

# CelticLife

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# Entertaining the soldiers in Kandahar

Troy MacGillivray joins other musicians in Afghanistan

By Alexa Thompson  
Photos by Kelly Clark

I'm taping this interview. I intend to upload parts of it as a podcast on the website, but Troy MacGillivray and I are giggling so hard that I wonder if any parts of it can be salvaged. This incredibly talented, affable young man is brimming over with anticipation of joining friends Kimberly Fraser and Matt Minglewood and

12 other performers in Afghanistan. He takes a moment from packaging CDs to chat. There are to be four performances in all, at Canadian bases in Kandahar and Kabul. He was invited by Minglewood who was asked to suggest fiddlers from the East Coast.

**THE MUSIC'S IN THE BLOOD.** No doubt about that. Music has been central to Troy MacGillivray's life since he was an infant. The younger brother of musicians Kendra and Sabra MacGillivray and grandson of legendary musician Hugh A. MacDonald ("Hughie the Fiddler"), he's a fiddler and a pianist and no mean step-dancer.

There was always music in the house, he recalls. At 6 p.m. the family would listen to Ray Mac's *Ceilidh* radio program on the local station. The program featured traditional music from the Atlantic region as well as Quebec and Ontario.

He began his musical education in Grade 1 or 2, when he began sitting in on piano lessons given to his sisters by a Nun from the local Bethany Convent on the outskirts of Antigonish.

"She was really good to me," he recalls. "She kept me on track with classical music and she made the lessons fun." Although the classes focused on classical playing, at the end she'd play fiddle tunes on the piano and let him chord along. She realized he was deeply interested in the fiddle.

Troy continued to take lessons from her, even though at 13 he was teaching himself at the Gaelic College in St. Ann's, until two days before her death at aged 94. "I remember she left that class early, saying she wasn't feeling well."

But let's step back a bit. This young man who admits he loves listening to all kinds of music, who has studied classical music all his life, completed an arts degree with a major in music, and is heralded for his traditional style of playing the fiddle, was wowing audiences at six with his step-dancing.

At nine, he started accompanying sister Kendra (then 16) to classes she was teaching at the local community centre. It wasn't long before he was taking up the fiddle himself and she remained his only instructor throughout his childhood.

Her style is traditional and he soon became immersed in the music of groups such as the Barra MacNeils. But by junior high school he was playing first violin in a String Orchestra, eventually earning the concert master spot when the previous concert master graduated to high school. "In those days there was no music (program) in junior high but we had two teachers who came in and one was involved with the String Orchestra. It was all classical (music) and movie themes. It was a really good experience to be able to absorb this music and ideas because I didn't have any classical (violin) training."

Anything he can't do? "Well, I did take up the drums and guitar but didn't take to them. I do have a bass (guitar) and took lessons while on a recording engineering course in Sydney (Nova Scotia)." That program, taught by Joella Foulds, required that students learn an instrument. Since he was already an accomplished piano and fiddle player, they let him take up the guitar. He still fools around with it, but doesn't have much time to devote to it. He also owns a drum kit that he plays for fun and even gave a child's size drum set to his



A versatile musician, Troy is equally at home with piano and fiddler.

two-year old nephew who happily plays along to music videos. Looks like there may be another musician in the making.

What Troy does do is write his own tunes, some of which turned up in a small booklet, *Fiddle Tunes*, dedicated to family and friends. It includes a brief history of his home village, Lanark, as well as a tribute to Hugh A. MacDonald and a tune in his memory, "Hughie No. 11". Most of the tunes have come to him over a period of years. "Sometimes I think of a tune for no reason at all. Other times, it's hard work." It was particularly gruelling when teaching an advanced class last summer in B.C.

What other projects has he been involved with? Last winter, following his recording engineering course, he purchased an interface so he can plug microphones into his computer. Last year he toured with Shane Cook, the versatile fiddler from Ontario, and other musicians, ending with a new CD that he and Shane co-produced — *When Here Meets There*, featuring Troy, Shane, guitarist Skip Holmes, Scott Macmillan and Mike Bryan, with Ray Legere on mandolin, Lew Mele, acoustic bass, and Bernie Senensky, accordion.

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Troy MacGillivray, Continued from Page 17

His previous recording, *Live at the Music Room* (see John Ferguson's review on page 32), was released late last year and has already been awarded the 2008 East Coast Music Awards (ECMA) Instrumental Recording of the Year. [Other CDs include *Musical Ties* (2001), *Boomerang* (2003) and *Eleven* (2005) — all ECMA nominees.]


Kandahar turned out to be more of an experience than he had anticipated. At least one performance was temporarily halted by a rocket attack. However, as he wrote in his newsletter: "It was an incredible, once in a lifetime opportunity that was also very humbling, one I'm not soon to forget. The hospitality and giving from the troops from all the NATO forces was overwhelming. It was great watching them enjoy and appreciate the music and entertainment. It is entirely different over there ... it is a place of strife where every day is more difficult than the day before. Every day it gets hotter — we arrived to 58 degrees Celsius yet they still welcomed us with smiling faces." The trip was organized by Canadian Forces Personnel and Family Support Services.

As I write, Troy's in Scotland, touring the Highlands with flautist Nuala Kennedy. Then he'll be back in Canada for a packed summer teaching and playing at various festivals.

He's always enjoyed teaching but with his touring schedule and other projects, finds it hard to schedule classes and still make sure that his instruction is consistent.

What he really likes is performing live. "I really do. It's a lot of fun when everything is working well. Maybe sometimes something stresses you out but other times it is fun!"

For more on Troy MacGillivray, visit his website at [www.troymacgillivray.com](http://www.troymacgillivray.com).

 Got a comment? Go to [www.CelticLife.ca](http://www.CelticLife.ca) to let us know

### Where to Hear Troy this July

16 Antigonish, NS Airs Concert	21 Brook Village, NS Square Dance with Andrea Beaton
18 Antigonish, NS Concert Under the Stars	23 Truro, NS Marigold Theatre (7:30pm)
19 Rollo Bay, PE Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival	24 Shelburne, NS S.E.A. Shelburne (former Navy Base)
20 Antigonish, NS Piper's Corner	26 Frankfort, NY Great American Irish Fest

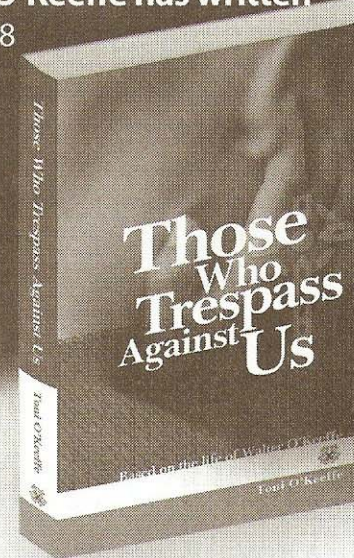
## This May be the Best Read of 2008

Vancouver Island Author Toni O'Keeffe has written what might be the best Book of 2008

Set in Ireland between 1939 – 1948, *Those Who Trespass Against Us* is a vivid and disturbing look at the life and suffering of Walter O'Keeffe during a period of time when both the state and church had gone mad with regards to the care of children. This is a heart wrenching tale of O'Keeffe, as a young orphan as he struggles to survive the inhumane treatment imposed on him by those charged with his care.

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"Walter O'Keeffe (Nov 18 1930 - April 21 2007) and his daughter & the books author Toni."



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