

Métis Fiddlers

The Métis are renowned fiddle players. "Fiddlers" as they are known in Métis communities are also cultural ambassadors. Every Métis community and family has a fiddle player ranging in age from Elders to very young children. Many of these Métis fiddle players travel throughout North America and take part in "Old Tyme Fiddle" contests such as *John Arcands' Fiddle Fest*, held near Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Below are biographies of some Métis fiddle players.

Gilbert Anderson was born in 1934. He comes from a large musical family and inherited a couple of family fiddles. He was always around Métis music and continues to teach and promote fiddle and dance through the Edmonton Métis Cultural Dancers programs. He calls many of his traditional songs "Fort Edmonton" tunes. Gilbert currently resides in Edmonton, Alberta.

John Arcand was born in 1942 near Debden, Saskatchewan. His greatest musical influences were his family especially his father Victor and grandfather Jean-Baptiste Arcand. He currently lives near Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Many people acknowledge his contributions to Métis fiddling and call him the "Master of the Métis Fiddle."

Mel Bedard was born in 1929 at Selkirk, Manitoba. Mel is the first recording artist to use the term "Métis" on an album. One of his greatest musical influences and closest personal friends was Andy DeJarlis. Mel is a very experienced judge and competitor and has won the *Manitoba Fiddling Championship* and the *Andy DeJarlis Championship* several times.

Albert "Hap" Boyer was born in 1928 at Cochin, Saskatchewan. He currently lives in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. You can always see Hap at Métis events such as the Back to Batoche Days and at other Métis celebrations. He continues to collect and record Métis tunes.

Richard Callihoo was born in 1920. His peers recognize him as the elder statesman of Métis fiddling. He comes from a large family of fiddler players and has recorded traditional family tunes on his recording, *Richard Callihoo Plays Traditional Old Tunes*. He has won the *North American Fiddling Championship* several times. Richard still travels to fiddle events across Canada and currently lives in Grovedale, Alberta.

Henry Gardipy was born in 1949 on Beardy's Reserve near Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. Métis music was always in the family. Traditional Métis fiddlers such as Eli Dumont, John Champagne and Alec Fayant were his early mentors. Henry proudly remembers winning contests such as the *Reg Bouvette Trophy* at the Back to Batoche Days from 1985-87. He presently lives in North Battleford, Saskatchewan.

Frederick Genthon was born in the Red River Settlement in 1857. For many years he worked as a fur trader at Moose Lake, Manitoba for the Hudson's Bay Company. His trading post was very successful due to his fiddle playing ability. Genthon also recorded the oldest known version of the Red River Jig in order to preserve the old Métis style. In 1941, he passed away peacefully in Winnipeg.

Ed Lafferty was born in 1927 at Wrigley, Northwest Territories. His greatest musical influences were his family especially, his mentor and

grandfather, "Old Joe" Villeneuve, an accomplished traditional Métis fiddle player. Ed played all over the North and competed at the *Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Championship* in Nepean, Ontario several times. He passed away in 1992 and is buried in his home community of Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories.

Richard Lafferty was born in 1944 at Fort Providence, Northwest Territories. He plays fiddle tunes learned from "old tyme" fiddlers who traveled up and down the Mackenzie River. His uncle, Danny Bouvier, was one of his greatest musical influences and mentors. Richard was given the *Order of the Sash* by the Métis Nation of the Northwest Territories for his contributions to Métis music and dance. He currently lives in Hay River, Northwest Territories.

Emile Lavallée was born in 1931 at the Métis community of St. Laurent, Manitoba. At the age of five he learned to play on a fiddle given to him by his father. Music was always a way of life and he was part of the *Laurentian Valley Boys Band*. He fondly remembers playing at barn dances, socials and weddings. One of his greatest honours was representing the Métis during a performance in Ottawa in 1992.

Gary Lépine was born in 1950 at Birtle, Manitoba. His father, Philippe Lépine, encouraged his fiddling, and gave him the family fiddle when he was only ten years old. One of his greatest influences was Reg Bouvette, who was also a close personal friend. Gary has attended fiddling competitions across Western Canada. He continues to record his tunes in order to preserve Métis music and style.

Homer Poitras was born in 1941 near Wolf Lake Métis Settlement in Alberta. His grandfather Joseph F. Dion, a well-known Métis activist in Alberta, gave him his first fiddle. He has received many awards for his efforts in the preservation and promotion of Métis fiddle music and dance. Homer has been invited to play for many government dignitaries. He currently lives in Elk Point, Alberta.

References:

Brunner, Trent et al. *Drops of Brandy: An Anthology of Métis Music*. (Book and compact disc compilation.) Saskatoon: The Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2002.