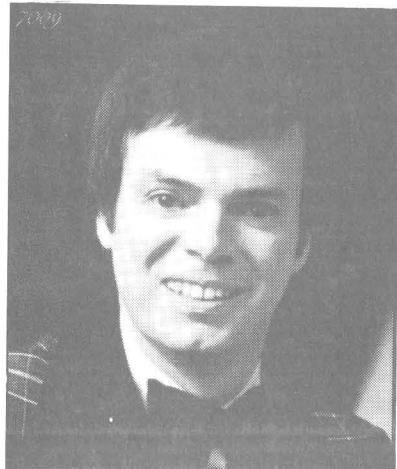


REVIEW



Doug MacPhee: **CAPE BRETON PIANO** (Rounder Records, 7009); **CAPE BRETON PIANO II** (MacPhee Records DMP 6-27). 6

A pair of unusual records, in that it is a piano that is featured as a solo instrument, playing what is usually heard on the fiddle. Cape Breton has a lot of good tunes, and a lot of good fiddlers to play them; here, as something different, is a good pianist playing fiddle music. MacPhee tries, not unsuccessfully, to reproduce the *style* of Cape Breton fiddling. It's still obviously another instrument—a percussive melodic instrument, as opposed to a resonant one, so there are obvious differences in technique and so forth needed (and supplied). To listen to the entire record however (not to say two of them) is something of a labour of love, and I found it not exactly wearing, not exactly monotonous, but just a little too much the

same. When a piano is used to accompany a fiddle, it may get solo work to do, and indeed should, for some of the time at least, if only to provide that measure of variety. When the piano is itself the solo instrument, how does one vary the performance?

Actually, of course, there is variety here, at least in the kind of tunes selected. MacPhee's sources include Robertson's *Athole Collection*, J. Scott Skinner, and Kohler's *Violin Repository*; while some of the more interesting material is collected in Cape Breton and published in the *Doug MacPhee Collection of Traditional Cape Breton Violin Music*.

The sleeve of the first record tells us about the artist and his background—inspired by his mother Margaret, herself a fine pianist, dancer and composer, Duncan MacQuarrie, a respected C.B. violinist “in the Old Tradition”, and others. The second record's liner notes tell us about the music, which is useful. Some of the music is well known all over—Niel Gow's “Farewell to Whisky”, for instance, “The Cock of the North” (a good old *English* tune, mind!), “The Braes o' Mar”, etc. etc. The Cape Breton material, besides traditional/anonymous compositions (“Hills of Cape Mabou”, “The Old King's Reel”), includes compositions by Dan Hughie MacEachern and, particularly, Dan R. MacDonald; and two of the four parts of “Farewell to Whisky” are Cape Breton composed.

All in all, a good couple of records, particularly for the music thereon; the enthusiast will want them, although those not used to solo piano may perhaps taste a few tracks at a time.

Murray Shoolbraid