

# 41st PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

*[Oral Questions]*

### Foreign Affairs

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):**

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. It relates to Canada's support for Ukraine. We all join the Prime Minister in condemning Putin's aggression, but the extent of Canada's involvement with Ukraine does not appear on the DFATD website. We learned through the media of RADARSAT-2 data being provided to Ukraine, initially over the objections of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of National Defence.

I hear that there may be memorandum of understanding between Canada and Ukraine. I would like the Prime Minister to confirm that and let the House know when it will be tabled with Parliament.

(1510)

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear throughout this that Canada is standing with the people of Ukraine in the face of Vladimir Putin's military aggression and we have made significant contributions directly to Ukraine. We have been part of the NATO assurance package. Whether it takes five months or 50 years, we will stand with the people of Ukraine for their independence and their freedom.

## Private Members' Business

*[Private Members' Business]*

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):**

"Now, what would you kids like me to play for you?"

Mr. Speaker, that is what my grandfather used to say every time he started playing when I was little. He got his violin out of its old case, and in the comforting glow of the wood stove that my grandmother cooked everything on, he played the strings that unite us to this day. The old farmhouse floors creaked under the dancing feet of all 20 of us grandchildren and the 16 adults

who made up our extended family. That was in the 1950s, but I remember it as if it were yesterday.

Bill S-218 would designate national fiddling day, and I have to say that I am very happy to talk about this. Of course, it is a shame that Bill S-218 came from the Senate, not the House of Commons, but I fully support the idea of designating a national fiddling day.

From Newfoundland to British Columbia to Quebec and the Prairies, fiddling has been bringing people together all over Canada for a long time. The traditional music canon bears witness to the many waves of immigration to Canada, making the fiddle the ultimate inclusive instrument. Fiddling draws on so many sources, and we can detect the influence of Scottish and Irish communities as well as French and **Ukrainian** ones in the pieces we play here in Canada. The instrument has fostered cultural fusions that are now part of our shared culture. Consider the very famous Quebec folk music group, Le rêve du diable, whose name comes from a reel, an Irish dance, called *The Devil's Dream*.

Creating this national day represents an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of the fiddle in our communities. It definitely plays a very important role in my riding, Joliette. For many people, Joliette is synonymous with music. Our slogan is "Joliette, sol de musique". We have the renowned Festival de Lanaudière, which brings together the finest classical musicians from here and around the world every year to play in a superb amphitheatre with incredible acoustics.

I invite all members of the House to join us at Festival de Lanaudière, which is held in late July and early August. Of course, the musicians are sheltered on stage, but the lawn can accommodate between 7,000 and 8,000 people. Spectators can enjoy their supper while listening to the music.

Our beautiful region has been a springboard for many traditional groups, including some you may have heard of: Bottine souriante, Belzébuth, les Poules à Colin and Les charbonniers de l'enfer. They did not all start in Joliette, but many of them developed there and recorded albums or performed their first shows there.

I appreciate the merits and beauty of the classical violin every year at the festival in Lanaudière, but the fiddle allows for more spontaneity, which makes it more accessible. I am pleased that we have this opportunity to talk about the social role it has played in our communities. The fiddler is more than a musician; he or she brings people together and is a communicator, a focal point that connects everyone. When fiddlers come together they can improvise reels for hours, to the delight of the toe-tappers around them.

In families, at lumber camps, at Christmas and Hallowe'en, the fiddle has made a tremendous contribution to Canada's heritage and development. It has helped weave Canada's social and cultural fabric and I am very pleased that we are recognizing the importance of that contribution. In the riding of Joliette, traditional music is still an important part of our culture today, as you can see at the Mémoires et Racines festival held at the end of July. What is more, the Joliette CEGEP has made a name for itself by offering a specialized program in traditional music. We also have a radio station back home that plays nothing but traditional music.

(1850)

You must also go to Saint-Côme to appreciate the importance of our traditional music, because in that area music groups are named after families. These families have their own particular style of singing, moving and interacting. The strong presence of traditional music, and thus of fiddling, is indisputable in Joliette.

