Upon writing about fiddle music and fiddlers in Nova Scotia, I find there are numerous styles, each with its own characteristics. In mainland Nova Scotia, we play what is called Down East Style... single notes (very little use of double stops), with a lot of embellishments such as trills and double grace notes. Unlike Cape Breton where they play mostly Strathspeys, Jigs, Clogs and Reels, we play Waltzes, Jigs, Two-steps, Reels, Hornpipes, Clogs, and Schottisches. I feel that our Old Time Waltzes are about the nicest music one can listen to. Some of our most popular Waltzes are: Manitoba Waltz (composed by Andy Dejarlis of Manitoba), Dawn Waltz (composed by Don Messer), and the Sir John A. MacDonald Waltz (composed by Graham Townsend).

Back in the 1930s we had two fiddle groups that greatly influenced our present Down East Style — George Wade and the Cornhuskers, and Jim Magill. Don Messer listened to these groups extensively. Our present style was of course largely influenced by Don Messer. Don Messer could take a traditional tune, make a few changes in it and make it a better tune. For example, Don played his opening theme, Fireman's Reel, smoother than either of the two above-mentioned groups, and I feel that is why many of the young upcoming fiddlers play a Waltz with so much feeling and tone. These young players are already composing new tunes and many of these tunes will catch on and influence minor changes in our Down East Style in the next century. Many of these young players are note readers, so maybe there won't be as many variations of each fiddle tune in future as there has been in the past.

Our Down East Style makes use of a combination of bow slurs and separate bows. In fast 2/4 tunes, the following bowings are very much used...

Fiddling in Nova Scotia occurs anywhere there's a party, as well as at lots of dance halls. One is almost always welcome if he or she carries a fiddle. In these times of unemployment, high costs, etc., fiddle music is what is desired. After all it is happy music and does no harm.

There are many sources of Down East Fiddling — for example, the records of Don Messer, Ned Landry, Clell Joudrey, Roddy Dorman, Bill Guest, Ivan Hicks and others. Some of the most popular tunes are: Big John McNeil, High Level Hornpipe, Saint Anne's Reel, Maple Sugar, and The Crooked Stove Pipe... These tunes have been passed on over the years by fiddlers who learned them by ear. Now these same tunes are being found notated in music books, so they should be around forever.

Most fiddlers know the fifteen or twenty well-known tunes, but each fiddler also seems to know tunes that the other players haven't heard. This is what makes fiddling
so interesting!

Each fiddler prefers the playing of certain other fiddlers, depending on what he or she likes — a good fast Reel, or a beautiful Waltz. I judge a fiddler's playing ability by how smoothly and musically he or she plays the Waltzes. Others look for a good, danceable feel. I feel the most important aspects of good fiddling are: a good clear tone, use of a "good" vibrato on Waltzes, an enjoyable tempo (the tune should not sound rushed), and good intonation. (Many old-time players hold the fiddle incorrectly, which cramps their left hand and causes notes to be played out of tune.) When playing the fiddle at dances in Nova Scotia, the tempos vary from location to location. For example, in Hants County they are very good dancers and like to have the tunes played fairly fast. In the Halifax-Dartmouth area they prefer the tempos slower.

_Piano Accompaniment Style_

The left hand is more important than the right. There is great use of chromatic runs, sometimes in tenths. We use mostly the middle down to the bass end of the piano. Some "good" Down East Style piano players are: Waldro Munro, Bill Guest, Florence Killen, Vivian Hicks, and Kimberley Isenor.

_Some Nova Scotia fiddlers and their styles._

**Cye Steele** — Truro area; very good jig player; has composed many good tunes.

**Don Whynot** — Bridgewater area; very good old time fiddler; knows many old tunes and has composed a few.

**Cliff Hamilton** — Lower Sackville area; a very smooth player who knows many beautiful Waltzes; plays a lot like Don Messer and is also a good composer.

**Andy Donaldson** — Dartmouth area; plays entirely by ear; very good rhythm to his bowing; is excellent at back-bow ing.

**Roddy Dorman** — Halifax; a great composer; was a very close friend of Don Messer, and played second fiddle on Don's later LPs; has a large collection of fiddle music; has played for dances over thirty years.

**Lawrence Buckler** — Dartmouth; a very smooth fiddler in the Don Messer style, and is also a great composer.

**Ron Noiless** — Dartmouth area; has one of the largest collections of fiddle music in notation; has played over thirty years for dances.

**Jarvis Benoit** — Halifax; plays some Messer style, but leans towards the Acadian French Style.

**Bill Guest** — Halifax; has a large collection of fiddle music; has composed over two hundred tunes; also has three books on fiddling on the market and is working on a fourth; was one of the founders of The Maritime Fiddlers' Association.

I feel the quality of fiddling is improving each year and that's due to the fact that many of the young players are being given lessons and learning to read music. That training along with the ability to play by ear, makes for an excellent musician and fiddler!!

_Bibliography_ (prepared by Anne Lederman)


Guest, Bill. _One Hundred Fiddle Tunes in Down East Style_. Toronto: Gordon V. Thompson.

Guest, Bill. _Bill Guest Anthology of Fiddle Tunes_. Mel Bay Publications/Gordon V. Thompson.


_The three Bill Guest books may be ordered from:_

Bill Guest
5 Donaldson Ave.
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3M 3B4

Cost is $7.95 per book plus $2.00 per order for postage.

_Discography_

Look for records of Don Messer, Johnny Mooring, Bill Guest and Jarvis Benoit. As well, recordings by Carl Elliott (Economy, NS), Clett Jondry (Bridgewater, NS), Lorimer Higgins (Bridgewater, NS) and Cye Steele (Truro, NS) reflect the Nova Scotia tradition of "Down East" fiddling. Others who also may be considered to play the style are mentioned in other articles in this monograph.

_Tune Books_

Thompson Music recently published "The Don Messer Anthology" (Toronto: Thompson Press, 1981). Older books of Don Messer, Johnny Mooring, Ned Landry, King Gamal, Andy de Jarlis, Ward Allen and others are generally out of print, but one would do well to watch for used copies. Although some of these players are from the west, Don Messer borrowed from all of them, and they can all be considered as having contributed to the "Down-East" or "Old-Time" style.