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Monthly Newsletter
2024 Fulbright Project

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A scene from St. John's Bay in St.John's Newfoundland

An t-Ògmhios [June]

Monthly Recap

Since early June, Cape Breton has graciously welcomed the long-awaited arrival of warmer weather, marking the beginning of regular square dance sets across the island along with local festivals, sessions, and more. This month, I've completed the majority of planned interviews for my project with the exception of a few that I still hope to gather pending scheduling. Between traveling and visits with musicians and cultural caretakers, dances, music and keeping up with my project, there's little time for sleep here in Cape Breton!

This month I made the journey to visit a neighboring province in Canada, Newfoundland, to give a presentation at Memorial University about my ongoing Fulbright project and research for Contemporary Technologies and the Traditional Music of Cape Breton. It was a wonderful experience to have the opportunity to visit another part of the world to talk and share perspective not only about where I am from in Appalachia, but to also build connections through conversations between people of differing cultural backgrounds and places.



Interview and field recording with musician Joe MacMaster at Beinn Mhàbu's campus in Mabou, NS



Bluegrass Abroad: A bluegrass jam hosted by author and historian Neil V. Rosenberg in St. Johns, Newfoundland with local musicians.

I consider myself a passionate advocate for promoting the rich arts and culture of the Appalachian region through various personal and professional outlets, including through music. Part of my talk at Memorial included sharing songs with roots from SouthWest Virginia including the Carter Family's "East Virginia Blues" and Tennessee Ernie Ford's "Sixteen Tons" with the help of KT Vandyke - who's finally made it back to the island for the month! My presentation focused on building connections between Appalachia and Cape Breton as the unique music of the Maritimes and the Cape Breton traditional music style have a history that parallels traditional music in Appalachia. Similarities in the people who settled in both areas, and the remote geography of both historically isolated regions, cut off by mountains, valleys, and islands, were all factors that resulted in unique and distinct musical styles respectively. The Appalachian mountains - which extend into the Canadian Maritimes - were even once connected to what is now the Scottish Highlands through the Central Pangean Mountains millions of years ago until the continents were ripped apart from plate tectonics, further building connections to these two places prehistory.



A scene inside a record store in St. Johns, Newfoundland highlighting local music

As part of my presentation I also shared the story and history of the 1927 Bristol Sessions, a historic recording session in Bristol TN/VA that's credited with sparking the commercialization and "big bang of country music." I used the Bristol Sessions as an example of how new technologies in their day (in this case, the use of the new Western Electric microphone) have the ability to disrupt and change musical structures long after their invention. In the late 1920's, the invention of the Western Electric Microphone



Musicians and a crowd at the Baddeck Gathering Ceilidh at St. Michael's Hall in Baddeck, NS. The Baddeck Ceilidh is a regular traditional music series taking place nightly throughout the summer.

had the ability to record music better than its predecessor, the acoustic horn. As time goes on and technology advances, the history of recorded music evolves alongside. This includes the changes and advances in recording equipment and the media formats used to replicate and share music. From reel to reel tape recording to vinyl records and from CDs to today's digital streaming platforms and everything in between, all of these inventions have played a role in shaping how musicians and listeners engage with music across genres. As for my Fulbright project, with our growing reliance on online technologies, both listeners and players of traditional music have more access to global musical influences outside of their local community and geographic region. With rapid advances in the way we use new technologies, the project documents the current traditional music scene in Cape Breton and seeks to uncover if access to outside musical influences is influencing the region's traditional music.







(Top) Peggy's Cove lighthouse in Peggy's Cove, NS (Bottom Left) St. Michael's Hall in Baddeck, NS. (Bottom Right) A fresh caught lobster from Mabou Harbour, Cape Breton.

Newfoundland and Labrador is Canada's 10th and youngest province, officially joining the country in 1949. Prior to this, Newfoundland was a British Dominion and essentially operated as its own country. In 1948 Newfoundlanders went to the polls to vote on whether Newfoundland would join in Confederation with Canada and become a new province or remain operating as an independent political dominion. The Confederation party won the vote with a narrow margin of just over 52% and thus Newfoundland officially joined Canada. There was an influx in Irish workers throughout the 17th and 18th centuries who began traveling to the Newfoundland for seasonal fishing work, and over time a large population of Irish began immigrating to the island. Through this influx of Irish and European immigration, Celtic musical roots are a strong foundation of modern traditional music in Newfoundland.



