warlock's Strathspey/Bog an Lochain (Athole Cummers)/The Nine Pint Coggie/Calum Fhionnlaidh/Prince Charlie/Tarbolton Lodge**  
MIKE MacDOUGALL (acc Mary Jessie MacDonald)
- 3 March, Strathspeys & Reel: **Donald MacLean's Farewell to Oban/Cairistiona Chaimbeul (Christy Campbell)/Port 'ic Artair (MacArthur's Tune) Untitled**  
JOHN WILLIE CAMPBELL (acc Kevin McCormick)
- 4 Strathspeys & Reels: **Lucy Campbell/Calum Crùbach (Miss Drummond of Perth)/Untitled/Cota Mór Ealasaid (Elizabeth's Big Coat)/Untitled**  
MARY MacDONALD (acc Mary Jessie MacDonald)
- 5 Slow Air, Strathspeys & Reels: **Niel Gow's Lamentation for Abercairney/Johnnie Pringle/ Munlochie Bridge/The Duke of Gordon's Birthday/ Perrie Werrie/Peggie Menzies/West Mabou Reel**  
ALEX FRANCIS MacKAY (acc Fr John Angus Rankin)
- 6 Jigs: **The Black Sporrán/Walking the Floor**  
JOHN NEIL MacLEAN (acc Phyllis MacLeod)
- 7 March & Strathspey: **A Sheana-bhean Bhoichd (Glengarry's March) Donald MacMaster's Strathspey**  
DAN JOE and GEORGE MacINNIS (acc Marie MacLellan)
- 8 Strathspey & Reel: **J Scott Skinner Strathspey/ Gillian's Reel (Muir o' Gellan)**  
JOHN NEIL MacLEAN (acc Phyllis MacLeod)
- 9 Strathspeys & Reels: **Unidentified/Calum Breugach/ The Duke of Athole/George the IV/The King's/Miss Lyle's Reel**  
ALEX FRANCIS MacKAY (acc Fr John Angus Rankin)
- 10 Strathspey & Reels: **Alex MacEachern's Strathspey/Fear nan Casan Caola (The Rejected Suitor) Untitled**  
JOHN WILLIE CAMPBELL (acc Kevin McCormick)
- 11 Strathspeys & Reels: **Miss Lyle's Strathspey/The Highlanders' Farewell to Ireland/King George/Tulloch Gorm (old setting with variations)/Lord MacDonald/Miss Johnstone**  
MARY MacDONALD (acc Mary Jessie MacDonald)
- 12 Jigs: **Untitled/Untitled/Dan the Cobbler**  
JOE MacLEAN (acc Mary Jessie MacDonald)

Scottish fiddle music arrived in Cape Breton Island with the Highland settlers over a century and a half ago, and the strongly Highland character of this region of Nova Scotia, in the Canadian Maritimes, remains to this day. Cape Breton with its harbours, heavily forested mountains and fertile valleys provided the Highlander with ample opportunity to exercise his old country skills in fishing, hunting and farming: the rural way of life of the Western Highland Gaels, together with their highly evolved oral and musical traditions, adapted easily to the new setting.

Until the first decades of this century the folk-culture was the sole source of entertainment in the scattered farming settlements, and the Highlander's keen appreciation of his traditional music has continued to be a strong force at the centre of the social and cultural life of the region's Gaelic communities. Although both of the national instruments of Scotland - the pipes and the fiddle - are widely played, the fiddle rapidly established itself as the more popular with the many traditional musicians on the island. It maintains its supremacy to this day despite the introduction of pianos, guitars and accordions. Fiddle music has always appealed to Cape Bretoners of all ages; the occasion may be a wedding, a picnic, a dance or (in the Catholic areas) a Sunday afternoon gathering. More often than not, particularly during the winter months when there is more time for leisure, to pass the time tunes are exchanged around the wood-stoves in the large farmhouse kitchens. The immediacy and vigour of the slow airs, marches, strathspeys, reels, hornpipes and jigs played in the Cape Breton style make them better suited for the kitchen than for the more formalised surroundings of the concert hall, but the dance hall is where the Cape Breton fiddler really comes into his own. During the summer months fiddlers such as Mike MacDougall, Alex Francis MacKay, Joe MacLean and Theresa MacLellan can be heard playing to packed halls of dancers, using a musical skill

gained from years of experience to bring out the underlying, driving rhythm that is so essential to traditional Gaelic music and song. The unaccompanied dance-fiddling of the last century has now been superseded by the introduction of chorded accompaniments on the piano, a technique associated largely with Inverness County musicians, which achieves a unique degree of musical inventiveness and taste in the playing of Mary MacDonald's daughter, Mary Jessie MacDonald.

The distinctive sound of Cape Breton fiddle music, so different from the Skinner style, derives from an unmistakable, contagious rhythm or 'swing' produced by a powerful bow-stroke, locally known as the 'Cape Breton Bow'. Complemented by skilful use of musical ornamentation, this bowing technique lends itself particularly well to dance music (jigs, strathspeys, reels and hornpipes) and recalls the description of the bowing of that most famous of all Gaelic fiddlers, Niel Gow. Around the time of Gow's death, during the Golden Age of Scottish fiddle music, the ancestors of the present generation of Cape Bretoners were being cleared from the western side of the *Gaidhealtachd* (the Gaelic-speaking area of Scotland). Although few traces of a Western Highland fiddle style survive in Scotland today, the area boasted a well-established fiddle tradition by the time of the clearances and this reached Cape Breton with the waves of immigrants. The peculiarly Highland features which have remained in Cape Breton fiddling include an affinity with the music of the pipes, a close association with step-dancing (a practice which has virtually disappeared in Scotland) and sung Gaelic words to fiddle tunes, called *puirt-a-beul* (mouth music), which are given here with translations.

