

Don Messer's Modern Canadian Fiddle Canon*

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Recent studies of regional fiddle music traditions recognize hierarchies of ability and authority among their practitioners. Thus, Joyce Cauthen, writing of old-time fiddling in Alabama, divides the individuals whose biographies she presents into "Modest Masters of the Fiddle and Bow" and "Alabama's Brag Fiddlers." When Peter Cooke began his research in the Shetland Isles, "Early enquiries," he says, "led me to the better-known, more skillful fiddlers, but it soon became apparent that collectively, they represented only the apex of a pyramid consisting of countless men and a very few women who could play the fiddle to some standard or other" (14). It is only coincidental that the records of Don Messer, the fiddler at the top of the Canadian pyramid for over two decades, were issued on the Apex label. But there is no question that from his position at the top, Messer shaped Canadian fiddling in a number of ways. In this study, I argue that Messer's influence can be seen as an example of what Philip V. Bohlman has described as "canon-formation"

When I mention the topic of this paper to Canadians, everyone over the age of thirty responds with brief reminiscences of the national CBC television show, "Don Messer's Jubilee," that ran from 1959 to 1969. They tell of watching with parents, speak of vocalist Charlie Chamberlain's legendary tipping, and recall the swirling folk dances of the Buchta Dancers. Elsewhere I have discussed how this extremely popular show reified the idea of the family entertainment at home (1976, 5). Indeed, during the past decade,¹ several nostalgic plays from the Maritimes have developed this notion. But Messer the fiddler, even though showcased on the screen, tends to get lost in the memories of those who saw only the television show. A full understanding of the meaning Don Messer's music had for Canadians requires a closer look at the man and his art.²

"The fiddle," says Edith Fowke in *Canadian Folklore*, "is Canada's pre-eminent folk instrument." In her brief discussion of the strong Scottish and Irish influences across the country, she mentions the Scottish-influenced styles of Cape Breton and Ontario and the Irish-influenced playing of Québec. According to Fowke, "a simpler style, stemming from Don

Messer's long-running radio program, is widespread in other regions" (64f.). Whether Messer's style is "simpler" is a question for later. But there is no doubt that Messer's radio performances influenced fiddlers all across Canada, creating a national canon of repertoire and performance practice.

Fowke and others studying Canadian fiddle music have stressed regional or ethnic distinctiveness (e.g., Proctor; Hogan and Hogan). There are, I think, several reasons for this. First, there is the Canadian tendency to think in terms of a "mosaic" model of national culture. Second, in recent decades folklorists have argued that folk expression is an alternative culture, championing the cultural equivalent of ecological and genetic diversity. Often such advocacy is justified through reference to fears of "massification," "cultural gray-out," "commodification" and the like (e.g., Lomax, 4f.; Narváez). In analysing the interaction between folk and country music in Canada, I have argued that such fears are at best overstated: the music spread by professionals over the airwaves, on records, and in concerts is never copied completely, and there is a dialectic between popular and folk culture (1987). In the present report, I choose another perspective, one that stresses the power of influence and hegemony in the dialectic.

Don Messer's Life and Work

Born in 1909 to Margaret and John Messer at their farm near Tweedside, New Brunswick, Don Messer was the youngest of eleven children.³ As the name suggests, the family had German roots; however, their ancestors had come to Canada in the 19th century from Scotland, where they had resided for several generations. Messer grew up in a rural Scottish-Canadian family. That he learned to play the fiddle at an early age reflects this milieu.

As a youth, Messer played at dances and for home entertainments and was acclaimed a good old-time fiddler. At sixteen, in the mid-1920s, he went to Boston to live at his aunt's boarding house and worked as dishwasher, busboy, window-dresser, and dry goods clerk. This was an extremely common move at the time; in fact, southern New England, particularly around Boston, still has extensive communities of Maritimes immigrants.

In Boston, Messer learned to drive and listened to the new radio stars. As well, he heard local radio programs by Cape Breton and Irish fiddlers like Alex Gillis and Jerry Tohey.⁴ During his several years in Boston, Messer also took formal violin lessons. This training was seminal; he was taught to hold and bow the violin in the "proper," classical way, and he learned to read and write music. So while he brought his folk fiddling skills to the big city, they were molded there into something different. Studying the violin was just another part of moving from farm to city, from barter to cash, from the old way to the modern.

