



The Island Fiddler

The Newsletter of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers Society



Vol. 3, Issue 3

September 2005

Islanders Perform at Grand Masters



Nathan Condon, accompanied by **Gary Arsenault** and **Richard Wood** entertained in Ottawa at the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Championship's Friday evening "Meet and Greet" and Dance. This event is held on the day prior to the Fiddling Championship at which Nathan competed. Richard also gave a spectacular show at the playdowns Saturday afternoon and again at the Finals Saturday evening. The great applause received by Nathan at all events at which he performed is indicative of the deep appreciation of Island fiddling by audiences throughout Canada (and elsewhere).

Fiddle Summit 2005



The **2nd Annual Fiddle Summit** held at the Carrefour Theatre 4 June 2005. From left to right Richard Wood, Nathan Condon, Roy Johnstone, Ward MacDonald, J.P. Cormier and seated Courtney Hogan with Richard Le Page.

IN THE MAKING: CELEBRATION PLANNED FOR 2007

A call to experienced fiddlers and organizers

At the last meeting of the PEI Fiddlers Society (PEIFS) on 28 May 2005, a discussion was held regarding the celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the PEIFS. During that discussion some long-term goals of the society were identified and it was determined that those goals could be achieved through a week-long fiddle festival held across PEI in the Fall of 2007. If you are interested in participating in this event, as an organizer, a venue, a musician, or a volunteer, please attend the next meeting of the PEIFS on Wednesday, 26 October 2005 at 6:30 pm at St. Pius X Parish Hall, 106 St. Peters Rd. in Charlottetown.

PEI Fiddlers Society General Meeting 28 May 2005

Paul Cheverie

Secretary/Treasurer

Chaired by President Ward MacDonald, a General Meeting of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers Society Inc. was held on the afternoon of 28 May 2005 at the Carrefour de L'Isle-Saint-Jean in Charlottetown. Paul Cheverie, Secretary/Treasurer, gave a healthy financial report (3 years) - largely due to the resurgence of Society's quarterly newsletter, The Island Fiddler. Reports from the Chapters were given by representatives Anne McPhee, Eastern Kings Fiddlers; Carolyn Drake, Queens County Fiddlers; and Barry Thompson, Prince County Fiddlers.

A major topic of new Society business was the upcoming 30th Anniversary of the PEIFS in 2007. A motion was made to begin plans for such an event and a Mission Statement was drafted. Exciting ideas (ie concerts, workshops, recognitions) of what this might entail were discussed. It is hoped that preparations will begin at the next general meeting of the PEIFS in October 2005

The June 2005 newsletter, completed just prior to the meeting, was made available to all in attendance. Distribution of the newsletter was discussed, including ways to link other fiddle related websites to the Island Fiddler site. Discussion of a permanent website for the Society was deferred to the next meeting.

The meeting expressed its gratitude to newsletter Editor, Gerry Cheverie, who after spending a year living in his home province of PEI, was returning to Ottawa. However, it was noted that Gerry had agreed to continue as interim editor of the newsletter from Ottawa.

A copy of the Society's bylaws was distributed to each executive member (including chapter representatives)

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The Island Fiddler



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This edition of *The Island Fiddler* is on the internet at <http://www3.pei.sympatico.ca/~paul.cheverie/tif.htm> where you can view/print.

From the President

There are great things happening with the PEI Fiddlers Society. As I look over this issue of our newsletter, I am proud to see the contributions that our members are making to their communities. Throughout the summer, groups and individuals have brought the sounds of fine PEI fiddle music to countless events on the Island and across the country.



Ward MacDonald

Apart from just performing, many Island fiddlers have taken on roles as organizers and producers. The development of this type of infrastructure is essential in continuing to present high-quality traditional music in a professional manner. This is especially important to think about as we begin planning our 30th Anniversary celebrations. I encourage all members to consider how you may become involved in these efforts. Carrying out this event will surely provide a rewarding and educational experience to all those involved. What role will you play?

I am pleased to hear news in this issue about fiddlers in the Southern Kings region. The region's voice is one we have not heard in almost two decades when the Southern Kings Chapter dissolved. I still remember following around my father and grandfather as they performed with that Montague chapter in the early 80s.

