

## A Scottish Evening with Natalie MacMaster

by Carvell Fenton  
Brunswickan Entertainment

Picture a terrain of rolling hills, wind swept and cold in the dying twilight. It is rugged and makes the small path you walk difficult, but yet there is a mystical beauty that draws you onward. You hear, carried softly on the wind, a few fleeting notes of a haunting melody and you know that you are near. You climb the crest of a small hill and the valley below unfolds before you. Nestled low along a gentle brook you see a small house with one window warmly lit. The winds blow, causing you to pull the edge of your collar up to shield your face, but also carrying more notes of the melody you heard moments before. You smile, and move on with a quickened pace, anticipating the evening of music and fellowship you have travelled far to enjoy...

Wondering exactly what kind of a review this is? Where did the thoughts included above come from? They come from a music that is not only entertaining, but also a music that rejuvenates and speaks to the soul. They come from the Natalie MacMaster concert at the Playhouse in Fredericton.

For those of you who did not attend the concert and are unfamiliar with Natalie MacMaster, I present a short introduction. She was born in Troy, Inverness County, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. She comes from a prestigious musical heritage, including Buddy MacMaster, her uncle and a master of the Cape Breton fiddle. She was supported from an early age by her family to pursue music, and is still supported as was evident in her appearance in CBC's television programme "Up on the Roof". At the age of 23, she has already forged a place for herself in traditional Cape Breton music, and is spreading that position worldwide with appearances in the United States, the Far East, the United Kingdom, in Ireland, New Zealand, and recently in Denmark and Belgium where she performed at the acclaimed Womex Festival. She has always remained true to her Canadian and specifically Maritime fans as well as not compromising the musical standards she holds. With every concert she expresses a pride and love for the music she plays that captivates an audience in a way that is hard to describe.

In addition to claiming an ever growing number of fans, she has also

achieved acclaim among her musical peers having won the East Coast Music Award in the "Roots/Traditional Artist" category in 1992. In addition, her third album *Fit as a Fiddle* brought her the title of "Instrumental Artists of the Year" at the 1994 East Coast Music Awards. Certainly a career that has long since gone beyond its initial stages.

I have been an avid fan of Natalie MacMaster for a number of years, so if you are reading this article hoping to hear a negative concert review, you have come to the wrong place. However, I implore you, please read on, and if you did not have the pleasure to enjoy her musical magic at this past concert, perhaps this will entice you not to miss her next.

The Playhouse was nearly full, with an estimate from one of the Playhouse representatives placing attendance at over 650. The concert featured Natalie MacMaster, but also four other individuals rounding out the group who have significant solo careers of their own. Natalie's group consisted of

Dave

fiddle music and step dancing, to singing and guitar solos. It appeared as though there was something for everyone.

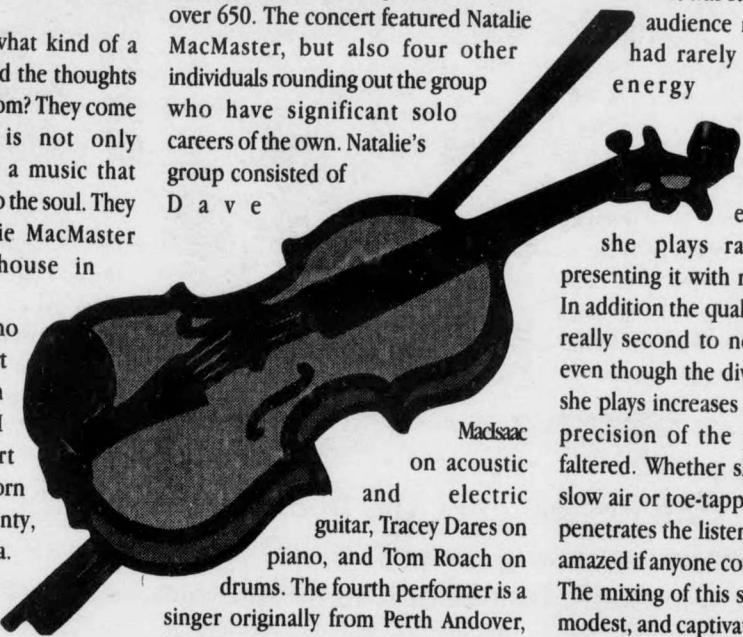
The mood of the crowd was one of the best I have experienced at a concert of this nature. From the opening set of jigs and reels (styles of fiddle melodies) the audience participated wholeheartedly. It always adds to the enjoyment of a concert if the crowd is in tune with the message the musician is trying to convey, regardless of the musical style, and I must admit that this crowd would rival any I have experienced. It was apparent that the response was appreciated by the performers as the mood turned from a concert setting into what seemed like a few friends relaxing with some music at home.

It was stated by a number of audience members that they had rarely seen the level of energy portrayed by Natalie MacMaster. She has an ability to perform and express the music she plays rather than simply presenting it with no heart or feeling. In addition the quality of her playing is really second to none. It seems that even though the diversity of the tunes she plays increases over the years, the precision of the pieces has never faltered. Whether she is performing a slow air or toe-tapping reel, each note penetrates the listener, and I would be amazed if anyone could resist its power. The mixing of this skill with a relaxed, modest, and captivating stage presence makes an evening of her music an experience that will linger long after the fiddle is cased and the stage lights dimmed.

As is evident from this review, the concert was an experience that all who were not in attendance should regret missing. It is difficult to put into words what this music means to those of us who hold it dear. It is a music that is steeped in tradition and has arisen out of the tragedies and triumphs of countless generations both in Scotland and Cape Breton. It is a music that can move its listeners from the depths of despair to the summit of joy with a mere draw of the bow. Many have undertaken the task of bringing this music to those who have not yet experienced it, but few are performing the deed as well, or as nobly as Natalie MacMaster. If you have not experienced it, please do. For those of us who love it and are away from home missing it, or those of us who have acquired it in our travels, we say...play on!

Maclsaac on acoustic and electric guitar, Tracey Dares on piano, and Tom Roach on drums. The fourth performer is a singer originally from Perth Andover, Linda Brooks, who will be releasing her first album *Painted Moon*, just before Christmas. From her first note to her last, the audience was transfixed. She performed a number of her own songs including one written for her father. Her musical abilities were demonstrated in a Mary Black song titled 'Thorn Upon the Rose' and vividly in a final cappella hymn titled 'I Feel The Winds of God Today'. This final piece possessed a clarity of tone and voice that was remarkable, and left the audience wishing for more. She is definitely a talent to be experienced with a beautiful voice that took the crowd, and this reviewer by pleasant surprise.

The concert presented a relaxed atmosphere, with the members involved exchanging in banter among themselves and with the audience. There was no attempt by one individual to monopolize the spotlight, and outstanding solo selections were performed by both Dave Maclsaac and Tracey Dares. The concert encompassed everything from traditional Scottish



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ELIGIBILITY: A candidate must teach at least one 3-credit hour undergraduate course, and at least one 3-credit hour course each term, during the academic year in which the nomination is made. It is not expected that the nominees should excel in all criteria listed on the nomination form, but they should be qualified in most categories. Individuals are not eligible if they have been previous recipients of the Award.

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