

The Island Fiddler

The Newsletter of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers Society



Vol. 6, Issue 4

March 2009

Zélianne à Joe Bibienne

Accomplished Acadian Fiddler by Dorothy Griffin-Farish

Sources for this article are Georges Arsenault, Ken Perlman, Austin and Randall Poirier, and Patricia Roy.

"Feisty" is the first adjective that comes up when Zélianne à Joe Bibienne comes to mind!

Born on September 2, 1922, Zélianne, also known as Zella, is the second youngest daughter and one of fourteen children of Joseph B. Arsenault and Julie-Anne LeClair of Egmont Bay. Joseph B. had been previously married to Bibianne Arsenault and had two sons, Cyrus and Emmanuel, by her. This whole family is noted in the Evangeline area for its musical talent. Joe Bibienne was

an accomplished fiddler and Julie-Anne was a good singer and step dancer. All their children learned to play the fiddle and other musical instruments and played well enough to accompany at dances. Music was indeed a way of life in this large and poor family - so poor that Zella told in one interview "I was so dang poor I was born bare naked, and you can't get any poorer than that."

Zella first learned to play the fiddle and step dance when she was about seven or eight years of age, but she didn't play in public before the age of sixteen. She also learned how to play the mouth organ, the piano, the pump organ, as well as a bit on the guitar and accordion. Zella was a great step dancer and was featured on many TV musical programs both as a fiddler and dancer.



Zella (Arsenault) Poirier Gaudet

According to Ken Perlman in the introduction of his book, *The Fiddle Music of Prince Edward Island* published by Mel Bay Publications, Zella and her sisters Louise, Kate, Rita and Mary were among the first women fiddlers on Prince Edward Island to play regularly at community dances and entertainments.

In a newspaper interview with Patricia Roy for the *Summerside Journal-Pioneer* when she was presented with the Golden Fiddle Award in 2004, Zella stated: "I remember that I used to make up my own tunes while learning to step dance on the cellar door because my mom

didn't want all that noise in the house all the time."

Her first reward for dancing in front of an audience was a quarter. "I was so excited with my quarter, but I had to give it to my mother because she had a sore neck and needed to buy some Minard's liniment, which cost 25 cents a bottle."

This passionate individual, noted for her sense of humour and her joie-de-vivre, has led a very busy and interesting life. Playing the fiddle has taken Zella to Expo 67 in Montreal, and while there she was a member of the Evangeline Dancers troupe. She entered and won numerous fiddling contests and was the Island's fiddling champion in the late 1970s. She also won a step dancing championship at the Evangeline Exhibition at the age of fifty-three.

See Zella page 2

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The Island Fiddler

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Zella cont. from page 1

Zella found herself on stage in the middle of two 22-year-olds and two 24-year-olds. She recalled that the organizers didn't really want her to dance because they figured that she was too old. "When my turn came, I showed them what an old woman could do. I was on stage in about two steps when they announced I had won."

Zella was married in the 1940s to Joseph Poirier. They had a family of eight children. At least one of her sons, Randall (Randy) has been in the music business for a number of years and is involved with the Calgary Stampede, according to Randy's brother Austin. Joseph Poirier died in 1986 at the age of 74. On September 2, 1993, Zella remarried to Martin Gaudet. Martin died in 1998.

On August 1, 2004 at Abram's Village the organizing committee of the Atlantic Fiddlers' Jamboree presented the Golden Fiddle Award to Zella (Arsenault) Poirier Gaudet, affectionately known in the Evangeline area as Zélianne à Joe Bibienne, who, up to that time, had been playing the fiddle for 74 years. This award, a painting of her home in St. Raphael painted by Lucie Bellemare, was a tribute to Zélianne's contribution to Acadian traditional music. According to the write-up of this presentation Zella was in the hospital and her nephew, Jacques Arsenault, accepted the award on her behalf. In Zella's own words: "I got the surprise of my life when they told me about it. I didn't even know that they had taken a picture of my house."

As of early 2009, 86-year-old Zella (Arsenault) Poirier Gaudet is in poor health and resides in a manor in Summerside. She still enjoys listening to fiddle music when there is musical entertainment at the manor, but she is quick to let the fiddler know in no uncertain terms if a mistake is made during the playing. Her health may have deteriorated, but her lively, feisty spirit still remains.