I would also like to announce a workshop I am designing for the fall. *Reading Music for Traditional Fiddle* will include everything you need to know about reading music as it applies to fiddle. It is my philosophy that to improve your playing you need to improve the way you learn, and learning by ear and by note are both important parts of learning well. If you are interested in attending such a workshop in the fall, please contact me at celticsomething@hotmail.com or (902) 626-8084.

Ward Allan MacDonald
 President, PEI Fiddlers Society



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"Music makes the world a better place"

Queens County Fiddlers

Carolyn Drake

When the nice weather arrives on Prince Edward Island, it means there will be plenty of fiddling to enjoy. The Queens County Fiddlers kicked the summer season off in fine fashion with their annual concert at the Carrefour Theatre in Charlottetown on 28 May. Another Evening of Island Fiddling featured group numbers, as well as solos by such well-known local players as Peter Chaisson, Sheila MacKenzie, Ward MacDonald, Chad Mooney and Courtney Hogan, as well as some great sets by our guest from Nova Scotia, Dara Smith. There was also plenty of great stepdancing, as well as musical numbers from Lester Stubbart and Colette Cheverie. All in all, a great night of entertainment.

A few weeks later, the Queens County Fiddlers took the stage again to start the entertainment portion of the Relay for Life, a major fundraiser for the Canadian Cancer Society which is held every year in June at the Charlottetown Driving Park Entertainment Centre. Then in July, it was off to the friendly stage of the Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival for our usual Sunday afternoon spot in the concert lineup. Great tunes, great sunshine and a lovely tribute to member and fiddle teacher Kathryn Dau-Schmidt made it an afternoon to remember.

In August, about 15 members found time in their busy schedules to perform at the Prince County Fiddlers annual concert in Kensington. The group also took a bit of much-needed time off from practice this summer which allowed us a lot more time to take in some of the great fiddle music around the province, particularly the shows involving fiddlers who are either members or accompany the group from time to time. For example, Cynthia MacLeod had a ceilidh every Wednesday and Sunday night at the Brackley Community Centre; Roy Johnstone had a Wednesday night ceilidh in Victoria, and he and Steve Sharratt appeared regularly in Charlottetown in a show known as Hot Plaid, as well as at several other Island locations; Sheila MacKenzie, along with Lester Stubbart, had a fantastic gig set up with The Celtic Ladies every week at The Guild in Charlottetown this summer (the sold-out show has been so successful that it will continue Tuesday nights in September if you are in the neighbourhood); Aaron Crane had a ceilidh at the St. Andrew's Chapel on Tuesdays throughout the summer and at Stanhope Community Centre on Thursdays; and Ward MacDonald played at numerous locations and produced

East Coast Explosion in Georgetown (www.kingsplayhouse.com) that brought in wonderful entertainment, including Buddy MacMaster on 29 Jul., Winnie Chafe on 10 Aug. and Beolach on 23 Aug. Many other members were also busy with tunes through the summer months.

It has been a great summer of music, with lots more to come in the fall as the cooler weather closes in. The Queens County Fiddlers are back at practice at St. Pius X Hall on Wednesday, 21 Sep. Practices will continue up until 14 Dec., which will be our Christmas practice. Some other special dates to remember: 19 Oct. - Queens County Fiddlers AGM; 26 Oct. - P.E.I. Fiddlers Society Meeting, 6:30 p.m., at St. Pius X Hall.

General Meeting, from page 1

for discussion and possible revision/update. This topic was also deferred to the next general meeting.

It was suggested that the Chapters submit nominations for new Life Memberships in the Society.

The current executive was reaffirmed: Ward MacDonald as President, Carolyn Drake as First Vice President and Paul Cheverie as Secretary/Treasurer. A new 2nd Vice President - Nathan Condon - was elected. Nathan is a fine young fiddler and will make an excellent Vice President and will be an asset to the Society. Nathan announced that he had been selected to participate in the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Championships in Ottawa in August 2005.

The meeting was adjourned to a potluck supper followed by an evening of music with the Queens County Fiddlers Annual Concert.

