



Air Chéilidh: the Gaelic Narrative Project

April 9, 2021

Hosted by Margie Beaton

Guests: Margie MacInnis, Mary Janet MacDonald, Dale Gillis.

Greetings and Gathering

- So lovely to see so many people from Scotland, despite the late hour. • 'S math ur faicinn! Good to see everyone!
- Hello everyone! So many familiar faces!
- A bheil Gàidhlig aig duine sam bith? (Does anyone speak Gaelic?) • Tha Gàidhlig agam. Agus tha fhios gu bheil aig cuid eile. (I speak Gaelic, and I know others do.)
- This is so lovely to see all the faces I usually see at the dances but haven't seen in two years since I'm stuck in Ontario.
- Tha, tha Gàidhlig aig feadhainn seo! (Folks on here have Gaelic.) • Don't think I've ever been to a ceilidh and didn't see Dale!
- I believe there was a port-á-beul made for Dale and his travelling to dances!!
- Tha Gàidhlig agam cuideachd. (I speak Gaelic)
- I'm in Halifax and haven't seen many of these faces in a year! • Agus mise (I speak Gaelic)

- Roddy McInnis says hi to Dale Gillis!
- Halò Alasdair 'S math ur faicinn a rithist (Hi Alasdair. Nice to see you.) • Hello Dale, 'S fhada bhon uairsin! (Hello Dale, long time no see.)

Gratitude and Happiness

- Such a precious legacy from Margie and Jimmy in the West Mabou Dance! • Mary Janet welcomed the world to Cape Breton through Tunes and Wooden Spoons.
 - My first experience dancing in square sets was because of Mary Janet, and her VHS tape. I have been SO grateful to her for that.
 - I second the 'happy music' theory!
 - Happy music! yes!
 - Good for the soul!
 - Excellent observation Dale... the unconfined joy of a dance! •
- Definitely Uplifting!
- Love this conversation!
 - Love seeing all ages at the dances!
 - I've had a smile on my face the whole time during this conversation! I second that about the happiness of the dances!
 - Wonderful!
 - Yay for Margie and Jimmy!!! Love them both!!
 - Great Poem!
 - Thank you for sharing your poem with us, Margie! XO
 - Mine and my daughter's lives would be very different were it not for West Mabou dances and Jimmy and Margie!
 - Great inspiration to have kept a record of all those dances! Bravo. • That beautiful poem sums it all up! May the dances continue for our children and grandchildren!
 - Very pleasant way to survive lockdown in Ottawa! Wish we could fly in now!!!
 - Great topic and guests.
 - Thank you all for sharing your stories and time with us! Could just keep listening to the conversation!!
 - Thank you for all the wonderful stories!

- Enjoying this evening with the stories and guests!
- You are all gems!!
- What a wonderful evening! May the dance go on!

Memories stirred

- I've enjoyed meeting two enthusiastic dancers and remembering the community dances of my youth.
- I was at Glencoe that night, it was amazing to be there and hearing all those stories.
- I remember having Ryan Lamey in the set next to me. He drove all the way from Boston for the West Mabou dance, stayed at his aunt's overnight and drove right back that same weekend. He told me he had a grind of a week and just needed a good dance.
- Jimmy's wake was the most amazing thing I've ever experienced. Truly magical.
- I love how the floor in West Mabou has that give and how you can feel it • You learn where the best spots in the hall are to dance!
- And the hump in the floor by the piano in West Mabou...
- Yes, when the floor gives and bounces. Goosebumps!
- Memories of dancing with Danny Hector, Mr. McKay and Mr. MacArthur and Ginger. If I saw them my dance card was full for the night
- I remember my first Glencoe Mills Dance in 2016, it was Joe MacMaster's debut playing for his first full dance at Glencoe.
- First Cape Breton dance was Glencoe during Celtic Colours driving with Burton over the mountain in heavy rain!
- That was the night somebody had the idea that the floor at Glencoe Mills wasn't slippery enough, so they polished the floor. It was pandemonium, bodies flying off the dance floor left and right
- Father Angus MacDonnell was my first dance teacher and he was the best dancer I ever saw . . . his ankles were all cartilage, I think
- Many great memories of dances in Cape Breton--what Dale said about the people, and just the amazing music, really rings true. But I also have great memories of the Cape Breton dances in Toronto. Many great memories of going back to Malcolm and Shirley MacDonald's, where the musicians would stay, and the music would carry on until well after the sun came up.

Great people, great fun, and great music and dance.

- I was just remembering AJ and his kicks!

What stood out for you in the conversation you just heard? What moved you?

