

George Mandeville

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MMS - OK, George if you could start at the beginning and start as far as your playing music in Fort Resolution where you were growing up, just your sort of first impressions of music, where you first heard it, how you got interested in playing?

GM - Let's see, I was in the hospital when I was about aged 10, I was hospitalized for about a year and a half and basically I just started playing the guitar for something to do. I mean in those days we had no, we weren't allowed to go to a movie theatre, there was no such thing as TV, even a radio was a luxury and there were a few people in the hospital that had guitars and more or less just sang and played the guitar just for entertainment. So I was more or less just handed the guitar and told to try it, a few basic chords and you know. That was where I was introduced to the guitar and I really got to enjoy it. And when I did get out of the hospital, I went over to visit my next door neighbour who was *Angus Beaulieu*. Now, *Angus* was great influence on a lot of the musicians in (Fort) Resolution because he had several instruments, he had probably the first amplifier in the town and was very influential to a lot of other musicians in town. I was just lucky that he was my next door neighbour and he encouraged us and he spent a lot of time with anybody that showed interest in music. I did spend a lot of time with *Angus* and he was always very encouraging. It was almost like every day I would be over there, trying a few licks. There was always, people from out of town would come and like I say, because there was no form of entertainment besides music and old time dances, I was always, it seemed like anytime there was an old time dance because I had been playing with *Angus* quite a bit he asked me to come over and we'd practice our tunes and whatever and he would show me the different chords, different licks on the guitar and basically I just chummed along with *Angus* and some of the other guitar players in town.

MMS - Who were some of the other guitar players in town?

GM - People like *Cecil Lafferty* and there was *Tony Buggins*, there was quite a few people that played the guitar, I mean it was nothing like what you hear nowadays because of the different influences, like tape players and CD players, whatever. Everything was more or less just passed on to each other and everybody played by ear. Like nobody took any formal music lessons or anything but basically we got into this just to make entertainment, you know? Pass the time and it seemed like every weekend there was an old time dance happening somewhere and it was actually exciting, you know like I really enjoyed it. I made a point of being at every dance, you know, spent most of my time just playing the guitar for whatever fiddlers and that's how I got into music.

MMS - That was right from, you were in the hospital at 10 years old and then you started playing with Angus right after that, so through your early teens?

GM - Early teens, yes, and then I went to Breynat Hall in Fort Smith and I didn't play too much there, you know but it was more like when I got home that stuff happened, you know.

MMS - You were playing the traditional fiddle music right? I mean you were playing back up guitar?

GM - Mostly yes, I played like rhythm and a little bit of lead, you know and didn't get really into playing with like a band, an organized band, it was more like the early years was playing just more or less, just playing rhythm or playing along with a fiddler. That's what I enjoy mostly. After (Fort) Smith I went to school for my grade 9 and 10 there, came back to Res (Fort Resolution) and then went to Akaitcho for my grade 11 and 12. That's where I got into playing with Rock and Roll bands. A lot of "Ventures" stuff, a lot of instrumentals.

MMS - OK, can I go back to even before you were in the hospital and the guitar and stuff like that. Did you go to the old time dances that were happening before you even started playing guitar? Do you remember any of the older players, I guess you would after you started playing guitar and stuff like that but some of the fiddlers that were around before you even started to play?

GM - Not really, like I didn't really, I can't even remember going to old time dances until I come out of the hospital, basically. I didn't have that much interest in what was happening in the music field and that but once I started playing the guitar then I got more interested and I always enjoyed the fiddle, you know, playing along with the fiddlers. And there were quite a few good fiddlers come out of (Fort) Resolution. It seemed like any time there was an old time dance, somebody would let me know there was one and I would always be there. I was at every old time dance that happened in (Fort) Res. I think there was, like during the summer months, like from the time school was out like at the end of June until the end of August, it seemed like every night or every second night there would be an old time dance happening somewhere, you know. It was exciting, like I really enjoyed that. There was not much else to do, you know. I don't even think there was a road punched into (Fort) Res at the time. So we were pretty isolated.

MMS - What years would we be talking about here?

GM - I come out of the hospital I think in 1957 so from then on until I went to High school.

MMS - The road went in there in what, '60 or '61? Was that when the road went in there or was it later?

GM - I would say early '60s, I think probably '62 or so. '61 or '62 was when they pushed the road through to Pine Point and then onto (Fort) Res from there.

MMS - After you started playing and stuff like that, I know radio, like you say radio was a bit of a luxury and stuff like that but what kind of music were you listening to on the radio that was coming up from down south?

GM - A lot of “Ventures” and the “String-A-Longs”, you know, a lot of instrumentals were very popular at the time and I got to learn most of the tunes. Like, if I could afford I would go out and buy a record and practice along with it.

