

# Down east excellence



*The Cape Breton Collection of Bagpipe Music*

132 tunes, published by Taigh a' Chiuil, Box 31149, Robie RPO, Halifax, NS B3K 5T9 Canada. Cdn\$21.95

by Iain MacDonald

**W**hen I was eight years old, my mother dragged me—an unwilling victim—down to the local pipe band to sign up for lessons. Not far behind was my best friend at the time, Jamie McIntyre. Jamie's family came from Glace Bay in Cape Breton, where his great grandfather "Long Joe" McIntyre was pipe major of a local band. Remembering that connection gave me a heightened interest in reviewing this collection.

*The Cape Breton Collection of Bagpipe Music* has some very good reading. Shears did an excellent job with the introductory material, giving a solid contextual framework for the music that follows. He also provides many clues and suggestions for those who would take the study further.

Shears says that the music was derived from four sources: old manuscripts, tapes, fiddle tunes arranged for pipes, and modern compositions. I found many of the old tunes and arrangements to be musically pleasing, simple, and suitable for a variety of uses. "The Boys in Navy Blue," "Black Brecks," "Barnard Castle," "The Fairy Piper," "Peter Ballie," "The Foxhunter's Reel," and "The Smith of Chilliechassie" are some of the many examples of good tunes in this category.

Some tunes are so strong that they play equally well on many instruments, and others just don't translate well. Some of the fiddle tunes in this collection make rather ho-hum pipe tunes, and others make for excellent playing. In the excellent category are "Ballindalloch Castle," "The Strathlorne March," "Dusky Meadow," "Sandy McIntyre's Trip to Boston," and "The Left Handed Fiddler."

There are a number of modern compositions in the book, and while most are very playable, a number are surely quite forgettable. Barry Shears' tune "My Daughter's Lullaby" is a very pleasant exception to that rule.

The collection features eighteen marches in a variety of time signatures. The seventeen strathspeys—many written with a two-beat reel rhythm—are entertaining and lively. So many good strathspeys in one collection is a rare occurrence these days. The large selection of reels leans to the "fiddle style" or "kitchenpiping" reels widely sought for band medleys, solo sets, and sheer, unmitigated fun. The thirty jigs provide excellent material for bands and soloists, in Cape Breton settings of familiar tunes, in pipe settings of fiddle tunes, and in new compositions.

Two of my favourites in the book include a setting of "Banjo Breakdown" as a Clog Dance, and a traditional slip jig entitled "Dougald's Favourite." The collection finishes with a varied selection of airs in which most pipers will find a tune to enjoy.

My friend Jamie never did stick with the pipes. He learned a few tunes and then moved on to hockey. If he'd lasted a few more years, he too might be cruising through this collection of Cape Breton music.

Me? I've been doing this gig for thirty years, and a book like *The Cape Breton Collection* is worth the wait. **pd**

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