

**Commodification of Traditional Musical Modalities and Cultural Identity (Re)constructions  
on Prince Edward Island, 1980s to the Present**

**by**

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## NOTE ON SOURCES: AUDIO RECORDINGS OF ORAL INTERVIEWS

The four interviews that constituted the core set of primary sources used in this study were undertaken during the course of February 2022. Three interviews involved just one interviewee and myself, while the last interview involved two musicians and myself:

Mike Pendergast, Tracadie, PEI, February 6, 2022 (length: 02:19:50)

Ward MacDonald, Charlottetown, PEI, February 18, 2022 (length: 01:55:12)

Chuck Arsenault, Charlottetown, PEI, February 20, 2022 (length: 02:13:05)

Emmanuelle LeBlanc and Pascal Miousse, Charlottetown, PEI, February 23, 2022  
(length: 01:38:02)

The interviews were recorded in audio-visual form. The original video files remain in the possession of the author.

Audio files taken from those original recordings, with some minimal redactions in the case of the Pendergast and MacDonald interviews, are stored in the University of Prince Edward Island's online data archive, [data.upei.ca](http://data.upei.ca), and are publicly accessible via the thesis' webpage on Robertson Library's online institutional repository, [islandscholar.ca](http://islandscholar.ca).

## INTRODUCTION

The story of fiddle and folk music on Prince Edward Island, much like the story of any folk culture, is one of relationships and identity. For most of the Island's history, musical expressions of folk culture—of ballads and complaints, reels and jigs, dances and celebrations—were both the lifeblood of communities and the living legacy of the European settlers who made Prince Edward Island their home. The songs and fiddle tunes that they played and sang, not static and petrified but as living and breathing as the people who interpreted, composed, and performed them, told of their relationships with the social and natural worlds they inhabited. Many of the narratives surrounding what has become known as “traditional” music have been lost, or otherwise obscured and made murky by time, while others have ascended to take their place in regional mythologies. Like all traditions, Island folk music is susceptible to the subtle rhythms that affect the cycles of individual and generational human memory, and as such, its place within current Island society and the meaning it holds for Island identity is secured only through a constant negotiation between forgetting and remembering, glorification and detraction, preservation and reinvention.

This thesis is an attempt to understand that very process of negotiation, and its intended destination is a greater understanding of the cultural, economic, and political shifts occurring over the course of the second half of the twentieth century through the first decades of the twenty-first century which cleaved the various Island folk-traditions from their original cultural contexts and instigated a wholesale reordering of their roles and places within current-day Island society. As such, the types of relationships that are examined in this piece are ones that emanate from interactions between adherents of regional folk-music forms and the contemporary economic, social, and cultural realities they inhabit. Much in the way that old tunes and songs tell the story of early-modern Island life, the changes undergone by the ballad and instrumental dance traditions

on Prince Edward Island tell important stories of their own. Through an investigation of these changes, it is possible to glean a better understanding of the processes of modernization, of the cultural competition that accompanied the introduction of mass media to the Island, of the institutional resurrection and revival of folk forms, and of the commodification and professionalization that have come to shape and define the current state of traditional music on PEI. This study is an exploration of the ways in which these changes have impacted and shaped the identities and positions of those individuals who work and reside within these living traditions.

Over the course of this study, what became clear is that the personal history, culture, language and the institutional and economic contexts surrounding and underpinning the creative processes, career orientations, and artistic identities of Island traditional artists necessarily lead to those artists engaging in certain types of personal and performative self-commodification and identity construction. Simultaneously, the choices that artists make regarding artistic goals, career orientations, and personal values, by virtue of their place within Island society as cultural creators, also informs both local and wider conceptions of Island history, culture, and identity.

## **Literature**

This essay relies upon an existing literature on the subject of Island folk music and draws extensively from ethnomusicological research and folklore studies that address the story of local traditional and folk-revival movements, as well as comparative movements and traditions that occurred in other Western contexts. Academics and folklorists who focus on explorations of the local Island context present varying angles for consideration, though a general orientation towards Anglo-Scots-Irish fiddling styles between the late 1800s and the 1970s exists within the broader literature. Significant in this regard are the works of folklorists Jim Hornby and Ken

Perlman, both of whom rely heavily on oral interviews and folk history to present oft-times celebratory accounts which focus on Island fiddling during what Perlman refers to as the “traditional period,” the period prior to the various waves of revivalism which arose during the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> The period between the 1980s and the current day remains generally unexplored, the exceptions being the work of Meghan Forsyth and Kate Bevan-Baker. Forsyth’s focus is specifically trained on the history and culture of Acadian musical expression since the beginning of the revival period. Her lens is that of a cultural anthropologist as opposed to a folklorist, and her chief strength lies in her ability to deconstruct and assess the interrelated roles of identity, tradition, and innovation within the processes of cultural and musical performance and commodification which have become increasingly important within the genre over the past fifty years.<sup>2</sup> Ethnomusicologist Kate Bevan-Baker’s PHD thesis, “Archipelago Soundscapes: Irish Music History and Vernacular Fiddle Tradition on Prince Edward Island,” though less concerned with exploring a commoditized traditional musical landscape than Forsyth, also provides fresh research perspectives, concentrating as she does on the role and integration of the oft-forgotten Irish fiddle style on the Island.<sup>3</sup> While works that center on the Island’s musical landscape play a central role, perspectives which focus on the folk expression and folk revivals of other localities

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Hornby, “The Fiddle on the Island: Fiddling Tradition on Prince Edward Island” (M.A. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1982); James J. Hornby, “A Survey of Fiddling in Prince Edward Island,” *Canadian Folk Music Bulletin* 19, no. 3 (1985): 7-10; Ken Perlman, *Couldn't Have a Wedding without the Fiddler: The Story of Traditional Fiddling on Prince Edward Island*, (1 ed., Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014); Perlman, *The Fiddle Tradition of Prince Edward Island: Celtic and Acadian Tunes in Living Tradition* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications Inc., 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Meghan Forsyth, “‘*De par chez nous.*’ Fiddling Traditions and Acadian Identity on Prince Edward Island” (PhD Diss., University of Toronto, 2011). See also Meghan Forsyth, 2014. “Staging La Francophonie: Tradition, Tourism and Acadian Musical Spaces on Prince Edward Island,” *MUSICultures* 40 (2). <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/MC/article/view/21523>.

<sup>3</sup> Kate Bevan-Baker, “Archipelago Soundscape: Irish Music History and Vernacular Fiddle Cultures on Prince Edward Island” (PhD Thesis, Concordia University, 2018).

provide both global context and thematic contrast to the Island's story.<sup>4</sup> In comparison to Island fiddling, the various Island ballad traditions have received little academic attention. What literature exists is predominantly associated with efforts by folklorists like Sandy Ives to collect Island ballads from the 1950s to 1970s.<sup>5</sup>

While ethnomusicology continues to explore and navigate the implications of a commoditized Island musical landscape, the critical impact that the development of cultural infrastructure and cultural commercialization have had on the processes of musical commodification within an Island context remains a largely untold story. Since the 1990s, increased access to artistic grants and cultural funding through the Canada Council of the Arts (CCoA) and other more regionally based agencies has fundamentally altered understandings of performance and artistic creation for both traditional and non-traditional musicians.<sup>6</sup> At the national level, there has been some (surprisingly limited) academic exploration of how funding

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<sup>4</sup> Owe Ronström, "Making Use of History: The Revival of the Bagpipe in Sweden in the 1980s," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 21 (1989): 95–108, <https://doi.org/10.2307/767770>; Jeff Hennessy, "Fiddle grooves: Identity, representation, and the sound of Cape Breton fiddle music in popular culture" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2008); Mark Sheridan, Iona MacDonald, and Charles G. Byrne, "Gaelic Singing and Oral Tradition," *International Journal of Music Education* 29, no. 2 (May 2011): 172–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761410396960>; and Ian McKinnon, "Fiddling to Fortune: The Role of Commercial Recordings Made by Cape Breton Fiddlers in the Music Tradition of Cape Breton Island" (M.A. thesis, Memorial University, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> While little exists by way of formal academic treatments on Island ballad traditions, various efforts have been made by both professional and amateur folklorist such as John Cousins, Donald Shaw, Randy and Dorothy Dibbly, and Christopher Gledhill to preserve and share old Island songs; Edward Ives, *Drive Dull Care Away: Folksongs from Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: Island Studies Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> A Canada Council of the Arts report published in 2001 makes it clear that funding targeted directly at artists located in rural and remote locations had increased enormously in recent years. PEI artists were significantly impacted by the resulting financial support for their work. Canada Council of the Arts, *Arts and Cultural Projects in Rural and Remote Canada: A Review of Canada Council Support* (Prepared for the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage: Ottawa, On, December 2001).

has impacted artists and their output;<sup>7</sup> at the local level no such academic review was found. Though the implications of the growing relationship between funding agencies and traditional Island musicians have been generally ignored, it has become evident that access to and a familiarity with the cultural grant model reveals particular truths about the orientation of both individuals and communities towards the music industry, as well as towards the creative process itself. An exploration of Island tourism, which has been one of the most important economic drivers for the province since the mid-twentieth century and which has accrued a commensurate literature within local scholarship, provides important insight into the context within which the commoditization of Island folk culture took place. As Edward MacDonald and Alan MacEachern show, over the past half century economically motivated promoters of tourism have purposefully nurtured the idea that visitors will find authentic opportunities to experience charming, quaint, traditional life on the Island.<sup>8</sup> While the fictional world of *Anne of Green Gables* has been the most visible element in Tourism PEI's strategic courting of tourists desirous of a dip into an

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<sup>7</sup> Niedzviecki 2000; Berland 2007; Gainer 1989. Berland, Jody. 2007. "The Politics of the Exasperated: Arts and Culture in Canada." *English Studies in Canada* 33 (3): 24–30. <https://search-ebshost-com.proxy.library.upei.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=37835399&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Niedzviecki, Hal. 2000. "Fear and Loathing on the Granting Trail: Canadian Art Versus Canadian Bureaucracy." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35 (3): 251. doi:10.3138/jcs.35.3.251. Gainer, Brenda. 1989. "The Business of High Culture: Marketing the Performing Arts in Canada." *Service Industries Journal* 9 (4): 143–61. doi:10.1080/02642068900000067.