Around 1929, Messer returned to Canada, settling in Saint John, New Brunswick's largest city. A photo in his scrapbook shows the 20-year-old fiddler in the studio of CFBO (later CHSJ) for his first radio series (Messer

n.d., 1).⁵ Dressed in suit and tie, and flanked by a second fiddler, pianist, drummer, and banjoist, all similarly dressed in business suits, he is holding the fiddle under his chin in a pose that duplicates the photos at the front of John Craig Kelly's *First Lessons on the Violin*, the initial book he used in his music studies in Boston.⁶

During the next decade, Messer would be on and off the air at CHSJ, the Saint John station that became the local CBC outlet. Some of his series were aired nationally; others were regional or local. Meanwhile, Messer travelled throughout the province, playing for dances in small rural communities. Band members came and went, some programs having budgets for more musicians than others. By the mid-1930s, two musicians who would remain with him for the rest of his life had joined: bassist Duke Neilson, a circus kid who, as "Julius, the human volcano," sometimes did a fire-eating act at the band's appearances during the 30s, and singer (and sometime guitarist), Charlie Chamberlain, billed as "The Singing Lumberjack."

In 1936, the Messer band was selected to help represent New Brunswick at the annual Sportsmen's Show in Boston. Billed as "Don Messer and the New Brunswick Lumberjacks," they were acclaimed in newspapers and made a number of appearances and radio broadcasts. This success bolstered Messer's reputation in Saint John, and in 1937, after another successful appearance at the Sportsmen's Show, he made his first recordings for Compo Records of Montreal. Utilizing a unique recording technique, the company recorded selected tunes and songs from Messer's Saint John radio shows directly off the air in Montreal during the summer of 1937. His first 78s appeared that autumn on two labels: the English-language Melotone, and the French-language Starr.⁷

His national career thus launched, Messer continued on CBC radio in Saint John until early 1939. Later that year, CFCY, the CBC station in Charlottetown, seeking someone to replace an undependable local fiddler, hired Messer. He moved to Charlottetown along with Neilson and Chamberlain and formed a new band. In November, 1939, they began broadcasting as "Don Messer and his Islanders." In the next three decades, Messer and the Islanders would become Canadian fixtures. They were heard nationally every week on the CBC and, starting in 1942, on Compo's Apex label. From the mid-40s onward, the group made annual national tours in addition to their many appearances in the Maritimes.

During World War II, PEI was the site of military training camps, and Halifax, within listening range of CFCY, was the main staging area for European naval traffic. The Islanders' national popularity grew as many young service people heard and saw the group. Messer continued on CBC radio until 1959, the year he began the national CBC television show that ran until 1969. Consistently one of the top-rated shows on Canadian TV, its abrupt cancellation in 1969 caused a national furor that reached Parliament.

In 1970, Messer moved to CTV, the principal independent national network. There his syndicated show ran until 1972. In his final years, Messer corresponded with various radio stations about the possibility of establishing a 15-minute show; this seems to have been his favorite performance medium. In March, 1973, Messer died of a heart attack.

Don Messer's Canon

Why was Messer successful? First, he was a good musician. More than that, he embodied principles that made him a model for modern Canadian old-time fiddling. His lessons gave him the ability to read music, and he subsequently taught himself how to play backup to accompany singers. He was proud of his access to the world of printed music and, as early as 1933, told reporters of his valuable collection of rare old fiddle-tune manuscripts.⁸ Guitarist-singer, Mac Doane, a member of one of Messer's early bands, recalled visiting Messer and playing through tune books:

He lived up country then, he had a house up country. And we'd, I'd play there with him 'til after midnight. And his wife would go to sleep and my wife would go to sleep. Because he was trying out, he had these old books of music. And he was trying out all these different pieces of old-time music. And he'd ask me, "How do you like that one?" Well, I'd say, "That one I don't like too much." Well, the next one would be a good one, you know. All old-time fast music. I just played along with him because we just enjoyed playing, that's all.

Messer would mark the tunes that passed muster with a check mark or write "good" (sometimes both), and thus was constantly expanding his repertoire. Eventually his collection of music would include fiddle-tune and technique books, ranging from J. Scott Skinner to Joe Venuti. Similarly, his record collection contained all manner of fiddle music, including the Farr Brothers and Stephane Grappelli with the Hot Club of France along with all the well-known Canadian and American old-time fiddlers. Due to his ability as a reader of music, Messer could take advantage of new tunes sent to him by fiddlers who listened to his shows. Because he used these tunes and credited the men and women who composed them, he received more and more. Ultimately, he would invite the most accomplished of these fiddlers to appear as guests on his program. Thus, over many years, Messer established a reputation as a patron of fiddlers.

