

## Music on the margins: fiddle music in Cape Breton

*Burt Feintuch*

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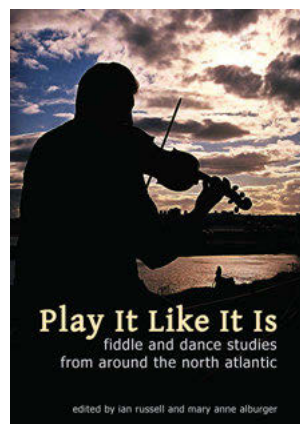
### Play It Like It Is

Fiddle and Dance Studies from around the North Atlantic

*Edited by Ian Russell and Mary Anne Alburger*

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## Music on the margins: fiddle music in Cape Breton<sup>1</sup>

BURT FEINTUCH

Cape Breton is an extraordinarily creative place. It's a place that is, in several ways, on the margins. But it's also a place where cultural creativity is remarkably vital and where music is driving a developing sense of renewal. Cape Breton is an island, part of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, north of mainland Nova Scotia and east of most of North America. Since 1955 a causeway has connected the island to the mainland. About 147,000 people live on the island, the majority of them in the vicinity of the de-industrialized urban region around Sydney, the largest city. Rural Inverness County, the hotbed of the music, and the place I know best, has a population of about 21,000. For the island as a whole, and for Inverness County in particular, the population is declining. The island's economy simply can't support its population, and, for much of its history, people have had to leave. Two of the island's economic mainstays, the steel industry and coal, are nearly gone, and a third, the fishery, is, like most fisheries in the world, experiencing significant change. On the edge of North America, isolated by distance from markets, as are many other parts of the Canadian Maritime Provinces, Cape Breton is a geographically and economically marginalized place. It's also, by the way, a terrifically beautiful place. But, as a couple of people have said to me when we've spoken about the economic predicament of the island, 'You can't eat scenery'.

Perhaps 25,000 displaced Scots from the Highlands and islands settled in Cape Breton in the first half of the nineteenth century, displaced by the decline of the kelp industry and the Clearances. These were poor, Gaelic-speaking, Catholic Scots who crossed the Atlantic to Cape Breton, where they joined native people and descendants of earlier French fishermen. Industrial development abetted cultural diversity in Cape Breton, but the island, especially Inverness County on the western side, is very strongly inflected by that Scottish emigration. Many people would agree that Inverness County is both the centre of the Scottish culture and the heart of the music. Once I telephoned a shop from which I'd been mail-ordering CDs. When I gave my name to the woman taking my order, I said, 'Feintuch', and asked out of habit if I should spell it for her. She said no; then she spelled it for me. When I told

her how surprised I was that she remembered it, she said, 'You have to understand – everyone around here is named MacDonald'.

This really is an extraordinarily creative place. A few months ago, Alistair MacLeod, a fiction writer who grew up on the island and spends his summers there, won the International Dublin Literary Prize, the world's most valuable award for fiction. Potters, poets, and painters abound, and although fiddle music is these days the best known music from Cape Breton, there are any number of other thriving music scenes across the island. When I asked Frank MacDonald, who publishes the Inverness *Oran*, the weekly paper on the west side of the island, why this seems to be such a remarkably creative place, he connected artistic creativity to something more fundamental.

FM: There's a kind of a scripted conversation that goes on around Cape Breton tables often, and it's 'People going away. It's a shame, the educated ones, if they go to university they go looking for a job in Halifax or Toronto or wherever, and so we're losing all our best and our brightest.' I remember one time while this conversation was taking place a friend who had come here, had moved to Cape Breton from northern Ontario, called that into question. She said, 'I don't believe that's true. I think it takes a lot more creativity and ingenuity to stay here than it does to leave.'

I think there's a nugget of truth in that because you've got to have skill for every season [laughs]. You've got to be creative, whether it's artistic creativity or just being able to hustle. We've got people who've gone to trade school four times. They can be a carpenter in the summer, and they can be this or that, a short-order cook, in the winter, or whatever.

BF: And that kind of pattern is pretty typical?

FM: I believe so, yes. The number of people who can turn their hands to any number of skills is quite phenomenal.<sup>2</sup>

Here's a leading fiddler, in what amounts to a follow-up to Frank MacDonald's comment.