Fiddling is important and prevalent throughout the entire Lanaudière region. Not very far from my riding, you will find the Camp de Violon Traditionnel Québécois de Lanaudière, a wonderful asset for the entire region. Its president, the talented fiddler André Brunet, supports this bill. In highlighting the role of fiddling in Quebec culture, he said:

If any instrument is as authentic as our emotions in the whirl and swirl of a gathering, it is certainly the violin, an integral part of the dance that sweeps us away, that brings us together and tugs at our heartstrings.

Mr. Brunet added:

Each of us is a fiddler at heart.

The president of the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Association, Graham Sheppard, also supports this bill. He said:

Amid the turmoil that surrounds us and the difficult decisions that this House has to make, it is refreshing to stand and be part of this effort. For the thousands of fiddlers and lovers of fiddle music in Canada, a National Fiddling Day will be a cherished annual event. Also, this will give each of us the encouragement to foster the preservation and growth of fiddle music in the regions that we represent and throughout Canada.

In my opinion, these comments from people in the community show that this proposal has a lot of support and a laudable goal. I spoke about my grandfather, but I am sure that many members of the House had fiddlers in their families. That is why this bill is getting so much support. I am sure that everyone here will vote in favour of it.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is good news for Canadian heritage. I encourage everyone in the House to support this bill.

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to speak on Bill S-218, an act respecting National Fiddling Day, which would designate the third Saturday in May each and every year as national fiddling day. Bill S-218 would align in both content and spirit with World Fiddle Day, an annual day first commemorated in 2013, which celebrates the fiddle, the violin as some would call it, family of instruments.

National fiddling day would increase the understanding of the history of fiddling in Canada, would promote musical collaboration and offer an opportunity for community engagement and entertainment. In doing so, this national day would link rural and urban settings, multi-generations of Canadians and multicultural groups to the vast range of styles comprised in the art of fiddling.

As we all know, the fiddle is commonly played at important Canadian events. Fiddling is rooted in Canadian culture. It unites our lineage yet reflects regional diversity and culture, which is French, Inuit, Metis, first nations, **Ukrainian**, Scottish, Irish, Acadian and so on. They all play the fiddle through its various different styles.

Canada recognizing such a day would provide an opportunity not only to celebrate the fiddle as an instrument but also to celebrate fiddling itself: the men and women who bring this music to life; the entertainment; the coming together of family, friends, and community; and the celebration of our unique and distinctive cultures that find such a melodic expression through the fiddle. Indeed, the influence of exchanges between many cultures contributes to the evolution and diversification of fiddling music.

I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the origins of fiddling as it relates to my riding and the entire island of Cape Breton. The tradition of the fiddle lives on in Cape Breton where we are fortunate enough to have a number of world-class fiddlers such as Ashley MacIsaac, Natalie MacMaster, former premier Rodney MacDonald, Buddy MacMaster, Howie MacDonald, and of course the Rankin Family band who carried Cape Breton music to an international audience. It seems that even the most famous Cape Breton musicians are considered as friends and fellow members of the larger music community. Natalie, Ashley and the Rankin Family are all members

of the Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association, which was formed in 1973 and will celebrate its 42nd anniversary this year in Boston.

During the 19th century, thousands of Highland Scots emigrated to Cape Breton. Members just have to look in a phone book in Cape Breton and they will see the Macs are everywhere. They brought with them such a rich cultural tradition that dominates the island to this day. Traditional Celtic music remains as braided into the Maritimes' energy, beauty and personality as a tartan is to kilts. Communities and the Gaelic culture were transplanted to Cape Breton, bringing the traditional fiddle style of the highlands and the islands with them.

Cape Breton fiddle music is unique in many ways, with a complex cultural history and its profound relationship with social identity on Cape Breton Island. Cape Breton fiddle music continues to thrive and evolve because it is not simply an historical artifact or a cultural curiosity but rather a vital, evolving and regenerating musical form. Cape Breton fiddling has slowly evolved with the careful guidance of family and the local community.