MMS - There was somebody selling records in (Fort Res) or did you have to go another town?

GM - The Bay, the Bay would be the only place, I would say. And *Angus (Beaulieu)* there again supplied a lot of the... He had a reel to reel and I don't know where he got his material from but he seemed to always have something happening in music, you know. We would come to visit him and he would say hey, you gotta hear this, you know.

MMS - Some new piece of music that way.

GM - Oh Yeah.

MMS - Mostly, your playing was mostly traditional fiddle music?

GM - Up until the time I went to school and then I started playing in a rock and roll band.

MMS - Akaitcho Hall?

GM - Akaitcho Hall basically.

MMS - So, who were you playing with at that time?

GM - Our lead singer was *Herb Beaulieu*, he was from my hometown. *Matt Lafferty* would be another one, he was our Bass player and singer and *Jim McPherson* was actually the first drummer we had when we started, this was back in '63 and then *Hans Nendza*, I don't know if you remember *Hans*, he was our drummer.

MMS - So you guys would play in Akaitcho hall or would you play for the school, in town?

GM - We played every weekend we would play for a dance, you know and I don't even think we got payed for it, we played because we enjoyed it. And then the Elks Hall would hire us almost like every, maybe once or twice a month, you know, to play for their dances, mostly teen dances. Then we played at the school for different events, like if there was a basketball tournament, a ball tournament or whatever, out of towners would come in and a high school dance would be organized and I think we were probably the only band in town at the time so we were always asked to play. I think five dollars apiece was what we got and that was a lot of money in those days.

MMS - Cool, so you were playing again, playing rock and roll and you're playing the early instrumental tunes, "The Venture's" tunes.

GM - Mostly, yeah, I think "The Beatles" were just coming on the scene then. We did a few of their stuff. But mostly whatever was popular at the time, you know.

MMS - From there when you got out of school, where did the work or the music take you from there?

GM - OK after I left school, I, like, our band basically broke up and I never really got back into playing with a regular group. Then I actually quit playing in '67 I think it was '68. Then I accompanied different singers, *Ted Mercredi*, you know, there was some other different groups that needed a guitar player, they'd phone me up and say hey we need you to accompany us, we've got accordion player here or a piano player here or whatever....

MMS - So playing in the Elks and the Legion here?

GM - With old *Henry Undheim*, *Betty Stevens*, I even accompanied her. I'm sure you have too, you know stuff like that. So I wasn't really too serious into it. And then I basically set the guitar down around 1970 or so, never touched it again until 1985, I think about 15 years, I never really played at all until my son *Lee* got interested in music and he asked me if I would teach him how to play the guitar and that's, so I got back into it again.

MMS - Picked it up, and then playing since then, who have you been playing for?

GM - Basically, just accompanying *Lee*. Him and I we did like a guitar duo, just him and I. I just helped him along with playing the guitar. He got comfortable with it and then he switched over to the fiddle so basically that's where I'm at right now is, I accompany him on the fiddle and that's what I really enjoy.

MMS - That's where you find your niche that way is playing behind the fiddle tunes?

GM - Yeah.

MMS - It seems within the Metis people, the fiddle is like a torch or a beacon or something like that. The songs and the tradition that comes from those songs, that's something that I have always sort of admired. Do you see it in the same way?

GM - That's a good way to describe it. It seems like that's all we had in the old days and that's why I'm really attached to the fiddle or the sound of it. Like myself, I don't play the fiddle at all but I was involved in, like a square dance group, "The Metis Reelers". We did this organized dancing and we travelled all over the country. I was with them from '85 'til I'd say about 1990 or '91 when I quit the group. While I was involved with this dance group, I always had *Lee* come along with me, you know. Like he tagged along and I think he, I don't know if you would call it like immersion whatever, you know, but just being around that fiddle sound, I was always

practising the different steps, different dance formations, whatever and he was always there and it was almost like he was immersed into the fiddle music and that's why he got playing I think. Just being around.

MMS - That cultural part of it, your heritage that way, for sure. How big was the dance group, can you tell me about the "Metis Reelers" and some of the things that you did, places you went?

GM - We formed in '85 OK and we had a group come in from Edmonton, like they came in and showed us some of the dances that were forgotten you know? They travelled to all of the different communities and more or less regained or, some of the lost dance steps and dance patterns and that. So we found out that they had a lot of knowledge and some of these dances were forgotten, so we brought them up to more or less help us with our dance formations and whatever. Some of the old traditional dances, we weren't even aware of, they re-introduced back to us, you know? Some of the places we travelled were, OK right off the bat, like after we learned some of these dances, we watched the videos and that, after we got probably good enough to do some performances, we were invited to St. John, New Brunswick, we were in there like for 2 weeks so.