It's an incredible struggle. I'm a carpenter by trade. I do cabinets. I've done mechanic work. And you have to turn your hand to some of that stuff; you wear many different hats in the run of a year in order to pay the bills and that sort of thing. It seems like there's always periods of time through the year that you have to take your lesson book out and chew on water.<sup>3</sup>

These days, when you talk about Cape Breton creativity, you inevitably talk about fiddle music. In fact, if fiddle music were a disease, an epidemiologist would probably describe parts of Cape Breton as clusters. Especially in Inverness County, fiddle music seems to have a presence and intensity unrivalled elsewhere in North America. Taking the biomedical analogy a step farther, it's worth noting that when Cape Bretoners talk about this music, they often claim that it's 'in the genes' or 'in the blood'. Some public health researchers point out that an unusual concentration

of various phenomena can happen by chance, and so they question the value of what they call 'cluster investigations'. But in the context of Cape Breton, it seems as if more than chance is at work, and it's provocative to think about the local conditions that contribute to this flourishing local world of old music. Given that Cape Breton fiddle music is thriving when many other Western regional musics of the same vintage have largely vanished or radically transformed themselves, what might account for the vitality of this music in a place that is, in many regards, on the margins?

Sometime, probably in the 1970s, tourism and highway officials named an Inverness County highway, Route 19, the Ceilidh Trail. If you travel along the Ceilidh Trail, especially during the summer, you can't help but notice the extraordinary presence of old music. You hear Cape Breton Scottish violin music, as it's often described, in dances in local halls. You pass the community centre in Judique where a sign welcomes you to 'The Home of Celtic Music' and invites you to visit the new Celtic Music Interpretive Center. Gift shops, hardware stores, groceries, and other local shops sell tapes and CDs, nearly all self produced, of local musicians. Go into the bank in Inverness (population 1400), one of the two largest towns in the county, and you might hear fiddle music in the background instead of Muzak. Pick up the Inverness *Oran*, (the Gaelic name of which translates as 'song of Inverness'), and in the summer there's more coverage of local music than sports. Nearly every summer weekend presents a local music festival. The sign welcoming you to Inverness town features a fiddle, as does the sign welcoming you to Mabou, twenty minutes south. The music seems to be everywhere. A few years ago I went to an evening event where about a hundred people had bought tickets to hear an ethnomusicologist interview two local fiddlers. That's when I knew I'd found paradise.

Of course, it's not paradise, but it's an exceptionally musical place, a place where people value old music, find it useful, and benefit from it. And so, I pose for myself a question I know I can't really answer, about the social and economic conditions that allow the music to flourish at a time when so many other local musics of similar vintage have lost vitality or have slipped beyond the margins.

I start by thinking about the social – locality and identity in particular. I realize that these seem to be the reflexive starting points for many of us and are admittedly, therefore, perhaps, suspect. As I mentioned earlier, people sometimes call this music Cape Breton Scottish violin music, and the 'Scottish' part of that formulation is important. Especially in Inverness County, where there are also significant Francophone and Mi'kmaq – that is, Native – populations, the descendants of Scottish settlers form the majority culture. There are so many MacDonalds, MacMasters, Beatons, MacDonnells, and so forth on the island that people often have elaborate nicknames to distinguish them from others whose names are virtually identical.<sup>4</sup> Until this generation, Gaelic was the primary language in parts of Inverness County. The story that Cape Bretoners tell about their music begins with Scottish emigrants carrying it to the new world where, thanks to geographic isolation, it changed less than it did in Scotland. As a result, Cape Bretoners talk about their music representing a purer and older Scottish style and repertoire than the music played these days in

Scotland. In fact, it's a compliment to say that a musician has a lot of Gaelic in his or her style. I don't believe that this characterization of Cape Breton fiddling as archaic Scottish music is as accurate or straightforward as it seems to many commentators, but it's clear that the music is a primary emblem of identity here, the closest thing to Gaelic now that the language itself is debilitated.