Cape Breton fiddling, up until even the early 1980s, was often referred to as Scottish fiddling or Cape Breton Scottish music. The term "Cape Breton fiddling" may also have become more common as our global community has become more accessible, given that international contact and communication has increased. Perhaps with growth in air travel, technology and communications, Cape Breton musicians and music fans have grown to see differences between their music and Scottish, Irish and other music to deem it acceptable to call their traditional music by its own name. No longer is a Cape Breton musician required to be called a Scottish fiddler, or an Irish player, he or she is now referred to as a Cape Breton fiddler, which is less confusing. However, influences from other styles still exist or continue to be imported, exchanged and adapted to the general Cape Breton traditional style.

We have many workshops in Cape Breton at The Gaelic College where people come from all over the world to exchange their ideas and their form of music. This further emphasizes the unique and cultural diversity associated with the art of fiddling, as it is a craft that has been influenced by many diverse cultures.

(1900)

In rural Cape Breton, early Scottish settlers were able to preserve their highland style through a strong need to continue both their dance music and their oral cultural forms. These old and interdependent traditions were the basis of local entertainment. Over several generations, they came to provide relief, not just from isolation and long winters but also from the heavy labours associated with a challenging environment. Whether people worked on the farms in the fields, or in the coal mines, steel plants and the fishing fleets, a fiddle was always handy.

Even though in recent times much of the original and Gaelic culture has been in steep decline, the music has continued to flourish. While a healthy evolution of the form is evident in spite of radical changes in linguistic, social and economic conditions after 1955 when we built the Cape Breton Causeway, Gaelic fiddling has survived intact.

Fiddling represents the preservation and continuity of community. Fiddling is a building block of many communities, especially in Cape Breton and my riding of Sydney—Victoria. Inverness County is home of the Cape Breton fiddling tradition. For longer than any other Scottish settlement, the people of Inverness County continue to live as they might have lived in Scotland 100 or 200 years ago.

Cape Breton classic fiddling music is also linked to the Gaelic language. Most fiddlers generally agree that the sound of a correctly performed Cape Breton fiddle tune resonates with the sound of the spoken Gaelic language. The decline of the Gaelic language in Cape Breton could therefore

be perceived as a direct threat to the survival of the fiddle tradition. Despite the perceived threats to the survival of Cape Breton fiddle music, it has survived and continues to evolve. It is a key economic factor. Out migration significantly affected the Cape Breton fiddle tradition. Playing style and sound experienced an intermingling with other cultures in places like Massachusetts and Michigan, which clearly affected its evolution.

Like the Gaelic language, once the most prominent language on our island, and for years the primary language of many Canadians, the fiddle tradition was believed to have suffered with the introduction of the radio and later the television to the island culture. As a language disappears, it is up to participants to decide the validity of maintaining other things which that language has influenced, for example, fiddling, in the case of Gaelic.

The CBC film called *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* was produced in 1972, and it was a cry for help and a plea for survival of this most important tradition of fiddling. The result was a renaissance in fiddling, beginning with the annual festival of fiddlers at Glendale in 1973. From that point on, fiddle music began to thrive again, attracting young players and wider audiences. New tactics and new sounds, but the fiddle was continuing to get back its popularity. Preparation for the successful 1973 festival gave birth to the Cape Breton Fiddlers' Association, and its work continues today. The association's main mandate has been to preserve and promote traditional Cape Breton fiddle music. Since its inception, it has provided workshops and opportunities for its members to learn new tunes and techniques. It has published tunes written by its members and it has provided venues for musicians to perform for thousands of people. It has nurtured and supported its members to excel. As a result, many of these wonderful members are now worldwide.

Cape Breton fiddle music became part of a global Celtic revival where Celtic music in various forms achieved a high degree of international popularity. This traditional music has helped Cape Breton in providing a boost to the depressed island economy. Tourism is taking off in Cape Breton and one of the biggest tourist attractions, and I encourage all members to come, is in the break week in October. It is called Celtic Colours. It is when the leaves of all the beautiful hardwoods in Cape Breton are in full colour, while we have a big Celtic festival with a whole week of music. We have musicians brought in from all around the world, plus our local talent. Church halls and every venue is used, with music throughout the island. Thousands of visitors come to Cape Breton to enjoy the hospitality and Celtic music it provides.