<sup>8</sup> Edward MacDonald and Alan MacEachern, *The Summer Trade: A History of Tourism on Prince Edward Island* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022). Also very useful from Edward MacDonald and Alan MacEachern is "Rites of passage: Tourism and the crossing to Prince Edward Island," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 49, no. 99 (2016): 289–306. doi:10.1353/his.2016.0002; and from Edward MacDonald: "A Landscape ... with Figures: Tourism and Environment on Prince Edward Island," *Acadiensis* 40, no. 1 (2011): 70–85. Accessed July 22, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41803311>.

idyllic past,<sup>9</sup> traditional music has also become an integral element in tourism promoters' visions of the evolving island brand. More theoretical approaches, such as that of Ian McKay, provide important models for understanding the role of discourse theory within processes of cultural identity construction and tourism. Central to McKay's work, especially "Quest for the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova-Scotia" and "Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933-1954," is the question of self-commodification in which local actors become willing participants in the creation of mythologized cultural realities, usually for economic gain. While this inevitably leads to a consideration of similar phenomena within an Island context, it also opens a discussion which questions the limits, even the existence of "authentic" cultural expression, and further necessitates some thinking about the meaning of the term itself.<sup>10</sup>

Over the course of the twentieth century, anthropologists and historians have radically altered academic understandings of culture. The redefining of culture as comprehensive, universalis, and relativist—a shift which was visible in the work of thinkers associated with the anthropological new wave—did much to undermine the imperial and colonial assumptions that had underpinned the discipline until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> However, it is also the case that characteristics that defined older conceptions of culture—bounded, small-scale, unchanging,

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<sup>9</sup> Diane Tye, "Multiple Meanings Called Cavendish: The Interaction of Tourism with Traditional Culture," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études Canadiennes* 29, no. 1 (2018): 122–34. <https://search-ebshost-com.proxy.library.upei.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edspmu&AN=edspmu.S1911025194100094&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>10</sup> Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (McGill-Queen's University Press: 1994).

<sup>11</sup> T.H. Eriksen, "Between universalism and particularism: a critique of the UNESCO concept of culture," in J. Cowan, M-B. Dembour, R.A. Wilson, eds, *Culture and Rights. Anthropological Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press: 2001), pp. 127-148.

authentic, and homogeneous—have continued to live on in public interpretations of culture, and are, as Noel Salazar and Nelson Graburn write, “widely used by a variety of tourism shareholders, staking claims of identity and cultural belonging on strong notions of place and locality.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Methodology**

Central to this project’s research process was a series of oral interviews conducted with a selected group of prominent traditional musicians currently working within the genre on Prince Edward Island. There are a few important factors which made an oral-history approach to this topic both methodologically appropriate and strategically necessary. The first of these is largely concerned with the existent literature on the subject: while there exists a growing body of work by historians and ethnomusicologists that increasingly covers the various narratives, angles, and aspects of the history of folk and traditional music within the province, there has been little attention paid to academic work that concentrates on the more recent developments within the industry and genre has been little addressed. In circumstances such as these, the personal histories of the local actors who were directly impacted by and who lived through this recent history become in their own right a framework for further research and an oral map of the narrative territory that exists in place of a bibliography of second-hand sources. However, it is also the case that this piece focuses not only on historical narrative, but also on identity construction; as such, the processes by which interview subjects interpret, craft, and recount their own identities in relation to their professions, personal histories, and creative endeavors become

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<sup>12</sup> Noel B. Salazar and Nelson H. H. Graburn, eds, *Tourism Imaginaries. Anthropological Approaches* (Berghahn: 2014), 6. <https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/salazartourism>.

sources of utility in their own right, serving as they do to place the interviewees within not only their self-realized narratives but also within the broader cultural and historical framework.

For this project, five research participants were highlighted as potential candidates. These, it was determined, represented a broad cross-section of linguistic and cultural identities, stylistic orientations, and commercial positionings within the professional musicianship of Island traditional music. The final list of candidates was selected through a process of deliberation and discussion with my thesis advisor, Professor Lisa Chilton, but which also factored in questions of availability and accessibility. As the primary researcher and interviewer, this process was inevitably influenced by my personal history as both an active member of various traditional music communities on the Island and as a professional touring musician. As such, it is important to note that all interview participants and their personal histories were to various degrees personally known to me prior to conducting the interviews, a fact which inevitably helped to consolidate their roles within the project while simultaneously impacting the form and direction of the interviews themselves. The interviews consisted of one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half hour semi-structured interviews which largely took place in the subjects' homes. These conversations were documented in real time using audio-video recording equipment, after which the resultant audio files were transcribed to facilitate later thematic analysis. While each interview process began by exploring a set list of questions concerning key themes (thus, providing a framework for the conversation), interviewees were also given space to direct the discussion in ways that allowed them to address topics and share experiences they felt to be most important to them. As such, the conversations became semi-collaborative in nature, where interviewee and interviewer relied upon shared knowledge and experience of a cultural space, tradition, and industry to

explore similarities and variations within the processes of identity creation and self-commodification.

In the interest of transparency, some discussion of my own history and background is first required in order to understand the impact of my own positioning on the collaborative nature of the interview process. I was born and raised in South Rustico, Prince Edward Island. My father is a Rustico Acadian, while my mother, born a Thomson, is a classic mix of Scots-Irish whose immediate ancestry predominantly comes from the Rose-Valley area of Queen's County. Both my mother and father's families were musically oriented and were also variously involved in community organizing and local performance. My own musical education began at the age of six following the death of my grandfather, Jack Thomson, a fiddler of questionable skill but great musical passion. Following his death, I was encouraged to pick up the fiddle in his memory, though my training as a musician began in earnest when I began classical violin lessons with Jen Clement and the Singing Strings program in Charlottetown. I continued to train classically until the age of 18, all the while engaging with an informal and self-directed regime of "traditional" musical practice that was mediated predominantly through audio-recordings, live music sessions, and the occasional master class. As such, my early years as a fiddler were spent somewhat isolated from the Island traditional music community at large, though age and confidence eventually allowed me to become a more active member of these communities.

Following high school, I began to explore the possibility of playing music, specifically traditional folk song and instrumental music, as a career. Under the heading of a new musical group called Ten Strings and a Goat Skin, my friends and I began arranging instrumental music and traditional song to fit within a performance context, experiencing some degree of early success on the Island and within the Maritime region. Positive reception brought us into contact

with the infrastructure of the music industry at an early age; showcases at various regional, national, and international industry events saw us touring across the Western World and navigating the pressures inherent in managerial and agent relationships. All the while, questions of the nature of the contradictory pressures inherent in the relationships between tradition, community belonging, sense of place, and the processes of cultural commodification and professionalization became important considerations when thinking about our future objectives in relation to both the industry and the musical communities within which we existed. While the band's final tour took place in April of 2018, these questions and the experiences that birthed them have continued to inform both my role within my community as well as my objectives and orientation as an academic.

It is inevitable, then, that both my personal history and pre-existing relationships with the interview subjects should impact the direction and content of the conversations in ways that present unique exploratory possibilities as well as specific challenges. The shared understanding and experience of particular musical communities, industry spaces, career experiences, and creative processes allowed the interview subjects and I to explore important threads that would otherwise have been inaccessible to a less involved researcher. However, it is also the case that my role as a participant "peer interviewer" prompted some degree of confusion, assumption, and interference on my part within the flow of the interviews themselves. The analytical process which followed these interviews then has been one which not only focuses on a thematic analysis of the content of the interviews, but also one which included careful thought and deep reflection about the impact of my own contribution to the conversations.<sup>13</sup> It is my hope that this

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<sup>13</sup> An invaluable resource when I was thinking through the oral history aspect of this study was the section on research methods in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*, and especially the piece on interviewing your peers: Devotta,

subsequent awareness and contemplation has been enough to minimize any adverse or inaccurate interpretations of my subjects' thoughts and words, and that in general, my own insertion into the conversation exists as a net good when considering the entirety of the project.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though the historical scope of this project lies firmly within the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the question of historical identity also plays a critical role in understanding modern commodified iterations of “traditional” cultural expression. This being the case, the establishment of some degree of historical, ethno-geographical, and cultural context is necessary.

The history of European settlement on Prince Edward Island is divided into two distinct periods. The first of these was known as the French period, which lasted from 1720 until 1758. The period under French colonial rule saw the Island (called Isle St-Jean at the time) predominantly used as a base for multiple unsuccessful fisheries. During this period, it was also slowly settled by Acadian families from the mainland, many of whom in the later years sought refuge from an increasingly uncertain political climate that would evolve into waves of deportation from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The fall of Fortress Louisbourg would tie the Island Acadians to a similar fate; in 1758, two to three thousand Island Acadians were deported to Britain, France, and their respective colonial possessions.<sup>14</sup> Much like on the mainland, the

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Kimberly, Cheryl Pedersen, Julia Woodhall-Melnik, and Flora I Matheson. "Peer Interviewers." In *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, edited by Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, Alexandru Cernat, Joseph W. Sakshaug, and Richard A. Williams. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2019. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036764917>.

<sup>14</sup> Earle Lockerby, *Deportation of the Prince Edward Island Acadians* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2008), 22.

deportation became a fixed aspect of cultural identity for the hundreds of Acadians and their descendants who traveled back to the Island following the *Grand Dérangement*.

Though resettlement during the post-deportation period, known as the British era, was a slow, lurching process, it was still faster than during the French period due largely to early influxes of Highland Scots fleeing the clearances and, to a lesser degree, American Loyalists resettling in Canada after the revolutionary war.<sup>15</sup> This was also the period that would fundamentally define the Island's ethno-geographic makeup for the following 200 years. People of Scottish descent dominated the ethnographic map of the Island during the first half of the nineteenth century, with almost a half of the Island's population registering Scottish ancestry during the 1881 census (45%). The greatest concentrations of Scottish settlement in PEI were along the North Shore, throughout Kings and Eastern Queens counties.<sup>16</sup> The Scottish have remained the most populous ethnic group up until today but they increasingly lost ground over the course of the nineteenth century to Irish immigration and to French repopulation.<sup>17</sup> After the Scottish, the Irish were most numerous (at 23% of the population by 1881). Arriving years after the initial waves of Scottish their settlement was largely contained within previously inaccessible areas like the interior of the lots and along county lines. Important centers of settlement included Western Prince County and Charlottetown.<sup>18</sup> Acadians also resettled on the Island in the years following the deportation and the British takeover, chiefly situating their communities around the Cap-Egmont region (what is known today as Evangeline), in Rustico, and in the region of

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<sup>15</sup> Maria H. Vandenberg, "Prince Edward Island and Migration: A Survey History" (B.A. Honours Thesis, University of Prince Edward Island, 2005), 17-18.

<sup>16</sup> A. H. Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island: A Historical Geography of Settlement and Agriculture in Prince Edward Island, Canada* (University of Toronto Press: 1959), 207-8.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Malpeque Bay.<sup>19</sup> Much like the Acadians, English settlement was not initially statistically significant, and only became numerically important over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>20</sup> Other groups of people inhabited PEI from the eighteenth century onwards, including people of Mi'kmaq origin who pre-dated the arrival of Europeans, and immigrants from places outside of the British Isles. However, as a result of their small population sizes as well as the comparative political and economic power wielded by Island elites of Anglo-Celtic background, the history of Native and non-white peoples on the Island is certainly one of marginalization. These ethno-geographic dimensions inform the current popular beliefs held by Islanders about their ethnic provenance; while people boasting Irish and Scottish ethnic heritage have diminished over time, Island identity is still largely conceived as Scots-Irish (with an emphasis on the Scottish), or Franco-Acadian (inhabiting the place of the lesser partner).

