



## ArtSmarts

### 2005-2006 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

## LEAHY

Thursday, February 2, 2006 11:00am

Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teacher,

We hope you find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for the school matinee presentation of **Leahy**. This guide, which is intended to be used in conjunction with the Multicultural Music curriculum guide, provides information about the Canadian-Celtic band Leahy plus a brief overview of Canadian East Coast music. Also included in the guide is a review of audience etiquette.

Mondavi Center gratefully acknowledges the institutional donors supporting the Arts Education Program during the 2005-2006 Season of Performing Arts:



NORDSTROM, INC



WESTAF

With additional support provided by ArtesAmericas, Bank of America Foundation, River Cats Foundation, UC Davis Health System, Teichert Foundation and UC Davis School/University Partnerships.

## LEAHY: THE BAND



The free-wheeling musical octet known as **Leahy** offers a fresh and contemporary take on Celtic music. The exciting fiddle-driven group, comprised of the eight Leahy siblings—four brothers and four sisters—is not from Ireland or Scotland but from Ontario, Canada. The award-winning band mixes jigs, Hungarian *czardas* and other European dance music, Cape Breton fiddling, high-energy step-dancing, a bit of rock, jazz, and world music, and a variety of traditional regional instrumental styles reflecting their Québécois roots.

The Leahy siblings were raised on their ancestral farm near Lakefield, Ontario, Canada. Forebear Michael Leahy arrived in North America in 1825 from Ireland and brought with him a rich musical tradition that has passed down through the generations. Each of the Leahy children learned to play the fiddle from their father, while their mother—who was raised in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia—taught them to sing, dance, and play the piano. As teens, the siblings performed across Canada with their parents, and quickly became favorites on the festival and fair circuit. A documentary profile, *Leahy: Music Most of All*, won a 1985 Academy Award for Best Foreign Student Film. Following an extended break from performing, the members of Leahy reunited, and a deal with Virgin Records saw their career soar in dramatic fashion.

The 1997 debut compilation, *Leahy*, seized the public's attention, and extensive touring (much of it as the opening act for fellow Canadian Shania Twain) boosted the band to phenomenal sales of

double platinum (over 200,000) in Canada. The album also sold impressively in the U.S. (where it reached No. 4 on the Billboard world music chart), Great Britain and Europe. The group snared three Canadian Juno Awards, for “Best Instrumental Group” and “Best New Group” in 1997, and took home the “Best Country Group or Duo” trophy the following year.

Commemorating the band’s hometown, *Lakefield* (2001) was Leahy’s second release. According to reviewer Michael Simmons, the new anthology combined “superior traditional fiddling with contemporary pop rhythms and modern country harmonies,... [to] create a new form of Celtic music that perhaps can best be described as "stadium *ceilidh*” (a session of traditional music, storytelling, or dancing). Leahy's sound may not appeal to the traditionalist, but their high spirits, danceable tunes, and instrumental skill will have even the stodgiest purists secretly tapping their toes!”

*In All Things*, Leahy’s most recent release, combines the influence of the band's Irish and Scottish roots with their inherent desire to widely travel the musical map. Fiery instrumental pieces, like "The Wedding Day Jig" and "Clog Medley," feature the group's trademark nimble-fingered fiddle playing alongside contemporary-flavored backdrops of bass, percussion and piano. There are the trademark instrumental pieces like "Pointe Au Pic Medley" (an homage to their Québécois influences), "Gzowski Medley" (inspired by their respect for the famous Canadian broadcaster, writer, and editor), and "Chasing Rain," a tune capturing the step dancing element that's always a key part of the legendary Leahy live experience. The title, *In All Things*, refers to their music, explains Erin Leahy: "It is our spirit, it is how we are connected, it is a reflection of our experiences throughout life." "We all write individually," adds Donnell Leahy; "Sometimes something that is half-written becomes a collaboration, other times someone writes a whole piece. There is a sort of general vibe that we possess, where we all recognize whether we like a piece or not. Then there will be a collaborative effort in tweaking or finishing it off." The album was primarily recorded at The Farm, their home studio in Lakefield. Donnell adds, "We produced it ourselves because we want to sound natural and honest. We want to sound like Leahy."

Leahy’s compelling career voyage has proven that a musical style defying easy definition can still find a world-wide audience. "It is liberating to see that there are no boundaries," stresses Donnell; "Over the course of a year, we perform at jazz, bluegrass, country and Celtic festivals. We play for classical audiences, we've played with heavy metal bands, and it works every time." Leahy's genuine love of such a diverse range of music fuels their uncompromising creativity. By refusing to be bound to the conventions of any one genre, they have forged a truly distinctive sound.