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> If you wish to be listed as a teacher, contact the editor annemcphee@pei.sympatico.ca or 687-1521

Fiddling Related Websites

Vishten

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Ward MacDonald

From the President By Ward MacDonald

As I write this afternoon I am enjoying another bright sunny day! The long winter is nearly over, and it's a good time to thinking about fiddling. I would like to commend our newsletter team with another great

issue...we are lucky to have you!

There are lots of exciting things happening within our Society this Spring and I'd like to tell you about a few of them beginning with a quick update on the Trip to Scotland. In mid-December, Marlene MacDonald and I met with Burton MacIntyre (the gentleman who planned the Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association trip in 2008). Burton kindly gave of his time to travel to PEI and share his experience with us. During our three-hour meeting, Burton shared actual numbers for what we can expect our costs to be. He also gave us advice on everything from fundraising to selecting a travel agent to what bus company to use in Scotland.

I want to thank Burton for his generosity as his experience and guidance is an invaluable resource to our group. We plan to invite Burton back to PEI later this year to share his experience first-hand with our members. After viewing the CB Fiddlers' fundraising timeline, we decided to move our target date for the trip to July 2011.

Many fiddlers have been busy on behalf of our Society over the past year. Thanks to the efforts of some fiddlers in Southern Kings, our Society is preparing to welcome a fourth chapter! See the Southern Kings Report on page 6 for details.

Some of our members also assisted in the facilitation of a Select Survey of PEI's Community Halls in 2008. In total, 58 halls were surveyed. The resulting 173-page document is available for download at www.peifiddlers.com.





Eastern Kings Fiddlers by Anne M. McPhee

The Eastern Kings region has been under a heavy blanket of snow for the past two months. Weekly storms and school closures, high winds and poor travel-

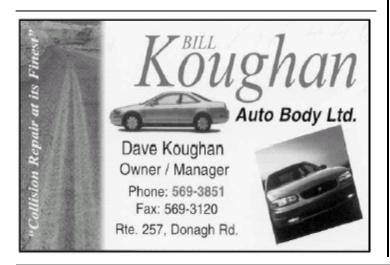
Anne M. McPhee

ling conditions have slowed things down and many people are not venturing out too often. Fiddle classes at the Rollo Bay School have been hit hard by a series of Monday night storms through the month of February. Everyone is looking forward to the longer days and better weather and being able to get together again.

Icy conditions have proven quite hazardous to Teresa Wilson who suffered a fall and is now in hospital recovering from a broken femur. Best wishes to Teresa for a speedy recovery.

Despite the treacherous road conditions, the Goose River and Lorne Valley dances have continued all winter with a good group of dedicated dancers attending regularly.

Congratulations to Vishten, JJ Chaisson and Colette Cheverie for being recognized for the quality of their work and being presented with PEI Music Awards. These and other Island musicians also made a great showing at the 2009 ECMAs in Newfoundland including Kendra MacGillivray, Tim Chaisson and Brent Chaisson. For those of us who are not adventurous enough to step out into treacherous driving conditions, it has been a great winter to stay home, get lots of practice in, read and research and of course, watch lots of TV.



There is quite a bit of research being done about how music affects the body, mind and spirit. As a child, Albert Einstein had trouble in school but believes he became one of the smartest men in the world because he learned to play the violin. Science is proving that playing a musical instrument has been shown to increase a child's IQ by 7 points. Former Singing Strings member Peter Mutch is now a Music Therapist on PEI and works with people of all ages and abilities to address any number developmental and learning disabilities as well as helping to rehabilitate those suffering from physical disabilities and long term pain. encountering an older fiddler in the hospital and explaining his job description, the fiddler asked Peter "How did you land that gig?"

Researchers may be proving that music can strengthen the mind and heal the body but we already know, as Bishop Faber says, "music feeds the soul".





Safely Home—Well known Island entertainer Clayton Burke (left), a.k.a. Hank Slush (right) of Cardigan died peacefully on Feb 22, 2009.

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Judy MacLean Dancers On the Move



Judy MacLean Dancers in photo are: L-R: Vanessa Bernard, Judy MacLean and Paige LeClair, all of whom perform several dance styles including strathspey/reel, jigs, reels, and clogging.