Identity read as history merges with a strong sense of identity in the present, in the form of social ties and ties to place. There are times when it seems that nearly everyone is related to nearly everyone else, or at least everyone knows everyone else. For example, one of the most popular fiddlers in Inverness County, Kinnon Beaton, was the son and grandson of well-known fiddlers. He grew up in Mabou, across the street from the hall where his father played for dancing, and so he heard the music and his neighbours dancing late into the night. Kinnon's friend, the late John Morris Rankin, another well-known fiddler and member of the popular Rankin Family band, grew up across the street, hearing that same music every weekend. For a time, Dan R. MacDonald, fiddler and prolific tune composer, lived at the third point of a triangle, no more than 100 yards from the Beatons and Rankins. One of Kinnon's daughters plays the fiddle, and he has taught various nephews and nieces, as well. Growing up in Mabou, you heard the music, knew the musicians, and probably understood the music as part of neighbourly life.

Your church might have played a supporting role, too. Inverness County is predominantly Catholic, and aside from the fact that some priests play the fiddle, the church is, at least these days, a primary sponsor of dances, which often happen in parish halls and raise significant funds for the parish. In the early 1970s, after the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation aired a documentary called 'The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler', which pointed out that the music seemed to be ebbing, a priest, Fr John Angus Rankin, played a central role in demonstrating that the music had plenty of vitality, helping spark the current revival. So, locality and identity – ethnic and perhaps religious – both embrace and support the music. And many people had the benefit of growing up in households where they heard this music, either live or on recordings, virtually all the time. There may or may not be a scientific basis for the 'music in the genes' theory, but it must be that hearing the music regularly, especially when you're young and music-learning comes easily, can help make musicking seem a natural part of life.

In those small communities, the music never lost its association with the dance. In fact, even with the music seemingly at a high point these days, Liz Doherty has said that in the 1950s the island had more dance venues than today.<sup>5</sup> At the very least, that implies that dancing was once even more local. In an interview, fiddler Buddy MacMaster told me about an era when the dances were typically in schoolhouses, very local. He refers at the end to playing, in 1938, his first paid gig.

At that time each little area had their own school. They were one-room schools, and they usually had from grades one to ten in the room. Each community had to raise money to support the school. And they used to put on dances,

entertainment, to keep the school in repair, and I think, also, to pay the teacher. Of course, I suppose, the people that lived in the community contributed in some other monetary way to pay the teacher. The salaries were pretty small at that time, maybe \$400 a year. But there was a dance occasionally in each community: Judique South and Judique North – there's a lot of Judiques, you know – and Craigmore, and Troy was another, which was kind of far away at that time, for me. But that was my first dance that I got paid for. I guess they heard about me up in Troy [laughs], fifteen miles away.<sup>6</sup>

Regular dances, a strong parish presence, and knowing your neighbours, seem to add up to an unusually high amount of what sociologist Robert Putnam calls 'social capital'. For Putnam, social capital is the glue that holds people together in community. He tends to find it in civic culture, in local organizations ranging from churches to bowling leagues.<sup>7</sup> In Inverness County, music brings people together, stands for identity, supports the parish or perhaps the local youth baseball league, and in general encourages and maintains community. Even if there *were* bowling alleys in the towns of Inverness County, it seems highly unlikely that you'd find people bowling alone.

I shouldn't romanticize this place, though, despite its spectacular scenery and seemingly intact small communities. Identity and locality may appear to work well in Cape Breton, but, as I mentioned earlier, the economics are a failure. Cape Breton communities have nearly always leaked residents, with the problem increasing after the First World War. Economically marginal, the island has never been able to support its population, and out-migration is a feature of Cape Breton life. Between 1976 and 1996, the area around the town of Inverness lost 8.3% of its population.<sup>8</sup> The 1999 unemployment rate in Canada was 7.6%.<sup>9</sup> For Cape Breton, official unemployment rates are greater than 20% across the island, but it's likely that the 'real' rate is about 40%.<sup>10</sup> In that context, one young fiddler, a university graduate, told me that if it weren't for his music, he would have had a stark choice: try to make a living cutting pulpwood or leave the island. If everyone who'd left would return, he told me, the island would sink. Back to Frank MacDonald, publisher of the Inverness newspaper, the *Oran*, talking about sense of community in Inverness County and about the economic necessity of going away:

FM: I think the other thing that really creates a strong Cape Breton identity is that growing up, you're aware – almost from the time that you're capable of being aware – that you're going away sometime. So the home is something that you grow up expecting to leave. And studies that I've heard done by ECBC [Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation] indicate that for every person that's on the island there's two Cape Bretoners living somewhere else. But every single one of them – they'll spend thirty or forty years in Toronto or Boston or California, but they never leave the island for a day in their hearts. Their houses, their music, is here. And they form little enclaves wherever they are [laughs].