Violin lessons also taught him "proper," classical technique: how to hold the instrument properly; how to play in upper positions. His was a clean, even sound, with a light short bow and much left-hand ornamentation, particularly trills and triplets.⁹ It may have sounded "simple" when compared to the work of Jean Carignan, but most fiddlers I have spoken with who grew up listening to his music thought he played the tunes "right" and with more flair and precision than the fiddlers of the generation before him. Herein lies a central reason for his ability to create a canon: he was

seen as playing well, and as being an expert in the music. If Messer played a familiar old-time tune, he did it the right way: the melody was correct; the interpretation was proper.

Messer created the canon first on the radio and then through his records. During the early years, when his records appeared as 78s, most of the tunes were traditional. Messer's versions were authoritative. In 1942, he published the first of twelve tune books. These included many pieces he recorded. A rough tally yields 115 during his career; some were printed more than once. Many of the 78s and 45s were reissued on LPs. Although they suggest the most popular or frequently requested tunes, his recordings and tune books give an incomplete picture of his repertoire. His personal collection includes hundreds of tune books and thousands of music sheets. Surely, Messer did not perform everything he gathered, but even a small percentage would push his repertoire into the thousands.

A better estimate of the pieces in Messer's canon would result from examining the performing repertoires of Canadian fiddlers in various regions. On doing so, I have found that one cannot avoid encountering tunes associated with Messer. For example, during the early and mid-50s, American folklorist Newbell Niles Puckett spent his summer holidays in the little Ontario hamlet of Bobcaygeon and whiled away his spare time recording songs and tunes from his local friends. His fiddling neighbours played 52 tunes for his tape recorder; of these, 20 were printed, recorded, or both, by Messer (cf. Doucette, 29). Some are ubiquitous in fiddle repertoires (e.g., "Cock of the North," "Devil's Dream," "Rock Valley Jig," and "Soldier's Joy"); others had just been recorded by Messer (e.g., "MacIlmoyle's Reel," "Swamplake Breakdown," and "Woodchopper's Breakdown").¹⁰ Maybe Puckett's neighbours knew some of these before Messer did, but here, as has often been the case in the past with printed texts of orally familiar songs, Messer's performances were taken as authoritative and even tended to shape the playing of fiddlers who had already learned the tunes. Like most canonizers, Messer valorized old repertoire and introduced new. Hence Messer's was a canon of both repertoire and technique; it was both aural and written. But this was just the beginning. He made it happen in other ways.

A dualism in Messer's own rhetoric about his music parallels his combining of classical technique with traditional tunes. On the one hand, Messer was quick to assert that his music as "authentic," representing a region where traditions were venerated and cherished. Thus in a 1933 letter to the national head of the CRBC (predecessor to the CBC) requesting a network radio show, Messer argued that it was unfair for the national network to broadcast a Montreal group, Bert Anstice and his Mountain Boys, twice weekly. "After all, this type of music originated here in the Maritimes, and why should we have to listen to make-believe stuff from Upper Canada?" (Messer n.d., 8). When a Maritimer uses the term "Upper

Canada,” it almost always carries a tone of resentment toward the hegemonic dominance of central Canada. Messer got his national network show the following year.

On the eve of his 1937 trip to New England and New York, Messer spoke to a Saint John newspaper of the previous year’s successful trip. They had appeared not just at the Sportsmen’s Shows in Boston and Hartford but also at banquets, theatres, and private parties. They were “the first Canadian band east of Montreal to pass the NBC” audition. In a newspaper article of Jan. 9, 1937, “Lumberjacks Arrange for New England Tour,” Messer explained their success by saying that “the hillbillies and rural bands performing throughout the States were chiefly made up of musicians, regular dance players, and not true performers of hinterland tunes”(Messer n.d., 2)¹¹

By the 1950s, Messer had developed this line of argument a bit further. He told an interviewer for *Maclean’s* that what he played was “folk music, the music of the people. Our fathers brought these hornpipes, jigs and reels over with them from the old country—Scotland and Ireland—and they kept them alive” (MacDonald). A decade later Messer had added a nationalistic dimension to the heritage angle (*Calgary Herald* Mar. 17, 1961: 31): “I hate that word hillbilly. What we play are songs that have been around for hundreds of years. They’re folk songs that could almost be called ‘Canadian’ folk songs.”