PEI Fiddlers Society General Meeting

**Wednesday 26 October 2005 6:30 pm
St. Pius X Hall 106 St. Peters Rd Charlottetown**

All are welcome!

Most Recent Recordings

J.J. Chaisson	<i>Class Act</i>	687-2261
Elmer Deagle	<i>Elmer Deagle</i>	566-2314
Fiddlers' Sons	<i>Eagles Fly</i>	569-3745
Billy MacInnis	<i>On The Bow Again</i>	628-1911
Maria McDougall/Allison Ling	<i>Wake the Affections</i>	672-2965

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Prince County Fiddlers

Barry Thompson

The Prince County Fiddlers have performed at a Variety of venues over the summer months. We began by playing for the clients and staff of Community Connections in Summerside on 23 June. The next day we played for the Heritage Festival held at the Wyatt Property also located in Summerside. We also played and rode on a float in the Lobster Carnival Parade on July 11. We were fortunate in that the rain held off until after the parade. We were once again proud to participate at the Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival on 17 July. On 24 July we were happy to perform at the annual Irish Festival held in the community of Emerald.

On 13 August, we hosted the PEI Fiddlers in concert. The concert was held at the Community Gardens Arena in Kensington. We were happy to welcome to our concert the Queens County Fiddlers, Peter and Kevin Chaisson, and Kathryn Dau-Schmidt and her group of Students from Eastern Kings. The Ladies Slipper Step Dancers were also featured during the evening. On 21 August, we helped open the Kensington Harvest Festival.

Nathan Condon launched his new CD entitled "Playing in the Sand" Thursday 18 August in Kensington where a large crowd turned out to hear selections from the CD. Nathan has been honored by being invited to compete in the Canadian Grand Masters Old Time Fiddling Competition to be held in Nepean Ontario in late August.

On 6 August, Jim MacDougall acted in the capacity of Judge of the Fiddling Contest, a long time feature of the Tyne Valley Oyster Festival. The winner of the competition was Keelin Wedge from St Louis.

We have recently purchased some new sound equipment from Sobers Music in Summerside.

During the Summer we continued to meet on Monday evenings for practice. We hope to be able to attract some new members to the group. We were happy to welcome a violin student from Ontario to one of our practices.

We are sad to say goodbye to Grace Law and Kim Vincent who are relocating to Toronto. Both Kim and Grace will continue to instruct in their new location.



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Island Fiddle Music Ambassadors



Roy Johnstone performs with **Steve Sharatt** in St. John's at the *Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival* Aug 2005.



Instructor Ward MacDonald makes a point at the first *Klondyke Fiddle School* in Dawson City, Yukon Aug 2005.

Letters

Editor,

You may be aware that Premier J. Angus MacLean, wrote the book "Making It Home" After his death, his widow, Gwen, gave me his file titled "Violins" full of his private letters. All are much the same " Dear so-and-so, I'm trying to find PEI made violins. My first school teacher, a Mr. Bolger made violins and so did ...

So that got me thinking - I wonder what's happened to all these fiddles? Obviously Angus had a dream and that's been passed to me and I'm running with it, to **create a PEI Fiddle & Music Museum**. I have a fiddle from Ivan Dowling; he has loaned one his father had made, along with a photo of him playing it and an article of where he played etc. One day a man came and asked if I wanted to buy and old fiddle?.....It was one that Mr Bolger had made!

I also have a book of fiddle tunes by an Island fiddler Emmett Hughes. 60 tunes he wrote himself. He only had 20 books printed. Most people play Scottish, Irish and Cape Breton tunes but these are PEI tunes.

So if anyone has any fiddles or other musical instruments etc. that they are willing to sell, loan or donate to such a Museum please let me know. This is for the Island's Heritage and History. Anything at all that would be of interest in a music museum.

Let your families share their heritage with others. As well, I'm going to try to write a book "The History of Fiddle Making in PEI".

Richard Le Page, email info@rlepageviolins.com or www.rlepageviolins.com

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Fiddle Care

I've been asked:

"How often should I change my strings and get my bow rehaired?"