Since the earliest years of European colonization, agriculture has been at the heart of both the Island's economy and society. Small-scale commercial and subsistence farming was the lived reality for most Islanders up until the second half of the twentieth century, when paved roads, automobility, and electrification efforts brought modernity to rural PEI. However, Island culture, social life, and even identity remain largely informed by a shared agrarian past, even though the number of Islanders living in urban spaces now outnumbers those residing in the country. Many Islanders pride themselves on upholding the essential community values enshrined in the period of family farming and small communities. The Island also boasts strong historical connections to industries like shipbuilding and fishing, the latter of which represents to this day a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Vandenberg, 42-3.

strong economic facet. However, the province's fisheries, especially the lobster fishery, have slowly been replaced as the Island's secondary industry by tourism as it became increasingly important over the course of the post-war period. Though the branding has shifted substantially since the mid-twentieth century, tourists are more often than not sold a version of Island history and identity that heavily emphasizes an idyllic rural agrarian past. Paired with a historical isolation from the mainland (New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island were permanently united with the opening of the Confederation Bridge in 1997) and a marketing emphasis that accentuates the literary version of nineteenth-century PEI made famous through the works of fiction of L.M. Montgomery, it is not surprising that the Island is frequently sold (to both tourist and local) as a pastoral fantasy, a place out of time. As such, it is unsurprising that such a place has retained, either naturally or artificially, its connections to traditional musical expressions like fiddling and folk song.

### **Before the Revivals**

European folk music was present on the Island as soon as Europeans began to immigrate: evidence of fiddle music on PEI stretches all the way back to before the official French settlement of the Island, when one Antoine Carin was hired to play for the workers of an Island-based fishing company in 1719.<sup>21</sup> While folk songs (and perhaps even fiddling) no doubt made up an important part of the Island's cultural landscape during the French period, the construction of the Island's current musical makeup began after the deportations with the first waves of Highland immigration. Early Scottish settlers brought not only their native Gaelic language, stories, and songs, but also fiddles, bagpipes, and dance tunes with them.<sup>22</sup> Later the Irish would

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<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Donovan, "'After Midnight We Danced Until Daylight': Music, Song and Dance in Cape Breton, 1713-1758," *Acadiensis* 32, no. 1 (September 9, 2002), 5.

<sup>22</sup> Perlman, *Wedding*, 14-15.

do the same. Simultaneously, Acadians who had remained on the Island or re-settled after the deportation continued to participate in their own folk customs which inevitably changed over time due to the proximity of their new neighbors; though it is impossible to say if fiddle played an important part in Acadian culture in the pre-deportation period, it is generally accepted that Acadian communities adopted (or, otherwise re-adopted) the fiddle from Scottish settlers over time.

By the turn of the twentieth century, fiddle culture and ballad traditions on the Island were generally felt as distinct from the European traditions that gave birth to them. While there was a dominant Island “style,” Island fiddling did display considerable amounts of regional variation born out of limited mobility and cultural division, with language and physical distance playing the most important roles in regional stylistic retention for both songs and fiddle tunes. However, considerable degrees of transmission, adoption, and adaptation were also visible, suggesting a musical landscape that was far from static; especially important in this regard were the Acadian regions, whose fiddle repertoire was, even in the early twentieth century, comprised of extensive mixes of Scottish and Irish strathspeys, reels, jigs, and marches adopted from their Anglo-Celtic neighbors, as well as much older French melodies.<sup>23</sup>

Though material, style, and language may have been regionally specific, the place of “traditional” songs and tunes within the broader community was generally consistent for much of Island history, though also subject to change over time. Fiddling was the music of the social world, and by extension fiddlers became public figures within their respective communities. Jim Hornby refers to the period between 1840 and 1940 as “the dance fever” era, where various

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<sup>23</sup> Forsyth, *De par chez nous*, 97.

forms of social set dancing became part of most public events.<sup>24</sup> Slightly later, the tea party and church pageant formats became popular, a shift towards “cleaner” forms of social entertainment that accompanied the drive towards prohibition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>25</sup> Fiddle and dance competitions also had an important moment in the sun between the 1920s and 1960s, but their competitive natures are typically remembered today as having created more divisiveness within fiddling communities than good.<sup>26</sup> However, more historically ubiquitous than any other format was the house party or kitchen party, a semi-planned or unplanned musical social event featuring song and fiddling. Though probably quite similar to many other European traditions of rural hospitality and celebration, the PEI house party has taken on a mythological sheen over the past thirty years, in part due to its extensive exploitation by a great many Island tourism organizations who recognize its branding potential. Also deserving of mention, though less historically recognized, is the Acadian Frolic, an event similar to a house party but which came at the tail end of some large communal task.<sup>27</sup>

The advent of radio in the 1930s deeply impacted the musical landscape of the Island, especially informing trends amongst Island fiddling communities. Proximity to Antigonish, Nova Scotia allowed players in Eastern Kings County access to radio broadcasting out of that area, and a wave of local stylistic interpretation followed suit.<sup>28</sup> Much in the same way, Islanders situated in the extreme west of the Island were privy to broadcasting from Carlisle, Quebec, allegedly accounting for the introduction of, amongst other innovations, podorythmic foot-tapping within

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<sup>24</sup> Hornby, *The Fiddle on the Island*, 37.

<sup>25</sup> Perlman, *Wedding*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 224.

<sup>27</sup> Forsyth, *De par chez nous*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

Acadian circles.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the appearance of New Brunswick-born Don Messer and his largely invented Canadian “old-time” style in Charlottetown in 1939 should not be left out: hired as the musical director at radio station CFCY, Don Messer and his Island Band quickly became household names not only on the Island, but across the country, though appreciation for his playing style was only lukewarm amongst older Island fiddlers.<sup>30</sup> Still, Messer’s mastery of the radio and his later jump to television would symbolize a shifting media landscape where mass-entertainment (and, increasingly, American media) became a more important source of cultural entertainment in Island homes over the course of the 1950s and 1960s.

The 1950s and 1960s coincided with a period of decline for fiddle music and community dance throughout many Island communities. Patterns of outmigration, endemic on the Island since the late nineteenth century, continued to sap vitality from economically depressed rural regions, and fiddlers, like many other young people, left the Island to find stable employment on the mainland and especially in New England. The 1960s also coincided with broad rural electrification efforts, rural school consolidation, and increasing access to mass-media entertainment; these, Perlman suggests, were major pressures that threatened to upturn the community oriented entertainment landscape of the Island.<sup>31</sup> When reflecting back on this period, Marie Livingston, who would go on to become a highly influential tune composer from the Evangeline region, noted: “we thought rock and roll was going to take over the world.”<sup>32</sup>

Figuring out the place of song and ballad culture within the framework of Island popular entertainment and culture provides a more substantial challenge to the historian. Island folk

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<sup>29</sup> Perlman, *Fiddle Music*, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Forsyth, *De par chez nous*, 98-99.

<sup>31</sup> Perlman, *Fiddle Music*, 20.

<sup>32</sup> Marie Livingston, as quoted in Forsyth, *De par chez nous*, 139.

songs, especially the local anglo-ballad traditions associated with Larry Gorman and the much older preserved repertoire of the Island Acadians, have at various points in time been the subject of extensive ethnomusicological collecting by historians and academics from both within and beyond the province. Despite this, Island folk-ballad traditions have received significantly less attention than instrumental music from either the public or academics. Unlike Island fiddling, Island ballad traditions did not experience a renewed wave of attention that would fundamentally secure their place within Islanders' social life and historical imagination. This could be, in part, due to the nature of the role that ballad and song have played within Islander communities and its incompatibility with new social structures and social orientations; compared to the supportive institutional framework that grew up around fiddling on the Island during the second half of the twentieth century (including annual competitions and volunteer-based organizations), folk songs have existed exclusively within organic systems of transmission and performance. In spite of the limited community-based engagement with the Island's folk song heritage, several groups of performers, starting most notably with Barachois, have drawn upon the example and inspiration provided by internationally renowned folk singers elsewhere in Atlantic Canada to build successful careers using folk material. In this, Acadian performers were both earlier and more firmly situated in an authentic traditional base than were their anglophone neighbors whose engagement with "the folk" might sometimes be more rightly considered notional for the purposes of marketing than serious engagements with works coming out of the traditional genre.

### **Folk-Music Revivalism at Home and Abroad**

Central to any discussion concerned with modern iterations of traditional folk-music genres lies the question of the "revival." While revivalism as a concept carries within it inherent biases and political orientations which modern theorists see as conceptually limited, it is generally the case

that folk music revivals (and folk revivalism in general) are recognized as distinctly modern phenomena. Though typically regional in scale and defined and prompted by local histories, culture, and politics, there exists a broad sense of temporal and thematic continuity across the various iterations of these movements, emerging as they generally do from the same post-war political climate. To this end, the many waves of folk-music revivalism that have washed over Europe and North America since the mid-twentieth century, though regional in their expression, equate to local responses to important post-war political forces, especially the rise of regional and cultural nationalism, shifting economic realities that interrupted or undermined local industries, and the spread of globalism, mass-media, and mass tourism.<sup>33</sup> The result is that the revivalist process has, at certain points in the history of the academy, been conceptualized within frameworks of reactionary nostalgia, anti-modernism, and the reification of various fundamental cultural myths: a return to the simplicity of a historical pastoralism, a restoration of community values, a rediscovery of a lost cultural legacy. With the complicated additional pressures associated with processes of commodification, professionalization, and branding that so often accompany modern revival movements, it becomes quickly apparent that inherent within the concept of revivalism itself are historical judgements which position certain forms of cultural expression, be they original or revivalist, as more or less authentic, and therefore more or less worthy of study.

Despite the broad similarities which seemingly highlight revivalism's reactionary nature, considerable effort has recently been expended within the field of ethnomusicology to highlight the process of revivalism and tradition as, in Forsyth's words, "a dynamic process that is

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<sup>33</sup>Mark Sheridan, Iona MacDonald, and Charles G. Byrne, "Gaelic Singing and Oral Tradition," *International Journal of Music Education* 29, no. 2 (2011): pp. 172-190, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761410396960>, 173-175.

informed by, but not reliant on, an individual or group's interpretation(s) of some aspect of the past."<sup>34</sup> This fundamental shift in orientation has had the effect of emphasizing the role of local cultural actors as one of cultural creation rather than of self-interpretation or historical emulation. Furthermore, it endows them with a new degree of historical agency that validates decisions made around self-commodification in the interest of capitalizing on, for example, economic or political opportunity. Though this perspective does still leave open to interpretation the exact relationship between tradition or historical continuity and creation, it does effectively undermine the false dichotomy between past and present which exists at the base of a classic interpretation of revivalism, thereby allowing modern scholars to interpret revivalist movements as processes of evolution and development as opposed to within the stultified framework of cultural death and rebirth.