## Discography

*Leahy* (Leahy Music Inc., 1997; Narada, 1998)

*Lakefield* (Leahy Music Inc., 2001; Narada, 2001)

*In All Things* (Virgin Music Canada, 2004; Narada, 2004)



For more information on Leahy, please visit: <http://www.leahymusic.com/>

## INTRODUCTION TO THE LEAHY FAMILY



**Donnell Leahy**, Fiddle  
Married to Cape Breton fiddler, Natalie MacMaster (in October 2002)



**Erin Leahy**, Piano  
Other Roles: Vocals, Fiddle, Guitar, Bass, Step Dancer



**Angus Leahy**, Fiddle  
Other Roles: Piano, Step Dancer, Mandolin



**Maria Leahy**, Guitar  
Other Roles: Vocals, Piano, Fiddle, Banjo, Step Dancer  
Before Leahy, she was a certified high school teacher



**Siobheann Donohue** (nee Leahy), Bass  
How to Pronounce Name: "Shivon"  
Other Roles: Fiddle, Piano, Step Dancer, Vocals



**Doug Leahy**, Fiddle  
Other Roles: Step Dancer, Saxophone



**Agnes Enright** (nee Leahy), Step Dancer  
Other Roles: Piano, Vocals, Fiddle  
Education: Mathematics at Dalhousie University (Halifax, NS)



**Frank Leahy**, Drums

## CELTIC CANADA

Canada is home to some rich musical traditions—notably those of the indigenous Inuit, the French settlers in Québec, and the Scottish and Irish population on the east coast.

**THREE WAVES, TWO TRADITIONS:** The early European settlers (French, Celtic, and English) created three distinct regions but only two genuine musical cultures. New France became Québec, a nation first within an English colony and then, after the 1867 Act of Confederation, a province within the country of Canada. Be it Québec the province, or Québec the country, the place has long nurtured and cherished its artists, including musicians. Politics played a part in its musical revival of the 1970s, and the lures of global pop culture are now challenging the commitment of the Québécois to a genuine local tradition.

Likewise, the provinces of Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia guarded their Scottish and Irish ancestries with tenacity over the centuries. Their commitment has paid off unexpectedly with the current explosion of East Coast music—the ‘hottest’ scene in the country.

Interestingly, of the original emigrant paths, the one that ventured furthest up the St. Lawrence Seaway, to what is now the province of Ontario, formed the economic and political power base for the country without ever producing much music. That is, until Toronto’s rebirth as a multicultural Mecca—beginning in the 1960s—with its ever more remarkable musical marriages.

**THE EAST COAST—KITCHEN MUSIC UNBOUND:** The Maritime provinces of Canada were primarily settled by Irish and Scottish communities fleeing famine or economic hardship at home. On Cape Breton Island, for instance, there was a huge influx of Scottish settlers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries due to the Highland Clearances. To this day, the descendants of those immigrants show a pride in their Scottish heritage. Musically, this is reflected in a Scottish fiddle style—generally accompanied by piano—much more dance-like than the classical veneer that’s developed in the British Isles. Many musicians from Scotland, in fact, repeat their ancestors’ immigrant journey, albeit for shorter periods, in order to rediscover their own traditions as preserved on craggy Cape Breton.

All that activity aside, the revival in East Coast music was hard to foresee. Just two decades ago it was still necessary to seek out East Coast music in the kitchens of Newfoundland fishing villages or the church halls of Cape Breton. Poverty, isolation and the lack of interest in Celtic music left the Maritimes feeling that their traditions and pastimes were at best quaint, at worst embarrassing.

\*\*\*

East Coast music advanced to an international stage with some of the following musicians: fiddler **Rufus Guinchart** (1899-1991); the Newfoundland band **Figgy Duff**; Cape Bretoners: the families **Rankins** and **Barra MacNeils**, the fiddler prodigies **Ashley MacIssac** and **Natalie**

**MacMaster**, and the rigorous traditionalist **Mary Jane Lamond**; from Nova Scotia's capital, Halifax, composer **Scott Macmillian**, and the Afro-Canadian **The Gospel Heirs**; New Brunswick's French Acadien revival fiddle families, the **Arsenaults** and the **Gallants**. Celtic music outside the East Coast proper claims two international stars: **Loreena McKennitt**, from Stratford, Ontario, and the now-famous **Leahy** fiddling family from the central part of the province.

Excerpted from the article "Canada," by Charles Foran. *World Music: The Rough Guide*. vol. 2 (London: Rough Guides Ltd., 2000) 350-361.

# CANADA



-map taken from <http://www.lonelyplanet.com>

**OFFICIAL NAME:** Canada

**CAPITAL CITY:** Ottawa

**TOTAL AREA:** 3,851,734 square miles

**POPULATION:** 31,825,000

**CURRENCY:** Canadian Dollar

**LANGUAGES:** English and French are the two official languages

**RELIGIONS:** Roman-Catholic (45%); Protestant (36%); Other (19%)

## THINK ABOUT IT!

Talking with your teacher, friends and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt, you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

1. How would you describe Leahy's music to a friend?
2. What feelings did you have while you listened to the music and songs?
3. What did you like best and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?
4. Did you have a favorite selection? A least favorite? Explain.
5. Do your parents or grandparents have an ancestral music and dance culture? What are they?

This CueSheet was written by Anett Jessop,  
Graduate Researcher, Davis Humanities Institute

## ATTENDING THE THEATER

### *What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:*

- \* Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately;
- \* Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- \* Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- \* Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- \* Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- \* Please turn off cell phones and pagers;
- \* Flash photography is strictly prohibited;
- \* Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee.

### *What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:*

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best possible work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, such as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.