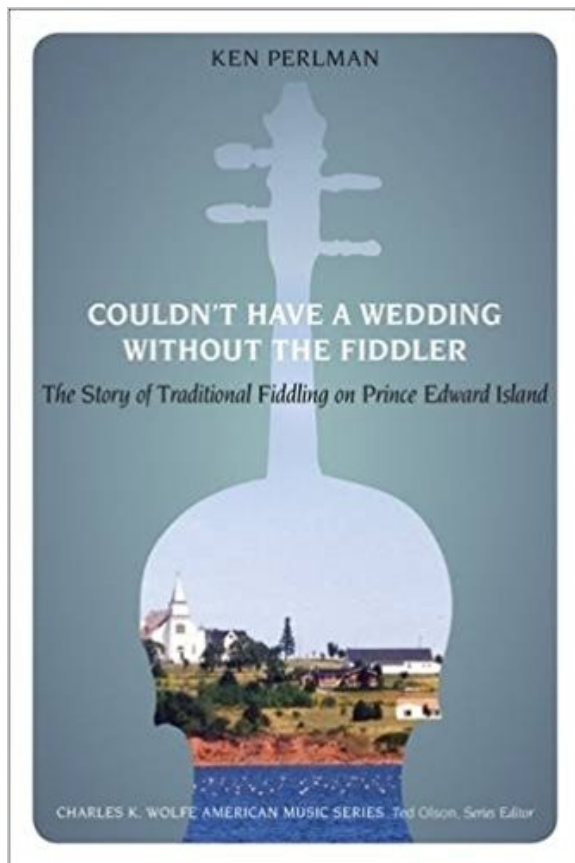


Reviews

Edited by John Leeder

Book

Ken Perlman. *Couldn't Have a Wedding Without the Fiddler: The Story of Traditional Fiddling on Prince Edward Island.* University of Tennessee Press, 110 Conference Center, 600 Henley St., Knoxville, TN 37996-4108, USA; www.utpress.org; Ken Perlman, 307 Bellevue St., Boston, MA 02134, USA; kenperlman@aol.com



Bottom line: This is an interesting and worthwhile book.

I speak from the vantage of an ethnomusicologist, a Canadianist, a wannabe fiddler and a university instructor. I featured the fiddle in Canada as part of my Introduction to Ethnomusicology undergraduate classes. In support of those lectures, I collected a substantial library of fiddle monographs and music notation compilations. And in that collection, what I found most interesting were the discussions about the

fiddle's role in the care and feeding of a community. So with all this in mind, I was primed for this book.

Another reason to be enticed by this book can be summed up in four words: "Anne with an e". How could anybody raised on Anne of Green Gables (book or television series) pass up this book? Unaccountably, Lucy Maud Montgomery never mentions the fiddle in her novel of the same title. However, CBC fans of the sequel, *Road to Avonlea*, will remember that the loveable outlier, Gus Pike, pulled a fiddle out of his pack now and again. And to be fair, the fiddle does receive its due in some of Montgomery's other books.

Those of an earlier generation may recall Don Messer and his "Islanders". Yes, that's Prince Edward Islanders. The author has several very interesting comments about the dubious place of Don Messer in the minds of the island's older fiddle community. Many of us are aware of the considerable literature devoted to Messer and his fiddling, so Ken Perlman's collected reminiscences are important new insights.

And finally, if you want to read about a world of listeners with the same voracious appetite for music as exists today, but unlike today, had only one recourse – listening to live fiddlers – this book is for you. They were the jukebox, Walkman or MP3 player of the day.

This book is essentially an ethnography, roughly arranged in topical and chronological order, and like all important ethnographies, it is very thorough, covering the years up to 2006. Each topic is backed up by multiple interviews and cultural context, gathered mainly in 1992-93 and again in 2006. Perlman even provides some cogent observations of changes he observed between the two visits. The layout of the book is a bit old-fashioned, in that it's very dense with text; illustrations and photos are sparse, and printed in greytone. Although this format may be economical from the point of view of production costs, and appropriate for an academic treatise, some will find it challenging to read.