Folk-music revivalism is present in Atlantic Canada as it is in most long-settled parts of North America; though the Island boasts long and colorful French and English ballad traditions, early revivalist efforts were largely led and centered on Island fiddle communities, and more specifically around the dominant Scottish and Acadian styles.<sup>35</sup> Both of these styles and their respective communities have, over the past half-century, undergone multiple waves of revival which, due to geographical and historical proximity, share certain features and influences. Modern iterations—recalling the two waves of fiddle revivalism that occurred first in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, and second, in the late 1990s and 2000s—have as their spiritual

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<sup>34</sup> Forsyth, *De par chez nous*, 119.

<sup>35</sup> In other parts of Atlantic Canada the fiddle revival was accompanied by a revival in traditional song, which is especially visible in the second wave. The success of bands such as the Barra MacNeils and the Rankins of Cape Breton, and Great Big Sea in Newfoundland illustrate this point. While not achieving the degree of national and international recognition as did their Nova-Scotian neighbors, many Island folk musicians and musical groups did make good use of the rich local ballad tradition by both interpreting and drawing inspiration from the local folk-cannon.

source the fiddle revivals of Cape Breton Island which occurred during 1970s and 1980s. Cape Breton's role as the regional originator of the fiddle revival is unsurprising: since the mid-twentieth century, the Nova Scotian government's tourism and cultural policy has revolved around the dogged promotion of the province as Canada's Scottish heartland.<sup>36</sup> Cape Breton's revival began in response to the broadcasting of a 1972 CBC documentary called "The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler," a title at which locals scoffed, yet the documentary and the concerns that it represented would lead to widespread efforts to both preserve and enshrine local traditional music culture and fiddle-style across the region.<sup>37</sup> A year after the documentary was released, Glengarry Cape Breton hosted the first Festival of Scottish Fiddling, and local and provincial groups had funded and developed various musical education opportunities to secure the tradition's future.<sup>38</sup> The successful propagation and subsequent professionalization of traditional music in Cape Breton led to international acclaim, as well as more regional reproduction; Cape Breton fiddlers, especially those who dominated the scene throughout the late 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, found opportunity on the world stage, and all the while, cultural groups and individual artists from the other Atlantic provinces sought to ride the contemporary wave of fiddle popularity.<sup>39</sup>

Island fiddlers very quickly organized themselves on the Cape Breton model, establishing the Prince Edward Island Fiddler's Association (PEIFA) in 1975, as well as shortly afterward the Scottish-oriented Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival.<sup>40</sup> As Perlman writes:

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<sup>36</sup> Hennessy, *Fiddle Grooves*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Forsyth, *De par chez nous*, 134

<sup>38</sup> Hennessy, *Fiddle Grooves*, 72. See also Ian McKay's *Tartanism Triumphant* for a more complete depiction of the cultural politics of Nova Scotia during the twentieth century.

<sup>39</sup> Forsyth, *De par chez nous*, 135.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

[Early organizers] were also attuned to the forces that had made the rise of the great Cape Breton players possible, such as the growth of paying venues and the development of the widespread ability to read music. Many programs and organizations that arose during the PEI revival, then, can be seen as attempts to make Prince Edward Island more like Cape Breton, in hopes that these conditions would encourage youngsters to develop the dedication and professionalism of Cape Breton's better-known performing artists.<sup>41</sup>

The institutionalization of fiddling under the banners of these organizations was a step in an entirely different direction for fiddlers of what Ken Perlman calls the “traditional period” (the period prior to any of the waves of revivalism).<sup>42</sup> Scottish fiddling on the Island became entirely organized around the nascent PEIFA and its successor organizations, the Queens, Kings, and Prince county Fiddlers, which while disruptive to “traditional” styles and forms provided consistency, stability, and an air of respectability to a musical culture which had long been considered the pastime of rogues and reprobates.<sup>43</sup> As a result, much of the spontaneity and local flavor of regional fiddle styles was given up in favor of a standardized repertoire (much of which was imported from off-Island, especially from Cape Breton) that could be performed in large group settings, which was the primary method of play promoted by the PEIFA. While its demise had been avoided, the culture of Island fiddling remained, with some exception, the purview of older “hobbyists” and for the next twenty years, with young Islanders continuing their gravitation towards various pop styles.<sup>44</sup> It was only with the regional, then national popularization of such young Cape Breton artists as Ashley MacIsaac and Natalie McMaster in the late 1990s and early

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<sup>41</sup> Perlman, *Wedding*, 346

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 334.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 348.

<sup>44</sup> Though the term “hobbyist” is used here to demonstrate the difference between professional and non-professional fiddle players, Ward MacDonald highlights the fact that due to the few professional players during the period known as the “first wave,” this distinction had very little impact on ability, dedication, or musical reputation within the broader community.

2000s that young Islanders began to reconsider the social and economic value of the art form.<sup>45</sup>

From there, a “second wave” of young, professionalized fiddlers emerged from across the Island.

As Perlman concludes in his book *Couldn't Have a Wedding without a Fiddler: The Story of Traditional Fiddling on Prince Edward Island*:

In retrospect, the major outcomes of the PEI fiddling revival were twofold: creating a local professional fiddling scene and making the art of fiddling available as a pastime to a significant number of Islanders. Fiddling on Prince Edward Island may have changed significantly since the 1970s in terms of venue, style, and repertoire, but it might well not have survived as a widespread activity without undergoing precisely these kinds of changes.<sup>46</sup>

While this broad assessment of the last fifty years of Island fiddling is predominantly focused on Island “Scottish” styles which dominate in English-speaking communities, similar patterns are also visible within francophone and Acadian communities. Much like their Scottish counterparts, many prominent Acadian fiddlers in the 1970s had become great admirers of the Cape Breton fiddling repertoire, an appreciation that came with a simultaneous awareness of the success of initiatives like formal musical education and the fiddle-festival model. However, local revitalization of traditional musical forms within Acadian communities also resulted from and were dependent upon the 150 year process of cultural, economic, political definition that could broadly be referred to as the Acadian nationalist project.<sup>47</sup> Unlike their Scottish counterparts, the reification of local Acadian cultural expression fits within a broader pre-developed framework of politically motivated cultural identity construction, itself a subset of the broader goals inherent in the fight for French language and Acadian cultural rights within the Atlantic Canadian region. The implications of this are that revivalist efforts within Acadian communities came about

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<sup>45</sup> Forsyth, *De par chez nous*, 136.

<sup>46</sup> Perlman, *Wedding*, 388.

<sup>47</sup> Forsyth, *De par chez nous*, 113-114.

within a landscape where institutional and organizational support for cultural projects, as well as governmental assistance and funding for cultural initiatives, was already well grounded within systems of community knowledge.

Despite sharing sources of inspiration then, there existed fundamental differences between revival movements in francophone and anglophone communities on PEI, differences that became particularly visible during the period of the “second wave.” In “*De par chez nous: Fiddling Traditions and Acadian Identity on Prince Edward Island*,” Meghan Forsyth intimates that fiddling within Acadian communities in the 1970s did not experience the same renewed enthusiasm as was found within the Anglo-fiddling communities, writing that “Local musicians recall only one or two young fiddlers who played in the region in the early 1970s. While there were older fiddlers who played exclusively in their own homes, there were few who played publicly for parties and social dances.”<sup>48</sup> Those players who did emerge from Acadian regions like Evangeline often sought to emulate the Cape Breton style that had become the purview of most anglophone fiddlers in the west of the province. The building of a sense of local musical confidence was a process intrinsically associated with growing performance opportunities for musicians of the region; events like the Exposition Agricole et Festival Acadien de la Region Evangeline, which incorporated fiddling and step dancing into its programming during the 1970s, and the later Jamboree Atlantique des Violoneux (founded in 1986) which paired local musicians and dancers with professional off-island talent, provided valuable performance experience and exposure for local musical hopefuls. At the same time, rural dinner theaters like Paul Gallant’s long-running series *La Cuisine à Mémé* (1985), which mixed music and theatrical performance with comedic depictions of local culture, served as a performance incubator for many local

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 138.

Acadian groups. Performers who came through this system learned the utility and effectiveness of highlighting and dramatizing the specific qualities and particular character of Acadian culture for both local and tourist audiences.

This format would be validated and refined during the early 1990s with a series of projects that placed a newly commodified version of Acadian musical culture into the spotlight. Grady Poe's PEI Kitchen Parties, a traveling musical series that sought to emulate its namesake by presenting Acadian artists in small rural halls across the Island, became an Island phenomenon during its brief two-season run, successfully introducing a broader Island audience to "Acadian music" for the first time in a modern setting. Out of Poe's Kitchen Party series would also come one of the most successful Acadian touring groups of the period, Barachois. Featuring Evangeline musicians Albert Arsenault, Helen Bergeron, Louise Arsenault, and Chuck Arsenault, the band, managed by Poe, would go on to perform over 2000 shows across fifteen countries, introducing international audiences to their unique brand of fiddling, step-dancing, renditions of traditional folk songs, physical comedy, and storytelling. In this regard, Barachois was taking cues from various other regional "trad" bands like the Rankins and the Barra-MacNeils, who also sought to meld fiddle traditions and reprised folk songs into marketable stage shows with broad national and international appeal. In their turn, Barachois became the model for many Island Acadian groups who sought to tour outside the province, with later groups taking clear inspiration from Barachois' extensive use of archival musical materials.

Barachois' adoption and employment of a regional folk-song repertoire is a reflection of a broader trend amongst "traditional" musicians and bands emerging throughout Atlantic Canada during the 1990s. Folk acts like the Barra-MacNeils, Great Big Sea, the Rankin Family, and Ashley McIsaac found that traditional song fit well within a branding strategy whose objective

involved selling shows to national and international markets that were increasingly interested in Atlantic Canadian “folk” content. Simultaneously, the integration of regionally specific folk songs had the desired effect of introducing audiences to literary and historical interpretations of local culture that was inherent within the songs themselves. While this process of revival and commodification of folk song (as opposed to instrumental dance music tradition) is one which gathered steam over the 1980s and into the 2000s, it is interesting to contemplate the variation that existed within the Island’s musical landscape. Whereas bands emerging out of Acadian communities like Barachois and, later, Vishten would make extensive use of archival materials collected by local historians and ethnomusicologists during the 1970s, there was no one in the Anglo-PEI world making use of similarly rich collected source material.