Although all the fiddle-players here read music, the large majority of their tunes have been acquired by ear. Tunes, along with the rest of Gaelic tradition, have been



carefully passed on over four or five generations by men and women musicians, often transmitted through families. While fiddle music for the Cape Bretoner has always been a source of entertainment rather than a profession, Cape Breton, like Scotland has produced brilliant performers such as Dòmhnall Iain an Tàilleir, Big Ronald MacLellan (father of Theresa and Marie MacLellan) and Little Jack MacDonald whose musicianship lives on in folk memory. A close association still persists here between this Gaelic tradition of fiddle music and the Gaelic language on the island - most of the musicians recorded here speak Gaelic as a first language and have connections with the rural areas of Inverness County, a stronghold of Scottish folk-culture. Foremost among the living Inverness County musicians is Mary MacDonald (Màiri Alasdair Raghnaill) of MacKinnons Brook, near Mabou. Now in her late 70s, Mary is noted for her old settings of traditional tunes which were handed down to her in a direct line of transmission from Skye and Lochaber. Cape Breton's large fund of traditional tunes from the Scottish *Gaidhealtachd* includes many which appear in the famous 18th- and early 19th-century Scottish collections, as well as some whose names and words are no longer remembered. Printed collections, which became available some thirty or forty years ago, are a frequent source of tunes, as is Cape Breton's continuing tradition of Scottish folk-composers exemplified by the work of Dan Hugh MacEachern (tracks 7 and 11) and the renowned Dan Rory MacDonald.

The recent resurgence of interest in the British Isles concerning regional fiddling traditions has also taken place in Cape Breton. The gradual decline of the island's Scottish music, brought on by forced migration from an economically backward area and compounded by the spread of mass media, has been replaced in the '70s by a large-scale, active revival which has restored Scottish music to its essential

place in the region's cultural life. Older, experienced fiddlers are coming forward to play to increasingly appreciative audiences at the large bi-annual Glendale festivals devoted entirely to the fiddle, and tunes by talented young composers are beginning to be heard. Today, more than ever before, there is every reason to believe that Cape Breton fiddlers will maintain one of the most authentic and vital traditions in Celtic instrumental music to be found in our lifetime.

Notes by WILLIAM LAMEY, FR JOHN ANGUS RANKIN and JOHN SHAW.

THE LARGE MAJORITY of settlers from the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland arrived in Cape Breton between the end of the 18th century and the middle of the 19th. The forced mass migration to North America was a direct result of the Highland clearances, which affected whole communities of small farmers, fishermen and craftsmen throughout the Gaelic-speaking regions. Although most of the Highland immigrants had no wealth, and very little formal education or knowledge of English, they brought with them the extensive folk culture which had served as the sole form of entertainment in their rural Highland communities. The Gaelic folk culture, which includes storytelling, songs, games, dances, mouth music (Gael. *port-a-beul*), pipe music and fiddle music, survived the sea-change and the settlers' initial struggle with an inhospitable environment, and flourished in the farming communities that sprang up throughout the island. Cape Breton in the 1800s was ideal for the retention and growth of Gaelic oral and musical tradition: the isolation and independence of pioneer farming families encouraged the settlers to provide their own entertainment, while ensuring that the traditions remained conservative. Even to this day, certain parts of the island have retained Gaelic dialects from Lochaber, Lewis, North Uist, etc, and a discerning listener



can, with practice recognise regional differences in the fiddle styles of Cape Breton communities such as the Mabou Coal Mines area, Margaree and Iona.

The Highland appetite for music has always been a prodigious one, but the difficulties of pioneering allowed for few if any full time professional musicians and fiddle music (or “violin music” as it is commonly called by Cape Bretoners) has remained a sideline even with the very best traditional players. In the early days, fiddlers performed mainly in private houses, most of which had rooms large enough for dancing, and the fiddler played unaccompanied. The occasion might be a wedding, a dance after a milling-frolic (a gathering to shrink the homemade tweed) or simply a friendly ceilidh or social visit. There is a close association between fiddling and dancing, particularly step-dancing, and most of the tunes played are dance-tunes. The custom of playing and dancing on a cross-roads while returning from a house-dance was common at one time, as it was in the island of South Uist in Scotland. Schoolhouses were also a favourite venue for dancing to fiddle music; John Willie Campbell (Track 3; Track 10) recalls playing unaccompanied for dances as a boy at the schoolhouse in Glencoe, Inverness County, in the late ‘30s and early ‘40s. From about 1900, dancehalls began to appear throughout the county, giving rise to the larger square-dances and round-dances that are widely enjoyed there today, particularly during the summer months.

The tunes and techniques of Cape Breton fiddling were acquired, as John Willie puts it, “*aig an taigh*” (at home), usually from relatives or neighbours, who made a conscious but not a formal effort to teach them. Predictably, music was often passed down through families, some of which became widely admired for the quality of their playing. Among these are the Kennedys of Broadcove, the MacLellans of Cleveland, the Beatons around Mabou and the Chisholms of Margaree. The last three families produced the late Big

Ronald MacLellan, a legend in his own time and father of Theresa and Marie MacLellan (Track 1), as well as Mary MacDonald (Màiri Alasdair Raghnaill, nee Beaton - see Track 3; Track 11) and Angus Chisholm, two of the finest living Scottish traditional musicians. Fiddle music thrived on the farms in the predominantly Catholic areas where, in hours of leisure, a fiddle was often passed around the room and each person present took his turn at playing a tune. In these parts, Sunday afternoons were (and still are) customarily reserved for “violin music”, accompanied by a large tea, though unflagging “all-nighters” devoted to music were by no means a rarity.

Even to the untrained ear the differences between the Cape Breton fiddle style and those heard today on the mainland of Scotland are striking. Particularly with dance-music (strathspeys, reels and jigs) the Cape Breton fiddler, once he hits his stride, plays with a pronounced and contagious rhythmic lift - known as “drivin’ er” (Gael. *‘ga draoibheadh*) or “comin’ back on ‘er” - which we have not heard in recordings from the Scottish mainland. Fr John Angus Rankin of Glendale, Inverness County, a Gaelic-speaker and authority on Cape Breton music, has in one case been able to trace an important part of the regional fiddling tradition directly back to Scotland:

“One of the old-time players in the Mabou Coal Mines area was Alexander J Beaton, born May 28, 1837 in Mabou Coal Mines. He would be the grandson of Fionnladh Mór. Fionnladh Mór was the son of Alexander of Skye, a fiddler who left Skye, settled in Lochaber and converted to Catholicism. Fionnladh Mór was born in Achluachrach in Glen Spean, Lochaber, in 1776. He was a pioneer settler in Mabou Coal Mines, arriving there around 1809. (His son) John Beaton (Iain Mac Fhionnlaidh) was born in the old country on 12th May, 1794 and was married to Mary MacDonald Aug. 9, 1819. His son, Alexander (J) Beaton



(Alasdair Mac Iain ‘ic Fhionnlaidh) was born in this country.”