Sunday Night Shenanigans show/ ceilidhs will be soon starting at a new venue with lots of exciting new guests as well as the many favorites featured last season. Last year the weekly events were held at the Benevolent Irish Society, but due to availability and the fact that the shows have grown to require more space we have decided to relocate. Further updates re: entertainment and location will be published in the Guardian and Buzz. First show is scheduled for Sunday, June 7 at 7pm. Contact Judy MacLean organizer/host for Sunday Night Shenanigans at 902-566-5545 email: judymacleandance@eastlink.ca

SOME FIFTY YEARS AGO

by John (Mel) MacPhee

I left Prince Edward Isle, when I was not very old In search of some adventure, up in Ontario Now many years have passed me by, But I'm still on the go Now I still dream of my home of fifty years ago

I've a brother and four sisters that I've not seen in awhile Because they all reside, On Prince Edward Isle I would like to go and see them, Just to say hello But the road is long and lonely, when you drive from Ontario

Now I mustered up some courage, and hit the 401 And headed down passed Cornwall, and on through Montreal The hands on my clock told me, that I was making real good time, So I just kept on a driving, to the New Brunswick line

I motored on to Fredericton, down to Cape Tormentine It's there that I saw the link, it almost blew my mind With so many pillars standing tall, holding up the road The road that wasn't there, some fifty years ago

I drove across the Strait, it was an awesome sight When you're traveling on that highway, way up in the sky I knew I was close to heaven, when I got to the other side I knew that I'd come home again, to Prince Edward Isle

I drove up to Charlottetown, on to St. Peters Bay Cause in my heart I knew, that's where I'd want to stay My sister has a country home, close to the shore It brings back lots of memories, of fifty years and more

When we got up next morning, we'd have a cup of tea Then we would go to the den, and watch mass on TV Then we'd sit and she'd relate, tales from days of yore All the stories that had happened, some fifty years ago

After many years of being away, it sure was nice to be Back on P.E.I., with friends and family I know one thing for certain, not like the time before I surely can not stay away, some fifty years or more.







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Southern Kings Report by Amy Swenson

Exciting news – it looks like Southern Kings will soon have its own official chapter of the PEI Fiddlers Society! Plans are afoot to start practices every other Monday

Amy Swenson

night in Montague beginning in April. Anyone interested in participating should call me at 962-2273 or Urban Chaisson at 962-3865.

This winter has proved challenging to any classes meeting on Monday nights! Nevertheless, we have had enthusiastic beginner and advanced groups at the Murray Harbour Community School with a total of 20 students. The beginner group has been very dedicated and seem to have caught the fiddling bug for sure. The advanced group is proud to be presenting two new local tunes at the closing March 16th: Urban's Halley's Waltz, written for his granddaughter, and George Docherty's rollicking Pinette River Jig. Morell Community School has also had a fiddle class and after the school is over any interested fiddlers are welcome to join them at their weekly practices call Emmett DeCoursey at 961-2962 for time & place.

Seven keen young fiddlers played at the music festival recital Feb. 22nd at Hillcrest United Church. They started off the concert with a nice rendition of *O Canada* and then performed solos & duets, along with many young pianists and singers. The next recital is April 19 at 2pm, at the same location. This concert is free and is always a fun event featuring music students aged 5 to 16.



The Murray River Ceilidhs for the QEH are starting up March 7 and will continue for 10 weeks on Saturday evenings at the Murray River Hall. These concerts have been very popular fund raising events in the past few years and have always featured a wide variety of performers, great door prizes and 50/50 draws, fudge and amazing cakes at auction. Admission is only \$5, so get there early for the best seats!

By now, many of you will have heard that the popular Milltown Cross fiddler Attwood O'Connor was in a serious car accident on Dec. 27th. His several injuries are healing and he has been in good spirits when friends have visited him at the Kings County Memorial Hospital. He should be ready to put some weight on his injured leg and ankle very soon so we hope to see him up and walking in the near future. Good luck with your recovery, Attwood!

Long time fiddler Jimmy Halliday from Eldon has been in poor health this winter. Jimmy, a member of the Queens County Fiddlers and Life member of the PEI Fiddlers Society has taught at community schools and encouraged many aspiring fiddlers over the years. We want to send our best wishes to him and his family and hope to feature an article on him in an upcoming Island Fiddler.

Trip to Scotland: Brief Update



- 1. New tentative date July 2011
- 2. 20 members signed up already!
- 3. Contact Marlene MacDonald for information 368-1832
- 4. More information in June edition of The Island Fiddler



Rose in the Garden

Comment: Also played by O'Connor on Rounder Project.