### **Tourism, Funding, Commodification**

The process by which Island culture became commodified is one which is intrinsically entwined with the transformation of the tourism industry on Prince Edward Island, as well as the broader evolution of the conceptualization of tourism as a process, a system, and a commodity in its own right. In the early 1980s, Island tourism underwent a distinct shift in which a significant degree of governmental control of the industry—government having been for decades the driving organizational, regulatory, and strategic force behind all things tourism in the province—was ceded to the private sector, and specifically to the newly rebranded Tourism Industry Association of Prince Edward Island (TIAPEI).<sup>49</sup> On the surface, this shift was the result of a generally under-funded tourism department which sought to offload expenses, especially in the realms of marketing and promotion, to a second party in the midst of economic stagnation in the latter half

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<sup>49</sup> MacDonald and MacEachern, *The Summer Trade*, 340.

of the 1970s. But this changing of the guard also signaled important changes in the western touristic landscape, both at home and abroad. As Edward Macdonald and Alan MacEachern write of the state of affairs at the end of the 1970s:

It was no longer good enough for Island tourism to rely on its good looks and charm in order to court visitors. Inexpensive air charters, package tours, changing consumer values and attitudes, emerging travel patterns: all challenged the Island's market share. Global tourism was on the rise, but that only overwhelmed travelers with the tyranny of choice. And so, the marketing plan that followed was sprinkled with imperatives, what tourism providers "should" and "must" do to spread out visitors, lengthen the season, change perceptions, improve the tourism product.<sup>50</sup>

Influenced by the tradition of research-based and state-implemented economic development measures that defined the era of the Comprehensive Development Plan years, both government and TIAPEI turned to consulting companies to produce data which could assist the department and its private-sector partner in cornering new markets and enticing new demographics, as well as extracting maximum value from those demographics who were already visiting.<sup>51</sup> This was accomplished, to a much greater degree when compared with previous iterations of tourism strategy, by attempting to broaden the variety of experiences on offer for the average Island tourist. In 1987 and 1988, the DPA Group conducted studies which highlighted Culture and Heritage as untapped resources within the Island's touristic ecosystem, simultaneously finding that, in general, the "culture buff" variety of tourist stayed longer and spent more money when visiting.<sup>52</sup> Macdonald and MacEachern continue: "In the 1970s, heritage had been preserved primarily for Islanders, in order to protect their sense of self. Tourism was considered a welcome by-product. Now, heritage would be packaged particularly

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 334.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 349, 337-338.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 350.

for tourists with the tacit approval of a heritage sector short of resources and sensitive about its low funding priority.”<sup>53</sup>

While the commodification potential of all manner of artistic and cultural expression was considered and exploited, what might be called “traditional” Island culture was especially well placed to cater to the changing expectations and goals of the tourist public. Amidst the backdrop of the emergent individualism and booming commercialism of the late 1980s and the 1990s, Island tourist advocates recognized the resurgence of a kind of pastoralist urge within their target demographics, who sought to offset the ennui which was the result of restrictive, sedentary, white-collar urban existence through the consumption of the “authentic” and “genuine” within a rural setting.<sup>54</sup> MacDonald and MacEachern point out that this new thread necessitated a collaboration between the Department of Tourism and TIAPEI, who could market and promote the “authentic” nature of an Island tourist experience, and Islanders employed in the industry who provided the on-the-ground services for tourists and who thus became part of the product itself. MacDonald and MacEachern also make the case that while marketers and local tourist providers were typically inspired by local traditions, they were not by any means bound to any pre-existing cultural expression or historical lineage, and were happy to fictionalize aspects of Island culture and heritage if it meant that their paying guests’ emotional desires were met:

What tourism’s investment in cultural heritage did encourage was the creation of a sort of cultural simulacrum. In the same way that commercial lobster suppers facsimiled “old-fashioned” Island cuisine and state-sponsored training programs had revived “old-fashioned” handicrafts (or, sometimes, coaxed them into existence) to supply the tourist market, institutionalized event attractions such as *ceilidhs* (from the Gaelic word for “visit”) recreated “old-fashioned” entertainment for visitors and locals, taking an actual

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 371.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 369.

tradition, the community concert, and giving it a faux backstory (a uniquely Gaelic origin) as a way to popularize it.<sup>55</sup>

Evidence of the Island's new "culture and heritage" orientation became plainly visible in the tourism association's attempts during the 1990s to tie the Island more closely to its history of European immigration. With the intention of igniting in the tourist imagination a sense of cultural continuity between the old world and the new, 1990 and 1991 were deemed the years of Ireland and Scotland, respectively, with the 1992 season slated to be a celebration of Acadian heritage, though one which never materialized.<sup>56</sup> MacDonald and MacEachern are quick to point out that the 1990s folk-revival and efforts by Island tourism organizations to promote cultural itineraries, though contemporary with each other, were corollary rather than causal. What is more than evident, however, is that both local tourism providers as well as tourism industry representatives both saw the potential inherent in the promotion and commodification of "traditional" island cultural expression, an alliance that has defined Prince Edward Island's branding strategy to this day and which continues to factor heavily into the career strategies and creative choices of Island traditional musicians.

While certain Island traditional musicians were eager to tap into local tourism revenue streams offered by new performance opportunities like those associated with the "ceilidh boom" of the late 1990s and early 2000s, it was also the case that the 1990s was an important period of growth for cultural agencies and industry associations which sought to provide local musicians opportunities to expand outside of the Island context. Organizations like the East Coast Music Association (founded as the Maritime Music Association in 1989), which organized a yearly regional awards show and buyer's conference, was established both to connect East-Coast

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 373.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 375

musicians with managers, agents, venue owners, and festival operators working on national and international levels, as well as to legitimize and propagate the “East Coast” brand.

Simultaneously, local industry associations and cultural organizations, like the Federation Culturelle de l'Île du Prince Édouard (1991) and Music PEI (2001) arose to provide services such as professional development programs, industry export projects, and programming initiatives on local levels to both anglophone and francophone musicians. However, the programs and initiatives put in place by these new organizations did not uniformly benefit all professional Island musicians, and for those whose careers were chiefly oriented towards local performances within a tourism framework, there was little industry support. This divide between touring and locally based musical acts also applied to musicians' ability to access important cultural funding from national arts and music industry organizations like the Canada Council of the Arts, Factor, and Musique Action, whose funding programs provided significant grants for everything from recording projects, to marketing, to tour support.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly enough, familiarity with and access to industry support and cultural funding within the broader traditional music community also seemed to differentiate Island traditional musicians along linguistic and cultural lines, with Acadian artists being much more likely to access funding and attend industry and showcasing events than their Anglo counterparts who, in large measure, developed locally oriented careers centered largely around tourism.

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<sup>57</sup> In *Arts and Cultural Projects in Rural and Remote Canada: A Review of Canada Council Support*, a document prepared by the CCoA for the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, the organization highlights a contemporary shift in funding priorities to more fully include projects by Canadians in rural areas over the years of 1998 through 2001. Though amounts dispensed on a year to year basis depend largely on the sum total of applications submitted to the CCoA, the document reveals a consistent increase of funding allocated to projects emanating from rural Island communities, as well as the organization's intention to increase rural project funds by an additional 57 million in 2002.

The various elements explored in this section—Island history, ethnic and linguistic provenance, culture and cultural values, and the processes of revivalism, cultural commodification, and technological, social, economic, and institutional change—are all factors which, to varying degrees, underpin the identities of Island traditional musicians, including those who have participated in this project. Though the perspectives and lived experiences of the interviewees are far from homogenous, this broad outlining of the development of the socio-cultural and economic contexts in which Island traditional musicians currently exist provides both context for understanding their perspectives and a basis for evaluating the various ways in which their interviews prove, contradict, and otherwise expand upon common understandings of the place of folk music within current-day Island society.

## PROFILES

To begin to understand the complex and varied ways the interviewees are situated in relation to their careers, their histories, their artistic practices, and the cultural and social spaces they inhabit, each requires a degree of introduction. The following profiles have been composed largely from each participant's account of their personal histories.

### *Michael (Mike) Pendergast*<sup>58</sup>

Mike was born into an Acadian-Irish household in the town of Palmer Road near Tignish, Prince Edward Island. The partnership of his Irish-descended father and his Acadian mother is emblematic of the cultural and community dynamics that typify the extreme Western tip of the

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<sup>58</sup> Mike Pendergast, interview by author, Tracadie, PE, February 6, 2022 (interview hereafter referred to as “Mike.”)

Island, where important historic communities of both Acadian and Irish immigrants settled and resettled throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although born into a mixed language household, Mike, alongside his four brothers and sisters, grew up speaking English exclusively, though he recalls being exposed to important elements of francophone culture throughout his childhood, not the least of which was French song. Singing featured prominently within the family setting. His mother was an active community organizer and an early champion in the fight to establish a French-language school board on the Island who, in her spare time, organized community concerts and musical soirees. Mike simply describes his father as “a natural entertainer,” recounting that his earliest memories were of watching his father sing and entertain at community parties and gatherings.<sup>59</sup> These various influences came together to form an early musical education for all five children which centered around community performance, storytelling, and song.

Though born into a family with deep historical and community ties to folk music (Mike’s grandfather, one “Big” Jim Pendergast, is famous in local circles for escorting the late Sandy Ives around the Island during his trips to the Island over the course of the 1950s and 1960s), Mike places his formative encounters with what he calls “Island folk music” at a much later place in his life. While the music that was sung within his family was bilingual, the material was part of wider French and Anglo-Irish popular musical canons (what he refers to as “campfire songs”) as opposed to material that was distinctly local. Additionally, he highlights the place of community theater productions, especially those organized by the West Prince Arts Council, as well as his high school boys choir as formative musical experiences.

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<sup>59</sup> Mike - 00:01:48.

After finishing high school, Mike spent time in Central and Western Canada, working various jobs. During his time as a tree planter in Edmonton, Alberta, Mike adopted what would become his primary instrument, the piano accordion. He was also introduced to the music of Stan Rogers, and through him, an emergent musical genre that Mike recognizes as “Maritime music,” for which he developed an instant attraction. While his shoulder seasons and winters were spent working and busking in various cities, he would frequently return to the Island during the summers. These were periods in which he became incrementally more aware of a regional resurgence of interest in both Maritime and Island folk music, an awareness that was bolstered by his summer employment with Paul Gallant’s *Cuisine à Mémé* dinner theater in the Evangeline Region, as well as his later exposure to Grady Poe’s traveling Kitchen Party series. Mike also recounts that the increasing popularity of contemporary folk-inspired Maritime music groups like Great Big Sea of Newfoundland and the Barra-MacNeils of Cape Breton contributed to a sense of living through a period of musical revival.

Moving back to the Island in 1993, Mike’s interest in Maritime and Island folk music began to coalesce into a career. Employed early on as an actor and performer at Avonlea Village, a popular Cavendish “living literature” tourist destination associated with L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*, Mike learned to accompany Scottish fiddle music by playing with other musical actors, notably Island fiddler Cynthia Macleod. Mike also became a fixture at both the Malpeque and Stanley Bridge ceilidhs, both of which were founded by members of the Pendergast family during the ceilidh boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Mike reflects on how, over the course of this period, his repertoire began to shift towards a more geographically and temporally limited palette of Island songs and away from the broader Anglo-Irish and Maritime canons. Becoming increasingly interested in the collection and performance of songs

and ballads associated with the Larry Gorman era of Island songwriting (circa late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), Mike sought to come to grips with the specific qualities of this material through creative experimentation, writing new songs in a style emulating that of older Island material despite the genre's descent into relative obscurity. At this point in time, Mike considers himself to be one of the few remaining of this particular folk style, and he sees the preservation of said material to be one of his duties as a musician and a performer.

