

Interview with Joey Beaton and Angela. June 30, 1986.

000- Joey Beaton, March 8, 1949. Angela Marie Cameron July 8, 1967.

015- Qualities of a step-dancer.

The most important quality is the ability to keep time. I've taught square dancing in the past and the first item I've always tried to instill in my pupils is the concept of keeping time and I put on examples from different Scottish records and I ask them simply to tap their toe. If they can't keep time or just a foot beat, they'll never be able to get up and step dance or do the Mabou shuffle or the hop.

(Angela) You have to be able to keep time. In order to perform at your best you have to have a good peppy fiddler and piano player or your just... You may have a first-class step-dancer and a good violinist but if you have a pianist who is an 8th late with the chord, the whole thing is unbalanced. Everything has to be coordinated. A lot of the step-dancers go off the timing especially in the reels. We observe that. Once you go off beat it's very hard to get back on. You kind of have to stop. A good step-dancer will very gracefully slide back into the tempo of the tune. A good step-dancer should never go off the beat. That's the most important thing.

084- Position of the body.

You should stand straight. Shoulders back, you shouldn't be slouched forward. The hands should never be moving when you are step dancing. They should be just held by your side, just relaxed. It should be just your feet moving. You see step dancers where their knees are kindof going with their feet. But it should be just their feet moving. No other part of the body should be moving. (Joey) The mechanism of the whole body should really let go. You can't be stiff. You have to loosen your whole body. I like to see a step dancer that puts their whole body into it. It's got to be relaxed, poised, and polished.

117- Distance of feet from the floor.

(Angela) I heard from older people like my parents if you're hoppy or you raise your feet high off the floor, then you'll never make a good step-dancer. You shouldn't raise your feet off the floor too high. You see a lot like this at square dances in the third figure.

(Joey) One of the best step-dancers is Harvey Beaton. He's polished, poised, presentable, straight, well-groomed.

142- Stage presentation.

Stage presentation adds a lot to it too. You have to smile to the audience. It depends where you are but if you're at a concert performing for people, you're performing. But if you are at a dance in a square set, you aren't performing. Doing a step-dance, the performer side of you comes out (even within the square dance context). A smile can add so much to that presentation. I heard Father Angus mentioning that a good step-dancer never looks down at the floor. A good step-dancer looks out at the crowd. It's most important for the step-dancer (more than the

musicians) because they are right out there in front. They are front and foremost.

189- How and where Angela learned.

My first lessons were taken when I was 7 years old by Father Angus MacDonald, from Deepdale. He was supposed to be one of the top step-dancers around. I was first introduced to step-dancing through him. That was the first time I ever tried or saw step dancing. It was never in my home. I was always interested in it after that. Then Mary Janet gave lessons so I decided to learn a few more steps from her. After that I made up steps on my own and watching other step-dancers and trying to imitate them.

215- Memory.

It's a natural process. I think of a few steps ahead. I just do the steps I think of. I have approx. 60 steps between strathspey and reel. Some people have more. Harvey Beaton has more and the Warner sisters have more, about 100. It depends. The steps are done spontaneously. Maybe other people do, but not me.

246- Joey taught square dancing.

I didn't go into step-dancing. The shuffle is done to a jig and the hop is done to the reel. (He plays and she demonstrates). I tap with my left foot. It's tap shuffle, tap shuffle. The hop and the shuffle are the two basic categories and within that there are specific steps. Everyone gives their own names to it. When I teach, I make a list of the steps to be taught, like the hop step shuffle of the back step, or heel toe shuffle. They are descriptive of the movements. I put different names than Mary Janet. (She would give us a list of the names she gives). She'd only teach 2 or 3 steps in a lesson. There were 10 to 15 in a class. I could get the students to keep time but when it came time to keep time and dance with the music, they couldn't do it. It was all off beat. You really have to watch the timing. You have to be able to interpret the tune. It's better if you know it. This is lacking in the educational system. They should teach this in schools. They don't teach dance in school at all. Joey taught square dancing in Brook Village and in Mabou. This is a night class and there was a mixture of young and old. I taught at the historical society too. They have french immersion but not scottish culture in school. Like at Mabou ceilidh there was too much rock and roll.

