



# DOUG LAMEY

## Journey to True North

Matt Merta

One sign of a true artist is the immersion of oneself into the art in every aspect. For a musician performing a regional style of music, that may mean relocating to the land that inspired the sound of that music.

Doug Lamey relocated from the exciting music scene of Boston, where he helped continue a thriving Celtic music scene, to Cape Breton, where the music of the British Isles and Ireland have found a true home in North America. He has remained there since 2011 and continues to perform and teach fiddle there.

“My family went to Cape Breton every summer to visit my grandparents in Kingsville, Cape Breton,” Lamey

says. “We were always attending concerts and dances. From age 10 to 17, I attended a summer music program at the Gaelic College in St. Anne’s, Cape Breton. It’s a program that is still going on today. My own kids, as well as my nieces, are now attending that great music program at the college.”

Lamey’s grandparents would also prove to be the biggest influence on his musical career. Grandfather Bill Lamey served as an important fiddler and Scottish/Cape Breton music historian during the 1940s, recording a number of 78s while living in the Boston area. Grandmother Sally Lamey was the daughter of a Gaelic songwriter. While both retired from the music scene

before grandson Doug took an interest in fiddling, their influence has stayed with him to this day. “The love of the music was the most important thing that was passed down to me, as well as the importance of playing correctly. Learning tunes directly from the old books from Scotland gave my music a great foundation.”

Growing up in Norton, Massachusetts, Lamey began to study the violin at the age of six. It was a chance meeting with fiddler Natalie MacMaster at a relative’s house that cemented his interest in the instrument. “One of her early tapes was playing, and my mom referenced that the young woman walking by with her fiddle case

was the musician we were listening to. I was intrigued. After having supper together, Natalie played some music at the table. I somehow ended up sitting next to her, and she taught me 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' and 'The Skye Boat Song' that evening. She is so inspirational.

Those were probably the first two pieces of music I really learned, even though I was taking violin lessons by then."

While Natalie MacMaster was one influence, there were others, as well. "My dad took me to sessions at Cape Breton fiddler John Campbell's house in Watertown, Massachusetts. John's encouragement was super helpful, and I learned great old tunes from him."

Lamey continued taking violin lessons in Classical, Irish, and Cape Breton music at Wharton College in Norton, as well as the aforementioned Gaelic College during his summer teen years. This gave him the opportunity to study under such well-known fiddlers as Buddy MacMaster, Seamus Connolly, and Alasdair Fraser. "When I was 18, I started playing gigs with guitarist



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Cliff McGann. We played together for a decade, which was really fun. We played a lot of gigs and festivals such as the Lowell (Massachusetts) Folk Festival, Long's Peak Highland Games in Estes Park, Colorado, and the New Bedford (Massachusetts) Folk Festival,

to name a few. We played weekly at The Old Court in Lowell, along with countless weddings through the years. We were busy."

As a young adult, Lamey immersed himself in the Boston Celtic and Cape Breton music scene. "Boston College's Gaelic Roots program, which was led by Seamus Connolly, was great for networking at an early age, being able to meet players my age that were as excited as me to learn from the likes of Buddy MacMaster and Carl MacKenzie. Emerald Rae, Brendan Block, and Lydia (Shaw) Dant are a few great fiddle players I was playing with as a result of that awesome program. Later on, I was pretty active in the Boston Irish scene. I loved going to The Burren. There are so many more awesome musicians in the Boston music scene. It's such a great area for Irish, Scottish, and Cape Breton music. So many amazing fiddle players!"

During this time, Lamey also did a lot of production work. His resume includes the ICONS Festival, A Christmas Celtic Sojourn, and A St Patrick's Day Celtic Sojourn. Moreover, he worked extensively with the band Tri, which in 2009 recorded the album *Among Friends/ A-measg Chàirdean*.

