

# Celtic Edge goes from trad to rad

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*Celtic Edge* features Cape Breton fiddler Ashley MacIsaac in concert with fiddler Shannon Quinn and DJ/composer Jay Andrews. The music special, directed by Bill MacGillivray, screens on Sunday at 2:30 p.m. at Park Lane as part of the Atlantic Film Festival.

It's hard to picture Ashley MacIsaac feeling like the wise old veteran.

But early in [Celtic Edge](#), the brilliant Cape Breton fiddler, once known for his wild antics, muses about young hipsters in the traditional music scene.

In the 45-minute music-special screening on Sunday at 2:30 p.m. at Park Lane as part of the Atlantic Film Festival, the now 41-year-old performer is joined by musicians he inspired — fiddler Shannon Quinn and DJ/composer Jay Andrews — for a concert affectionately dubbed trad to rad.

Twenty-something Cheticamp guitarist Maxim Cormier, musician-comedian Tony Quinn (Shannon's father), guitarist Jamie Robinson, and Cape Breton singer-songwriter Kyle Mischiek, are also featured in the special, that blends concert footage with backstage preparations and interviews in which Creignish native Maclsaac notes he grew up without cable till he was 14, at which time he discovered pop music.

Directed by Bill MacGillivray and produced by Terry Greenlaw, who are partners in Lunenburg-based [Picture Plant](#), with musical direction by Tony Quinn, Celtic Edge aired this summer on CBC Television's Absolutely Maritimes and is expected to air on CBC nationally.

MacGillivray, a Governor General's Award-winner, whose documentary Man of A Thousand Songs about Newfoundland's Ron Hynes won Best Documentary, Best Director and the People's Choice Award at the 2010 Atlantic Film Festival, says he is a "a longtime fan of good music."

Speaking by phone from Lunenburg while looking out his window at the Bluenose, he muses that, "Ashley and his cohorts in the show are all great musicians and I'm in awe of musicians. The opportunity to work with these amazing musicians was one I couldn't pass up."

The idea came from Tony Quinn, who wanted to make a film about Celtic music old and new.

Maclsaac was an obvious choice "as the premier exponent of Scottish fiddle around here," says MacGillivray.

While Maclsaac is steeped in the Scottish fiddle tradition, Shannon Quinn is an expert in Irish fiddle.

"Shannon is just a blessing as far as Nova Scotia entertainers are concerned, she has all of the charm and the great skills of Maritime music, but she's also really, really advanced in her knowledge of Irish music and other traditions of performance," says Maclsaac in the special.

*DJ-composer Jay Andrews has worked with fiddlers Ashley Maclsaac and Shannon Quinn and joins them both in Celtic Edge, a music special directed by Bill MacGillivray that screens on Sunday at 2:30 p.m. at Park Lane as part of the Atlantic Film Festival.*

"Jay is a common denominator and in both cases you watch the notion of what Celtic music is being stretched by bringing a DJ vibe," notes MacGillivray. "Ashley wanted to work with Maxim and he brings him into the mix."

Maclsaac, a lover of techno music, contends fiddle music is basically dance music. "The beats and sounds that are around right now, actually fit the fiddle quite well."



People have the notion that Cape Breton music is fiddles and bagpipes and Gaelic music but it's more than that, says MacIsaac in the film, suggesting crossover is

the best term for what's happening in the musical genre now.

There is discussion in the special of the fear some people have that straying from playing traditional music the way it has been for centuries will destroy the Celtic tradition.

But none of those involved in Celtic Edge believe that.

"The whole mash-up vibe is happening with lots of music," notes MacGillivray.

The musicians spent a day and a half working out what music to play for a concert in CBC's new studio on Mumford Road, that is far more intimate than the old Studio H, says the director who was happy they were able to create a candlelit, nightclub vibe for the concert.

"In the evening we shot the dress rehearsal and the next day we shot the actual performance."

He was worried how the concert would go over in the black box shooting space.

"But it's a credit to the musicians that they created a moment in time, there was magic within the evening."

He also credits Andrew MacCormack's "spectacular editing" for the emotional buildup.

Working with MacIsaac was a bit like working with Hynes, says MacGillivray, whose 1988 feature film *Life Classes* launched his directing career.

"They have that quality that makes them interesting. They are both unfiltered. And Ashley's music is unfiltered. He's passionate and deeply rooted in the music and plays like no one else. He's always in the moment. Working with him was a real joy.

"People talk about bad boy Ashley," MacGillivray continues, noting throughout the process Maclsaac "was very supportive, open and inclusive of Shannon and Jay and what they were creating. He was careful to make it a group, not an Ashley show. He was very concerned everyone was included in a good way."

Besides listening to the gorgeous music, what MacGillivray particularly appreciated was listening to the musicians talk. "They have their own language, a shorthand that's amazing, I'd love to do a documentary on that."

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