

TEN & TWO

THE MUSIC



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NOVA SCOTIA

Concert at the Barn

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*The Fiddle Tree
of Otis Thomas*

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PHOTO: © OTIS TONAS



CONCERT AT THE BARN

Story by **TEN & TWO STAFF**

Photos by **WALTER HODGES**

IF THERE IS BODY to Cape Breton Island it's in the Highlands and the coastline. If there is blood in Cape Breton Island it's in the music. Celtic music is everywhere, every day. Gloriously, there is no escaping it and no need to. It is the background to life on the island. For the most part, Cape Breton music is not a modern Celtic approach. It's music the way it was played in the late 1700s and early 1800s by the Scottish immigrants who came to Cape Breton Island during the forced evictions of the "Highland Clearances." Scots currently come to Cape Breton to learn how to play the music of their homeland because Scottish music lost its way and found it again in Cape Breton.

ON CAPE BRETON you can literally hear Celtic music every night of the year in churches, pubs, restaurants, community centers and private homes. Each gathering is called a ceilidh (pronounced caylee) and often involves step dancing. The fiddle is the foundational instrument of Celtic music along with piano and guitar and Cape Breton's fiddlers have become known around the world. Last names like Rankin, Cottar, Beaton, MacNeil, MacLellan, MacIsaac, MacMaster and many others are known everywhere Celtic music is played. On the island, the Red Shoe Pub in Mabou near Margaree (owned by the Rankin sisters) is a typical home of great food and music every night.

(Previous page) Howie MacDonald is an icon of Celtic Music playing on Cape Breton. On this particular evening he sets toes to tapping while playing the tune Up On The Hill from his CD Auld School, during a concert in The Barn at the Normaway Inn. (Above) A detail of one of the classic fiddles designed by Otis Tomas, the Cape Breton fiddle maker. (Facing page top) Allie Mombourquette is a talented upcoming young fiddler from Cape Breton. She is completely absorbed by the joy of making music. (Facing page bottom) Jason Roach plays a Celtic beat on piano to Howie MacDonald on fiddle. The music filled the barn and the audience with the rhythm's of the Highlands.






CELTIC COLOURS, is an annual nine-day festival that takes place at various Cape Breton locations in October. It's literally an island immersion into the music. Musicians come from all over the world to take part in this homage to the music.

We experienced our own immersion into Celtic music at a Friday night concert in The Barn at the Normaway Inn. It's literally a converted barn on the Normaway property. Dave MacDonald is the Celtic music-driven owner of the Normaway and MC of the shows that highlight established and emerging talents. They do it every week from June through October. After a day spent fly fishing the Margaree and a great dinner at the inn finished off with a glass of local Glenora whisky, this concert is more than worth it. It will take you to a place you've possibly never been before.

The concert we saw included two young women at the start of their Celtic music careers and an established talent with a long resume. We'd never seen a Celtic music concert and The Barn just exploded with the energy from the fiddles of Allie Mombourquette, Chrissy Crowley and Howie MacDonald. The crowd that filled The Barn was young and old. Every single person kept time to the music. Some young ones step danced. Some old ones step danced if they could. If they couldn't, they kept time by simply taping a finger on a knee. It was exhilaratingly clear the music

lived in their hearts. During an intermission, I talked with Chrissy about her music and her future. One comment said everything I needed to know. I asked her what she does when she's not playing music. She said, "I eat and I breathe." The ultimate seduction is the power of focused passion, and there's little doubt what Chrissy and Allie and Howie will be doing tonight. Tonight, somewhere on Cape Breton, the air will be filled with the sounds of Celtic music. 

Normaway Inn

<http://www.thenormawayinn.com/home.html>

Celtic Music Cultural Centre

<http://www.celticmusiccentre.com/>

Introduction to Celtic Music

<http://www.sfcelticmusic.com/Capebreton/cbmintro.htm>

Celtic Colours Festival

<http://www.celtic-colours.com/>

Red Shoe Pub

<http://redshoepub.com/>

(Previous page) Allie Mombourquette and Chrissy Crowley keep time with Howie MacDonald's furious fiddle pace. Howie is the senior and the master of his craft. The women are very talented, but the respect to Howie shows in their eyes. (Facing page) Chrissy Crowley is a very talented young fiddle player with Celtic music in her blood. She was raised on the music. It's how she lives and breathes. You can see it in her eyes.





(Clockwise from top left) Chrissy Crowley does a solo fiddle tune titled The Departure from her CD of the same name. The Barn at the Normaway hosts Celtic music concerts every week from June through October. The concerts consistently show off the best musicians from Cape Breton and around the world. All the musicians tend to talk directly to the audience and engage their listeners in the history and the stories behind the Celtic Music. In Howie MacDonald's case, he can't resist telling a few funny stories. He's telling the audience "The three things I like the most in life are Lobster Tail and Music."