That depends on how much playing and practicing you do, but as a rule, at least once a year is good for both, especially if you want to keep a good clear sound. The strings tend to "go off" even if the violin isn't being played and the bow hair loses its grip.

"Where should the bridge be?"

There is a little nick on the inside of the treble "F" hole. (right hand side). The middle of the ankle of the bridge should line up with this. Also the bridge should be lined up with the sides of the fingerboard. Sight from the pegbox, down the fingerboard.

"Where should the sound post be?"

Behind the bridge approx. 1/8 to 3/16 and inline with the ankle of the bridge. The best place is where the sound suits the player. Please don't try to move it yourself, I'll do it for you. It may fall over and then you'll really have a problem.



Richard Le Page

While we are on measurements here's some that may be of interest:

General Guide For Violin Size By Age

3-5	1/16 – 1/2
4-7	1/4
6-10	1/2
9-11	3/4
9 to adult	4/4

This is only a guide, each child needs to be measured for a correct size.

Measurements For Violin & Cello

<i>Violin</i>	4/4	14"
	3/4	13 3/8"
	1/2	12 1/2"
	1/4	11 1/8"
	1/8	10 1/8"
	1/16	9 1/8"
<i>Cello</i>	4/4	29 5/8"
	3/4	27 5/16"
	1/2	25 1/2"

(Richard Le Page: 659-2932 email: info@rlepageviolins.com web site: www.rlepageviolins.com)

Events Forecast

15 Sep 2005	Musical Bridges Concert	Charlottetown - Carrefour Theatre	800-565-0278
16-18 Sep 2005	She Sells seashells - Kitchen Party	Charlottetown Waterfront	866-955-2003
7 & 21 Sep 2005	Ceilidh on the Wharf	Victoria Village Wharf	658-9999
28 Sep 2005	Fiddle & Square Dance Concert and Dance	Tracadie - Community Centre	676-2488
29 Oct 2005	Fiddle Doo & Pot Luck	Kensington	963-2221
Daily	to 17 Sep 2005	Concert	Cavendish - Avollea Village
Mondays		Ceilidh & Dance	963-3050
Tuesdays	to 27 Sep 2005	Celtic Ladies	St. Peter's Bay Circle Club
Tuesdays	to Oct 2005	Evening Frolic Concert	961-2899
Wed & Sun	to 14 Sep 2005	Brackley Beach Ceilidh	Charlottetown - Arts Guild
Wednesdays		Square Dance	620-3333
Wednesdays		Ceilidh	Cavendish - Rainbow Room
Wednesdays	to 21 Sep 2005	Ceilidh at the Corner	963-2221
Wednesdays	14 & 28 Sep 2005	Kitchen Party	Brackley Beach Community Centre
Thursdays	to 29 Sep 2005	Ceilidh	672-3555
Thursdays	to 08 Sep 2005	Ceilidh	Old Lorne Valley School
Thursdays	to 24 Sep 2005	Close to the Ground Concert Series	687-2584
Fridays		Ceilidh & Dance	Souris - Seniors Silver Threads
Fridays	to 14 Oct 2005	Ceilidh at The Irish Hall	687-2396
Fridays	2, 16, 30 Sep 2005	Ceilidh	Orwell Corner Historic Village
Saturdays		Fiddle Concert and Dance	651-8515
Saturdays		Dance	O'Leary - St. Luke's Hall
Sundays		Ceilidh & Dance	853-4325
Su/Mo/We/Th	to 13 Oct 2005	Scottish Music Concert	Stanley Bridge - WI Hall
			836-4310
			Rollo Bay Fiddle Field Barn
			687-2584
			Pooles Corner - Kaylee Hall
			394-1115
			Dundas Plowing Match
			583-2113
			Charlottetown - B.I.S. Hall
			892-2367
			Murray Harbour Community Centre
			962-2792
			Charlottetown - St. Pius X Hall
			368-1832
			Goose River
			961-2205
			Monticello Log Hall
			628-1254
			Richmond - MacKinnon Homestead
			854-2245