Currently, Mike's career revolves around a variety of performance types which are generally seasonal in nature. Spring involves frequent conference performances, the long summer tourist seasons are associated with ceilidhs and assorted tourist-experience bookings, while the fall and winter see Mike at work in a rather different niche, that of children's entertainment on school circuits and at daycares. While he primarily positions himself as a professional entertainer, his preservationist orientation as well as the types of audiences for which he typically performs (children and tourists) necessarily imbues his performances with an educational emphasis.

### *Ward MacDonald*<sup>60</sup>

Ward MacDonald was born and raised in Montague, PEI. Brought up in an Anglo-Scottish multigenerational musical family, music was a constant presence throughout his childhood. His father, Allan MacDonald, was already a competent guitarist by the time he began playing fiddle in his late teens, and became infatuated with the Cape Breton-inspired style which dominated fiddling circles in Eastern PEI. Adding to the mix were Ward's paternal grandparents, who were

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<sup>60</sup> Ward MacDonald, interview by author, Charlottetown, PE, February 18, 2022 (interview hereafter referred to as "Ward").

well known square-dance promoters, at whose dances Allan would regularly play. Ward's earliest exposure to the community was through house parties and Eastern Kings County Fiddlers events that he would attend with his father, who was a member. Ward began taking lessons with Paul MacDonald, one of the first young professional fiddlers to emerge from the Island revival scene. Himself a student of the Eastern Kings Cape Breton style, Paul MacDonald provided Ward with his first formal musical education experience, preparing him for his first forays into performance at the Benevolent Irish Society in Charlottetown, as well as the preeminent Monticello ceilidh at the age of fourteen. Though his lessons ended after two years, Ward's teens were spent engaged in personal practice and, more broadly, transitioning from learner into full participant as an adult member of the Island fiddling community. Accompanying this shift was the necessity of navigating new cultural dynamics associated with learning, performing, and sharing music within a wider social framework that included dances, ceilidhs, house concerts, and the non-homogenous fiddling community itself, each of which had their own ideas around acceptable engagement and propriety. During his interview, one moment that stood out as an important waypoint during this transitory period was Ward's attendance at his first fiddle camp, which was hosted at the Gaelic College in Cape Breton.

During his university years at UPEI, Ward became associated with the Queens County Fiddlers (QCF) via its then-president, Father Charlie Cheverie. Soon after, Ward would step into a leadership role with the organization, being appointed as President and Music Director for the duration of his period of study. Stepping back from QCF leadership after earning his degree, Ward also sat as President of the Board of Executives of the Prince Edward Island Fiddlers Society (PEIFS) for two terms. It was shortly after stepping down from his position with the PEIFS that Ward began performing more broadly. His work during this period largely consisted

of parts in larger, season-long productions like the College of Piping's *Gaelic Storm* or daily shows aboard various cruise ship lines. Disliking the repetitive nature of this type of performance, he turned his attention towards programming and promotion, playing an integral role in the conceptualization and organization of the first PEI Festival of Small Halls as well as other Island events. Additionally, Ward began engaging more fully as an educator, teaching at various fiddle camps throughout North America, amongst which were the Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp in Colorado, Dawson City's Klondike Fiddle School, and the North-East Heritage Music Camp held in Johnson, Vermont. Through these events, Ward became privy to the resurrection of social dance modes occurring in tandem with the resurgence of interest in instrumental folk music. This exposure began a period of experimentation and integration of dance calling within the Island social dance scene (a social mechanism which, while at one time popular, had largely disappeared from the Island landscape). He set about organizing Here We Go Barn-Dance, a promotion company that organizes square dances for special events across the Island.

Today, Ward's playstyle exists within the Cape Breton sphere. He is, however, uncomfortable with such categorizations, choosing instead to frame his creative production outside the confines of a particular genre and to present his music on its own terms. He is also an accomplished pianist and a recognized tune composer; his compositions are widely played on the Island and, in pockets, across the world. Currently, his musical career is oriented towards promotion and booking, with performances mostly centered on non-tourist venues and performances (festivals, listening rooms, background gigs) that allow him to remain creatively flexible.

*Chuck Arsenault*<sup>61</sup>

Chuck Arsenault was born to Acadian parents from the Evangeline Region who had resettled in Montague for work. Despite their Acadian heritage, the Arsenault parents made the conscious decision during their move to linguistically integrate into their new community, raising all of their eleven biological and foster children in a largely English environment. Chuck subsequently recognized that while he and his siblings remained generally unexposed to the French language for the entirety of their childhoods, they were surrounded by the cultural and material aspects that characterize Island Acadianness. Chuck's father was a schoolteacher, and his mother became the local church choir director. Chuck credits his early exposure to music to his mother, who made participation in church choir mandatory for all her children. He highlights this aspect of his childhood as the experience that founded his appreciation for "voices singing together."<sup>62</sup> Pushed to take music seriously throughout his high school years, Chuck discovered a deep love of the French horn through his time in band class, going on to study the instrument (and classical music more broadly) at an undergraduate level through UPEI's Bachelor of Music program. All the while, Chuck gained ensemble experience by playing with various regional youth orchestras and wind ensembles, eventually becoming a member of Symphony Nova Scotia after graduation. His love of the music, however, was muted by what he characterized as an apathetic and joyless work culture at SNS.

Returning to the Island to reorient, Chuck became interested in the idea of a career in French language education through a conversation with a family member. After spending time

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<sup>61</sup> Chuck Arsenault, interview by author, Charlottetown, PE, February 20, 2022 (interview hereafter referred to as "Chuck").

<sup>62</sup> Chuck - 00:03:02.

studying French through adult education courses, he began to take substitute teaching contracts, which eventually led him, for the first time in his life, to the Evangeline Region. His exposure to the region also brought him into contact with Acadian fiddle through members of the local music scene, including Albert Arsenault, Louise Arsenault, Helen Bergeron, and American transplant Grady Poe. Chuck's arrival coincided with an important episode for arts and culture in the Acadian region. Paul Gallant's "Cuisine à Mémé", the influential Acadian dinner theater, was at its zenith when Chuck became involved, performing for a season alongside Albert and Helen. Additionally, Grady Poe, who saw the untapped potential of branding Island Acadian music as distinct from the dominant Cape Breton-influenced style of fiddling, was in the process of developing a new season of his successful PEI Kitchen Party series. A traveling show presented in small halls across the Island and featuring francophone and anglophone Island artists, PEI Kitchen Party ran for two seasons featuring Chuck, Louise, Helen, and Albert as the house band, concluding with a season of free daily performances at the Confederation Centre of the Arts in Charlottetown entitled "PEI Kitchen Party presents: Barachois." Emerging from these two Evangeline-based productions, Barachois made waves at the 1996 East Coast Music Week. Their unique brand of Acadian fiddling, interpretations of archival francophone songs, dance routines, and physical comedy went on to launch a successful nine-year international career that saw them performing over 2000 shows across fifteen different countries.

Barachois' success left an indelible mark on the Atlantic Canadian music industry and, more locally, provided an important precedent for young Acadian folk musicians interested in professionalization and a career in touring. However, as band members' priorities were increasingly shifting from touring to family and community, Barachois decided to amicably disband in 2003. Chuck would continue to tour and record, albeit at a diminished scale, with

Albert (the acclaimed project was aptly named Chuck et Albert) for a number of years, before moving on once again. Chuck has since dedicated himself to music education, teaching music and theater full-time at Evangeline School. In his lessons, he concentrates not only on passing on essential musical and theatrical rudiments and techniques, but on the techniques associated with performing. Furthermore, he sees it as a personal duty to support students in extracurricular activities involving music, frequently giving of his time to help guide them through their first professional contracts or to assist in the development of shows and productions that benefit young performers. As a result of this shift to a role as an educator, Chuck no longer deliberately seeks out opportunities to perform, and plays music for his own enjoyment.

*Emmanuelle LeBlanc and Pascal Miousse*<sup>63</sup>

Emmanuelle (Emma) Leblanc and her twin sister, Pastelle, were born in 1980 and grew up in the Evangeline region of Prince Edward Island. Transplants from New Brunswick, their parents arrived in the region in 1979, and though they both came from non-traditional musical backgrounds, they quickly became indelible members of the Evangeline traditional musical community. Emma's father, whose father was a jazz saxophonist, had studied classical and jazz flute at the Université de Moncton. Her mother, though she didn't play, came from an eminent traditional music family from Grand-Digue, New Brunswick, and began step dancing in the local style when she arrived on the Island. The couple became involved with traditional music through their neighbors and through various community events, sitting on committees and volunteering for various festivals including the Expo-Agricole et Festival Acadien, as well as the Atlantic

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<sup>63</sup> Emmanuelle LeBlanc and Pascal Miousse were interviewed together by the author at Charlottetown, PEI, February 23, 2022 (The interview is hereafter referred to as either "Emma" or "Pascal," depending upon the speaker in question.)

Fiddlers Jamboree. Emma recounts that her father's music parties quickly became a well-loved staple of the local scene, and that her early exposure was largely associated with this type of social event.

Despite the family's nascent interest in the traditional musical genre, Emma and her sister's first musical instruction came in the form of classical piano and step-dancing lessons. The sisters were deeply influenced by their dance teacher, Helen Bergeron of Barachois, who impressed upon them the long-term value of traditional dance modes as a skill that could provide unique opportunities. By their early teens, they were traveling with their young Acadian dance troupe and participating in important folk festivals (namely the Festival International de Lafayette in Louisiana and the Winnipeg Folk Festival), exposing the sisters to a broader musical world and leaving a lasting impact on them both. Also impactful were the popular neo-traditional recordings produced by both the new-wave of Cape Breton fiddlers in the early and mid 1990s (especially those of rock-fusion fiddler Ashley MacIsaac) as well as the recordings and performances of modern Irish bands like Danu who, during this period, were touring extensively throughout the Maritimes. By the time Emma picked up her primary instrument, the whistle, at the age of 18, she was already well versed in the musical vocabulary of Acadian, Cape Breton, and Irish traditional musical styles.

The foundations of Emanuelle's musical career were put in place shortly after moving to Moncton to study music at university. In 2000, Emma, Pastelle, and two musical friends were asked to put together a short set of music to present at *Francofête*, the East-Coast francophone industry and showcasing event. Reinvited the following year under a new band-name (*Celtitude*) and after substantially more practice, the project, whose material consisted of traditional Acadian songs with a mix of traditional and modern tunes from PEI, Ireland, and Scotland, was extremely

well received. From their new connections with French, Belgian, and Swiss music agencies present at the conference, Celtitude began to tour internationally almost instantly. Following two years of extensive European touring and in search of a new fiddler, it was at Francofête 2003 where Emma and Pastelle initially met the man who would become their touring partner for the next 18 years, fiddler and guitarist Pascal Miousse.