Despite his traditionalist claims, Messer also made certain that his band could provide music for a variety of tastes; and he certainly was no purist. For example, between 1934 and 1938, the Saint John newspapers—owned by the same people who owned the radio station where he performed, and thus reflecting to some extent his own publicity work—used a variety of names that conveyed the band’s image in different ways. Because there is little chronological consistency in the use of names, I offer here a brief structural analysis.

Messer’s band names had up to four parts. Of these the first was the most important and always present, that of *owner*, always stated in the possessive as “Don Messer and his” or “Don Messer’s.” Next in frequency came the *image*, for which, in this period, two terms seem to have been interchangeable: “Lumberjacks,” referring to the workers in New Brunswick’s largest industry and conveying an association with the rural hinterlands of the province, and “Old Tyme,” “Old Tymers,” or (rarely) “Old-Time.” This usage too had rural connotations but also referred, with consciously antique spelling, to an idealized past. A third element was *place*, using one or more terms that alluded to the group’s performance venue or home: “Radio,” “Dance,” “Saint John,” or “New Brunswick.” Finally, the *type* of organization was sometimes specified; most frequently, “Orchestra;” less often, “Band.”¹²

The ways these elements were combined conveyed the varying ways Messer and those who wrote about him perceived his music. In the summer of 1935, the local paper of Campbellton, a small northern New Brunswick town, under a headline proclaiming "Famous orchestra here tomorrow," named the group "Don Messer's Radio Orchestra," tying it to the context most familiar and prestigious to its readers, the radio (*Graphic*, Aug. 9, 1935: cf. Messer n.d.). The following summer, a Saint John paper described the group's tour in the same region in terms that associated it with the urban centre from which the band broadcast: "Don Messer and his Saint John Orchestra ... is delighting dancing enthusiasts on the North Shore" (Messer n.d. notebook). By contrast, newspaper accounts of the band's appearances in Saint John stressed the rural and antique connections, sometimes referring to the group as the "Lumberjacks," but most often using the term "Old-Tyme." A 1935 notebook containing Messer's radio set lists and band accounts is titled, in his hand, "Don Messer's Old Tyme Dance Band featuring modern and quadrilles." In this context it should be noted that of the two terms, "Orchestra" was the older and more sedate, and "Band" the more modern, connoting such contemporary genres as swing. As well, orchestras generally featured strings, whereas bands highlighted winds. The Islanders regularly added sax, clarinet, and trombone when playing dances, though such instruments were used rarely on records and seldom on radio or television. On his records and while in the USA, Messer's group was identified as the "New Brunswick Lumberjacks."

These varied names conveyed images of authentic backwoodsmen for the Yankees, country boys who could also play modern music for the Saint John people, and city boys for the country audiences. Later, when his Islanders were worked into smaller spin-offs for brief radio (and later TV) segments, the group was called Don Messer and his Modern Men and The Backwoods Trio. Messer thus continually claimed both sides of the line: old-time and modern.

Messer succeeded in establishing a canon of fiddle music because he projected an image his contemporaries could identify with. He respected institutions, looked both toward the past and the future, and was engaged in the issues of the day. Not only did he record old tunes, he also issued sets of dance tunes with calls. His new tunes frequently had such nationally evocative titles as "Victory Breakdown" (issued near the end of World War II), and "Miss Supertest's Victory Reel" (after a Canadian win in Gold Cup unlimited hydroplane racing).

If his patriotic mixture of modern and old-time imagery reminds Canadians of the name of the country's former ruling party, the Progressive Conservatives, then it should come as no surprise to discover that from early in his career Messer took advantage of political connections. Working on the publically owned network, he was not averse to lobbying in parliament

for the reinstatement of canceled radio contracts, or for the expansion of his TV show from regional to national status. On more than one occasion, Messer performed for political events. In 1966, he provided important musical support in the campaign of PEI Premier Alex Campbell. And through his Ottawa-based agent, Messer played a part in encouraging and channelling the massive spontaneous protests that followed the cancellation of his CBC-TV show in 1969.

