

Prefer Performance. CD produced by Richard MacKinnon (Cape Breton University, Centre for Cape Breton Studies, 2010. Audio recordings. Notes by Erin Martell. CD no number. Available for download at: http://culture.cbu.ca/ccbs/MP3_Download.html).

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par Rodolfo Stavenhagen sur le métissage, le discours intégrateur, la revalorisation folklorisante de « l'Indien » et la gestion des revendications autochtones au XXI^e siècle.

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Référence

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Prefer Performance is a collection of audio recordings produced by the Centre for Cape Breton Studies at Cape Breton University. With state-of-the-art audio facilities, these two recordings demonstrate the Centre's newfound technical capabilities through the musical talents of their faculty and students. The material is comprised almost entirely of folk and Celtic music. It includes a substantial amount of instrumental music, including two flute and guitar duos with Heather Sparling and Chris McDonald, and several selections of fiddle-based performances. I was particularly struck by the fine tenor banjo playing of David Curley and Brona Graham; the addition of the banjos added a crisp timbre and texture to three tracks of traditional Cape Breton fiddling. The two tracks that feature the Cape Breton Fiddle Music Class made the bold choice of recording without any accompaniment, something that

is not common within Cape Breton tradition. This decision however, provided the group fiddling with a large, enveloping sound, familiar to fans of Cape Breton music—it is comparable to the mass performances of the Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association, and is now a performance style seen regularly in concerts all over the island.

The sung portion of *Prefer Performance* includes more general traditional folk songs, like CBU Choir's rendition of "Farewell to Nova Scotia." Representing the Gaelic tradition of Cape Breton, there is a *port-à-beul*, "Calum Crùbach," sung by Clare Lafferty, though I was disappointed with the length of the performance, which totalled only 27 seconds. Of particular interest to me was the only selection that might appear to have absolutely no connection to Cape Breton music whatsoever, Richard MacKinnon's blues rock track entitled "The Ticket." That having been said, that song is actually quite representative of a unique side of Cape Breton—blues rock. The hard-driving blues rock in Sydney is now a tradition with its roots in local musicians like Sam Moon and Matt Minglewood, and can even be seen in MacKinnon's accompanists, Fred Lavery and Gordie Levatte of the Blues Merchants.

Overall, the aesthetic of the CD tended to lean towards that of a live, raw sound, particularly on the fiddle tracks. The decision to record these performances as a live group preserved the natural sound of the room, and gave it some of the qualities of a well-recorded ethnographic field recording. My main criticism of the collection is the complete absence of archival recordings. The CBU is home to some of the finest archival materials in Nova Scotia, and including a track or two of archival material would have been a nice addition. It is clear that *Prefer Performance* is intended as a means for student recruitment – a fair portion of the liner notes are dedicated to listing the hardware and type of work that is done in the Digitization Laboratory at the Centre for Cape Breton Studies and the Folklore Department. Clearly a testament to the enthusiasm of the faculty and students, as well as how much the community supports the school and program, this is a CD that truly shows what is happening in the Folklore Department at CBU.

The other CD, *Soundtracks*, is an anthology that was used to raise funds for a scholarship for university students who are developing a professional music career. As a way of commenting on this, virtually all of the performers on this recording are "gigging" musicians who have been involved in CBU as either students or faculty. The content of the

CD, therefore, is fairly diverse. It includes singer-songwriters, pop rock, Irish traditional music, Cape Breton fiddling, and even some J. S. Bach. As such, it is a wonderful example of the heterogeneity of music in Cape Breton— all of these recordings are examples of regularly occurring music in and around the CBU community. While there is certainly a strong fiddling tradition in Cape Breton, the music of the local Ukrainian community and the Cape Breton Orchestra are equally important parts of Cape Breton culture.

The CD prominently features two exchange students from the University of Limerick, button accordionist Caroline Murphy and fiddler, bouzouki player Neil Fitzgibbon, who appear on a total of five tracks. Exhibiting wonderful depth, playing traditional Irish instrumental selections accompanied by Sheumas MacNeil of the Barra MacNeils, the accordion playing of Caroline Murphy is a highlight. Richard MacKinnon also appears on this anthology as well, but this time as the frontman to a blues rock band, The Byegones. They cover “Your Cigarettes and Coffee” by Peter Narváez, yet another classic example of a well-respected folklorist with a successful music career.

In comparison to *Prefer Performance*, *Soundtracks* is considerably more commercial in nature. This can be seen in the prominence of contemporary rock and singer-songwriter selections, as well as its more polished aesthetic. I found that there was a lack of balance in the ordering of the tracks, however, with many of the cleaner, carefully produced tracks in the first half, and then the live, more ethnographic style recordings taking up much of the remainder of the album. I found this second release to be similar to the first, in that it has many of the same performers, but overall, it is significantly stronger, the production displaying greater confidence, perhaps because the purpose of the release was largely economic rather than for academic recruitment. In addition to creating a scholarship fund, it has also been a meaningful way to encourage and nurture young musicians by allowing them to be part of a significant economic venture.

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