

Roy Logan: A Profile

by George W. Lyon

Roy Logan looks down from the stage of the West Mount Pleasant Community Hall in Calgary to latecomer to the weekly *Fifty and Over Club* dance. He's just finished fiddling a foxtrot.

"Is it still raining, George?"

"A bit."

"A bit. Well, we need more than a bit."

For Logan, unlike most contemporary Calgarians, "we" still means the province as a whole, rural and urban. Born in Bassano in 1916 (he was the first birth in the new hospital!), he's lived all over the province, and when you ask him where he's from, he answers, "Alberta, that's for sure."

When he was nine years old, living in the Vermilion area, his father bought a fiddle and a guitar, though the family could not afford lessons on the instruments. Logan got his start in music with the assistance of an elder brother. "Thank goodness my father got those instruments!"

By the time he was twelve, he was fiddling for dances and house parties. In the good old schoolhouse days, one fiddler was often the entire orchestra. That's a tough way to learn music, but a sure way to find out how much you enjoy making it.

When radio became common, sometimes a dance was held without live music. In a community hall or living room, anyone with a radio tuned to the Saturday night broadcasts by the CFCN Old Timers, the Redhead Oil & Gas Kids, or Ma Trainor's Orchestra could host a dance. Mention of Ma Trainor reminds Logan of a winter evening he and a group were in the sleigh, headed for just one such radio dance. This was in the Frog Lake region. The dance had been announced to occur fifteen miles away from Roy's place. But his intuition told him it had been cancelled. He didn't want to say that he wanted to turn back on such a whim, but he didn't want to ride thirty miles in the dead of winter for nothing, either. So he claimed that his horse was going lame and turned back, despite a certain amount of grumbling and disbelief. He was definitely relieved to learn later that the dance had in fact been cancelled.

Logan was in the RCAF during World War II. "He always had a fiddle with him," his wife Mildred notes. He bought one for two pounds, ten shillings when he first arrived in England. "I lugged it over to Germany with my kit. It wasn't heavy, but it sure was awkward."

While he was stationed near Hamburg, he heard of an English soldier in a nearby unit who had a violin he didn't seem to play. Always on the lookout for a new (and possibly better) instrument and "rich with cigarettes" (since he didn't smoke but received the ration anyway) Logan went to see if he might be able to purchase the instrument. No deal—it was a gift from a German girlfriend, and the Englishman had promised never to part with it.

"Would you take three hundred cigarettes for it?"

Three hundred cigarettes? Well, he might be persuaded....

Music played a significant role in that war, and as always, it was more than the official band music meant to lift martial spirits. Many ex-soldiers have written of all-night jam sessions in latrines and other uninspected locations. Logan himself was once arrested for being in the wrong barracks with his fiddle; a sympathetic judge threw the case out of court.

At one such session, in Lincolnshire, Logan made a lifelong friend, Hugh Carlson, with whom he shares a teasing relationship as co-members of the Fifty and Over Orchestra. "Hugh came in and picked up a fiddle, and I've known him ever since. God forbid that I ever met him," he adds, with a grin on his face.

The two men are constantly looking for good jokes at each other's expense, often on stage. Once Roy deprecated his own skills as a pianist. "I'm not really very good," he admitted, quickly admonishing a nearby listener, "but don't tell everyone." Hugh was delighted at the opening Logan had left him:

"They'll hear it themselves!"

Back from the war, Logan worked as a salesman for a glass company for twenty-three years. Eventually he took up the trade of piano tuning, which he worked at for eighteen years.

Between tuning and fiddling, Logan had long been a well known figure in Calgary's music world. The fiddler from Bassano has tuned some of the classiest pianos in town. Roy's children took formal lessons; one daughter is still a piano tuner. When his son took violin lessons, Logan kept his own ears perked; today he acknowledges that he learned a great deal from the experiences. Two grandchildren are students both of classical violin and old time fiddling.

When the Fifty and Older Club was founded in 1951, Roy helped put together its orchestra. The group now consists of Logan, Carlson, Mildred, who plays drums, and Myrtle Holt. Although the group has only four members, among them they can count three pianists, two fiddlers, an accordion, and drums, so they have no problem offering a variety of sounds. Their repertoire ranges from real old time items like "The Spanish Waltz" and "Red River Valley" through Swing Era favorites like "Somebody Stole My Gal" and "Just Because," to country and western staples, "Okie from Muskogee" and "Faded Love."

Although there have been a few changes in the lineup, Logan has been playing with this group at the Hall for forty years. With no liquor allowed (none is needed!), the club offers one of the best situations for dancing in Alberta, and there surely is no better dance music in the province. The one hundred or so members and dancers are virtually a family now.

Some of them are approaching their nineties. They're still dancing. "We used to have a man who was ninety-three and still dancing," notes Eythel Fry, who does much of the organizing for the Club. "He died a year ago. Just got sick and died."

During the early Seventies, fiddle contests and jamborees began to be organized in Alberta, and Logan began to attend them. He was nervous at this first contest, held in Calgary's Heritage Park, so he didn't do so well, but that problem was short-lived. He now boasts over seventy trophies in his collection. Sometimes money comes with the trophies, though Logan doesn't compete in the really high-paying categories. Still, he has won as much as \$500.00 at some events. I've talked to some Alberta fiddlers who claim that they won't bother to attend a competition if they know Roy is coming.

He's stumped when asked what particular favorite memories he might have from his career. "Fiddling is my hobby and my life," he concludes. Suddenly a smile flashes in his eyes as he looks across the living room. "Outside of marrying you, Mildred...."