I can think of only one other book that takes the same approach, a book I also greatly admire: *Old-Time Kentucky Fiddle Tunes* by Jeff Todd Titon (The University Press of Kentucky, 2001). Titon also speaks from the perspective of a participant-observer, so skillfully described by the eminent ethnographer James P. Spradley (*Participant Observation*, 1980) and many others.

In 1991-92 Ken organized a most interesting team to help him throw the widest possible net over his subject area. It was funded by Earthwatch, an intriguing organization out of Massachusetts. His team consisted of volunteers, who paid (!) to participate in the research and interviewing process. They canvassed all parts of the island, recording the many instances of fiddling in order to map and record the entire island's fiddlers and their repertoires, influences and fiddling styles. Although he provides a brief and delightful description of the group project in his introduction, I suspect it might be an essay-length subject on its own. Even James P. Spradley (*The Ethnographic Interview*, 1979) did not offer guidelines and procedures for organizing a team of ethnographers under the direction of one person.

Ken Perlman, who is also an accomplished old-time banjo player, ingratiated himself with his informants to the point where he was even invited to play music with them. This is curious, given that the banjo, playing in company with a fiddle, usually performs in heterophony, sharing the melody line, rather than simply vamping in the style of a rhythm guitar. I would have thought the latter would have been more "diplomatic" than the former. Be that as it may, an addendum at the back of the book is a full list of interviews tagged by date, and make no mistake, it is extensive. From his vast constellation of details, the author successfully organized coherent topics and chapter headings that are a tour de force of information organization.

Readers who share my fascination with choreology will be especially pleased to read about the place of dance in his examined fiddle world. He learns early on from his first-generation informants that the only reason the fiddle exists for them is as an accompaniment to dance. Any other reason, such as performance showcases up on a stage, was to their way of thinking absurd. The dance information in one particular chapter is so detailed that it would be entirely possible to reconstruct a dance or two, along with the music that would have been played by the fiddler.

Ken Perlman does not eulogize the musical past of P.E.I. with visions of a musical Avonlea through rose-coloured glasses, before technology, before the gramophone, before electricity. This is especially true when he describes the community dances. Many of them were rowdy affairs, fuelled by drink and rivalries. And at the centre of the rough-and-tumble community mixers was the fiddler, or the devil incarnate, as the church would have it. As I read Perlman's vivid descriptions, I was reminded of the fight scenes at old-time dances in movies such as the great Canadian flick *Why Shoot the Teacher?* (1977), and the filmic homage to Cecil Sharp's predecessor in America, *The*

Songcatcher (2001). One can even think back to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where the boys were told to "take it outside" during the dance scene.

One of the first questions one asks as one digs into this book is, "What about that other island – Cape Breton?". As many of us know, C.B. is a hotbed of traditional fiddling, and Ken Perlman takes great pains to compare the two. In fact, rather than an eccentric and whimsical offshoot of the latter, P.E.I. was seemingly an equal partner in the long-ago, and lost the game of self-promotion to C.B.. In addition, he found a growing stylistic homogenization (i.e., Lomax's "grey-out"), where individual and local styles of playing were melding into one innocuous style that had more in common with C.B. than P.E.I.. The story of how Cape Breton stylistic mannerisms overtook P.E.I. is one of the many important insights in the book. One could only hope that Perlman's documentation of individual and local P.E.I. styles in his book might help to reverse the trend.

As is so often the case, a picture, or rather a recording, in this instance, is worth a thousand words. Some of the author's examples of idiomatic traits specific to P.E.I. fiddling lend themselves to music notation – tune variations (which recall the topic of tune families in dance music) and ornamentation, or lack thereof. But one characteristic that does not translate into music notation is timbre. For example, he talks about rough sounds that were used to emphasize beats for the benefit of the dancers. So when I read his descriptions about scratchy sounds produced by the early fiddlers, my ears pricked up instantly. I was reminded of traditional English fiddlers, who were also wild and woolly players (see Chris Bartram's excellent compendium called *English Fiddle*, Mel Bay Publications, Missouri, 2009). Naturally the outsiders took these rough sounds to be a sign of country bumpkin incompetence, but later authors heard varieties of timbre that marked uniqueness and privileged the beat over the beautiful, thanks to gutsy playing.