As Played by: Attwood O'Connor Track: 6, Time: 14:08



Prince Edward Island Fiddling Project Oct.-Dec. 2006 Transcribed by Ken Perlman

Ken Perlman reports that he has just shipped off all the edited music and oral history files on traditional Island Fiddling to the Canadian Museum of Civilization. He is now working on a website, sponsored by the Museum, devoted to PEI fiddling and says it should be up and running within the year, the next stage being to write all the text. All the best and good luck with this valuable work Ken.



Some members of the intermediate class of fiddlers at the Vernon River Community School, Fall 2008. From left to right: Richard Praught, Philip Bradley, Urban Chaisson, Bernard Farrell, Amy Swenson (teacher), Ethel MacQuarrie, Norbert Fraser, Lorraine Praught, Hugh Jackson and John Campbell.

Queens County Fiddlers Report by Carolyn Drake

The last few months have been full of changes and challenges for the Queens County Fiddlers. The biggest challenge was to find yet another spot for our weekly Wednesday evening practices. After it was determined that we were outgrowing our space at Parkdale Elementary School (combined with the possibility that the school might be closing at the end of this school year), Vince Keoughan and Linda Moran went to work tracking down some potential new practice sites. Eventually, they settled on the band room at Queen Charlotte Intermediate School on North River Road where we have been happily meeting since mid-January. There's plenty of room, so more fiddlers, other musicians and fans of the music are welcome to drop by on Wednesdays after 7:30 p.m.

The old year ended in a flurry of playing for many members of the group. In early December, we brightened an evening for residents of Andrews of Stratford with some traditional tunes, Christmas carols and lively stepdancing by Alice Cheverie, who was accompanied by her father, Paul Cheverie, and Kristyn Visser, who danced to music from the group. A few weeks later we were back on stage, this time for a special evening of seasonal music at St. Dunstan's Basilica in Charlottetown. Despite the threat of a snowstorm, we had a great turnout, with everyone enjoying the chance to play in this magnificent building. It certainly put us in the Christmas spirit. Then on Dec. 28, Linda and Mike Moran once again hosted the entire group and plenty of guests at their beautiful home in Rustico for tunes, plenty of laughs and lots of delicious food. As always, their hospitality is appreciated by the group and it was a lovely way to end the year.

The group is pleased to welcome three new members this winter: Amy Swenson, Kirsten Stewart and Ron Arsenault. The focus of our practices will be shifting in the coming weeks as the group prepares for its annual fundraising night of music. Watch local media over the coming weeks for more information on the time, location and lineup. This event is the group's main fundraiser for the year and allows us to send a promising young

Island fiddler for a week of lessons at the Gaelic College in Cape Breton. The fundraiser, scholarship and many other projects will all be on the agenda at the group's annual meeting on March 11. It gets underway at 6:30 p.m. with some pizza, followed by the meeting and some tunes. Everyone is encouraged to attend.

Also, members are asked to note that there will be no fiddle practice on March 18 due to the school being closed for March Break.

On a final note, members of the group were saddened to hear of the sudden death of member Cindy MacKinnon on Jan. 31 at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. A former member of the executive of the Queens County Fiddlers, she began playing the fiddle over the past several years, but she was always well-known as a fan of traditional music and as a gifted step dancer. Many members of the group attended her wake and funeral. QCF member Father Charlie Cheverie performed her funeral mass where beautiful music was provided by JJ Chaisson and Kevin Chaisson and a fitting step dancing tribute to Cindy was performed by members of her family. Our condolences go out to her sister, Marlene Gallant, who is also a member of the Queens County Fiddlers, and to her partner, Ken Campbell. Her bright spirit will be missed by everyone.

Fiddle Practices Open To The Public

Acadian Fiddlers Wellington 436-5532
Fridays 8:00 pm Boys & Girls Club

Prince County Fiddlers Summerside 836-3844
Mondays 7:30 pm Community Connections
Queens County Fiddlers Ch'town 569-4592
Queen Charlotte Intermediate School
Wednesdays 7:30 pm North River Road
Morell Fiddle Group Morell 961-2962
Thursdays 7:00 pm Above the Pharmacy
Eastern Kings Fiddlers Rollo Bay 687-1521
Mondays 7:00 pm at the Rollo Bay School
Everyone is Welcome

Don't see what you're looking for? Tell us!