"With traditional music, pushing barriers has been more of a refinement to me. Really, the old stuff is so great, so why fix it if it ain't broke. There are some great new compositions that certainly should be taken into consideration for sure. This music has been around for hundreds of years. It is certainly evolving. I love playing traditional music along with drums,

electric guitar, and bass, don't get me wrong, but what is better than fiddle, bagpipes, guitar, and piano? To me, that's as good as music gets!"

In 2011, Lamey and his family made the move to Cape Breton, to the town of Glendale, and he recorded his first solo project, *A Step Back in Time*.

"It definitely had that 'ceilidh' feel, which at its root means 'visit' in Gaelic," he relates. Guests on the album included his wife Kaitlin on piano and cellist Natalie Haas, as well as Sandy, Johnny and Jeff MacDonald, descendants of his great-grandfather.

Moving from Boston to Cape Breton proved to be a performing challenge for Lamey. "There are amazing world-class musicians in both Boston and Cape Breton. It seems I had more consistent performing opportunities in the Boston area, though in 2015, I had 100 gigs between May and October. Raising a family has definitely taken precedence over advancing my music career." He would eventually relocate to Baddeck, which offered more opportunity for performing, as well as schooling for his children.

Like almost all professional musicians, COVID proved to be a challenge for Lamey. Fortunately, he was able to perform a few livestream shows on Facebook, accompanied by Kaitlin. "Music has always been a constant in my household. If there was a morning where I had the house to myself or not, and I played a few sets, and that has many times been a nice and excellent highlight in my day. In some cases, maybe even the best part of my day. Everyone was stuck at home, and our performance definitely hit the spot for those tuning in."

For 2023, Lamey released his second solo album, *True North*. Recording for the project began in 2015, with Mac Morin and Sarah MacInnis joining in on piano. "Mac and I had recorded two tracks at Lakewind Sound in Point Aconi, Cape Breton in 2015. I picked it up where I had left off in September 2022. I knew I had to release an album. It's just in me to be doing this.



The fiddle and piano combination is, in my opinion, the most authentic presentation of the music. The piano playing was sounding so great, I didn't want to cover it up with anything else. It was also an opportunity for me to really show my stuff, without relying too much on other instruments."

The album contains the song "Bill's 78 Records," which is a salute to his grandfather, who recorded a number of Cape Breton songs on the older format back in the 1940s. "His style and tune selection have always been my number-one influence." While touring and promotion for the album has been limited, he has seen success with a sold-out show as part of the Burren Backroom Series in Somerville, Massachusetts. "I'm open to some gigging for sure. I do have an inclination to be in Baddeck."

While other commitments have limited his teaching as well as touring, Lamey still insists on the importance of instruction of the Cape Breton fiddle style. "This great music has been passed down for hundreds of years. This predates the modern-day violin, which Stradivarius and Guarneri spearheaded through the 1600s. The music started in Gaelic song and through the bagpipes. I'm open to teaching for sure."

As for other aspects of his musical future, Lamey states that he hopes to do more work with MacInnis, who happens to be the granddaughter of fiddler Buddy MacMaster. He also continues to enjoy working with his wife, Kaitlin. "As our kids get older, it would be nice to play more music with her."

Looking at the Cape Breton music scene, Lamey concludes, "The music scene is thriving and comfortable, for which I am grateful."



*Doug Lamey's fiddle arsenal consists mainly of two instruments given to him recently. "One is my grandfather's fiddle, which is a Friedrich August Glass violin. It's a really great instrument and is like an old friend. I had also been given my grand-uncle Sam Lamey's violin, which is a 1991 Clay Carmichael violin. It's an awesome, powerful violin. Clay is a luthier here in Cape Breton. I've got a bunch of bows. If a bow has that right weight balance, along with some great hair on it, that's good enough for me. I've got a Shure clip-on condenser mic that I like. I use an L.R. Baggs violin pickup and an L.R Baggs Paracoustic DI box. For rosin, I use Laubach Gold. My strings are Pirastro Chromecor."*

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