The author has provided recordings which include the notorious "scratchy" playing, but they are not contained in the book as a CD or a collection of links to MP3 tracks. They are found in a second publication he devoted to fiddling in P.E.I. Mind you, it is a different kettle of fish. Entitled *The Fiddle Music of Prince Edward Island: Celtic and Acadian Tunes in Living Tradition* (Mel Bay Publications, Missouri, 1996), it is essentially a how-to book, with dozens of music transcriptions provided by the author for the budding or experienced fiddler who would like to expand their repertoire. The first three chapters consist of information that is essentially a 30-page preview of the 463-page book he published later, under

discussion here. The next 150-plus pages contain dozens of transcriptions, with copious annotations, including stylistic quirks. Even more relevant are the recordings of many of the music examples, by source musicians, no less. He also produced a two-CD set of P.E.I. fiddle tunes for Rounder Records (1997), presumably also comprised of field recordings.

Unfortunately he did not cross-reference his 2015 book with his 1996 or 1997 compilations. I can confirm that the recordings contained in the 1996 publication provide the actual sound that prompted many of his written descriptions about the unique quality of P.E.I. fiddling. Perhaps he was reluctant to saddle the buyer with another expense.

But all is not lost! Perlman has created a website devoted to P.E.I. fiddling, bowingdownhome.ca, in part with the support of the University of P.E.I. and the Canadian Museum of History. It is replete with recorded music examples, and even features an ongoing series of interviews with old-time fiddlers. He promised this website on page xxvii, footnote 4, of his book, and he has more than fulfilled his vow. It sits as a free companion to the book. I should also add that the recordings with the 1996 book can be purchased separately, from his personal website.

Naturally the author is troubled (but I won't say "despairs") about the future of fiddling in P.E.I. (and North America in general). Technology and mass media displaced the fiddle long, long ago as the provider of dance music. Even the nature and genres of dance have changed. "Touch dancing", let alone group dancing, is gone. It seems that traditional fiddling is now an echo of a tradition that becomes more faint as each generation follows the last. One might even conclude that fiddling has become yet another endangered musical species. Enter in "salvage ethnomusicology". Will another group of anxious scholars convene in order to piece together the tradition of the fiddle, as they did for, say, East Asian music? See *Music as Intangible Cultural Heritage: Policy, Ideology and Practice in the Preservation of East Asian Traditions*, edited by Keith Howard (Routledge, 2012).

But it may be a mistake to think that jam sessions comprised of musicians with day jobs, like old-time fiddlers, is diminishing at the same rate as the fiddle. The gaggle of fiddlers in the kitchen has been replaced by the ubiquitous rock and roll band, where players of electric guitars and drum kits get together in garages and rumpus rooms to hone their pop music chops, sing some covers, and occasionally play for the local high school or community dance. I know that in my island community, opportunities for folk musicians to jam with fellow folkies are now few and far between, but the local music stores and music

teachers can barely keep up with the demand for pop music resources and instruments. We know that Maritimers and Newfoundlanders love their country and western. I await the arrival of an ethnomusicologist who does a comparative study of the world of 1926 fiddlers with the current 2016 environment of garage banders.

I can also think of a second caveat to counter the author's concerns. He documents several stages of revivals, some successful, some dead ends, ending with today's familiar scenario, where a great number of young players, mostly females, have taken up the fiddle. But rather than aspiring to be successors to the dance fiddlers of old, they are playing the fiddle as an alternative, or at least a temporary distraction, to the mainstream demands of their Royal Conservatory of Music exam repertoire. I know this demographic well, having been an avid participant in the Salt Spring Island fiddle camp the past few years.

What the author did not mention was the emphasis given to the young fiddlers to play by ear, especially at the summer fiddle camps. Camp fiddlers as young as 6 are taught to play traditional tunes by rote (thanks, in part, to Suzuki violin instruction). Perhaps this kind of aural instruction, combined with the author's research, could be used to revive the fiddling styles special to P.E.I.

In regard to aural instruction at fiddle camps, see Michael Frisch's excellent article "Notes on the Teaching and Learning of Old-Time Fiddle" in *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Winter 1987), and Megan C. Forsyth, "Teaching 'Trad': A Fiddling Ethnomusicologist's Reflections", in *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, vol. 45, no. 2 (Summer 2001). Incidentally, Megan's research stems from her participation in fiddle camps in P.E.I. circa 2010, so in a way, she offers a great update to Perlman's research that concluded in 2006.