Prince County Fiddlers By Barry Thompson

I really have nothing to report. I broke my leg January 13th and have been very much out of the

Barry Thompson picture. I still have my cast on. Unfortunately it was same leg I had surgery on twice last year.

Nathan Condon has been kind enough to drop by the house almost daily for tunes and conversation. Marlene and Ward visited me at the hospital one evening. I was sorry to have to miss the Fiddle Doo on Feb. 4th. Special thanks to the Prince County Fiddlers for their get well wishes, visits and phone calls.

I know that the PC fiddlers have performed at Andrews Lodge, and Le Chez-Nous in Wellington. Hope to be able to do better next time.



A Few Southern Kings Musicians



The Murray Harbour 5 - Playing at the newly refurbished Cambridge Hall in October 2008.

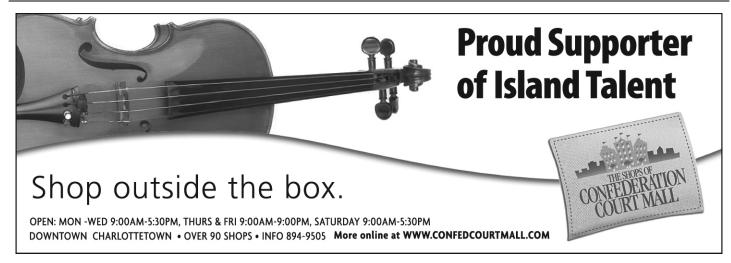
Left to right - Wayne MacLean, Cecil Chapman, Amy Swenson, Kenny Chapman and Mel Giddings.

Below: Attwood O'Connor Photos taken by Sarah Jackson











Acadian News by Dorothy Griffin-Farish

Greetings to all! Hopefully we will have a gentle spring after a bizarre winter. Here are a few items of interest from the Acadian community.

Dorothy
Griffin-Farish
Sincere sympathy is extended

to Louise Arsenault of *Les Girls* and to all members of her family in the death of their mother, Anne Marie (Arsenault) Gallant on Feb. 3, 2009. Anne Marie, wife of the late Alyre Gallant, lived in St-Timothée for over sixty years and raised a large and musical family. In 2007 Anne Marie had a heart attack and went through surgery. When the new addition to Le Chez-Nous in Wellington was complete she went there, but was a resident for only a few weeks before her passing. Anne Marie played the organ and accordion. When her husband was alive they were part of a musical group - Alyre played the fiddle and was accompanied by Anne Marie. This lively, funloving and musical lady will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

The January/February 2009 issue of **Island Living** magazine, pages 34-36 has a beautifully-illustrated story about the Evangeline region. Entitled "A Wintertime Ceilidh," it is about the Sunday night tradition of gathering in a family home in St. Chrysostome to celebrate the gift of music. This tradition has gone on since 1979 within the family of Polycarpe and Rosida Arsenault, breaking only once upon the deaths of Polycarpe and Rosida in 1995 and 1996. The musical setting is the living room at Father Eloi Arsenault's beachfront cottage. Guests and family members attend - for the pure love of music and fellowship. Those not acquainted with the Island Living magazine can call 1-866-945-0033 or check the Internet at www.islandlivingpei.com.

The P.E.I. Music Awards evening was one of great emotion for the Acadian and francophone community. Marcella Richard delivered a very touching homage to her friend Ken MacCaull who passed away during the last year and who will be greatly missed in the music industry.

JJ Chaisson received the award for instrumental recording of the year. Meaghan Blanchard took four awards, and the musical group Vishtèn received two awards.

The group Vishtèn, formed in 2000, was nominated for five 2009 P.E.I. Music Awards, winning Group of the Year, and Roots-Traditional Group of the Year. They are nominated for two 2009 East Coast Music Awards - Group recording of the Year and Roots/Traditional recording of the year. Before the ECMAs the group heads to British Columbia and, after the awards, to France and to Scotland for the Shetland Islands Folk Festival. Their third CD, "Vishtèn Live" was recorded April 18 and 19, 2008 at The Mack in Charlottetown, and during 2008 the group had performances across North America and Europe. For further information on this lively Acadian group go to www.vishtenmusic.com or www.vishtenmusique.com

An exhibit of artifacts and old items used many years ago by our ancestors was held at the Acadian Museum in Miscouche on Sunday afternoon, February 15th. Between presentations and during the snack break, music was provided by Marie and Orrin Livingstone.