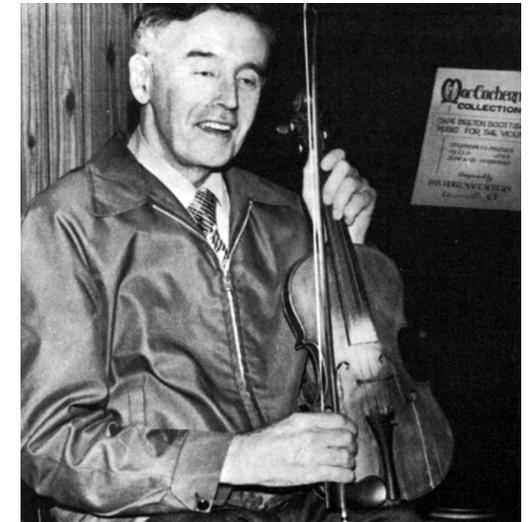
Alexander J Beaton in turn was related to Mary MacDonald’s family who lived a few miles away at MacKinnon’s Brook, and taught Mary many of her tunes. There is some evidence in the Old World, most of it indirect, which throws light on the origin of the Cape Breton style. Although the Golden Age of Scottish music (from about 1750 to 1830) saw the spectacular rise of Gaelic-speaking fiddler-composers such as Niel Gow and Malcolm MacDonald from areas bordering on English-speaking Scotland, there were also considerable numbers of fiddlers in the remoter Gaelic regions of the Highlands. Records from Dunvegan Castle, Isle of Skye (1740) list expenditures for a professional fiddler, and near the end of that century we hear of other Skye performers such as Neil (Mór) Campbell MacIntyre of Sleat and Alexander MacDonald of Stonefield (b c1795: Collinson 213). The abundance of fiddle-players in the country areas of the West, even after the time of migration to Cape Breton, is attested to by accounts of the large heaps of fiddles and pipes that were burned in Skye in the 1800s by certain members of the clergy in their attempts to suppress the music. It is heartening to observe that similar attempts to discourage fiddle music in Cape Breton some decades later met with no more enthusiasm or compliance than did the clerics’ occasional exhortations and dire warnings against the distilling of moonshine. This may be in part due to the belief known to the older generation of Cape Breton Gaels that “the fiddle is the only instrument that the Devil can’t play because the bow and the body of the instrument form the sign of the cross.”

Niel Gow, by all accounts, remained within the Gaelic musical idiom for his entire career but other fiddlers of this period were drawn to the Lowland centres, many of

them becoming proficient in the classical music from the Continent then popular among the upper classes. Some classical influences on their music and technique would seem inevitable, and Collinson’s observations (220-1), with examples, on the gradual move from the old Gaelic modes and gapped scales of Niel Gow’s compositions to the “chromaticism of a sort” of the later fiddler-composers certainly bear this out.

While no description of fiddling techniques has been preserved from the time of migration to Cape Breton, our own brief encounters with the fiddling technique surviving in the West Highlands, in particular the use of cuts (see below) when playing “for dancing”, support our view that Cape Breton fiddling originated with the native Gaelic style of this region. Scottish authors have noted, too, that the musical ornamentation used by fiddlers in the West is more closely modelled on the bagpipes than that observed among their counterparts further east, and this seems to agree with the Cape Breton style. There is a strong tendency among Cape Breton players to use one stroke of the bow for each note; equal force is given to the upbow and downbow, which accounts for the characteristic rhythmic “lift” in the reels, so far removed from the sound of the classical violinist. In this connection, the only surviving descriptions known to us of a native Gaelic technique from 18th-century Scotland, that of Niel Gow, are suggestive:

“There is perhaps no species whatever of music executed on the violin, in which the characteristic expression depends more on the power of the bow, particularly in what is called the upward or returning stroke, than the Highland reel. Here accordingly was Gow’s forte. His bow-hand, as a suitable instrument of his genius, was uncommonly powerful; and where the note produced by the up-bow was often feeble and indistinct in other hands, it was struck, in his playing, with a strength and certainty which never failed



Dan Hugh MacEachern

---

to surprise and delight the skilful hearer.”

Dr K MacKnight, 1809, cited in Emerson 176

“His manner of playing his native airs is faithful, correct and spirited. He slurs none, but plays distinctly, with accuracy, precision and peculiar accentuation ...”

Alexander Campbell, 1802, cited in Emerson 177

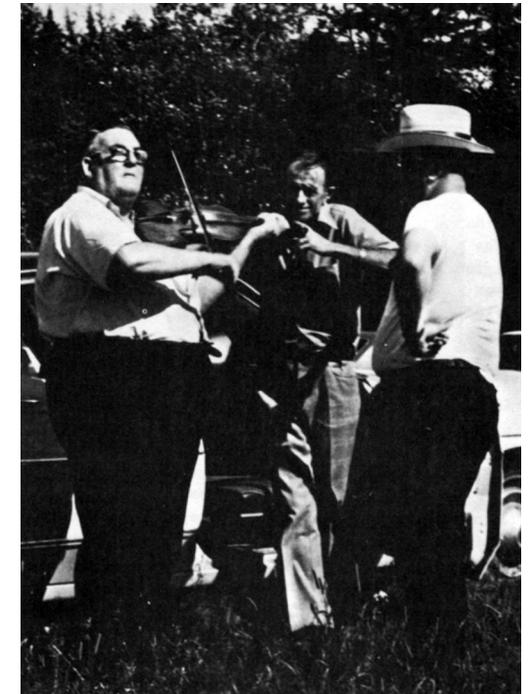
The possibility has been raised that Scottish fiddling in Cape Breton may have been significantly influenced by contact with American or Irish styles. Widespread American influence is unlikely because of the relative geographic and linguistic isolation of Cape Breton’s Gaelic areas until the turn of the century. While there was substantial immigration from Ireland to the industrial areas of the island, the essential features that we have observed in Old World Irish fiddling, such as quarter-tone glides and the tendency to take a group of notes in one bow-stroke (slurring), are nowhere present in the technique of this region’s Scottish players.