378- Teaching Square dancing.

I knew quite a number of the calls myself, but I resorted to a couple of resource people who had been dance goers over the years and who had danced a tremendous number of square sets back into the early fifties when Winston Fitzgerald used to play in Glenville. So I had access to a couple of people who were very up on the different calls. One of them was ?? Smith (385). He sat down with me and we wrote them up and I typed them and had them for distribution. It's sad to say the square sets are not being danced today. But they were in the fifties. The version that Joey

gave us is the version that would have been danced in the fifties. It was the Inverness County Square sets, the type of sets they danced in Inverness, Port Hood, Judique, and Mabou. There were three figures. If you go back a little bit beyond that they used to do the fourth figure. But I didn't teach the 4th figure. I only had the three.

You've probably seen in Glencoe, to a set, they probably had about 10 or 12 couples. It should only be four. And that, to me, degrades the whole concept of square dancing. You gotta dance in a square set with four couples to really feel how good it is. But you rarely get this now.

400- Why the Change?

Maybe people aren't as knowledgeable about it. But you're in competition with your rock bands. People have a tendency to let their culture fall by the wayside. You see a lot of younger ones dancing the square sets now and I don't think they really realize the right way to dance the sets. They just jump in and they dance. Also, a lot of them can't keep time.

410- Senior Square Set.

For the concert, they only did the third figure. They don't do the first figure properly. It's complicated and perhaps that's why they don't do it. Whereas the 2nd figure, you dance with your partner and it's only a matter of promenading to the left. I'd say once the square dances in Glencoe die out, I really feel that you'll have completed the cycle of square dancing on Cape Breton Island. It's the only one left on Cape Breton Island. It's the only dance that has survived a weekly dance with only square dancing. And it's dry dancing, no liquor involved. In the 60's now, they had one practically every night of the week. (431) Monday nights in Brook Village. Tuesdays in Southwest Margaree. Wednesdays in Mabou. Thursdays in Brook Section down near Broad Cove. Friday nights Strathlorne Legion Hall. Saturday nights in Mabou. They were running two in Mabou in the sixties.

435- Fading.

It began to fade because the local organizations began to bring in hard rock bands. It's fine when you have people visiting Cape Breton, at the peak of the tourist season. You can't get a crowd in Glencoe once September comes. The crowd drops. You're catering to the influx of tourists. A lot of them are people who were born here coming home for the summer. We all feel very good about Glencoe and it's a great meeting ground it's a great place to share ideas and music. I really feel it will vanish. It's not a vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler but the vanishing Cape Breton square dancing. However, about 7 years ago, the Glencoe dances were really dead. There were very few going and all of a sudden, they revived about five years ago. Everybody all of a sudden started going to them. But you don't have continuity year round. You only get that at the 8 week period during the summer when there are a lot of tourists dying to come home and go to a square dance. They don't have them every night anymore because they can't compete with these big rock bands that are coming in. The Glencoe dances now are strong. They were strong too in

1967 and 68, when they started. I played with Buddy MacMaster there on a small organ. And I had to pump it all. Glencoe Mills, they are a part of the Brook Village Parish and they were trying to assist the parish as much as they could so they decided to convert their school house into a dance hall. They got together and they renovated and they started their dances and they were extremely successful and were packed from the first night. And then the first thing they had to do was extend their hall so they applied for a grant and they received government help and they expanded. They put the addition in the centre of the building and that's where the canteen area is.

Side B

000- Dry square dance last year after the Broad Cove Concert.
(Angela taught T-Ball in the area last year.)

Needed to raise money for the league. So they decided to put on a dry square dance after the Broad Cove concert on Sunday night. They thought they could raise a few hundred dollars. They weren't sure because the Saturday night just before there had been a dance with three fiddlers. People told them they wouldn't get anyone. So he asked Kinnon and Buddy, because he felt these two could draw the crowd. So they put the dance on and charged 4.00 dollars admission. They cleared a thousand dollars that night. That was at the Mabou Hall. It was a wonderful fun-filled evening. People danced all night. It was packed. And that was probably the first dry square dance there in how many years.

