shifts into third position in "The Road To Lac La Nonne," and slides in "Uncle Ben." In his reels and jigs, Fred's bowing style is fairly straightforward. The bowing is mostly alternating up bows and down bows with few slurs. This allows him to play music quickly and with a strongly articulated rhythmic drive. At the same time, Fred composes and plays slower music, such as waltzes, with more complex bowing patterns and lyrical phrasing. Fred's waltz and slow fiddling style shows his appreciation for classical music.

There are many influences on Fred's fiddle style. Perhaps not the least is the isolation of his youth and the virtual absence of a regional fiddle style where Fred grew up in southern BC. Fred, in some ways, is like the mythic pioneer who starts with virtually nothing and hopes to build something completely new. Fred did not start with entirely nothing, however. He began learning music mostly from non-fiddlers. Fred's earliest teachers and main role models were a trumpet player, Joe Kieseweather, and then an accordion player, Al Saharachuk.

As Fred progressed, he was able to learn from available records. Fred learned much of the recorded music of the American fiddler, Tommy Jackson. Fred also learned some classical music from records. Fred eventually bought a 16 rpm record player that allowed him to learn from records at half speed.

Fred is also able to read and write the basics of music. The published music of Don Messer is among the earliest fiddle music that Fred learned, and it wasn't long before Fred was composing and publishing fiddle tunes of his own. One of the first tunes that Fred composed is "Curly Hair," which he composed when he was about 12 years old. It was recorded by Aragon records in Vancouver as a 78 rpm single in 1952. (See also the Discography.) The earliest published music of Fred's can be found in a collection of fiddle tunes published by Empire Publishing in New Westminster, BC for Ned Landry in 1952.

As he began to play professionally and travel across the country, Fred met many other notable Canadian fiddlers, such as King Ganam, Don Messer, Wally Troggett, AI Cherny, Graham Townsend and Calvin Vollrath. It is questionable how much Fred is directly influenced by these other fiddlers. Fred often speaks of his desire to create music which is "different." He has often wondered aloud if the reason for the near demise of fiddle music in many areas of Canada is because of a lack of courage or ability of some fiddlers to play a variety of styles. Most Canadian fiddle contests are a good example of the discouragement of variety of styles.
Fred's music is remarkable for its diversity and range of stylistic influences. It deserves to be exposed to more people! Fred's stories and his way of story telling also deserve an audience as well. In many ways Fred has lived a remarkable life.

What follows is a transcription of a taped interview with Fred recorded in February 1994. It has been an honour and a pleasure to relive, through this story and others, some of the highlights of Fred's life. Here Fred talks a bit about his youth and musical experiences. After this transcription, there will be a little more background and a transcription of another interview to enhance Fred's story.

Well, I'm Fred Lang, yes. I grew up in the Okanagan Valley amongst all the tomato plants and cucumbers, cantaloupe plants, and orchards. And during the war, it was pretty rough goin'. Well, the War come in '39; I was 12 years old. Just a little guy. And I did have a fiddle, but I didn't know much about it, you know, it just used to hang around. I could scratch away on it. Till a neighbour played a trumpet; he showed us how to tune it and keep it up. So he started a bit of a school. There was two or three other guys who played fiddle and one guy played trumpet. And he started a bit of a school. You know, once a week in the winter, when there wasn't no work. And that's how I got to learn how to play the music. Just from this old trumpet player, well, Joe Kieseweather his name was. Many years before he played in the German marching bands over in Germany. And he came across to Osoyoos there, gosh, after the First World War. It was mostly German people in that territory, because it was desert and nobody figured it would ever amount to anything. By gosh, it got to be some of the best agricultural land in the whole Okanagan.

Anyway, after that I just got married (1946), and I worked in the packin' houses, packin' the fruit. Well, I made all kind a' boxes for tomatoes, cucumbers; peach crates were the big thing. They used to pack tomatoes and cucumbers in them. And apricot crates, cherry crates; we used to put the dividers in for cherries. And then the prune crates, they were a little tougher to make because they used a heavier nail, a little harder to nail. And then the cantaloupe crates, they were the worst, nobody wanted to make those. I loved the peach crates, because you only had an inch and a quarter nail. And I could nail a hundred and fifty of those an hour. There was nothin' to makin' a thousand of those a day. But, your wrists soon got tired of, you know, hittin' that. It was just steady
bang all day. And it was hittin’ heavy on a steel railroad track. And that’s what you hammered on. So, every time you hit, why it was solid.

When I was about 20, just past the year 20, I guess the work and every thing and havin’ the baby and lookin’ after every thing, got the best of me. I woke up in the doctor’s office one day. They told me I wouldn’t work any more. So, it kinda’ hits you pretty hard when you’re a young fella just tryin’ to get a family goin’.

So that’s when I couldn’t work, so I got the ole fiddle out. I worked at it pretty hard and I got invited to Penticton then to play in a local band. There was an accordion player, he played really good and I got to learn a lot more about music. But then this heart trouble kept catchin’ up on me. Nobody’d give me work anywhere because they knew that I wouldn’t last.