Messer was not only politically aware, he was also an astute and hard-nosed businessman. A former member of his band who joined relatively close to the end of Messer's career recently told me that the other members, "were all scared of him" (Mullen). They had good reason, for Messer ran a tight ship. One early contract spells out his strict rules about behaviour on- and off-stage, about drinking, etc. (Messer). His insistence upon musical literacy, although quite common among fiddlers and pianists, was unusual for the country and western field, from whom he drew band members from time to time. He used his position of prominence in the record and broadcast fields to promote the work of other fiddlers, recording or performing their compositions, and hiring them as guest performers for his broadcasts. In this way, musicians who might have resented his success, seen him as a competitor, or viewed him as a commercial sell-out, were indebted and grateful and thought of him as their advocate.

Conclusion

Writing of folk music canons, Bohlman stresses the role of community, defining the folk music canon as "those repertoires and forms of musical behaviour constantly shaped by a community to express its cultural particularity and the characteristics that distinguish it as a social entity" (104). Here I argue that an individual is responsible for creating a canon. There is little difficulty in identifying Don Messer's work as one of Bohlman's three types, namely, the *mediated canon*. Such a canon is found where members of a community "share many aspects of culture, but it is physically and geographically impossible to exchange [these aspects] without mediation" (111). According to Bohlman, the mediated canon characterizes:

groups that are in the process of transition from small to large communities. Thus, a mediated style may forge a diverse complement of cultural differences into a normative style that allows a degree of cultural sharing and a more intensive drawing of cultural boundaries. The resulting tradition retains elements of the old while admitting the new in patterns consistent with underlying pluralism. (114-15)

What seems most important here is the idea of *influence*. Ottawa Valley fiddler, Dawson Girwood, used this term to describe Messer:

And the other thing was the great influence that Don Messer had. His music was everywhere. We were able to get the Don Messer show on radio and then

later of course, the television show which was on for, I think, 20 years. And when I was quite small, they broadcast on Friday night; and in the summertime, in those days a car radio was quite a fad of course, you should be downtown doing your shopping on a Friday night and you would hear Don Messer music all over town, cars driving up and down. (Bégin, 7)

Messer was a force from afar who had access to millions of Canadians via broadcast, recording, and print media. To the extent that his values and ideas regarding music and dance in the past and present were congruent with those of his peers, both musicians and listeners, he functioned as a community spokesperson. The Canada he was born into was less than 50 years old, and had been brought together as a confederation through the construction of railroads. His generation grew up in a time of consolidation during which the country began to hear, and then see, itself via the broadcast media. Messer played an integral part in acting out the Canadian musical identity of his time. To this day, the fiddle is fundamentally more important to country music in Canada than in the USA: in part, because fiddle music is traditional in many of the European-derived ethnic groups that make up the older portions of the Canadian cultural mosaic; in part, because fiddle music transcends language barriers; and in part, because of Messer's legacy as a star of Canadian country music.

To understand fully Messer's role we must consider what happened after he reached his peak popularity in the 1960s. Since then, the drift of national cultural politics has been toward ever more diverse regional and ethnic stances. Messer has been criticized as a homogenizer, someone who did not represent the truly authentic fiddle music of any particular region.¹³ Interestingly, it took the emergence of his national fiddle music canon to draw out the advocates of competing canons.

In the ethnographic truth of things, every fiddler is a microcosm of individual, local, regional, national, and international tastes. As the media have grown more fragmented and specialized, Canadian fiddlers have gained access to representations of competing canons. Having the recordings and the music, they can play tunes from Sean McGuire, Émile Benoit, Kenny Baker, Jerry Holland, Jean Carignan, and many more. As is evident in music and record collection, Messer too was aware of these competing streams; however, he created a synthesis from them for an audience that generally was less sophisticated in such matters. Ironically, as the fiddle community caught up with Messer in this regard, his influence as a synthesizer waned. Today he is often thought of as influential, but the nature of his influence is no longer understood because he is no longer alive to act as a patron and because his innovations have become part of the consciousness of Canadian fiddlers everywhere. Canadian fiddle canons now reflect apparently less synthetic styles and repertoires, be they raw or fancy, local or international. Hence, when I stand back and look at Messer, I see an

individual whose actions led many to accept him as a community spokesperson until his music and his ideas were so deeply ingrained as to render him obscure and unnecessary. Much more could be said about his music: for example, the way his tunes, their textures, titles, and roles in song and dance reflected concerns of Canadians in the middle of the 20th century. As Canadians once again ponder their joint future, what seems most important is how Messer offered a modern solution to the old problems of distance and diversity in an immense and variegated country.