On February 16, 2009 in Charlottetown the humorous musical duo Chuck and Albert won the P.E.I. Museum and Heritage Foundation Wendell Boyle Award for outstanding contribution to heritage through performance. Congratulations to Chuck and Albert, former members of the Acadian group Barachois! They have brought new life to songs and music of past generations on the Island, and particularly Acadian music. They have also brought Acadian culture to a larger audience by traveling throughout Canada, as well as the United States and Europe. On April 18th they will be performing at the Confederation Centre in Charlottetown. This summer they will launch their first CD of Acadian music, as well as giving performances at the Harbourfront Theatre in Summerside. For further information check their website www.chuckandalbert.com



From the Archives

The following was taken from the first Island Fiddler Newsletter published in 1978 following the first Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival. Seen in front on the left and on the cover on the right is founding member of the PEI Fiddlers Society, Joe Pete Chaisson.



Che P.C.I. Fiddlers Fociety

Newsletter

PROFILE OF A FIDDLER

Joseph Chaisson, whose picture appears on the cover was born in Bear River (near Souris) in 1912. The son of a well known local fiddler, Joe showed an interest in the fiddle at an early age but Joe's father tried in every way to discourage Joe from becoming a fiddler for reasons best known to himself. "The only time I touched the fiddle as a youngster" says Joe "was when my father went in to Souris and I know he'd be gone for a while". Joe says he started fiddling at "around twenty when my uncle bought me a fiddle and a couple of bows and a lot of strings from Boston". He picked it up very quickly and was soon playing for weddings and pie socials "that sometimes went on until 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning, that's without accompaniment too, just sitting alone in a corner".

The people who most influenced Joe's fiddling style were first his father and second, Angus Chisholm. Joe claims that Angus Chisholm was "the best he'd ever listened to". For many years Joe was too busy with business and family matters to have time for playing, but, unlike his father, Joe gave every encouragement to his soms and daughters to play. Some of whom are exceptionally fine fiddlers in their own right - Peter and Kenny, to name only two. In conclusion Joe expressed the opinion that the Society was the best thing that ever happened to Island fiddlers and feels that without it, old-time fiddling would have soon disappeared from the Island. When asked if he now had the chance to change anything in his fiddling career, he replied by saying "Looking back on it, I'd have liked to learn to play by note."



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Events Forecast

For up-to-date events visit www.peifiddlers.com; www.festivalspei.com/events or check local listings

Every Sunday 2pm	Fiddle Frolic	Tracadie Community Centre	Tracadie Cross	902-676-2300
Third Sunday 7pm	Kellys Cross Ceilidhs	Kellys Cross Church Hall	Kelly's Cross	902-658-2290
Every other Monday 7:30	Ceilidh Kitchen Party	Bingo Country, Riverside Dr.	Charlottetown	902-940-6702
Wednesdays 8pm	Square Dance	Old Lorne Valley School	Lorne Valley	902-687-2584
Wednesdays 8pm	Ceilidh	Silver Threads	Souris	902-687-2396
Wednesday 8pm	Irish Set Dance Classes	BIS Hall, North River Road	Charlottetown	902-566-3447
Fridays 8pm	Music, Song and Dance	Benevolent Irish Society	Charlottetown	902-892-2367
Fridays 8pm	Friday Night Ceilidh	St. Peters Circle Club	St.Peter's Bay	902-961-2899
Saturdays 9pm	Goose River Dance	Goose River Hall	Goose River	902-961-2205
Every second Saturday 8pm	Square Dancing	York Community Centre	York	902-629-1869
Saturdays	QEH Fundraising Ceilidhs	Murray River Hall	Murray River	902-962-2273
Sat March 14 2 - 4pm	St Patrick's Day Concert	Confederation Court Mall	Charlottetown	902-566-5545
Sun March 15 1:30 - 4:30pm	St. Patrick's Day Ceilidh	BIS Hall, North River Road	Charlottetown	902-566-3447
Tues March 17 6:00 - 10:00pm	Irish Set Dance Classes	BIS Hall, North River Road	Charlottetown	902-566-3447

Joe Bibienne



