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A Talk with Marie MacLellan, Pianist I never heard it called a fiddle. It was always a violin in our home. You check the dictionary, if I'm not mistaken. You'll find that in the dictionary that a fiddle is a part of a dishwasher. My father and my brothers and Theresa never ever called it a fiddle. It was always a violin. Even J. Scott Skinner, the great big classical Scottish violin player, he called it "violinist." Violinists are what they should be recognized as. They are violinists. (You don't think "fiddle" is respectful.) Well, it's respectful enough, the word. But to me, just my own humble opinion, it cheapens them. (It does have a lighter sense to it.) Sure it does. And I think our players in Cape Breton are above that. I think they deserve to be called violinists. They are real professional musicians, and I think it's a violin they are capable of playing. My father, Big Ronald, he was a great musician. (How did he become a violin player?) I can't understand it. We could never figure it out, why he was such a great violin player. Because he never had any special training. He just grew up, and he'd be in different places playing different violins. I don't believe he even owned a violin, when he was young. But he became one of the great violin players of his time. He never did explain to us, he never told us why he was such a great violin player. But I always thought that it was a gift from God that he had. He didn't learn, in any specific way, except what he just picked up on his own. So it had to be a gift from God. (What did he do to make his living?) Blacksmith by trade. He was in Inverness a long, long time. He blacksmithed. My father was noted for this: he'd take the most cross, kicky horse. And he'd just take him and he'd throw him. He had some knack--I remember him as a child--he'd take that cross horse and he'd just turn him over--like with one hand on his back. And he'd tie his feet, and he'd shoe him. He used to work at this heavy, heavy work. Eight, nine, ten horses a day. And you'd say, well, his hands were so calloused and rough. And he'd take the violin and he'd play the most delicate, professional tune that you've ever listened to. So it had to be a gift--I still say it was a gift. And many, many, many people, even in this day, would tell you that--what a delicate violin player, and yet what rough work. My mother played the organ. She was a professional organist. When she was a young girl, she used to play in the church hall. She used to play with my father, all different places. Anywhere he played, she played as well. That's gone out, but that is beautiful--organ and violin together. Nicest music that you can listen to. We had one of those small pump organs, that you pump with your feet. That's where I started to learn. (So you didn't play piano first.) Well, I'll tell you. I wasn't very well-to-do. I was sort of poor in my time, like when I was small. Our people didn't really have too much. So as a kid, I took up the guitar, and I used to play a few chords on the guitar. And Teresa and I used to play for dances. We'd go to different places. I could carry the guitar with me and I could play to accompany her. And then when we came home, of course, we'd switch back to the organ again. But she and I played a lot of dances, just with the guitar, to make a few dollars. But when I got older, and I left home and I came down here, I said. Now, 'first money I make--first year I work and the first money I earn--I'm going to



buy a piano. So that's what I did. And I started to play the piano shortly after coming down here. Well, I wasn't very old when I came down here. I was, I guess, in my 20s, probably. I didn't play piano to start, because we didn't have any. I always wanted one though. All my lifetime I wanted a piano. I'll tell you how I learned to play the organ. Mama played it. And she'd be after you not to be at it--"Leave it alone," you know, "leave the organ alone--don't be at the organ." And she'd go to the organ and she'd play for awhile. Just when she'd get away from the organ, I'd go and I'd start-- and I'd try to do what she was doing. So