

[Page 31 - With Pianist Doug MacPhee](#)ISSUE : [Issue 43](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1986/8/1

With Pianist Doug MacPhee As far back as I can remember anything, it's music. I can go back, I suppose, to 3%, 4 years old, hearing music in my home. My mother is a very well-known piano player, as you know--Margaret MacPhee. And when we lived in the old MacPhee home-- that was my grandfather's home; it was left to my mother after my dad died; my dad died when I was very young--most of the fiddlers that were on the go back in those days landed at our house at one time or another. And in those days there was no television. And a ceilidh in the home was a popular thing. Probably Sunday afternoon was a great time for music sessions. And Saturday nights, if there wasn't a dance somewhere, the gang would gather at our place. I can remember former Inverness (County) fiddlers living in New Waterford, like Duncan MacQuarrie, Jack MacNeil, Mary MacDonald, John Archie MacIsaac--people like that coming to the house. Johnny Wilmot lived in Glace Bay at that time. I can even recall one of Johnny Wilmot's sisters being married, and I was no more than 5 years old. And I was allowed to stay up to hear the music. My mother knew I liked music. I can recall Joe Confiant (and) Johnny Wilmot--they were in their heyday-- those two fiddlers playing together. And Alex Basker--that would be Tommy Basker's father--playing the harmonica. He was a terrific harmonica player. He was a big heavyset man. And I can recall him hauling all these little 10-reed harmonicas out of his pocket. He had one for every key. So it didn't matter what key the fiddler played in, he was prepared. And the power he had. He'd be the centre of attraction while he'd be playing. And he could also sit down and perform alone, with the piano--take the lead. In fact, they had a radio program way back--weekly program--Joe Confiant, Alex Basker, and John Willie Morrison on the piano. So anyway, all these performers would come to our place. I can remember sitting on the end of my chair. I can even tell you tunes. I was no more than 5 years old. So, I've heard music all my life. I was extremely interested in players. And I could tell a good player from a fair one and from a bad one. I'd get very excited about certain players. Like, we'll single out Mary MacDonald. Her music excited me. It is Gaelic expression--she had a terrific lift, and a terrific drive to her music. That music just seemed to go through me, it used to put chills up my spine. Did you ever get a bad fright, and your hair seems to rise--you know that feeling that goes through you? Well, that's the way music would affect me, even at that time. And Mary MacDonald's music would do that to me. She was only a tiny woman, but a very strong player--terrific bow hand • And great at the cuttings, you know, putting the cuttings in--very clear, very polished musician. (Was Gaelic part of your home?) No, not really. But I used the term "Gaelic expression" because, I think, as Johnny Wilmot