So, I think this has been a big part of the island's sense of itself – the fact that people get a very strong sense of home. I don't know what percentage, but an extremely high percentage of our tourism business in summer is people who come home, not people who come from away for the first time or whatever.

BF: I'm very aware of that from going to dances and just talking to people I dance with. People tell you, 'I went to school in this building', if you're at Glencoe Mills, for instance. And they're now from Watertown or Toronto or Waltham or whatever.

FM: Yes. And they all plan to retire back here, but they never do, because they've raised a family. Their children or grandchildren are living in Detroit and they can't... So, you don't move back, but in their minds, most of them have never left. Certainly in Atlantic Canada a lot of places – like Newfoundland has that same sense of itself. Cape Breton has that same sense of self. Quebec has that. Prince Edward Island, I think, does to a great extent. Someone asked me this summer what the national food of Cape Breton was. And I was very flattered – it's not often someone from away recognizes us [as] a nation.<sup>11</sup>

As Frank MacDonald says, many of those who left do return to visit. Family and place pull people home, especially during the summer. At a small concert a few years ago, I heard a woman introduced as having made more than forty summer trips back home. Many of the people you run into at music events are home for a visit, having left the island for better prospects elsewhere. A few years ago, I walked into a dance at Southwest Margaree with Dougie MacDonald, a fine young fiddler. I asked how many of the perhaps two hundred dancers were local, and Dougie said about half. I trust his estimate, because many Cape Bretoners have a very finely tuned sense of locality.

Increasingly, there's a lot at stake when it comes to that other half of the dancers, the visitors, that is. Cape Breton Scottish violin music is proving to be an *economic* resource. In a place where the old industries – fishing and mining in Inverness County – are in decline, where the scenery attracts visitors but only during the short warm season, where the distance from markets is large and the workforce not well trained, music is increasingly looking like more than a *cultural* resource. Referring to the entire island, one scholar writes that the domain called 'Tourism and Culture', which includes music, has now become the primary economic resource of Cape Breton and the largest employment sector.<sup>12</sup>

Various Nova Scotia tourism publications include an advertisement that reads, 'In New Orleans They Mardi Gras, In Cape Breton We Ceilidh'. 'Ceilidh', of course, is a Gaelic word for neighbourly gathering. A generation ago in Cape Breton it seems not to have referred much to music. But these days, along the Ceilidh Trail, 'ceilidh' is shifting its meaning to describe a music session or performance, often one that's open to the public for a fee, mirroring what happened earlier in some Scottish communities. And like the word 'party' in US English, 'ceilidh' can be a verb in Cape Breton.

Ian McKay's 1994 book, *The Quest of the Folk*, tells the story of how Nova Scotia's tourism industry and other not disinterested parties created the notion of

Nova Scotia as a pure, simple, unadulterated place.<sup>13</sup> McKay doesn't emphasize Cape Breton, but it seems that in a general way the history he describes is repeating itself there, albeit with a somewhat different spin. Witness the photo, a couple of years ago, of Buddy MacMaster, the senior icon of Cape Breton fiddle music, on the cover of the provincial guidebook to Nova Scotia, with spectacular mountain scenery 'Photoshopped' in. More and more people are coming to ceilidh in Cape Breton. Back to Frank MacDonald:

