

# Fiddling Sampler Tape

21M233 / 21L423

1) James Scott Skinner "The Strathspey King" 1843-1927

*Bonnie Lass o' Bon Accord, Marquis of Huntley's Farewell, Ten-pound Fiddle*

James Scott Skinner was considered the greatest fiddler of late nineteenth-century Scotland. He composed many tunes that have had wide circulation, and his variations to tunes, often written out, were and are widely memorized. This recording was made in 1910, and features his popular air, *Bonnie Lass*, a song without words. He won the Inverness violin competition in 1863 playing James Marshall's (1748-1833) strathspey, *The Marquis of Huntley's Farewell*. Notice the characteristic "Scotch snaps" (quick short-long rhythms) of the strathspey. *The 10£ Fiddle* is one of his own reels.

2) Chris Duncan

*The Sheiling Song*

Chris is the Australian Scottish fiddle champion, and here he plays an old highland Gaelic air. "Sheiling" is part of the barley-husking process.

3) Alistair Frazer and Jody Stecher

*Lady Louise Gordon's, Miss Gordon of Thorpe, Fisher's Wedding, Mill of Laggan*

Chris Duncan's teacher, Alistair Frazer, plays two strathspeys and two reels in lowland Scottish style. Notice the tasteful guitar playing of guitarist Jody Stecher, who leaves a lot of notes out of the chords.

4) Ashley MacIsaac

*The Rosebud of Allenvale*

Cape Bretoner Ashley MacIsaac is a left-handed fiddler who plays the fiddle "backwards" (as if strung for a right-hander). Sensationalized for his youthful charisma, his antics off-stage have earned notoriety as well. Here he plays a J. Scott Skinner air with lots of soul.

5) Buddy MacMaster

*Goldenrod, New Stove, Irene's Jigs*

Buddy is the recognized master living fiddler of the Cape Breton tradition—quite an honored position, since there are so many fine fiddle masters on this small island north of Nova Scotia. Notice the way he controls his bow: the music is powerful in the regularity of the rhythm, but he changes the speed of his bow. This technique is called a "driven bow," and it is highly desirable in this Highland Scottish style.

6) Winston Fitzgerald (1914-1987)

*Iron Man, Riddrie, Mrs. Douglas of Edman*

The late Winston Fitzgerald was the doyen of the last generation of Cape Breton fiddlers. Gifted with remarkable technique, he was noted for the

wonderful chiseling of the compositions that he never played the same way twice. His repertoire was huge, gathered largely from written sources; but it was he who said, "Playing a fiddle tune from written music is like taking a bath with your socks on."

Jerry Holland

*Father John Angus Rankin's March, Trip to Dublin Strathspey, Aoiffe's Reel, Harry Bradshaw Reel, Johnny Muise's Reel.*

Like many others, Jerry Holland's family moved to Boston (and others to Toronto, Windsor [Ontario], and Detroit) when the mines and fishing industries collapsed on Cape Breton the 1950s. Jerry, a great composer and fiddler, now lives back "down on the Island," but travels often to the Boston area for concerts and workshops. "Aoiffe" is pronounced, "Ee-fee."

7) Michael Coleman (1891-1945)

*Cherish the Ladies*

The great Michael Coleman was the most influential Irish fiddler of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Living for most of his professional life in New York, he made a number of recordings that sparked a great revival of the Sligo style back in Ireland. Almost all senior Irish fiddlers will tell you that they ate Michael Coleman's recordings for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Notice the ornaments and the difference between his jig style and that of Buddy MacMaster, above.

8) Tommy Potts (1912-1988)

*The Blackbird*

This oft-played air (which does in fact have Gaelic words) is played here by the wonderful and eccentric late Tommy Potts, whose individual mastery was passionate, inventive, and inimitable. Many old Irish airs are, as this, arrhythmic.

9) Frankie Gavin

*Man of the House, Providence Reels*

Most famous for his band, De Danaan, Frankie Gavin plays in the Galway style that has a lot of rhythmic life as well as attention to ornament. These reels are among Chicago police chief Francis O'Neill's collections.

10) Kevin Burke

*Kid on the Mountain*

Sligo fiddler Kevin Burke plays a five-part slip jig (9/8) usually played as a concert piece. Kevin is one of the most respected of the Sligo players, and most people, hearing this style, think of it as quintessential "Irish fiddling."

11) Matt Cranitch

*Mick Duggan's Polkas*

In the western hills of County Cork in Southern Ireland lies the area known as Sliabh Luchra, "as much an area as a state of mind." The music of this area can

be very magical, and the repertoire is a bit different, including a lot of slides, polkas, and airs.

Side II

12) Altan

*The Curlew, McDermott's, Three Scones of Boxty, Unnamed Reel*

The music of Donegal on Northern Ireland's west coast has a lot of Highland Scottish influence, as heard both in its rhythmic drive and repertoire. This is a live recording of reels by the very popular Donegal band, Altan, led by fiddler Mairead Ni Mhaonaigh.