Fiddle Practices Open To The Public

Prince County Fiddlers	Mondays 7:30 pm
'Community Connections' S'side	836-3844
Queens County Fiddlers	Wednesdays 8:15 - 9:15 pm
St. Pius X Hall Parkdale	569-4592
Eastern Kings Fiddlers	Mondays 7:00-8:00 pm
Rollo Bay Consolidated School	687-2584
Acadian Fiddlers	Fridays 8:00 pm
Boys & Girls Club Wellington	854-2570



A few of the many fiddle students of Kathryn Dau-Schmidt ... at the Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival 2005

Eastern Kings Fiddlers

Anne M. McPhee

As predicted, this summer has proven to be a busy season of music, fun and good times in Eastern Kings with something on the go for every night of the week and then some. Attendance was up at all the year round ceilidhs and events in the area due to the influx of tourists and people coming "home from away" for the holidays. As well, there were a number of special events over the summer that were also very well attended.

The Saturday night dances in Goose River were late starting this year but once they got going there was no stopping people from coming out and enjoying Peter Chaisson on the fiddle, Lemmie Chaisson on guitar and vocal, Bonnie Campbell on piano and Alton MacKenzie with his trusty spoons. These fun evenings should continue until the weather turns nasty and attendance drops.

The Monticello ceilidh saw the introduction of a new MC. Gene (Jimmy Bornish of the "Black Bornishes") MacDonald of Monticello has taken over the reins. Jenny MacQuaid who, after close to 15 years of "running the show" in Monticello, has decided to pursue other interests.

The Monday night ceilidhs in St. Peter's Bay continue to be well attended where everyone is given a turn to play. There's always lots of back up, sometimes up to 14 or 15 guitar players at once! The Friday night ceilidhs at the Dundas ploughing match fields will continue through the early part of the fall before moving back to St. Peter's Bay Circle Club for the winter months.

Tuesday nights at Mary Warren's café in Goose River saw a small group of ladies gathering to play a variety of tunes, especially enjoying anything written by J. Scott Skinner. Aided by the regular attendance of Teresa Wilson and a special visit from Amy Swenson, a lot of good tunes and stories were told to the enjoyment of all. The middle of August saw the arrival of Myra Franks MacLeod and her band of fiddle families for two weeks of music immersion and fiddle workshops in Goose River. The tunes will echo off the north side capes for a long time to come.

Wednesday nights provide the choice of going to the Seniors Silver Threads in Souris where attendance was way up and a wide variety of entertainment was enjoyed by everyone there; or going dancing in Lorne Valley with Peter Chaisson on the fiddle and brother Kevin on the keyboards.

Thursday nights took you to the ceilidh barn on the Rollo Bay fiddle grounds. Attendance was good from the first ceilidh on despite all kinds of other events taking place at the same time. The 29th Annual Rollo Bay fiddle festival was a great success this year as usual. Cape Breton fiddler Glenn Graham put on two excellent fiddle workshops attended by fiddlers from all over the Island as well as from Ontario, Vermont, Massachusetts and

New Brunswick. He also performed at a Friday night dance and at the two Saturday concerts. The youth concert was very well attended as well. Elmer Deagle captured the audience with a few tunes from his new CD that was released in August. The crowd also enjoyed Chad Mooney as he played up a storm on his new Richard LePage violin. It won't take him long to have that fiddle broken in at the rate he's going.

Kathryn Dau Schmidt was selected Volunteer of the Week on the Eastern Kings website for her exceptional work with young fiddlers in the area and for going over and above the call of duty. Pictures and stories from the Rollo Bay Fiddle festival can be found on the website at <http://www.isn.net/susankin/071.html>

George Mel MacPhee is walking around flush after receiving a royalties cheque from the release of a tune he wrote called "George Mel's Dream." The story goes that George dreamed the tune the night his father Mel passed away, remembered it and found it on his fiddle. Ken Perlman recorded George playing the tune in 1991 and put the tune to notes in his book *The Fiddle Music of PEI*. A group in Toronto found the tune in the book and recorded it on their CD in 2001. The group has since disbanded but they were finally able to track George down this summer and pay him his royalties. George's wife Gladys called the cheque "Pennies from heaven." George and Gladys also celebrated their 40-year wedding anniversary this summer.