- Talking about Margie's journals of the dances reminded me that I used to keep a journal back in the late 1990's-early 2000's. I just looked at a couple, and I can see who was playing, who I danced with, and even the silliest details like the floor being sticky at Scotsville one night.
- Something lost and something gained -- great way to capture the difference between the "old sets" and those we dance today.
- The grass is always greener - we can't wait to get back to Cape Breton, and the folk we spoke to want to get back to Scotland!
- So many wonderful friends found on the dance floor. Smiles and greeting people at the dances have been such a highlight for our nights at the dance!
- Dale was so right about the happiness effect at the dances, the music, the community.
- What struck me was that I learned there is no generation gap at Cape Breton dances! That is a precious and special thing that should be cherished.
- That first dance back is going to be overwhelming I'm sure! • How connected the music, dance and Gaelic language are and how good that feels in my heart, to be part of a deep, beautiful, integrated culture. • Celtic music has the best frequency for wellness...we all know that truth! Beats out Classical.
- Do we expect that the Cape Breton square dances can return to their thriving selves after the pandemic? And will we remember the formations and routines?
- For me it's the sound of the fiddle as you are walking up to the dance when you first get out of the car. The anticipation of the dance.
- The joy of listening to the music with my feet!
- The joyful aspect of dance is so important and something not to be lost. • We need some pandemic routines so we can get back into the hall or onto the tennis court at West Mabou

- Recalling the joy of the dance hall...such great stories... makes me lonesome for the dance hall.
- Conversations left me feeling grateful! Can't wait to get back to the dances - such connection, joy, story, Gàidhlig, song ... and more.
- Even seeing a dancer elsewhere makes you smile in recognition and a nod across a grocery aisle or passing on the street.
- Great stories and wonderful energy. In my breakout room, I was saying what a great resource Margie's journal and dance books would be. • Love to hear more stories about dancers and the fiddlers • I am touched by how Margie kept a record of the dances. She was aware that she and Jimmy were doing something important, I think. • Hearing about the stories for Buddy after the dance, sounded like a lovely tribute to the man.

What is missed.

- Miss the pulsating rhythm of the dance floor!
- I miss the KEY CHANGE
- Missing Gus MacDonald, Lawrence MacDonald, Sandy Cameron, Dannie Hector and the golden boys at the front of the hall at West Mabou • I miss it all - the driving music, the great dancers, lively sets, great conversations and stories with really terrific folks of all ages. I think the first Brook Village dance will blow the roof off

Discussion on the Square Sets

- Hi from Scotland You talk of square dance sets Do the dances have names I am assuming that they differ from Royal Scottish Country Dances. • The square dances here are descendants of the quadrilles. I believe that a lot of our dances here are based on Lancers and Caledonians.
- Alasdair ... they are all referred to as Cape Breton square dances... different regions of the island have set variations.
- At Christmas Island it is a jig and two reels.
- Some dances in the Western Isles did not start until 11:00 pm and finish at 3:00am
- Then back to house ceilidhs after 3am Alasdair!
- In Scotland quadrilles had at least 5 movements You didn't need to visit the gym.

- There was a book from about 20 years ago called **Right to the Helm** that described some of those local set variations.
- Do you do Strip the Willow in Canada?

Parting words

- This was amazing . . . thank you to all of you!!!! A lot more freedom of expression in step dancing. The music is like the glove and the dance the fingers...
- Loved the sharing from everyone.
- Another great evening--congratulations, agus tapadh leibh gu mor • Tapadh leibh uile!
- What a fantastic lift to the spirit!
- What a wonderful evening!
- Mar sin leibh, agus mòran taing!
- Thanks for keeping the Gaelic and Highland traditions going! • This has been so wonderful tonight! Just thinking about the wonderful spirit in the halls & the great times with friends and family and the music with the floor bouncing. Drive 'er!
- Chair dancing here
- Tha mi air bhioran airson an ath-sheachdain (I am looking forward to next week.)
- Loved your contributions!
- Tapadh leibh, bha sin spòrsail. (Thank you that was fun.) • Such fun!
- Suas e!
- Weeehoooo!
- That filled my heart right up!
- Thank you for a lively evening and beautiful memories about the dances, which will continue soon I hope!! Margie B, Margie MI, Mary Janet and Dale.....keep er going!
- This has been amazing!
- I am danced out!
- I'm going to be grinning all night now.
- I loved it!

• That was fun! Hope to attend a dance in a safer time! Thank you! •

I'm all sweaty now!

• See you next week!

• Hope the dances are back later this summer!

• Out of shape and hard to dance in socks on carpet, but fun! •

Thank you so much for a wonderful evening!

• Helps immensely!

• What a beautiful evening! It was so lovely to hear all the great stories and memories. And it was great to get a little exercise at the end! I can't wait to get back to the dances.

• Tapadh leibh gu mòr! Loved all the stories and the good cheer. So looking forward to when we can have dances again

• Great fun! Nice to meet some new folks and hope to meet more in the future! Slàinte!

• That was sweet! Thank you getting us on our feet. What a hoot!!! Only in Cape Breton, eh?

• 'S math rinn sibh uile!! (you all did well)

• Thank you Margie, Dale, Mary Janet, and Margie, and all those who help put this together!

• Tapadh leibh gu mòr, bha siud gabhaidh fhein math. Thanks so much-- great evening!

• Such a boost! Great evening

• Thank you for this wonderful conversation, it will help keep us going until we can be together again on the dance floor.