In keeping with the accuracy with which the rest of Gaelic traditional culture has been transmitted from the time of the settlers, Cape Bretoners attach great importance to “having a tune right”, and tunes have been generally acquired and passed on by ear. However, Bill Lamey, a fiddler and long-time expert on Cape Breton traditional music now living in Boston suggests nonetheless that some of the original settlers, particularly those in Inverness County, may have brought with them a few collections which they were able to read. By the early 1900s the Skye Collection, the Athole Collection, O’Neill’s, Kerr’s, Lowe’s and one or two by J Scott Skinner were owned by a few players. During the ’30s Bill Lamey began acquiring collections from Scotland, and he was later joined in this by Joe MacLean and Dan Joe MacInnis. Contact with Scotland

was further established when Dan R MacDonald, a highly regarded Inverness County composer, was stationed for a time in Britain with the Canadian Forces during World War II, playing frequently for the BBC and collecting whatever books of Scottish music he could find.

Tunes, like Gaelic songs, were composed by the hundreds on the island. While most “homemade” tunes are now anonymous, some players became widely admired for their ability to make tunes. The first collection of Cape Breton music to be published was Gordon MacQuarrie’s Cape Breton Collection of Scottish Melodies (1940), incorporating his own tunes and those of other local composers. Recently (1975) another collection of music by Dan Hugh MacEachern of Queensville, Inverness County has been made available (*MacEachern’s Collection*), which contains *Alex MacEachern’s Strathspey* (Track 10). Undoubtedly the most talented composer in living memory is the aforementioned Dan R MacDonald of Judique (d 1976), whose prodigious output of tunes composed in the traditional style (so far uncollected) is said to number anywhere from the hundreds to the thousands. Other composers of note who are still actively making tunes are Donald Angus Beaton of Mabou and John Campbell of Boston, Mass., formerly of Mabou.

The fortunes of Scottish fiddling in Nova Scotia have always been tied to those of the Gaelic language - most of the players recorded here speak Gaelic as a first language and the rest are no more than one generation removed. Beginning as early as the 1880s, the wholesale immigration from the rural farming communities into industrial centres such as Sydney and the “Boston States” has had a devastating effect on the Gaelic language and music of the region. As the language declined, Scottish fiddling activity, which in earlier decades had extended over large areas of the adjacent mainland, became largely confined to Cape Breton. On the island, Inverness County became the stronghold of the musical



Dan R MacDonald (at left) and friends

tradition, particularly in the more isolated, self-reliant settlements such as Judique, Glendale, Glencoe, Mabou, Broadcove and Margaree, which had managed to retain some of their population and folk-culture. The deadening effect of the exodus from the country on Scottish music was compensated for to a small degree by musical activity in the urban centres. The first commercial recordings on 78s in the late '30s featured the music of such greats as Angus Chisholm, Winston Scotty Fitzgerald, Joe MacLean, Bill Lamey and Dan Joe MacInnis. During this period, Bill Lamey remembers receiving the equivalent of a good working wage playing for dances around the industrial areas near Sydney. The '40s saw the first regular radio programmes of regional Scottish fiddle music with Winston Scotty Fitzgerald, Tina Campbell and many others.

In spite of the steady growth of the summer Scottish Concerts, beginning at Broadcove in 1958, fiddling, along with all the other aspects of Gaelic folk culture, continued to lose ground to television and other manufactured entertainments imported from the mainland. With prospects of employment in their home regions being so few, younger people felt forced to direct their aspirations further afield towards Boston or (more recently) Toronto, and saw nothing practical to be gained by involving themselves in the local tradition. By 1971 an eventual end to Scottish fiddling in the Maritimes seemed so inevitable that CBC-TV, based in Halifax, filmed a documentary titled "The Vanishing Fiddler". The theme of the film and its implications brought forth a united response from Cape Bretoners that has been as effective as it was heartfelt, bearing out the Gaelic proverb *theid dualchas an aghaidh nan creag* ("heredity goes against the rocks"). The Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association was formed and the first Festival of Scottish Fiddling was held at Glendale in July 1973 - three days devoted entirely to Scottish fiddling. The response was enormous: 130 players performed for crowds that totalled more than

10,000. Soon a full-time teacher was employed to give classes in fiddling to children throughout Inverness County, and adult classes were established elsewhere throughout the island, eventually spreading to Antigonish on the nearby mainland, and more recently to Prince Edward Island. The next festival, which took place two years later at Glendale, with an even larger attendance, had the air of a celebration. The high point was the grand finale, where 188 Cape Breton fiddlers, led by Fr John Angus Rankin, played a medley of tunes together in a performance that expressed the sense of triumph shared by the players and the audience. Cape Breton fiddling could be saved. The Fiddlers' Association newsletter regularly circulates fiddle music, including pieces by younger local composers, and arranges meetings of musicians for practice sessions.

The events surrounding the revival and the securing of the Gaelic fiddle tradition in Cape Breton, however, include one sad occasion: Dan R MacDonald, Cape Breton's composer, died suddenly in September 1976. His funeral in Mabou, incorporating 50 fiddlers playing in a church filled to capacity, surpassed anything he would have imagined. It was a fitting tribute to a man who cared so little for material gain and contributed so generously to Scottish music.