**Pascal Miousse** was born in the Magdalen Islands. The son of a guitarist with a penchant for fiddle music, Pascal was enrolled in classical violin lessons from the age of five. He recounts that his early experiences of music involved watching his father play with revered Magdalen fiddlers at house parties, and that the energy and spirit contained in the music made a lasting impression on him. He played his first social dance in his early teens. The financial compensation for these and other small gigs was appealing to him, and he remembers that early on he became aware of music as a career possibility. During his teens, Pascal moved away from classical lessons and, for a short while, away from the fiddle as his instrument of choice in general. Instead, he picked up the guitar from his father and started a rock band with his friends, though he remembers that even in this period the appeal of fiddle music was undiminished. It was during his teens that he also began to see music as an avenue for travel beyond the Maggies. Once he had finished high school, Pascal moved to Quebec for CEGEP, but he found he disliked his courses and instead of focusing on his studies he started a band with another Madelinot who had also moved to the city. Playing mostly covers of French pop songs with the occasional fiddle number, the band became successful to the point that this work provided Pascal with the entirety of his income.

The band continued to play together for ten years, at which point they broke up amicably and Pascal returned home, looking for a new group of musicians to play with. Meeting Emma and Pastelle through a mutual friend, Pascal was invited to join Celtitude on a three-month tour

of Europe, and to record on their upcoming album after returning home. This eponymous album, entitled *Vishten*, would both coincide with a name change for the group, and usher in a new phase of Emma and Pascal's musical careers. Following the success of *Celtitude* and the excitement around the new record, Emanuelle and Pascal described the ensuing three years as being unsustainably busy, sometimes spending upwards of 200 days a year on tour. They also described the predominant issue as a managerial one; being pushed by their management to tour extensively in France, Belgium, and Switzerland (a very developed francophone tour network exists there), both Pascal and Emma expressed a shared sense of loss of control during this period. However, over time *Vishten* moved away from this touring model and, following in Barachois' footsteps, began to present extensively in front of anglophone audiences through folk-touring networks in England, Canada, the United States, and Australia, which are considered by the band to be more hospitable, lucrative, and "fun."

The members of *Vishten* have toured extensively across Europe, North America, and the Antipodes over the course of their eighteen-year careers. As ever, their music encompasses a mix of traditional and original tunes and songs, the writing and arranging of which is heavily inspired by the musical traditions of their home regions of Evangeline and the Magdalen Islands. More recently, their music has adopted a more modern flavor, subtly and effectively incorporating elements of jazz, funk, and rock into their regional repertoires.

## THEMES

In "Making use of History: Revival of the Bagpipe in Sweden in the 1980s," Owe Ronström makes an important distinction between history and the historicization of traditional cultural

expression. He describes tradition as “a past that is continuously reconstructed in the present.”<sup>64</sup> Ronström’s, then, is a definition that places power into the hands of the artists and performers who exist within peripheral cultural spaces, reifying their roles as cultural creators rather than cultural reenactors. Taking this perspective as a jumping-off point, this section seeks to expand the conversation about the processes of personal and collective identity construction to include aspects of the lived realities of Island traditional artists that have hitherto remained unexplored. If, as Ronström suggests, “tradition” is a continuous symbolic reconstruction of the past, then professional traditional musicians’ reconstruction of said past is necessarily informed not only by language, culture, and history, but also by personal values, career orientations, their relationships with cultural institutions and the broader music industry, and the processes of cultural and self-commodification and performance. Throughout the following pages, these dynamics have been explored by way of a process of analysis in which the interviewees’ perspectives are organized and considered in relation to various themes that emerged as particularly significant, including family and community, ethnicity and language, artistic vision and creative processes, performance context and audience expectation, industry orientation and monetization, and cultural infrastructure.

One of the first important themes addressed in this set of interviews was the role of family and community as the gateway to an engagement with traditional music. Though the recounted narratives varied from participant to participant, Emma, Pascal, Ward, Mike, and Chuck all articulated the importance of various early encounters with music, if not with traditional musical forms, as mediated through both familial and local social contexts. Within the set, there was perhaps no more self-aware exploration of this subject than that of Chuck. In our

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<sup>64</sup> Owe Ronström, *Making Use of History*, 95.

conversation, Chuck made it clear that his engagement with traditional music was one which was an adult, conscious undertaking, yet one within which his upbringing, familial context, and early community engagement played a formative role. Born into an Acadian family whose ties to the French language had been consciously severed, it is clear that Chuck's artistic identity is inextricably tied to a process of rediscovery of a metaphorical and symbolic Acadian "homeland." In his recounting of his first exposure to the Evangeline region and his falling in with the members of Barachois, Chuck reiterates this sense of rediscovery by highlighting the pervading sense of familiarity he felt when spending time in Evangeline despite the linguistic separation that was the result of his English-language childhood: "In meeting the rest of the members of Barachois, I quickly realized that we had the same upbringing, it's just that we had it in English, they had it in French. You know, big influence of the Church, big family... caring for people in your community you don't know .... Same Acadian dishes that we had at all the celebrations."<sup>65</sup>

Amongst the other interviewees, Chuck's narrative serves as a particularly good starting point for investigating the place of the familial and the immediate social environment within the processes of identity construction. This is due to his late engagement with Acadian musical tradition as well as his initial positioning as an "outsider" amongst the Acadians of Evangeline, both of which allow for interesting comparisons to be drawn when considering the experiences of the other interviewees. Chuck intimates throughout the interview that his participation in this music and his sense of inclusion within Island Acadian culture is far more related to the cultural practices and, more specifically, the cultural values he felt he shared with his bandmates by virtue of his upbringing in an Acadian household, as opposed to other markers of identity like

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<sup>65</sup> Chuck - 00:08:10.

language or community provenance. Even his classical musical training, which ostensibly sets him apart from the other members of Barachois, has little impact on his ability to participate in traditional musical form. As we will come to see, this line of thinking—one which sees music as a conduit for preserving and advancing particular positive cultural values—runs through Chuck’s musical career, deeply informing his attitude about the role of music and performance within the broader community.

The perspectives advanced by Emmanuelle Leblanc and Ward MacDonald, both of whom were raised within families and communities where traditional music featured prominently, speak to slightly different interpretations regarding the impact of family and community on cultural and musical transmission. Emma, for her part, imbues her home region of Evangeline with a particular musicality; phrases like “Evangeline is a really musical place,” while certainly addressing the social role of music within the region, also intimates a connection between geographical space and the musicality of those born there. This perspective is no doubt informed by her earliest exposure to music through the many parties, both organized and unorganized, hosted by her father, Philippe, over the course of her childhood; “Dad was just like this social butterfly that just wanted everybody to come party at the house,” Emma recounts of her father, “... the house in Mont Carmel was kind of like the hub.”<sup>66</sup> Ward MacDonald, in contrast, concentrates on an exploration of the sociality and the social framework of his fiddling community as the most important factor in musical transmission. This particular social orientation underpins Ward’s repeated invocation of the term “flesh memory,” or, the process by which musical transmission, participation, and learning become encompassed within the physiological recollection of a particular social encounter. Explaining this concept, Ward says,

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<sup>66</sup> Emma - 00:03:08.

“You can listen to a tune on YouTube a thousand times to learn it, but if you learn it from another human, you don't get a thousand tries, and you gotta hear it enough, and when you hear it out in the real world, you remember who you were with, you remember when you heard it, what hall you were in maybe, or what player it was.”<sup>67</sup>

Ward's interview in particular highlights the idea that transmission and learning involved the integration not only of musical lessons, but also of social mechanisms within which musical performance was nested. Ward, much more than the other interviewees, perceives the early musical landscape he inhabited as one which carries with it particular customs, etiquette, and established ways of being, including a social politics of music appreciation and performance that required integration as part of the educational experience. Questions of who plays when, for how long one might perform, and even how one gets asked to play during parties and dances (“My dad taught me this right from the beginning... If we were asked to play, we'd play. They'd say ‘wait to be asked, and you shouldn't have to be asked twice’”) speak not only to the lived social realities of traditional musicians within various communities, but also to the ways that those musicians interpret the social function of the music itself. Mike Pendergast, who had little early exposure to traditional music but who has become one of the few-remaining proponents of the Anglo-Island ballad tradition, remarks on the subjects and wordplay in songs which, through humor and derision, could be used as tools of social regulation. After providing a locally specific example of a mirthful send-up, he noted: “Those were the types of things you wrote about; you wrote about little scandalous - [silence]. Songs sort of kept people in line because they teased, and they made fun of, and they were useful.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ward - 00:51:30.

<sup>68</sup> Mike - 00:34:15.

More than just a piece of trivia, Mike's description of this particular musical phenomenon is paired with an anecdote recounting his attempts to write new songs which fulfill the same social function. This attempt at stylistic emulation is an important insight into Mike's own musical identity, which centers on his ongoing engagement with a historical version of Island song and ballad culture which has long been in decline. For Mike, who sees himself as one of the few remaining Islanders dedicated to this particular style of songwriting and musical interpretation, efforts to preserve Island ballad culture is inherently entwined with understanding and recreating the types of social environments and social spaces in which these songs were originally presented. His audiences predominantly consisting of tourists, Mike's performances are then necessarily concerned with both emulating and demonstrating the social contexts from which Island ballad culture emerged. Meghan Forsyth, channeling the writing of anthropologist Isar Godreau, refers to this process as "discursive distancing" in her essay on cultural performance in the Evangeline region, "Staging La Francophonie: Tradition, Tourism, and Acadian Musical Spaces on Prince Edward Island."<sup>69</sup> Central to this concept is the means by which local actors emphasize collective cultural identity through the adoption and performance of symbolized historical realities. Mike by no means the only interviewee to engage in discursive distancing through both performance and material selection; Chuck Arsenault, looking back on the early years of Barachois, remembers band members Helen Bergeron and Albert Arsenault relying heavily on the work that Island historian Georges Arsenault had done to collect old Acadian ballads during the 1970s. For Chuck, this type of musical resurrection was far from exploitative, and he stresses the importance of the personal connections the rest of the band felt for the songs they adopted from Arsenault's collection. "Georges Arsenault had done a great

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<sup>69</sup> Forsyth, "Staging la Francophonie," 77.

service to Acadians on PEI by going through in the '70s and taping all those people who are no longer with us," remembers Chuck. "Albert and Helen would go over to Moncton when the archives were there and play through the tapes and ... [imitating recognition] 'Oh yeah, I remember that song' ... so it was the ones that kind of stuck out to them as having some kind of meaning, you know. It wasn't like 'let's find the ones that say this or let's find the ones that do this,' it was 'let's find the ones that mean something.'"<sup>70</sup>

Much like Mike and the members of Barachois, Vishten's early work drew heavily on collections of Acadian folk ballads, and interpretations of their cultural history factored heavily into their performances. Contrary to Mike and Chuck, however, the members of Visthen recount that the interpretive framework of their early performances, especially the pressure they felt to play the role of cultural interpreters to foreign audiences, led to a sense of frustration. Pascal and Emma agreed about the way that the pressure played out: "We've always been proud to say we're from PEI and the Maggies, but the more the time went, we would spend less time pushing, like .... We would just say that this is where we're from, and this is the music we're playing, instead of it being a cultural show like we did for a number of years," says Emma.<sup>71</sup> Pascal comments on the difficulties inherent in explaining his Magdalen Island provenance to European audiences especially, and intimates that the process of interpreting his simultaneous Canadian, Quebecois, and Acadian identities for audience members, on top of being aggravating, also refocused their presentations away from the music in ways that did not match up with the band's values. Ward, whose musical career and artistic identity has remained largely untethered to the tourism industry or to the off-island music industry, proposes an interesting, self-aware

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<sup>70</sup> Chuck - 00:27:30.