Now that I have read all about P.E.I.'s folk music at the hands of its fiddlers and dancers, thanks to Ken Perlman, I wonder about the "other shoe" – folk song. I understand that Edward D. Ives collected songs in P.E.I., beginning in the mid-'50s: see his *Drive Dull Care Away: Folk Songs from Prince Edward Island* (Institute for Island Studies, 1999). The review of the book, written by Lorne Brown in *Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne*, vol. 34, no. 1/2 (March-June 2000), is just as glowing as the one I am writing here. What Mr. Brown seemed to have especially appreciated was the cultural context of the songs – music to my ears.

So who should buy Ken Perlman's book?

Ethnomusicology instructors in Canadian universities and elsewhere looking for Canadian musical

ethnographies. They will be able to access a “local” musical scene to balance the “global” perspective they are mandated to deliver.

Academics and cultural brokers who want to identify an Intangible Cultural Heritage within Canada. I.C.H. is a new imperative promoted by UNESCO as an adjunct to its World Heritage sites. As near as I can tell, the fiddle is our most likely candidate. And all the source players in Canada need a hand to maintain their heritage. It's interesting to note that P.E.I.'s fiddling I.C.H. was documented by somebody “from away”, despite the active presence of Canadian music folklorists and resident ethnomusicologists. I wonder how that happened!

Historians and history buffs who want to fill out their understanding of Canada's history by using the familiar medium of music. Although the material is unique to P.E.I., many of its general descriptions of fiddling are relevant across Canada.

Young fiddler hobbyists who want to place their jigs and reels into a cultural context. For example, Perlman's descriptions of the nature of revivals will make many of them look at their fiddles in a new and sobering light.

Budding authors and movie-makers looking for material and stories, both real and fictional, to evoke Anne with an “e”, but with music at its core.

In sum, this book needs to be in the libraries of every member of the CSTM, and I believe, every undergraduate and graduate music student in Canada. It is the newest member of the Canadian music canon.

Enjoy!

Norman Stanfield, Salt Spring Island, British Columbia

Book/CD

Tim B. Rogers. *The Mystery of the SS Southern Cross*. 2014. 256 pp. ISBN 978-1-77103-931-1. Killick Press, c/o Creative Book Publishing, P.O. Box 8660, Stn. A, St. John's, NL A1B 3T7; nl.books@transcontinental.ca; www.creativebookpublishing.ca (companion CD by Jim Payne & Fergus O'Byrne)

Tim Rogers is well known in the folk music scene for his singing and playing and his particular enthusiasm in collecting train songs. Many will be aware of his project, completed in 1983, with musical buddy Barry Luft, *Songs of the Iron Rail*. However, his passion for collecting and singing railroad songs is not his only preoccupation. His interest in the 1914 Newfoundland sealing disaster has been ongoing for nearly 40

years, and has resulted in a fine novel, *The Mystery of the SS Southern Cross*.

In March 1914 the Southern Cross left St. John's with 174 men aboard. The ship and all aboard never returned. It is certain that she was a victim of the great storm that hit on March 31 of that year. It was an enormous human loss to the communities of the Avalon Peninsula, the greatest disaster to hit the sealing industry.

Many facts are known about the ship, owners, captain, and crew, the preparation for the journey, and the general dangers of seal hunting. The mystery lies in the details of the voyage, the harvest, the decisions of the captain, and the ultimate disappearance of the ship. No crewmen or record of the voyage survived. No understanding of why the captain attempted to fight the storm exists.



Tim Rogers does a wonderful job of weaving the facts and personalities involved in this tragedy into a fictional account of events, bringing to life the names of the captain, crew, and owners of the Southern Cross. The reader becomes acquainted with the families of the sailors and the egotistical captain, the treachery of the owners as they cut costs in preparing for the journey, and the day-to-day combination of danger and drudgery that was a part of a sealer's life.

In *The Mystery of the SS Southern Cross*, Rogers creates a story of the vessel's last days at sea, seen

through the eyes of the young sealer John Lundrigan, who secretly signs on board to escape an overbearing and stifling father. Readers are provided glimpses of Lundrigan's boyhood, which give a vivid picture of life in pre-WWI Newfoundland and the lure of the sealing industry on the youth of the day.