NOTES

- * Earlier versions of this paper were read at the 1992 Annual Meeting of the American Folklore Society and the 1993 Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for Musical Traditions.
1. John Gray's "Don Messer's Jubilee" was produced by the Halifax-based Neptune Theatre in 1985-86. During the 1980s, the Mulgrave Co-op Theatre Company of Guysboro, NS, produced another original work about Messer: "Bring Back Don Messer."
 2. Americans, particularly those who spoke to me of Messer when this paper was presented at the 1992 AFS Meeting, have recalled how popular he was in New England and the northern border states to its west.
 3. Much of this information on Messer's life and career comes from Sellick and Osburne.
 4. A native of Cape Breton, Gillis (1900-74) had moved to Boston in 1922, formed a group called the Inverness Serenaders, and recorded for Decca. His programs were broadcast by WHDH on Saturday evenings (MacGillivray, 24f.).
 5. Messer's handwritten label reads "(First Picture Ever Taken in Radio Station of Group)" and includes Maunsel O'Neil with fiddle (widely known for his comic dialogue radio persona, "Joe LeBlanc"), pianist Eldon Rathburn, drummer James McCausland, and plectrum banjoist Roy DuPlacey. The 1929 date is conjectural as Messer's personal papers and scrapbooks indicate his Saint John broadcasts began in 1929, 1930, and 1931. However, Messer seems not to have had his own radio orchestra until 1934.
 6. Messer's copy is in Miscellaneous Songbooks 4-1, Public Archives of Nova Scotia.
 7. These were later re-issued on Compo's Apex label; some eventually appeared on MCA albums.
 8. 1933 clipping in Messer (n.d.).
 9. Halifax fiddler, Bill Guest, who played piano for Messer's 1971 tour and recorded his own versions of many Messer tunes, has said (3): "One must realize that in order to play the faster tunes such as Reels, Hornpipes, Two-Steps, Breakdowns and Jigs that we use only the upper part of the bow. The faster the tune—the less bow used! Jigs use more bow than do the tunes in 2/4 time and they are usually bowed separately. Waltzes make use of the entire bow. Embellishments may be added or omitted at the player's discretion."

10. "MacIlmoyle's Reel," recorded at Messer's eleventh recording session, Dec., 1943, issued as a single and later on LP, and printed (in Messer 1948, no. 25), might seem to argue for Messer's influence on Ontario tradition. But Messer's scrapbook (n.d.) contains a letter to him from James Miller, RR7, Peterborough, dated Aug. 4, 1943: "It seems a long time since I wrote you before, the time I sent "MacIlmoyle's Reel." Since Bobcaygeon is just outside Peterborough, there is a good chance Messer got the tune that way from the Ontario fiddle tradition (rather than *vice versa*).
11. Their 1936 NBC broadcasts seem to have been on WHDH, the Boston station on which Alex Gillis appeared. A clipping from the Mar. 28, 1936 *Toronto Star* (Messer n.d., 5) mentions this, although Gillis's program is not cited.
12. Folklorist Gary Stanton commented on an earlier draft of this article: "Your short structural analysis of band names ... seems to describe a process much more generally practiced within musical groups of the middle century. I once collected a few hundred names of bands from commercial recordings of the 1920s and 30s. They almost invariably would fit your categorization, if we had all the information.... The same motives, attachment to place, ownership, identification of musical orientation, would fit blues, jazz, and even Tex-Mex conjuntos. Since the musical styles may be local, the naming pattern is larger than even regional considerations ... it suggests to me that the pattern is market driven."
13. The issue of Messer's reputation is multi-faceted. James Hornby marshals evidence that Prince Edward Islanders, especially fiddlers, resented Messer (104-20). I discuss the resentment of Messer by some other Maritimers, placing it in the context of the cultural priorities of competing elites (n.d.). Elsewhere, I have argued that celebrity status for musicians like Messer is always temporary and marginal and is as likely to have negative aspects as it is to have positive dimensions (Rosenberg, 157).

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Résumé: Neil Rosenberg retrace la carrière du violoniste traditionnel canadien Don Messer et montre comment son répertoire a fini par constituer une "norme" pour les violonistes de tout le pays. En partant de la notion propre à Philip V. Bohlman d'une "norme médiatisée," Rosenberg met l'accent sur le rôle de Messer en tant qu'individu dans la définition d'un véritable corpus de mélodies et explique comment son influence a fini par décliner.