#### TECHNIQUE

The distinctive flavour of all Scottish fiddle music comes from a unique bowing technique which is realised among the best Cape Breton players as a "lively bow". The most striking feature in the bowing of fiddlers both in Scotland and in Cape Breton is the "Scotch snap" - an effect produced by a rapid flick of the wrist on the upstroke in figures consisting of a semi-quaver followed by a dotted quaver, that is the mark of the strathspey rhythm. In Cape Breton music, where the upbow and downbow strokes are generally given equal emphasis, the snap has evolved into a fine art and has



become one of the standards by which a fiddler's playing is measured. Although the practice may differ with individuals throughout the island, the bow is usually held with the ball of the thumb touching the stick underneath and the index and middle fingers resting on the grip above. The remaining two fingers often rest lightly on the stick to guide the bow. However, many players tend to raise and partially curl these two fingers. The middle section of the bow is the one most frequently used, though, as Bill Lamey observes, "I use different areas of the bow. The bow is so long - you can use any part of it. It depends on the type of tune that you're playing." Regarding the production of the powerful stroke so essential to Cape Breton dance music he continues, "It comes from the wrist mainly, and your elbow, with the shoulder going up as you go back to the back (G and D) strings and coming back down on the front strings. If you can't control your upper arm you get something (e.g. a safety-pin to attach your upper coat-sleeve to the body of the coat) to keep your arm down. That doesn't mean that you have to play with your arm tucked into your body - you couldn't do that. But to use your (upper) arm to go straight back and forth you get no effect at all."

In addition to gracenotes and mordents produced with the left hand, embellishments are produced with the bow as well, consisting of three rapidly alternating short upbow and downbow strokes, variously called cuts (Gael. *gearraidhean*), da-da-dums (to imitate the musical effect) in strathspeys, reels and marches according to the taste and skill of the player, and are heard as a general rule at the end of a strain. Some tunes, such as *The Devil in the Kitchen*, require double cutting - one cut immediately followed by another. Significantly enough, authorities in Scotland point out that the presence of cuts in the Cape Breton style is similar to what is written in the earlier printed collections of Scottish violin music. Executing and placing cuts correctly is considered by players to be one of the most difficult parts

of the style to master. Regarding the way in which cuts are produced in the music of Cape Breton musicians, Bill Lamey observes that cuts come "from the wrist, whatever position your bow's in when you need to cut. Don't run out of bow. If you come down too far you run out of bow unless you come up again, and if you do it (i.e. cut) on the upbow it's pretty good. Some people don't have the knack of cutting back up, It's easy enough to draw the bow down, but not so easy when it comes to getting it back up without any hesitation or break in the thing." A few fiddlers, such as the late Little Jack MacDonald of Inverness County, were universally admired for their ability to produce cuts anywhere in a strathspey or reel with no apparent effort. Bill goes on to observe that cuts are not confined to Scottish music, but are also employed by Irish fiddlers, who call the practice "trebling": "Don't forget the Irish. They put plenty of that in there. They can take 6/8 jigs and cut them up. They take 6/8, 9/8, 12/8 jigs and snap it up good. I couldn't do that. I never heard that in jigs in as much as I did in Irish."

The use of a neighbouring higher or lower string to create a drone effect is a constant feature in these has been recently observed, though to a lesser extent, among traditional fiddlers in the Western Highlands. Cape Breton musicians extend this to include a doubling of notes played on open strings by playing the same note simultaneously with the fourth finger on the next lowest string. The retention of the open-string drone, along with cuts, mordents and other musical ornaments may well have been encouraged by the necessity of playing unaccompanied at schoolhouse and kitchen dances, where fiddlers alive today can remember having to use their instrument to the best advantage in order to be heard above the noise of the dancers. Bill Lamey remarks, "It (the drone) helps, especially in Scottish music. We only have four strings anyway, so we've got to make the best of them, Of course what I try to do is emulate or imitate the pipes, especially in the reels



when you have the chanter and you can hear the burls coming out. You don't have a chanter in this case: you have a bow and fiddle. Without them (the embellishments or burls) the tune wouldn't sound like much."

The left hand is held with the palm touching, or nearly touching, the neck of the fiddle. The fiddle rests against the front of the left shoulder, being supported by the left hand rather than the chin. Some older players, particularly those of Lochaber extraction, have been observed by the writers to use what the Scottish term the "old hold" with the fiddle supported by the left hand and held against the chest. Marking time vigorously with the foot, known as clogging, is an important part of this music, particularly when it is played for dancing. In general, players clog twice per measure for jigs and marches. In strathspeys each beat is marked, while in reels and hornpipes the beats are tapped out with an alternating heel-and-toe motion.

1. Theresa MacLellan, violin, accompanied by Marie MacLellan, piano. Recorded at the Big Pond Scottish Concert, August 1976. Kevin McCormick can be heard stepdancing in the background. THE SOW'S TAIL (or *The Sow's Tail to Geordie*) is a strathspey version of an early 18th-century satirical song on George I alluding to "the ample proportions of his Hanoverian mistress". It first appears in printed music as a Scottish measure in *McGlashan's Collection of Scots Measures, Hornpipes, etc* (1781), and later as a strathspey with numerous variations in Niel Gow's *2nd Collection* (1803 ed.). The local version of the LONDONDERRY HORNPIPE played here has recently gained popularity through the recordings of Joe Cormier, a Cheticamp fiddler. DUNCAN ON THE PLAINSTONES, by J Scott Skinner, was recorded some years ago by Dan Joe MacInnis.

2. Mike MacDougall, violin, accompanied by Mary Jessie MacDonald, piano.

THE WARLOCK'S STRATHSPEY (by J Robert Lowe, Scotland, c1844) and ATHOLE CUMMERS were recorded by Bill Lamey on 78 in the '30s. The latter is a traditional Cape Breton favourite brought over from Scotland and dating back at least as far as Bremner's (undated) collections published between 1751 and 1761. Its name in Gaelic, BOG AN LOCHAIN (the water-ouzel), suggests that this strathspey, like many imitative children's rhymes in Gaelic, was inspired by the cry of the wild bird. No mouth-music words have been collected locally, but the following words are sung in Skye:

Ciamar a ni mi'n Dannsa Direach,  
Ciamar a ni mi ruidhle bòidheach,  
Ciamar a ni mi'n Dannsa Direach,  
Dh'fhalbh am prin' à bonn mo chòta.

(According to Dr Bruford of the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh, the *Dannsa Direach* was possibly another name for the circular reel, called *Dannsa Mór*.)

Dh'fhalbh am prin' a chuir air clìth mi,  
Dh'fhalbh am prin' a bonn mo chòta,  
Dh'fhalbh am prin' a chuir air clìth mi,  
Ciamar a ni mi ruidhle bòidheach?