In this first novel, Rogers does a great job of bringing his academic efforts in accounting for the events to life. To quote him "The academic articles I wrote about *the Cross* were not up to the task of telling the story..... the untold aspects of the great tale festered in my unconsciousness, finally bursting forth..."

It's a delightful read, and as a bonus it includes a CD of eight recordings relating to the seal hunt. The CD is produced and performed by two wonderful Newfoundland artists, Jim Payne and Fergus O'Byrne.

Blaine Hrabi, West Covehead, Prince Edward Island

Recordings

Qristina & Quinn Bachand. *Little Hinges*. BRP15. Beacon Ridge Productions, 2560 Vista Bay Rd., Victoria, B.C. V8P 3E8; marie@abachand.ca; beaconridgeproductions.com

When I listened to the first track of the Bachand's new recording, I did a double take. Did I put in the wrong CD? Wasn't I supposed to be listening to a traditional fiddle duo? Where were the polished, high-octane tunes of their last album? What I was hearing was more atmospheric, and perhaps a little post-rock. *Little Hinges* is Quinn and Qristina Bachand's third album, after *Relative Minors* (2008) and *Family* (2011), and contains fiddle, traditional, and folk music alongside a larger exploration of sound and genre. When I first met their recordings, they presented as a pair of teenage fiddle siblings. Now it seems they are growing up and outward in their musical tastes, while still retaining their core.

According to the liner notes, the album is organized into two parts. They state that the duo has set out to expand their horizons beyond the "oftentimes rigid-minded traditional music". The first, more traditional, section contains the most fiddle music and a mix of original repertoire. The second half begins with a bridge track composed by Quinn. He calls it a non-vocal "palette cleanser" meant to transition the listener to the ethereal, or "dreamlike", sounds of the latter half. Although this part of the album has more foregrounded experimental sounds, it ends rooted in their traditional repertoire, with "Three Little Babes" (a.k.a. "The Wife of Usher's Well", Child 79; Roud 196) and the famous fiddle tune "The Hangman's

Reel". While on first listen some of these new elements are a bit surprising, based on previous expectations, the album hangs together nicely.

The string that ties the whole album together is not their repertoire selections in terms of instrument, region, or in the case of this project, even genre per se, but their relationship to the music. It all connects to their heart. Each piece reminds them of friends, family, places, and important experiences in their lives. In this way the album feels as if the listener is invited into their circle of friends. Even when they do not personally know the composer or singer of a piece, they always base the inclusion in their experiences of friendship which the song has acquired for them. For example, "Crooked Jack" by Dominic Behan takes the opportunity to honour their late friend Josh Dixon. Similarly, "Hang Me", which they learnt from a recording of Dave Van Ronk, was included because it reminded Quinn of a tour which ended at a friend's house. The other tracks are all connected to memories of friends, or important milestones in a young person's life. As might be expected, family is also central to their experience of music. They honour their parents with a few original tunes as a way to say thank you for a musical upbringing, and don't forget each other by including tune sets to reminisce about their childhood and celebrate a reunion after a long time apart.

One of the most exciting aspects of this album is their explorations outside the traditional musical box. Quinn seems to be the leader on this, as he composed the first and seventh tracks, which are instrumental pieces experimenting with a more electric sound, lots of echo, and sound samples, amongst other things. Their percussionist/sound engineer Joby Baker should be credited with providing a consistent background sound as the tracks transition from more traditional towards atmospheric. The use of the celeste, wind chimes, and fun recording techniques like filtering the acoustic guitar through amps, pipes and garbage cans all add to the feeling that this duo are expanding their music horizons in terms of both sound and subjects. Qristina is also finding her own voice with an original song in "Listen" and recasting male perspective songs such as "Crooked Jack" from a female viewpoint, which lends it a new angle and feel.

My only criticism of their first album was that it felt a bit placeless. This album appears to be more rooted in their experiences as West Coast musicians, and reflects the diversity of music in which they are involved. That said, I'm still waiting for them to discover some of their Asturian roots – perhaps the next album?

Evelyn Osborne, Tai Tie Tong, Hong Kong