So, one day the Calgary Range Riders, a group from Calgary, come through town and they came up to where we had our radio program, and the boss, Bill Hilton, he says, “Would you like to come play with us?” I said, “Gosh, I don’t know. It’s a pretty big deal ta leave home and start hittin’ the road and playin’ music, you know.” And I didn’t know the modern stuff at all ‘cause we didn’t have anybody that did any of the singin’. All we did was play Old Time music for dances. And Bill says, “Nope. We just want you for square dances and then you can learn to play the upright bass, and that’s what you’re gonna play while the other dances are on, see.” So, that’s what I did. I learnt to play the bass that first night on stage. They handed me the bass, and said, “Go to it, son.” That’s how I learned the upright bass. And then I’d play the square dances on the fiddle.

But, that was a lot of fun, too. We never made any money, you know. You’d get up in the mornin’, and you’d never have any money. Nobody had any money. And you had to have a hotel room to stay in. You couldn’t leave town because you had to come back with money to pay your hotel room so’s you could leave. And you didn’t get to eat till you got to the next town then where you were playin’. And after a few people paid admission to come to your dance, then you’d send somebody out for hamburgers. And that’s the way you ate many a time, day after day. It was just that way. A lot a’ times we’d just buy a loaf of bread and a ring of garlic sausage.

The winter time was the toughest. We had six guys in one car. And everybody had their instruments, plus the great big bass, plus your suitcase and six guys in one car. And you didn’t really have winter clothes because you weren’t really out in the winter, because you were musicians, you were inside, see. But, you’re travelling along BC, and you gotta go over the mountains. Next thing you know, you’re stuck. Well, the whole works ya have to get out in this blizzard. Three feet a snow on the highway, it’s just a blowin’, you know, and you gotta get yourself out a these drifts. Man, I’m tellin’ ya, we just about froze to death.

I started playin’ with the Calgary Range Riders in December of 1951. We played around BC, and then they had a trip planned fer right ta go to the East Coast. But we only got as far as Ontario, and then the Band kinda’ went haywire there. So, I quit then and went from Orillia where we had a radio show there every day, and I went to Owen Sound where there was a group playin’ there, the Hillbilly Jewels. And I no sooner got there, and the next day I was playin’ with them.

That’s how I got to know Joe Brown and family, and Barry Brown [of the contemporary Canadian country band Family Brown] was just a baby then. So that was in 1952. So, we had the Wilf Carter Show comin’ to town one day, so we thought, well, we wouldn’t book any shows for that night, and we’d go to the Wilf Carter Show. Little did we know that at our radio show in the afternoon at four o’clock, Wilf Carter’s manager was at the radio station waitin’ for us. Apparently, Wilf Carter’s group had quit, and they needed a band for that night to go right on there. So, we got playin’ with Wilf Carter for the rest of that tour.

So, we went right from Owen Sound through Manitoba,
Fred Lang was born October 2, 1926 in Carmen, Manitoba. His family had just immigrated to Canada from Serbia. His father had been with the army and had travelled a lot in Europe and as a result knew six or seven languages. His mother was a little musical. She sang but didn’t play an instrument.

The family had a fairly successful business with relatives in Winnipeg, but a family disagreement led Fred’s family to move west in 1929. The family loaded up the old Model T and headed to BC. Between Grand Forks and Christiana Lake, BC, the car broke down. The family walked to the nearest town to get replacement parts. When they returned, everything of value had been stolen, and what was left had been set on fire. So Fred’s family began their new life in Grand Forks, BC, with virtually nothing, just in time for the Depression.

In Grand Forks, the whole Lang family joined the Firemen’s Hall Marching Band. Fred was given an alto sax to learn to play. But Fred wanted to play the fiddle. In fact, he actually wanted to play classical violin. He’d heard the Happy Gang on CBC Radio and loved the sound of Blain Mathé’s violin.

In 1938, the Lang family moved to Osoyoos in southern BC, and here Fred got his first violin. His family paid $5.00 for it. Joe Kiesewether, the old trumpet player, lived about a quarter mile away from the Langs, and he was Fred’s first fiddle teacher. Joe would tune the fiddle and give Fred a few things to work on. When Fred needed more things to learn or when his fiddle went out of tune, he went back for a lesson from Joe. Fred also learned to read music a bit from Joe.

Fred began learning to play, however, by ear. He learned to play the popular, singable music of the day, such tunes as “Sweet Georgia Brown,” “Don’t Fence Me In,” “In The Mood,” and “Alexander’s Rag Time Band.” Fred wanted to learn music from the Don Messer radio show, but this show came on at 3 pm BC time, when he was supposed to be helping with chores. Fred does remember, though, sneaking away from chores once in a while to listen to the Don Messer Show on the old battery powered radio.

**1945-1955**

By 1945, Fred moved away from Osoyoos, for the first time, to Penticton for work. By this time, Fred played old time fiddle/square dance music, and country music, mostly during his spare time. Fred’s first band in Penticton was the Western Serenaders, whom he played with until 1948. In September 1946, he married his first wife, Elva, and lived in Oliver, near Penticton.

In 1948, Fred began playing with what became known as the Okanagan Ranch Hands, whom he played with until