How will I dance the Upright Dance,  
How will I dance a pretty reel,  
How will I dance the Upright Dance,  
Now that the pin is gone from the bottom of my coat?

The pin is gone that allowed me movement,  
Gone from the bottom of my coat,



Mike MacDougall

The pin is gone that allowed me movement,  
So how will I dance a pretty reel?

THE NINE PINT COGGIE is in the Athole Collection. CALUM FHIONNLÀIDH (Englished *Malcolm Finlay*) is claimed as a Cape Breton composition, though no author is given in Gordon MacQuarrie's *Cape Breton Collection*, where it is printed. The reel PRINCE CHARLIE has been widely published, notably in Kerr's *First Collection of Merry Melodies* and the Athole Collection. There is a tradition noted by Simon Fraser in his *Airs and Melodies Peculiar to the Highlands of Scotland and the Isles* (1816) that the reel, there given the Gaelic name *Prion(n)sa Tearlach*, was the work of Lord Lovat's minstrel following the '45. TARBOLTON LODGE with its driving tempo is frequently played in a number of versions both by Scottish and Irish musicians.

3. John Willie Campbell, violin, accompanied by Kevin McCormick, piano.

The *scordatura* tuning (or *gleus*) is used throughout this set, with the G and D strings raised one full tone giving AEAE. This high bass tuning is well known in Scottish music, since it facilitates fingering and the use of open "drone" strings for tunes in the "fiddler's key" of A and gives a fuller, more resonant sound. It is heard most frequently among the older generation of Cape Breton fiddlers, a few of whom, like Mary Macdonald, are noted for the breadth of their repertoire of high bass sets.

The pipe march DONALD MacLEAN'S FAREWELL TO OBAN is a local favourite thanks to a recording by Joe MacLean. CHRISTY CAMPBELL (Gael. CAIRISTIONA CHAIMBEUL) is the Gaelic version of *The Miller of Drone*, an old strathspey claimed both by Nathaniel Gow (1802) and John Pringle (1801) but already extant in the Bodleian Manuscript of 1740. Keith Norman MacDonald, a Skye collector, remarks that "however, the way in which the old

Highland fiddlers played it was quite different from the set in Gow's books" and we find this same distinction between the traditional and the printed settings in Cape Breton. *Christy Campbell* is the *scordatura* strathspey par excellence for Inverness County players, and John Willie's authoritative style and accurate timing bring out the strong rhythm in the piece that makes it so well suited for stepdancing. There are a number of popular mouth-music versions from both sides of the Atlantic, all praising the virtues of *Christy Campbell*. The one given here was recorded from Malcolm Angus MacLeod of Skir Dhu, Cape Breton in 1975:

Pòsaidh mi 'nuair a thig an t-Samhainn, (3)  
Cairistiona Chaimbeul,  
Ged a tha do chasan caola  
'S e mo ghaol gun taing thu.

Pòsaidh mi gun fhios, gun fhios i  
Pòsaidh mi gun aimhreit,  
Pòsiadh mi gun fhios, gun fhios i  
Cairistiona Chaimbeul.

I will marry at Hallow-tide (3)  
Christy Campbell,  
Though your legs are thin,  
You are my love nonetheless.

I will marry her without notice, without notice  
I will marry without contention,  
I will marry her without notice, without notice,  
Christy Campbell.

According to tradition in the Inverness-Mabou area the following strathspey, PORT 'IC ARTAIR (*MacArthur's Tune*), was associated with the family of MacArthur Mor (Big MacArthur) of Mabou Coal Mines, whose father was born



Màiri Alasdair Raghnaill

on the Isle of Canna, Inner Hebrides, Scotland. The closing untitled reel belongs to the Inverness area and may be a traditional variant or reworking of *Captain MacDuff's Reel*, found in Part Third of Gow's Complete Repository.

4. Mary MacDonald (Màiri Alasdair Raghnaill), violin, accompanied by her daughter Mary Jessie MacDonald, piano.

Mary's rendition of the "old settings" of strathspeys and reels is a good example of one of the most highly respected traditional styles in Cape Breton. Considered by many to be the best living exponent of the Gaelic style of fiddling, Mary learned her music from a long line of excellent musicians in the Mabou Coal Mines area, near her birthplace. Mary's "broad" style incorporates a masterly use of embellishments and frequent variations on the tunes, set to a powerful but unhurried rhythm. Her first strathspey, LUCY CAMPBELL, is a four-part pipe tune. CALUM CRÙBACH (Lame Calum, or *Miss Drummond of Perth's Strathspey*) is claimed both by Niel Gow and by Malcolm MacDonald, a professional musician from Gow's own town of Inver, Perthshire, who often accompanied him on the cello at dances. The mouth-music words are well remembered throughout the Gaelic-speaking world, and seem to refer to the introduction of the Lowland shepherd and the Cheviot sheep into the Highland glens, which led to the clearances:

'Ille chrùbaich anns a' ghleann,  
Cum thall na caoraich uile,  
'Ille chrùbaich anns a' ghleann,  
Cum thall na caoraich.

Cum thall, na toir a nall,  
Cum thall, na caoraich uile,  
Cum thall, na toir a nall,  
Cum thall na caoraich.

Lame lad in the glen,  
Keep all the sheep away,  
Lame lad in the glen,  
Keep the sheep away!

Keep them there, don't bring them here,  
Keep all the sheep away,  
Keep them there, don't bring them here,  
Keep the sheep away.

The first of the following old-style reels is attributed to Robert ("Red Bob") Mackintosh, a gifted performer and composer during the heyday of Scottish violin music who was born at Tullymet, Perthshire around 1745. The words to COTA MOR EALASOID (*Elizabeth's Big Coat*) still exist among the older generation of local singers (from Lauchie MacLellan, Dunvegan, Inverness County):

Tha còta mór Ealasaid air Anna nighean  
an fhìdhleir,  
Tha còta mór Ealasaid air Anna 'dol a phòsadh.  
Tha còta mór Ealasaid air Anna nighean  
an fhìdhleir,  
Air Iseabal's air Ealasaid 's air Anna 'dol  
a phòsadh.