And speaking of celebrating. Joey (Syl) and Tillie MacDonald had a joint 75th birthday celebration this summer. Joey turned 75 this past January while Tillie was 75 in May. Joey was interviewed on a CBC radio program this summer as being one of the most faithful attendees of the Rollo Bay Fiddle festival. He hasn't missed a one in 29 years.



Tillie and Joey

Peter Chaisson, president of the Eastern Kings Chapter of the PEI Fiddlers Society reports that in general, the numbers were down at the fiddle festival and at the Rollo Bay ceilidhs, the same as all over. But, he says, the bills will be paid and it looks like there is enough money to pay for another year of fiddle lessons to anyone, young or old, who wishes to learn to play a tune or two on the fiddle. Fiddle lessons will start as usual, in the middle of October and the Kitchen class will be starting up again at same time, Monday nights at 7:00pm with Peter Chaisson, Chad Mooney, Lemmie Chaisson, Jimmy Townshend and me and anyone else who wants to join us to play a few tunes and have some fun. Everyone is welcome.

Natalie & Buddy MacMaster

Traditional Music From Cape Breton Island

A review - - by Ward MacDonald

Released on Sunday, August 28, this recording is sure to become an instant classic. I had the good fortune of attending the release at the Judique Hall and sharing a cherished experience with the sold-out crowd. The drive back to the ferry in Pictou Monday morning was way too short, only time to listen through the album twice. The recording was my most exciting **purchase in a long time as it renewed my spirit for playing.** Before the ferry docked in Wood Islands, I had learned two cuts, it's that good.

This is the first recording that Buddy and niece, Natalie have ever done together. An inspiring idea itself, the album rejuvenates an enthusiasm for pure tradition. Twin fiddles are complimented by the rock-solid accompaniment of Betty Lou Beaton on piano and Dave MacIsaac on guitar. CDs will be in stores soon and are available on Natalie's website: www.nataliemacmaster.com.

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Southern Kings Fiddlers

Amy Swenson

The summer season has been very busy for Southern Kings area fiddlers. Atwood O'Connor, Bud Stewart, Cecil Chapman, Amy Swenson, Kenny Chapman, Ambrose Casey, Ray Cantelo, and Francis McCormack and have been entertaining at Kilmuir, Sturgeon, Lower Montague and Murray Harbour ceilidhs, at senior's residences, benefits and at the Montague Waterfront Concert series. Francis has also played at Monticello, Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival and on the ferry, often weaving his back-up fiddling magic with singer Lester MacPherson.

Our area has many up and coming young fiddlers who have been performing this summer as well. Belle River fiddler Dylan Menzie, who is turning 11 in September, has played at Beck's Furniture in Montague, an Eddy Quinn's Close to the Ground concert in Poole's Corner and at the Highland Games on August 6th. His lively fiddling and Scottish attire for that event, complete with red wig and kilt, delighted the audience at Selkirk Park. Dylan became a member of the Queen's County Fiddlers this spring. Another energetic young fiddler, Ryan MacPherson, entertained the audience at Kilmuir Hall July 23rd, accompanied by his father Sam on guitar, and they will also be at the Dundas Plowing Match. Young fiddling sisters Lisa and Dawna Maclean of Belfast have been playing at benefits in their area. Eight of Amy Swenson's students, aged 4 to 11, entertained at the Northumberland Fisheries Festival in Murray River on July 30th. On August 13th, 11 year old Janine Chapman of Murray Harbour played at the Island Wide Fiddling Contest in Charlottetown and Amy won second place in the Championship class.

On June 26th, forty students and friends of Amy's presented "Fiddlemania 2005" at Murray Harbour Hall. Fiddlers ranged in age from Brooklyn fiddler Merlin M'Cloud, 4, who just started playing in May, to Milltown Cross fiddler Atwood O'Connor, 82, who has been playing for 74 years! Atwood gave us a Princess Reel lesson and he and special guests Dylan Menzie, Francis McCormack, and Alex Ripley, a promising 14 year old fiddler recently arrived in Point Prim from Ontario, played much enjoyed solos. The Morell Community School Fiddlers made their island stage debut, and beginner and intermediate students aged 8-60 played several numbers in groups. The concert raised \$450 for tsunami relief in the village of Kinniya, Sri Lanka. The fall promises to be very active with regular ceilidhs continuing throughout the area in September and October, and a special benefit concert in November in Montague for a youth mission to the Dominican Republic. Starting up in late September is the Vernon River Community School, which has attracted an enthusiastic group of beginner and intermediate fiddlers for the past several years. They have been taught by Sheila MacKenzie and Amy Swenson. In January, Amy will again teach beginners and more advanced fiddlers at Murray Harbour Community School, and the Morell Community School will offer a winter fiddle class as well.