(1905)

I have so much more I would like to say about the fiddling across this great country we live in. I am supporting, and I ask my colleagues to support, Bill S-218, An Act respecting National Fiddling Day in Canada. We in Cape Breton, fiddlers and people who love to fiddle across this country, would appreciate this House moving this bill forward.

**Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address Bill S-218, An Act respecting National Fiddling Day.

Our country is culturally diverse. Over the centuries, newcomers have been arriving in Canada and bringing with them the traditions and customs of their cultural communities. Luckily for all Canadians, these traditions and customs often include art, music and dance.

The fiddle has been an important instrument in many of these communities. Across Canada, contributions from first nations people, in addition to Canadians of English, Scottish, Irish, French

and **Ukrainian** heritage have given Canada an incredibly rich and diverse inventory of fiddling styles and music.

Cape Breton, Nova Scotia is considered the heart of Scottish fiddling in Canada. Since the 19th century, with the arrival of the 25,000 Gaelic-speaking Scots, Cape Bretoners have come together for house dances. These house dances are an informal gathering with music, dancing and socializing. They have carried on the Scottish fiddling traditions.

The most famous story of Nova Scotia is the one about Buddy MacMaster, who worked as a station agent for the Canadian National Railways during the 1940s. Buddy was stationed at Valley depot, near Truro, where he often worked the late shift.

In the quiet times between trains, Buddy would often practise his fiddling during the night shift. The train dispatcher in New Glasgow knew of this and would communicate with Buddy and other station agents to find out when the tracks were clear. When they were, they would ask Buddy to play a song over the dispatch and railroad agents across the Maritimes would listen in.

Buddy's passion for the fiddle ran in the family, and today, Buddy's niece, Natalie MacMaster carries on that tradition. Ms. MacMaster has won two JUNO awards, and in 2006 she was made a member of the Order of Canada, not only for her enormous talent but for using her fiddling to support charitable causes across Canada and to raise awareness of development issues in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Ms. MacMaster is a fine example of the Cape Breton style of fiddling, which was brought to Canada from the Scottish Highlands. Today, many consider the Scottish tradition to be better preserved in Cape Breton than in Scotland itself thanks, no doubt, to fiddling masters like Ms. MacMaster.

Fiddling in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick is also a mixture of cultures with surviving Acadian influences, as well as those of Scotland and Ireland. New Brunswick's most famous influential fiddle player, of course, is Don Messer, who began his career on the radio in 1929 on a musical program called the *New Brunswick Lumberjacks* on CFBO in Saint John.

He became a Canadian household name in 1959 with his CBC television show *Don Messer's Jubilee*. His playing style, known as "down-east" or "Messer" style, was straightforward and easy to listen to. Mr. Messer's musical style established what is known today as the national Canadian old-time style. Don Messer's television show was reportedly the second-highest rated show in Canada, behind *Hockey Night in Canada*, and was enjoyed by all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

When the CBC made a questionable decision to cancel the show in 1969, it was inundated with protests and complaints from irate Canadians, with 1,500 angry telephone calls and over 20,000 pieces of mail. There were protests on Parliament Hill and angry questions from Conservative leader John Diefenbaker in the House of Commons. Fortunately, a Don Messer television show would be picked up in the fall by CHCH in Hamilton.

Fiddle music has a historic connection to many of our communities. It was a significant and common form of artistic expression for Canadians from all different backgrounds in different parts of the country. I encourage members to vote for this bill to honour this very Canadian tradition. We do not want to make the same mistake that the CBC made when it decided to cancel *Don Messer's Jubilee*.

Today, fiddlers, as well as festivals and community traditions, are keeping Canada's fiddling traditions alive. The fiddle has been an instrument that has enabled Canada's immigrants to continue their traditional cultures while they settled into their new homes in Canada. Fiddle music has contributed to Canada's rich history of community-building and melding of traditions into a culture which is uniquely Canadian.

I trust that my hon. colleagues will join me and agree to designate the third Saturday in May in each and every year as national fiddling day.