Anna the fiddler's daughter has on Elizabeth's big coat,  
Anna the fiddler's daughter has on Elizabeth's  
big coat on her way to be married.  
Anna the fiddler's daughter has on Elizabeth's big coat,  
Isabelle's wearing it, and Elizabeth, and Anna  
on her way to be married.

The last of Mary's reels is among the many that have not appeared in collections. Though it is often performed, its



Mary Jessie MacDonald

title and mouth-music words are no longer known locally.

5. Alex Francis MacKay, violin, accompanied by Fr John Angus Rankin, piano.

All of these tunes, with the exception of the final Breton reel, have been published in widely obtainable Scottish collections. A likely candidate for the universally enjoyed slow air for the fiddle in Breton is NIEL GOW'S LAMENTATION FOR ABERCAIRNEY. Gow's memorial to his longtime friend and patron continues an ancient tradition of *tuiream* (laments), a genre which flourished among the professional musicians and bards employed by the Gaelic nobility in Scotland and Ireland. The authorship of JOHNNIE PRINGLE is laid claim to by the early-19th-century Border fiddler whose name the tune bears in Gow's Repository (Part Third, 1806); also by William Marshall of Fochabers, celebrated in the words of Robert Burns as "the first composer of strathspeys of the age," in his collections under the titles *Miss Burnet's Reel* (1781) and *Miss Jane Stewart's of Pittyvaich* (1822). MUNLOCHIE BRIDGE is a traditional strathspey with Gaelic words still current here and in the Western Highlands. Our version was supplied by the *seanachaidh* (traditional storyteller) Joe Neil MacNeil ('Ios Nill Bhig') of Middle Cape, Cape Breton in April 1977.

Gu'n ith na coin na maragan (2)  
'S na luban dubha air Ruairidh.

'Se Seònaid 'rinn na maragan (3)  
'S na luban dubha do Ruairidh.

The dogs will eat the blood-puddings  
And the black puddings belonging to poor Rory.

Janet's the one who made-the blood-puddings  
And the black puddings for Rory.

THE DUKE OF GORDON'S BIRTHDAY, a tribute by William Marshall to the Duke in whose household he was engaged as house-steward, was initially published in Marshall's *First Collection* (1781). In spite of its well-attested authorship, the strathspey was integrated into Gaelic oral tradition as *A' Chaora Ruadh* (The Red Sheep) with appropriately light-hearted words (from Joe Neil MacNeil):

Cnàmh do chìr, a chaora ruaidh, (2)  
'S binne leam na ceòl na fìdhleadh,  
Cnàmh do chìr, a chaora ruaidh. '

Chew your cud, red sheep,  
The sound is sweeter to me than fiddle music,  
So chew your cud, red sheep.

PERRIE WERRIE is in the popular Athole Collection, and was likely introduced into Cape Breton from this or another written source. The same is also probable for PEGGIE MENZIES. The WEST MABOU REEL, named after a settlement in Inverness County, is regarded as a local composition; attributed to a musician belonging to the numerous musically talented families of Beatons who settled there from Lochaber.

6. John Neil MacLean, violin, accompanied by Phyllis MacLeod, piano.

THE BLACK SPORRAN, a bagpipe march in jig time by Pipe Major A MacDonald, comes from Gordon MacQuarrie's *Cape Breton Collection*. WALKING THE FLOOR is a popular dance-tune that has been recorded by Dan Joe MacInnis and by Donald MacLellan (the brother of Theresa and Marie MacLellan). John Neil's repetition of the tune an octave lower is a common device; for dance-playing the tune was often doubled an octave lower by a second



Alex Francis MacKay

fiddler, as is still the custom in parts of Ireland (see “Kerry Fiddles”, on TOPIC).

7. Dan Joe MacInnis and his son George, violins, accompanied by Marie MacLellan, piano. Recorded at the Big Pond Concert, August 1976.

GLENGARRY’S MARCH (Gael. *A Sheana-bhean Bhoichd*, Poor Old Woman) is a Highland pipe march which is in the Inverness Collection and in Kerr’s. The Gaelic words are from Joe Neil MacNeil:

A sheana-bhean bhoichd, (3)  
Cha’n fhalbh thu an nochd,  
Neo idir moch am màireach.

Thig am fìdhleir an nochd, (3)  
'S bheir e sgrìob air a' phort,  
'S ged a dh'fhalbhadh e an duigh thig e am màireach.

O poor old woman, you will not leave tonight  
Nor at all early tomorrow.

The fiddler will come tonight  
And he’ll stroke out the tune,  
And should he leave today he’ll come tomorrow.

DONALD MacMASTER’S STRATHSPEY is the work of the noted Cape Breton Scottish composer and fiddle-player Dan Hugh MacEachern of Queensville, Inverness County. It is available in his recently published *MacEachern Collection*.

8. John Neil MacLean, violin, accompanied by Phyllis MacLeod, piano.

J SCOTT SKINNER, a dance strathspey, is well suited to the buoyant swing of John Neil’s playing style. Penned by its Scottish author J Murdoch Henderson in 1934 as a tribute to

the memory of the Strathspey King, this and the following reel reached Cape Breton in Henderson’s collection *The Flowers of Scottish Melody*. GILLIAN’S REEL (MUIR O’ GELLAN) is attributed by Henderson to Peter Milne (1824-1908), an Aberdeen violinist who published a collection of strathspeys and served as a musical mentor to Skinner in the early stages of the latter’s career.

9. Alex Francis MacKay, violin, accompanied by Fr John Angus Rankin, piano.

The first strathspey in this set is unidentified. Alex Francis’ rendition of this and the following strathspey, CALUM BREUGACH, is remarkable for its precision and ringing tone quality, even by Cape Breton standards. The second tune (Engl. Lying Calum; also called *Calum Brogach*, Sturdy Calum, by Inverness County musicians) is an old strathspey in four parts, whose earliest appearance known to us is in Angus Cumming’s Collection (1785). THE DUKE OF ATHOLE, GEORGE THE IV, THE KING’S and MISS LYLE’S REEL (known to Irish fiddlers as *Paddy Ryan’s Dream*) are all traditional and have been published in recent collections. These last three tunes are commonly played as a set, with THE KING’S serving to make the crucial transition from strathspey to reel rhythm.