We would like to extend best wishes for a full recovery to master fiddler Jimmy Hume, who is battling cancer. For many years, Jimmy has been entertaining audiences in this part of the island with his dynamic playing style and his fine repertoire of Scottish and island tunes. He has also always provided much positive encouragement to young fiddlers in the area. We miss Jimmy and hope to see him back at Kilmuir and other ceilidhs very soon.



Fiddler's Shop Talk



Roy Johnstone

Playing in tune is a challenge on the fiddle and one that every fiddler struggles with at times. Most fiddle tunes are in keys G, D, A or relative minors of Em and Bm that are fairly easy to finger in that the spacing of the notes falls in places where the hand is a little more comfortable. Many of the Celtic fiddle tunes are in Dorian mode which we'll take up next issue. It is important to learn scales so you are familiar with where the notes lie on the fingerboard.

As you will probably recall from school music classes the basic structure for the major scales is two four note cells (a tetrachord) of tone, tone, semi-tone separated by a full tone. If this sounds complicated it isn't. It's just the sequence of notes starting on the first note, the "tonic" and then the following seven notes of the scale leading to the tonic, an octave above the starting note. For example let's start with the key of C, which is played on only the white keys on the piano (no sharps or flats). The C major scale is CDEFGABC. The notes increase in pitch (the frequency of the sound) as you move along the scale. C tone followed by a full tone to D followed by a full tone to E followed by a semi-tone or half-tone to F is the first tetra chord which is separated by a full tone before beginning the next tetra chord which would be G followed by a full tone to A followed by a full tone to B and then a half-tone to C. Although this might sound complicated at first it really is just describing the difference between the pitches of the notes and on the violin this translates into differences of finger placement.

Figuring out where exactly to place one's fingers is a bit of a challenge, especially in the beginning. It's really important to have your fiddle tuned in perfect fifths and you need to be able to hear when the instrument is perfectly in tune. Using a tuner will help to let you know when each string is in tune.

Once the instrument is in tune you can start to play your scales. If we start with the G scale we can use the open string for our tonic note. Then the pattern for our fingers becomes tone, tone, semi-tone on the G string and tone, tone, semi-tone on the D string. This means that the fingers fall in the same places on the G string as they do on the D string. A full tone interval is approximately twice as big as a semi-tone interval. Finger placement charts can be purchased in the beginning if you have trouble hearing where the fingers should be placed.

When practicing scales, practice as if each note was important, play slowly and get the note sounding clearly and in tune. Always make sure your hand is relaxed and that your fingers curve gently over the fingerboard. Remember to sit with your spine erect, your left arm relaxed with most of the weight of the fiddle being balanced by the weight of your head on the chin rest. Playing scales can really improve your playing greatly and as you work into new tunes in keys such as F, Bb, Eb, it's good to practice the scale of the tune first to get comfortable with the finger placement. Playing with a metronome is a good idea as well, so that you get your tempos even.

Till next time keep the bow rosined and the fiddle in tune!!!

(ECMA multi-nominee, performer and recording artist, Roy Johnstone, has a website at <http://www.royjohnstone.com/>)

Fiddle and/or Accompanist(+) Teachers

Abrams Village

Louise Arsenault Fiddle + 854-2830

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Kathryn Dau-Schmidt Fiddle 672-2711

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Anastasia DesRoches Fiddle 854-3116

Rollo Bay

Kathryn Dau-Schmidt Fiddle 672-2711

(thanks to Peter for allowing us to present these two beautiful waltzes to you)

Joseph and Margaret Chaisson

Peter Chaisson



In Memory of Aunt Gen

Peter Chaisson



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