13) Jean Carignan and Alan Mills

*La Bastringue*

French Canadian fiddling has its own thing, but also borrows a lot from Ireland and Scotland. *Las Bastringue* ("the dance hall") is a signature tune of sorts, a reel which is rendered in a typical slower lilt and played by all French Canadian fiddlers.

14) Gerry Robicheau

*Dancing Hornpipe*

Boston-area French Canadian-style virtuoso Gerry Robicheau plays a hornpipe of the type which has become typical of the genre. A wide melodic range, and lots of arpeggiated chords – show pieces for composers and players alike.

15) Jody Stecher with Hank Bradley

*The Twa Sisters*

This old ballad (Child #10) has a lot of versions, but they all tell a similar story: one jealous sister drowns the other, and a fiddler reconstructs a fiddle from her skeleton and hair.

16) Eck Robertson

*Sally Goodin*

Texas fiddler Eck Robertson recorded this tune in 1922 in New York. The recording has become a classic among old-time fiddling *aficionados*. Notice the intensity of the drones and the driving rhythm of the bowing.

17) Tommy Jarrell

*Sail Away Ladies*

North Carolina's late and celebrated fiddler, banjoist, and *raconteur*, Tommy Jarrell (d. 1985), was enormously influential to a great number of young players who would literally flock to his feet for lessons, which he dispensed liberally, generously sprinkled with anecdote. The fiddle tuning is AEAE.

18) Bruce Greene

*Kiss Me Quick, My Papa's a-Comin'*

Kentucky collector-scholar-fiddler Bruce Greene plays another tune in AEAE tuning. Notice how players of old-time music repeat a tune over and over, in contrast to most Celtic players, whose practice of playing a tune once or twice old timers find baffling.

19) Carter Brothers

*Nancy Rowland*

This band from Northern Mississippi, recorded in Memphis in 1928, was known for its raucous, hard-driving style. The words in this style are used for spelling the fiddler's bowing arm, and are often humorous, when they have meaning at all.

20) Blue Ridge Highballers and Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers

*Soldier's Joy*

This is a reel played by two bands in succession, both recorded in the 1930s. The tune originated in Scotland as a reel, but took its present form in Civil War, where it got some words. "Soldier's Joy" is morphine, given to ease the pain of battle wounds, but probably snuck and used recreationally, too. The Highballers were a band from Virginia, and the Skillet Lickers were musicians from Georgia and North Carolina.

21) Highwoods String Band

*Fire on the Mountain*

The Highwoods String Band, from Ithaca, New York, were a 70s revival band who drank heavily of the music of Tommy Jarrell and Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers. Walt Koken and Bob Potts play relentless fiddles, and Mac Benford plays the twangy fretless banjo. The tune is irregular in shape, and basically repeats the same melody in two keys. It is said to have originally been a Norwegian tune, but there is nothing resembling this style in Norwegian fiddling.

22) Bruce Molsky and Rafe Stefanini

*The Bluetail Fly*

Bruce is a pupil of and the leading exponent of Tommy Jarrell's style...and Rafe is from Italy, so you get a very important view here of what fiddling is really all about: a master of local style with a master who acculturated himself to it.

23) Michael Doucet and his band, *Beau Soleil*

*Reel de Dennis McGee*

Cajun (the word comes from “Acadian,” when the French were deported to Louisiana from Nova Scotia after 1755) music has a bit of Scotch-Irish, a touch of German, a strong taste of French Canadian, and lots of Creole.

24) Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys

*Blue Moon of Kentucky*

Bill Monroe’s several bands were among the original combinations which defined the genre now known as “bluegrass.” It is ensemble music consisting of fiddle, mandolin, five-string banjo (played three-finger style, not like T. Jarrell and Mac Bedford’s old-time banjo style), guitar, and bass. Most bluegrass quintets sing in the “high lonesome” style here presented by the late Bill Monroe. This live version of 1955 features the twin fiddles of Bobby Hicks and Joe Stuart.

25) Laurie Lewis

*The Maple’s Lament*

Bluegrass singer and fiddler Laurie Lewis wrote this old-sounding tune back when she ran a fiddle shop in the San Francisco Bay Area. It is the story of a maple tree’s becoming a fiddle, and has a very moody and sonorous fiddle accompaniment.

26) Mark O’Connor, with Johnny Gimble, Vassar Clements, and Kenny Baker

*Fiddlin’ Free, House of the Rising Sun, Jerusalem Ridge*

Modern fiddling phenom Mark O’Connor is heard playing with three extraordinary fiddle legends in excerpts from his CD called *Heroes*.

Johnny Gimble (*Fiddlin’ Free*) is one of the great fiddlers of the Southwest style, which was made popular by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, a 30’s-60’s band in which Gimble played, and which blended country music and jazz.

Vassar Clements can do anything – bluegrass, jazz, blues, old-time – and shows a bit of his bluesy style here in this *House of the Rising Sun* excerpt.

Kenny Baker is one of the great bluegrass and old-time players. Most aspiring bluegrass fiddlers know his recordings by heart. *Jerusalem Ridge* is an old-time tune in a minor-modal key, played in bluegrass style. Notice Kenny’s long-bowed, evenly balanced sound, and the twin-fiddle work at the end of this cut.