10. John Willie Campbell, violin, accompanied by Kevin McCormick, piano.

ALEX MacEACHERN’S STRATHSPEY ranks among the most widely performed of Dan Hugh MacEachern’s works. FEAR NAN CASAN CAOLA (The Man with the Scrawny Legs), called in English THE REJECTED SUITOR, is a pipe reel, undoubtedly very old, which is preserved in its fiddle setting in the Skye Collection. The fragmentary Gaelic verses recalled by Josie MacNeil, Big Pond, and Joe Neil MacNeil add to the impression of the tune’s antiquity. More elaborate verses have been recorded in the Highlands.



Dan Joe MacInnis

Tha tein' anns a' bhail' an duigh,  
Tha tein' anns an éibhleig, (3)  
Tha tein' anns a' bhail' an duigh  
Tha tein' ann, tha tein' ann.

Tàrr as mu'n tig an latha (3)  
Tàrr as mu'm beir iad ort  
Tàrr as, tàrr as, tàrr as mu'm beir iad ort

There's fire in the farm today,  
There's fire in the ember,  
There's fire in the farm today,  
There's fire, there's fire.

Take off before the day breaks,  
Take off before they catch you,  
Take off, take off, take off before they catch you.

The final reel of the set is sometimes named the *Margaree Reel* after the farming valley in the west of Inverness County, though some authorities feel that this name is a secondary one which became attached to an old Highland tune.

11. Mary MacDonald, violin, accompanied by Mary Jessie MacDonald, piano.  
MISS LYLE'S STRATHSPEY is in most of the more recent Scottish collections and has become an old standby for players throughout the island. THE HIGHLANDER'S FAREWELL TO IRELAND (Gael. *A Mhorag am bheil thu ann?*) is a traditional Gaelic strathspey at least as old as Alexander McGlashan's *A Collection of Reels...* (1781). KING GEORGE was likewise in the repertoires of the old-time Inverness County musicians, and even today is rarely heard elsewhere. In addition to being one of the strathspeys most memorably performed by Niel Gow, TULLOCH GORM

(Green Hillock) has always been regarded as containing something essential to Scottish traditional music. It was to this tune that the Rev John Skinner composed his famous lines ("They canna please a Highland taste,/Compar'd wi' Tullochgorum") defending the national music against the classical pieces then in vogue in some Lowland cities. The first musical notation of *Tulloch Gorm* is in the Drummond Castle MS (1734), where it appears as a rant. The earliest collection to include it is Bremner's, printed some twenty years later. The accompanying *port-a-beul* words suit the title and are doubtless some of the oldest words associated with the tune.

Theid mi null air Tulach Gorm  
Theid mi null air, theid mi null air,  
Theid mi null air Tulach Gorm,  
'S thig mi nall am màireach.

I'll go over the Green Hillock,  
I'll go over it, I'll go over it,  
I'll go over the Green Hillock,  
And I'll return tomorrow.

Mary's setting for *Tulloch Gorm* is the oldest traditional one known in Cape Breton (and perhaps elsewhere) for the fiddle. Her performance of the strathspey, with its variations, along with that of Angus Chisholm and Dan Hugh MacEachern, has always been regarded as a special event by listeners, and has become a specialty with her. LORD MACDONALD is from the first Lord MacDonald, Alexander, and its earliest printing was by Alexander McGlashan in 1786. It survives as one of the most popular items of mouth-music in the island's Gaelic-speaking areas (recorded from Malcolm Angus MacLeod, Skir Dhu):



Mairi Alasdair Raghnaill

A Mhòrag nighean Dòmhnail Duinn  
Tha thu cruinn, sgiobalta,  
A Mhòrag nighean Dòmhnail Duinn,  
Tha thu cruinn, bòidheach.

A Mhòrag bheag, ged tha thu beag  
Gu'n tig thu chun an tobair dhomh,  
A Mhòrag bheag, ged tha thu beag,  
Gu'n dean thu a h-uile obair dhomh.

O Morag, brown-haired Donald's daughter,  
You are neat and well-rounded,  
O Morag, brown-haired Donald's daughter,  
You are well-rounded and pretty.

O little Morag, though you are small,  
You'll come to the well for me,  
O little Morag, though you are small,  
You'll do all the work for me.

MISS JOHNSTONE is to be found in many of the modern Scottish collections, and in a slightly different setting in O'Neill's *Music of Ireland*, no. 1376.

12. Joe MacLean, violin, accompanied by Mary Jessie MacDonald, piano.

The first jig used to be popular among dance musicians in the Iona-Benacadie area of the island, not far from Joe's native Washabuct. Both it and the following one are traditional Scottish jigs that were passed down in the area. The third jig, DAN THE COBBLER, is Irish and must have come from Joe's extensive personal collection of traditional music. Irish double jigs have passed easily into the repertoires of Scottish fiddlers in Nova Scotia, while other varieties of Irish tunes such as reels, slow airs and slip jigs are less commonly heard.

#### SOURCES

BRUFORD, Alan, and MUNROE, Ailie, *The Fiddle in the Highlands* (An Comunn Gaidhealach, Inverness, 1973).  
COLLINSON, Francis, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland* (London, 1966).  
EMMERSON, George S, *Rantin' Pipe and Tremblin' String* (London, 1971).  
FLETT, J F, and FLETT, T M, *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (with appendix on dancing in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia by F Rhodes) (London, 1964).  
GIBSON, John G, *Fiddlers to the Fore* (Port Hawkesbury, N.S. 1975)

Special thanks are due to Joe Neil MacNeil, Alex MacNeil, Mr & Mrs T Butler and John Campbell of Sydney; to Frank MacInnis of Creignish; to J G Gibson of Melford; to Dr Alan Bruford of the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh; to Reg Hall of Croydon, Surrey and to the staff of Cecil Sharp House, London.



Joe MacLean

Digital remaster ©2013 Topic Records Ltd.  
©2013 Topic Records Ltd.  
The copyright in this sound recording and digital artwork is owned by Topic Records Ltd.  
All rights reserved.