161- Dry Square Dances.

My mother and father played at them from 1960-1970 approximately. They packed the hall every Saturday night over there. The admission was 50 cents and the dance began at 10:00 and went until 12:00. For ten consecutive years, they packed that hall. Then they started competing with the "pig and whistle" (dances with liquor) dances. The neighbouring communities would bring in bands and have a bar, the little dry square dances fell along the wayside. The "pig and whistles" have been a big factor in this, the "wet dances". My mother and father were receiving the great renumeration of 20.00 dollars for his fiddling all night and my mother got 10.00 dollars for her piano playing. They did that for ten years. Thirty dollars they brought home. We felt really proud because we were successful in putting in a dry dance at the Mabou Hall. The only reason we took the chance was we felt the element of risk wasn't high because you had a great flow of traffic coming from the Broad Cove Concert and they would be kind of geared up for a dance. We caught them and we were lucky. Although, there was a dance going on in Dunvegan. They had a square dance and a one man band. I think we would be very happy if we could ever resort to the days of the dry Cape Breton square dance because they were at their best. Brook Village Hall was packed every Monday night. Theresa MacLellan, I played with Theresa there in the summer of 1968 or 69 and she packed that hall every Monday night and Tuesday nights Cameron Chissohlm was packing the Southwest Margaree

Hall--- Cameron and Maybelle.

118- Round-dancing.

To a certain degree, I think square dancing might have had a somewhat small effect here in the Mabou area. But yet I remember my father, he was trying to cater to what the people wanted. Their wants at that time were simply, they wanted an evening of half square and half round. I must say myself, I found that most enjoyable too. I thoroughly enjoyed nice round-dancing. We are talking 1965, 66. I was 17. I remember in 1967, I was playing at square dances over in Glendale with Buddy MacMaster and I remember my father was looking for round-dance music for Saturday night in Mabou because people wanted to round and square. Just as I finished up with Buddy in Glendale, I turned to this round-dancing. I played round-dancing for a few years myself too in Mabou because I know my father was anxious. They wanted to have a singer and a guitarist and a piano. Often on occasion too I'd play round-dance pieces and a guitarist would accompany me--- "Your Cheating Heart"---you know, these songs. Just very nice simple round-dance pieces, but people really loved them. We'd integrate about 20 minutes of round-dancing between each square set and it worked well, the floor would be filled. They had round-dancing in the fifties at Glenville where Fitzgerald played. Winston Fitzgerald played at Midway Hall in Glenville. It's not up there any more but that was midway between Mabou and Inverness. There was a dance hall there owned by Donald MacClellan. But Winston Fitzgerald, his orchestra comprised with round dance music as well as square dance music. But he had a saxophone player and a pianist and guitarist. They did instrumentals and Winston, on occasion, would play waltzes as well, old-fashioned round waltzes. This has been happening gradually. In the 50's and 60's.

171- Scotch four and 8-handed reels.

He didn't know about that. I was at the occasional concert at Broad Cove where I was watching Scotch Fours. It must've been when I was 10 or 12 years old---around 1960.

184- Priest involvement in music and culture.

The priest can be a very staunch supporter in that he can sort of integrate the whole thing, the religion and the culture. Father Gene Angus Rankin, he does that beautifully. I talked to a fiddler a week ago and he said Father Gene Angus Rankin has something in him that he can take the best out of any fiddler no matter how good that fiddler is. He can get the best out of a fiddler. Not all priests can do that, but he's one that can.

198- Dance Prohibition.

Never have I heard they tried to stop the dancing. But I heard that approx. 110 or 115 years ago they tried to stop the violin playing. They felt there was a devilish spirit or something of this nature connected with the music. There is a story where Father Kenneth MacDonald, who was

parish priest here, set out to collect all the violins in the Mabou area during his ten year here as parish priest. I never heard anything on the dancing part.

218- Violin Styles.