These musicians have existed here for centuries, and up until a very few years ago if a musician went to a government agency to develop his business, which is playing music, I mean he would have been chased out of there with a broom [laughs]. Then all of a sudden you had the success of the Rankins, the success of Rita MacNeil, the success of Ashley MacIsaac, of Natalie MacMaster. And then you hear government development agencies saying that the musician is every bit as much an entrepreneur as the man selling cars down the street. And we should be investing in them. This phenomenon created itself, and all of a sudden, you've got a political run to catch up and take credit. But what it's seen as – and this is the risk – is a great tourist attraction. But tourism immediately threatens the authenticity of what's being performed in any given place. And at the same time, there aren't many other options. It's finding that balance of keeping control of the culture while at the same time allowing the island to benefit from it, because, along with fiddle music and some of the things that are identified with the Gaelic culture, rightly or wrongly, like the tartans and the parades and the bands – like Disney could do an awful job on us if they decided to market Cape Breton [laughs]. So, to avoid that happening while at the same time celebrating what's going on in a way that shares it with people so people who come to hear the music can get fed and find a place to sleep, and we can make a living. But I still don't know if the cultural industry alone is anybody's economic solution.<sup>14</sup>

So, don't imagine that tourism officials huddled somewhere and decided that music would be Cape Breton's economic salvation. Instead, in recent years a couple of models of economic success – off-island, that is – began attracting visitors to the island to hear music, and, according to Frank MacDonald, the tourism machinery swung into action, trying to catch up. Two young Cape Breton fiddlers have had very significant economic success, first in Canada, then in the USA and Europe. As many people here will know, the virtuoso fiddler and very personable Natalie MacMaster, from Troy, has become something of a sensation in the transnational 'Celtic' revival. Her promotional materials claim that no other Canadian artist performs as much as she does. Ashley MacIsaac, a remarkable young fiddler originally from Creignish, was 'discovered' by Philip Glass and JoAnne Akalaitis, who have summer houses in Inverness County, and who brought MacIsaac to New York, where his off-island career began. MacIsaac's mid-90s release, 'Hi: How Are You Today?' which fused traditional fiddle music with a variety of contemporary musics, went platinum



in Canada and had significant college radio play in the USA. Although Ashley (everyone refers to fiddlers by their first names in Cape Breton) has been struggling to make a stable career, both Ashley and Natalie are the object of intense interest and fondness at home.

As many people in Cape Breton will tell you, Natalie and Ashley have inspired a generation of young musicians to take up the fiddle. Where parents once sent their children to hockey camps, thinking about the possibility of economic success in sports, now many encourage their children to play the fiddle. Here's a fiddler in her early thirties, talking about the situation:

Well, that opens up a big pet peeve for me [laughs]. I'm really worried about what my father always termed as hockey parents. That we're getting fiddle parents. And everyone wants their child to be a Natalie or an Ashley. I shouldn't say everyone. But a good majority of parents of really gifted children and of children that will never ever be a performer, let's say, but surely they can play for enjoyment. But it's kind of becoming dangerous, now that there are so many successful Cape Breton artists, that I think that the thought that is, it's a way of making a living. But it's *not* a way of making a living unless you are lucky. And you just hit the right things at the right time. Because there's very few that are making a living at it solely, without a second job.<sup>15</sup>

Although a few other fiddlers, not from Inverness County, have found modest commercial success, these comments are echoed by other musicians. Back to the same subject, as seen by another leading fiddler:

There are a lot of different influences in our music here today. I suppose there's got to be room for growth, but I think it's growing at a rate, with such different influences, that it's getting distorted. That scares me because I see a lot of the young people that are hearing what I consider as somewhat distorted music today and thinking that that's the way it should sound. And that's where they're starting out – that's their starting point. There's a lot missing in them having an understanding of what the music actually was and where it started, how it evolved. I think a lot of parents are looking for their children to be the next superstar-type thing. I won't mention any names of the superstars or the...

Anyway, the point that I'm getting at is that they're playing for the wrong reasons. And there are a lot of immature fiddlers out there, ability-wise, that have been viewed as wonderful – 'Aren't they wonderful for their age' and all this sort of thing. But all the young people are hearing that. It doesn't matter what tradition or what type of music. You see it in all of it. With this particular thing I see, as quite a focused thing, and I see it a fair amount, and that is a child hears 'wonderful'. Well, once they start believing that, which some of them do, the learning process stops. The growth process stops. And some, you know, they expect to get the same kind of response when they're nineteen or twenty, and they hadn't grown since they were twelve years old or something

like that, as far as their abilities, and all of a sudden it's an awful shock to them that – 'Why ain't I as great as I was then?' . . .