(Top) A view from The Rooms Museum in downtown St. John's Newfoundland. (Below) Lobster traps on a fishing boat near Mabou, NS / Toni and KT / Whale Cove Beach in Cape Breton.







Fulbright Project Updates

To date I've spoken with 32 individuals for the project, nearly double my original plan! While many perspectives of interviewees are similar, I hope to speak with a few more folks during July to officially wrap up the interview recording project phase and move onto analysis while also taking time to continue collecting field recordings throughout the summer months at events and gatherings when appropriate. As a reminder, you can find out more about the people below by checking out full bios of the individuals with the embedded links.

Here's who I've spoken with this month:







Kimberly Fraser holds a degree in Violin performance from Berklee College of Music and in Celtic Studies from St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia. Education is important to her, reflected in Kimberley's dedication to teaching Cape Breton music both at home and abroad. A master at the trio of fiddling, step dancing and piano, Kimberley is a much sought after teacher for all three.

Boyd MacNeil and **Ryan MacNeil** are members of the family group of Cape Breton musicians The Barra MacNeils from Sydney Mines. Boyd first received his first violin lesson at the age of four, and 4 short years later made his performing debut. In his mid-teens, Boyd and his brother Ryan were special guests in the odd concert with the already established quartet, The Barra MacNeils, officially joining the group in 2005. Both were also members of the Celtic Fusion group Slainte Mhath from Cape Breton Island and are active musicians.



Joe MacMaster has swiftly established himself as a rising star in the Cape Breton music scene. Equipped with his exceptional talent in playing the pipes, fiddle, and piano, Joe has become a regular performer at local dances and ceilidhs in and around Cape Breton. He has toured across the United States alongside Natalie MacMaster, graced Ontario with his music on multiple occasions, and appeared at the Edmonton Folk Festival. As a Troy native, Joe is one of the younger members of the renowned MacMaster fiddling dynasty.







Dr. Glenn Graham is a composer, songwriter, music instructor, published author, and academic from Judique, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Glenn's roots stretch far into the rich musical past of Cape Breton. Glenn is a member of the renowned Beaton family of Mabou. Many generations of this family have produced countless musicians including fiddlers, piano players, Gaelic singers, pipers, poets/songwriters, composers and dancers.

Màiri Britton is an educator, musician and cultural project manager who has nurtured a life-long love and appreciation for the Gaelic language and culture. Originally from Scotland, her interest in Gaelic was sparked at the age of five through attending her local Féis, and she has learned the language to fluency with the support of generous teachers and prolonged immersions with mentors. As a Gaelic singer, step dancer and harpist, Màiri has been lucky to teach, perform and record with different projects in Europe and North America, including as lead vocalist with the Gaelic trad group Fàrsan.

Taya MacDonald is a young multi-instrumentalist from Mabou Harbour, Cape Breton with a passion for traditional Cape Breton music. Taya attends high school at Dalbrae Academy in Mabou. At age five, she showed a keen interest in traditional music. Through school music class, private lessons, participation in community ceilidhs and great family encouragement, Taya has learned to put her hand to the fiddle, piano, guitar, mandolin and accordion.



A crowd inside The Red Shoe Pub in Mabou, NS

Check out the video below - or click here to access

too see what I've been up too during the month of June!









(Top) Boat parade during Mabou Ceilidh Days. (Bottom Left) a fishing boat resting in a harbor. (Bottom Right) Singing at the milling table during Mabou Ceilidh Days

Looking Ahead

The end of June marked the kickoff to the 11th annual KitchenFest! [Féis a' Chidsin!] an annual festival with a goal of giving a platform to feature local traditional musicians from across Cape Breton and Nova Scotia a space to perform and highlight regional traditional music. In October, the annual Celtic Colors International Festival is the island's largest event taking place over 12 days and will feature 50 concerts in 36 communities across Cape Breton Island. Both festivals take place all across various community venues throughout different communitities. At the end of July I'll be attending a week long step dance class: The Mabou School of Cape Breton Step Dance with dance instruction led by Melody Cameron along with numerous guest instructors. I'll also be visiting the neighboring Prince Edward Island for the annual Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival.

An ceòl air feadh na fidhle. [The music throughout the fiddle.]

-Toni

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