You see a difference in the violin playing for example in Margaree---the Chisholms and another great violinist who has passed on, the late Angus Allen Gillis, he was from Southwest Margaree, Gillisdale to be exact. These people were well-known musicians. Their music was unique to the Margarees and Inverness County; same as the Mac Lellans over at Princeville in Inverness County, Theresa and all. Donald is especially an excellent strathspey player---the old time traditional strathspeys whereas Theresa excels in the Marches, she's probably the greatest Cape Breton fiddler of Marches.

241- Mabou Area violin styles.

There is very distinct fiddling in Mabou. The style that is probably most well-known for Mabou fiddling is termed the Mabou coal mines musical style. Father Hughie MacDonald wrote on the record The Beatons of Mabou he explains, "The Gaelic expression is achieved through the highly developed employment of bow triplets or cuts as they are called in Cape Breton and the use of ?? picato the art of bouncing the bow to achieve several distinct notes without reversing bow directions. Donald Angus is especially a master of this difficult technique achieved with the middle half of the bow. In the example of the old-time wedding reel (on the record Legacy) it was a perfect example of this bowing technique. That was a characteristic that was very representative of the Mabou Coal Mines style. Both the Gaelic expression in the music as well as the bowing technique. There are few violinists today that are playing the Cape Breton fiddling and utilizing that very skillfull technique of bowing.

270- Other players.

For slow aires you think of Winnie Chafe, Buddy MacMaster. Buddy has a style of his own unique to the Judique area. Natalie MacMaster, you always hear the overtones of the uncle, Buddy MacMaster in her music. The influence of all these violinists are coming out in the younger generations. I even hear overtones of the late Mary MacDonald in Natalie's fiddling. She sounds a great deal like my dad's first cousin. So I think that'd be tremendous if you'd get overtones of the Mabou Coal Mines Style along with the Buddy MacMaster style of Judique.

283- Willie Kennedy.

Willie Kennedy came from Kenloch. Willie has his own unique style of playing. Another well-known family, the Campbells of Glenora Falls. A very musical family and violins do excell in the Mabou Coal Mines musical style because the family relationships that go back with the Beatons in the family tree. I've gone back 170 years into the Beaton tree and I've found my grandmother, my dad's mother was a first cousin to John Campbell's father. So that musical stream of Campbells and Beatons is flowing right in the Campbell blood. It's been fed from two streams. You

can't miss it. So when you listen to violin tapes of Donald Campbell and John Campbell and you hear the bouncing and the lilting bow with which they play those strathspeys it's no wonder it's there, it's in the plasm of their blood.

304- Music belonging to families.

Interpretations belong to certain families. I think of one tune in particular Farewell to Whiskey. I've heard Donald MacLellan's interpretation of it with his sister Marie on piano, they've recorded that on an album. It's as beautiful an interpretation you could listen to. Then I play my own tapes and I hear Mary MacDonald's interpretation of it. Mary plays it a little slower. It's the same tune and both of them play it with a tremendous degree of excellence. To me I think it's more of an interpretation than of a family really owning the thing. But if you get into compositions there's more of an ownership thing. I remember Jerry Holland when he recorded his last album with Hilda Chiasson and David MacIsaac, Jerry phoned me and asked me if he could put one of my reels on. To me that's an honour. And that'll go out on thousands of copies. So I release ownership. They don't have to phone me, but they're paying you a compliment.

333- Cape Breton Repertoire.

It is wide open. Buddy MacMaster plays so many of the tunes that Winston Fitzgerald played. And vice-versa. There's just a set group of tunes that every one of them are playing. Theresa MacClellan, Kinnon, Buddy, John Morris, Willie Kennedy, and it's sort of the nucleus of the whole thing. It's always good to hear a fiddler come out with a newly composed jig or something. It keeps the interest. It keeps people wondering and listening.

343- Number of tunes a fiddler has.

Rather difficult question. Some have forgotten as many as they know over the years. I'd be only guessing to say 3 or 4 thousand.

350- Music for a set.

In a square set, if the set is danced properly, four couples to the set, you can get by with about 2 or 3 jigs. You are talking approx. 3 minutes per figure. Some of the fiddlers are playing them too long. Once the set gets into 10 minutes, it's dragging.

360- End.