One fellow made kind of a crude comment, but it was funny. He said, 'My God. I think that fellow's father must keep a cement block on his head', he said, 'to keep him small' [laughs]. So he'd be more adorable out there. That's awful.<sup>16</sup>

Less directly, Ashley and Natalie's successes also seem to have added value to the local musicians, who are increasingly invited to play off the island, featured in the media, and becoming known abroad as exemplars of the old Scottish fiddle style. With the large transnational commerce in music described as 'Celtic,' recordings of Cape Breton music are finding new markets.

Now, of course, the machinery of the tourist industry – especially the provincial government – is working to capitalize on this. By and large, it seems that Inverness County tourism used to be made up of people coming home to visit and people passing through on their way to the scenic splendours of the Cabot Trail and the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, to the north. The Ceilidh Trail infrastructure still reflects that – there are comparatively few places to stay and eat, and few other services for visitors. About five years ago, though, Inverness County got a summer school for the music, the Ceilidh Trail School of Celtic Music, which has tried both to serve the local population and to bring visitors to the area for at least a week, and which emphasizes participating in local musical events – the dances, ceilidhs, and the like that happen throughout the week. A year or so ago, a Celtic Music Interpretative Center opened in Judique, clearly pointed at attracting visitors. Thanks at least in part to the efforts of an economic development programme at the University College of Cape Breton, the only degree-granting educational institution on the island, Cape Breton music has gone online, and off-island interest, mediated by the online presence, has had a positive economic impact.<sup>17</sup> There's also a great deal of local interest in the fact that Rodney MacDonald, an excellent fiddler in his late twenties, was elected to the provincial legislature a couple of years ago and then appointed provincial Minister of Tourism and Culture. (One busy dance fiddler told me that she's hoping that he'll create an express lane for musicians on Route 19). But it's still a fact, though, that the island economy can't support many of the well-known fiddlers who live there. Ironically, it may be that Natalie and Ashley's success off-island has led more Cape Breton fiddlers to try to support themselves solely by music, which seems invariably to leave them in marginal economic circumstances.

Not all the tourism initiatives for Inverness County centre on music, although any reading of the promotional materials shows that music is increasingly important. The website for Inverness Town reports, 'our little community with its tragic history has struggled to survive. We are looking at the construction of a breath-taking, world-class, Links Golf Course on the old mine site between the town and the beautiful beach below... Inverness will become a tourist mecca.'<sup>18</sup> And there's recent news, and much controversy, about the possibility of offshore exploration and drilling for

oil and natural gas along the Inverness County coastline. For better or worse, the local economy might change considerably.

In this social and economic context, it's important to note that the music continues to be connected deeply to place, representing for many a kind of cultural continuity. At the same time, I should note that like most vital forms of art, the music has been able to change. I don't know how to measure change, but I really do believe that the music's ability to embrace creativity while holding on to its local identity is one of the main reasons why it thrives. The music remains in service, in some sense, of community, rather than an ossified example of 'heritage'. For instance, there's a very strong tradition of local composition, and new tunes enter the common repertoire all the time. I wonder, in fact, if a careful look at what's being played today, especially at dances, would show that local compositions and tunes from outside Cape Breton outnumber the 'old Scottish' part of the repertoire. (I'll add parenthetically that the nineteenth century Scottish tunebooks, which have been very influential on repertoire, reached Cape Breton around the Second World War, and there's too little known about the repertoire before those books were available.) The famous contemporary piano style of accompaniment is essentially just that – a *contemporary* style. The dance musicians are happy to use technology – nearly all them drive the dancers hard by using LR Baggs pickups on their fiddles, while their accompanists play Roland keyboards, and many of them produce their own tapes and CDs to sell locally. Most of the musicians, then, control the marketing of their music. Have a look at Buddy MacMaster's website.