<sup>71</sup> Emma - 00:56:43.

perspective which largely reflects his dedication to the maintenance of his own creative freedom. Speaking to the phenomenon whereby Island traditional musicians feel pressure to lean heavily on the use of cultural and historical symbols within their performances, Ward locates the root cause as one largely associated with audience expectation, saying, “It can feel like handcuffs. It's just your connection to your known audience.... If you want to keep being true to yourself, you change, and your presentation changes. If you are afraid that that known audience won't like it, you've put handcuffs on yourself.<sup>72</sup> In much the same vein, Chuck relates his own band's relationship with performance, highlighting that while establishing context for audience members is an inevitable requirement when touring, retaining a sense of personal and cultural authenticity within a performance paradigm is of equal importance. “You know, you're singing about traditional songs, and you want to give context to people,” says Chuck:

It's like anything, if you write any song, you're going to talk about what inspired that song ... so, you know, you're talking about Prince Edward Island, you're talking about people in your community, you're talking about upbringing, you're talking about your personal stories. You're not a museum act; you're not bringing out a fossil of a dinosaur and saying, 'let's sing a song about a dinosaur.' You are the dinosaur! It's about being entertaining and pleasant. You're not the French band, you're a good band who sings in French.<sup>73</sup>

Of the various themes that emerged throughout the interviews, questions around language, politics, and cultural funding were broadly discussed by all interviewees. Inevitably, the various professional orientations of the participants predicted a variety of relationships with the cultural politics that underlies federal and regional cultural funding models. What is clear, however, is that the place of cultural politics and infrastructure within the careers of traditional musicians is one which impacts their creative practices, their financial wellbeing, and their

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<sup>72</sup> Ward - 01:22:30.

<sup>73</sup> Chuck - 00:53:30.

artistic identity. Within these discussions, a thread emerges whereby the participants generally agree that access to funding and the success of applications within granting frameworks depends on the quality of the proposed project, but also involves other factors including the artist's cultural and linguistic background. Having what Emma refers to as "Acadian minority status" necessarily allows bands like Vishten and Barachois access to certain grant programs which remain inaccessible to artists like Mike and Ward. Despite this, both anglophone interviewees make it clear that they harbor little or no resentment towards those of French heritage who depend upon such funding models. Interestingly, Mike makes it clear that though his own career has included very little experience with the type of cultural funding models available through organizations like Canada Council for the Arts, he is cognizant of the impact that the injection of cultural funding within the Island musical landscape has had on his own career. He makes the important point that funding accessed by both Acadian musicians and francophone cultural organizations has, throughout his career, translated directly into gigs for him. Chuck, for his part, demonstrates a recognition of the impact that cultural funding has had on the incentive for venues to hire bands like Barachois, and Chuck and Albert; according to Chuck, Barachois' success within the Anglo-Canadian market was deeply affected by the requirement that certain venues present francophone cultural programming over the course of a given fiscal year, a condition which advantaged Barachois' ability to present French songs to English audiences. Referring to his experience performing at an industry showcase put on by the Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils, Chuck states, "When we would go and do showcases for OSAC, we fit *the bill* for those guys because we were French, but we were "English-French."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Chuck 00:52:30.

Beyond questions of who accesses and benefits from cultural funding, there is also the issue of how individual orientations around grants impact the lived realities and career prospects of the musicians. Different perspectives around the necessity of accessing funding for Chuck, Emma, and Pascal (the three interviewees who have most commonly accessed cultural funding) speak to how the importance of grant applications and, more generally, the cultural funding model have increasingly taken up more space within the lives of touring traditional musicians. At the peak of Barachois' touring history during the late 1990s, Chuck recounts that the band consciously adhered to a principle where funding was accessed only after a project, such as a tour, was deemed to be fiscally profitable. "Our modus operandi," he noted, "was 'let's never count on grants'"<sup>75</sup> Having little experience with regional or industry-oriented funding organizations like Factor or Musique-Action, Barachois' applications were largely to the CCoA, and predominantly consisted of small tour-support grants which Chuck refers to as "gravy." What became clear from Chuck's statements, however, is that he was personally never extensively involved when it came to securing cultural funding for Barachois, and thus has a relatively limited relationship to the funding application process, especially when compared to the members of Vishten. Emma recounts a very different story when discussing the band's ongoing relationship with funding, stating that access to tour support from CCoA, Factor, or Musique Action is often a prerequisite in determining if a given tour will be viable or not. Additionally, Emma intimates that the application process has become an essential part of her career as a touring musician and that Vishten relies heavily on support for, in addition to touring, album production, marketing, video production, and website design. While a comparison between the experiences of Barachois and Vishten is not enough to draw any specific

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<sup>75</sup> Chuck 00:50:01.

conclusions about shifts in funding trends and the state of the larger music industry between the 1990s and the current day, what is clear is that it has become increasingly beneficial for artists, including traditional musicians, to develop the skills required to succeed within the cultural funding model. Emma, for her part, is cognizant of the fact that her time spent volunteering on CCoA project juries (also an increasingly important trend amongst Canadian musicians) has done much to improve her ability to write successful project proposals, saying: “we have a lot of experience with writing grants, and we’ve had other people write them for us ... I’ve worked at the Canada Council of the Arts quite a bit over the years, and I know what people on a jury are looking for, and what are the parameters of what we should be funding.”<sup>76</sup>

While it is the case that Mike and Ward’s careers have not involved cultural funding to the degree demonstrated by the members of Vishten and Barachois, their positioning in relation to such types of cultural infrastructure does impact their own senses of musical identity. Mike in particular harbours strong views about the potential downsides of long-term financial reliance on CCoA and other funding bodies, especially regarding the inconsistency and insecurity of said reliance. “Early on, I decided that grants and applying wasn’t really for me,” says Mike. He decided that, “if I was going to do it and actually make a living, that I had to do it without—I couldn’t rely on money that might not be there next year.”<sup>77</sup> However, his aversion to the process is also due to his personal belief that the cultural funding model, as a rule, does not cater to the artistic goals and career orientations of locally based musicians like himself; he sees it as designed to support musicians whose careers reflect a standard industry approach to performance and recording. What becomes evident is that Mike’s relationship to grants and cultural funding is

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<sup>76</sup> Emma 01:27:30.

<sup>77</sup> Mike - 01:15:50.

inextricably linked to his personal sense of artistic self-reliance and integrity, and that these facets of his identity have developed out of a long career of working as a local musician. For Mike, successful artistic careers made within a limited local context are defined by a very different set of criteria than those with more outward orientations. Chief amongst these is a sense that working locally requires an enormous input of time and effort into honing both performance ability and creative process, because within the relatively small, fully integrated network of consumers of the local performers' work, a consistently high degree of quality is key to survival. While Mike makes it clear that this does not mean he believes artists whose career orientations lead them outside of the province are less hardworking, he does feel that operating within a creative framework which relies too heavily on cultural funding and other infrastructural support networks can lead to a decline in the quality of artistic output, as well as the recognition and promotion of relatively low-quality music. In a similar sense, he intimates that those in positions of power within the cultural industry often deride the careers and the art of musicians for whom profitability and broad audience intelligibility is an important factor in their performances. This series of perspectives, taken together, are indicative of Mike's wider orientation towards the local in all aspects of his career.

## CONCLUSION

If, as Ronström suggests, tradition is a continuous symbolic reconstruction of the past, then local cultural actors are necessarily implicated in the evolution of tradition as much as in its protection. In this study, interviewees were given an opportunity to voice their perspectives on the direction in which Island traditional music, as both cultural expression and commoditized product, has

developed within their lifetime, on the current state of the tradition, and on where it might be headed. As in the other topics covered in the interviews, the answers provided by the participants speak to their values in important ways by highlighting the aspects of the tradition they feel are worth protecting, the opportunities they feel have been missed, and their hopes for the future.

While each interviewee presents a unique perspective, some broad themes emerge from the collective that speak to a shared set of values and understandings. Common among the participants was a sense that efforts should be made to maintain and promote the growth of an organic home-grown audience that actively engages with and values expressions of Island folk-culture. The sentiment behind Ward's references to the importance of "flesh memory" in the learning and disseminating of traditional music is articulated in various other ways in these interviews as concerns that the passion for and deep knowledge of the music be preserved over time through the maintenance of the social web that underpins the processes of musical and cultural transmission. There is a similarly shared hope articulated by the interviewees that the cultural presentations performed by Island touring artists abroad will continue to be representative of an active and dynamic "scene" at home. Also prominent was the call for broader institutional support for artists who make their living within the local context, whether through the facilitation of access to cultural funding for PEI-based musicians, or the establishment of spaces where traditional musicians can engage in creative, collaborative, and mentorship processes in organic ways. A general sense of the importance of the subsidizing of the creative process is encapsulated within Mike's calls for the funding of artistic "flights of fancy" and the disentangling of the concepts of cultural, artistic, and monetary value. Concerning the relationship that Island musicians have to touring and the wider music industry, it is generally hoped that a shift towards more sustainable, holistic career models, as well as the expansion of

opportunities for artists to make part of their living without needing to leave home, might mitigate financial anxiety and stress associated with prolonged time spent on the road. Finally, participants recognized the necessity of providing opportunities for young artists, traditional or otherwise, to have healthy, positive early encounters with performance spaces and mentors which, as Chuck noted, will allow for the continuing preservation and conveyance of cultural values embedded within the musical forms themselves.

Beyond demonstrating a broader set of shared values amongst the participants, an assessment of their hopes for the future of Island traditional musical forms and communities, as well as their place within the broader cultural industry, can be interpreted as attempts to articulate a future in which a grounded, localized tradition provides opportunities for open artistic creation as well as economic opportunity for the musicians that take part in it. While traditional musicians' artistic and individual identities are naturally informed by their histories, culture, and language, as well as by their economic and institutional contexts, the commoditization of various traditional musical and cultural forms is clearly informed by the health of the communities that generate and inspire their artistic processes. What the interviews clearly demonstrate is that in order for traditional musicians to retain their roles within the process of symbolic reconstruction as outlined by Ronström in ways that are iterable over time, the phenomenon of cultural commoditization which is the natural outcome of performance, branding, tourism marketing, and a professional engagement with the cultural industry must not undermine the organic traditions and communities out of which the values and identities of said musicians are born.

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