The Cape Breton social and economic contexts remind me of other examples and make me think about other musics on the margins. I've written about fiddlers and their music on and off since the mid-1970s, when I wrote a dissertation about the art of a senior fiddler in southeastern Pennsylvania. People perceived him as the last of his generation – he was on the margins of an era, musically speaking. From Pennsylvania, I moved to my first academic job, at Western Kentucky University. There, too, I had the sad privilege of meeting and learning from a generation of older fiddlers, nearly all of whom had died by the time I left Kentucky. With their deaths, an older, dignified, and beautiful set of tunes and styles largely vanished, slipping over the margins. I can't resist saying, too, that when I was interviewed for my current job, the directorship of a research institute in the humanities at the University of New Hampshire, someone on the search committee told me that my research in fiddle music raised a few eyebrows among the scholars on the committee. There is no question but that the fiddle, its music, its practitioners, and those of us who study those subjects, all too often exist on the margins.

What's so striking to me about Cape Breton is the way the music has come to occupy the centre stage, in this marginalized place. Certainly, other musics around the world have found a similar accommodation, thriving in the interstices between locality, tourism, and mass markets, representing an idealized identity to local people and to visitors. Among North American examples, I think of Cajun and zydeco musics as at least superficially parallel. It seems to me that the very resilient

Cape Breton music has, like other thriving local musics, found at least a temporary balance among a group of factors including an enduring set of values regarding community and musical aesthetics, on the one hand, and largely post-industrial forces on the other. As a result, Cape Bretoners' highly successful balancing act – so far – portends, for better or worse, one way in which marginalized local communities might continue to enjoy their music, *their own music*, in the future. If the people of Inverness County can figure out how to sustain what matters to them in these rural, postmodern, de-industrialized conditions, one of the possible futures for traditional music might be playing itself out along the Ceilidh Trail.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This is an expanded version of a keynote address I gave at the North Atlantic Fiddle Convention at the University of Aberdeen on 27 July 2001. I owe thanks to many people who contributed to this work in progress, including Kinnon and Betty Beaton, Joey Beaton, Crisi Boucher, Kate Dunlay, Jackie Dunn, Mike Gurstein, Jerry Holland, Alan Leith, Dan MacDonald, Frank MacDonald, Paul MacDonald, Rodney MacDonald, Sheldon MacInnes, Margie MacInnis, Wendy MacIsaac, Ian MacKinnon, Richard MacKinnon, Buddy MacMaster, Mac Morin, Brenda Stubbart, and many others whom I've met while following the music in Cape Breton. Thanks, too, to Ian Russell for the kind invitation to participate in the conference, to his co-convenor, Mary Anne Alburger for the hospitality, and to Peter Cooke, for the suggestion that led to my participation.
- <sup>2</sup> Interviewed, 19 October 2000, at the offices of the *Oran* in Inverness.
- <sup>3</sup> From an interview in October 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> William Davey and Richard MacKinnon, 'Nicknaming Patterns and Traditions among Cape Breton Coal Miners', *Acadiensis*, 30, no. 2 (2001), 71-83.
- <sup>5</sup> Liz Doherty, 'The Fiddle Tradition of Cape Breton Island' (PhD Dissertation, University of Limerick, 1996).
- <sup>6</sup> Interviewed, 26 July 2000, at his home in Judique.
- <sup>7</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).
- <sup>8</sup> See [www.invernesscounty.ca/Index.htm](http://www.invernesscounty.ca/Index.htm).
- <sup>9</sup> See [www.economagic.com/em\\_cgi/data.exe/blsin/inu0022ca0](http://www.economagic.com/em_cgi/data.exe/blsin/inu0022ca0).
- <sup>10</sup> This figure is widely reported in casual conversation. I've heard it from a journalist, academics, and other Cape Breton citizens.
- <sup>11</sup> Interview, 19 October 2000.
- <sup>12</sup> See Michael Gurstein. 'Fiddlers on the Wire: Music, Electronic Commerce, and Local Economic Development on a Virtual Cape Breton Island, Canada – A Case Study', *Doing Business on the Internet: Opportunities and Pitfalls*, ed. Celia T. Romm and Fay Sudweeks (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1999).
- <sup>13</sup> Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).
- <sup>14</sup> Interview, 19 October 2000.
- <sup>15</sup> From an interview in October 2000.
- <sup>16</sup> This is the same musician cited in note 2.
- <sup>17</sup> Gurstein. 'Fiddlers on the Wire'.
- <sup>18</sup> See [www.inverness.ednet.ns.ca/future.html](http://www.inverness.ednet.ns.ca/future.html).