MMS - That was "Festival by the Sea, right?

GM - "Festival by the Sea" Have you been there too?

MMS - Yeah, so we did that and we travelled to all the different communities along the Mackenzie and around Great Slave Lake. Done performances all over, yeah. And Expo was the big one, Expo in '86 (Vancouver). So that was a lot of fun.

MMS - You were down there for 2 weeks too

GM - In Vancouver.

MMS - It seems like between the South Slave communities, Fort Smith and Fort Resolution there is like a lot of different players and different singers, like over the years that I know and even up until today, there's still young players that are coming out of there today and they're all really good, they're all sort of different and I sort of...

GM - Different in what way?

MMS - Different and, how can I put it, maybe it's the isolation thing. And it's that whole, what you were talking about earlier when you were growing up there was no television, there was no road, maybe you just had electricity, I'm not sure about that either but the smaller communities seem to nurture a different kind of musician as opposed to Yellowknife where I have sort of always grown up. It's always been, there have been lots of people from down south, and lots of transient, sort of, players and lots of different influences and stuff like that...

GM - It almost seems like there was a competition, you know, like there was lots of interaction

between different people and I don't know if you would call it competition but there was always something happening, like, you know?

MMS - In the smaller communities?

GM - That could be part of why it's produced so many different musicians. Like, I had the guitar and the next thing you know my next door neighbour got a new guitar, seemed like everybody was getting and pulling them out of the wood work. We would get together, just more or less exchange and there was a lot of that happening, you now?

MMS - Yeah, just that interaction like you say, just sort of being closer...

GM - By saying competition, I don't know if it's the right term but it seemed like more interaction would be the proper word to use.

MMS - Even in the Jazz thing in New Orleans where Jazz was just sort of starting out and stuff like that and that's what it was, was competition. As far as trumpet players, who is the loudest trumpet player, who could play the loudest for the longest, right? There was all of these and it was like a competition or a one up man ship kind of stuff...

GM - Good friendly stuff.

MMS - But, like you say friendly and by no means. It wasn't as if you were the louder trumpet that you would get paid more or anything like that. You were doing it just for the entertainment, that's the difference as well. I can only speak from my own experience but it just comes from a whole different place when you're doing it for your own enjoyment and finding your own entertainment. And that's all you're really doing it for.

GM - That's the difference between small communities versus bigger places like Yellowknife. We played for dances and never got paid, didn't even think of it, didn't consider it. But we played because we enjoyed it, you know? And you take a break and somebody is right on that guitar next! You have to wrestle it away from him to get back on. It was certainly not a monetary thing, it was more for enjoyment.

MMS - And being a part of the community.

GM - Yes

MMS - The other part of it is like, OK, there's your talent, there, you contribute that to your community. If you were a good cook then you would contribute your cooking skills or whatever carpentry or mechanics or whatever. But again, that's just the difference in talking with the players that come from the smaller communities, there is a whole different sort of mind set that happens there. A whole different reason for the playing, for starting to play, closer to the heart, holistic, whatever you want to call it, you know. It's just interesting, I guess the differences that way. When you were playing for these old time dances, how long would they go on for?

GM - Oh gosh, some of the dances, like it depends on how many couples you had now. If you had a hall full, there would like 20 couples, it seemed like 45 minutes to an hour for one dance. It was tiring, especially, look at the poor fiddler. Some of them were older but they seemed to just, they were the ones that really had the endurance it seemed. Probably because they had more years playing. There was one fellow, his name was *Sam Norn*. Like, he'd light up a cigarette, you know and before the cigarette would be done, the dance just went on and on, he would have to spit it out before it burned his lips. He would just carry on and somebody would come along, stick another cigarette in his mouth, light it for him and he would continue on, you know? It was fun.

MMS - It would go for like, what, 4 hours, 6 hours?

GM - There was no set time, it never was advertised, the old moccasin telegraph, you know, people would say, hey, there's a dance happening at Jesse's, you know? And so everybody would zip over there, throw all the furniture out, not throw it out, set it outside. Clear the whole area, the fiddler would get in there and...Oh yeah, like it went on from say, 6 at night, after supper until 6 in the morning.

MMS - So you're just taking shifts on the guitar and taking shifts on the fiddle?

GM - Yeah, exactly. It was a nonstop thing, like, sometimes, you had to actually pay the fiddler. It wasn't money, sometimes you would bring him a little jug of brew or whatever, you know. Then when he got thirsty, he'd hang up the fiddle and say, somebody go get a bottle for this guy, you know, we're going to lose our fiddler. And we had some real excellent fiddlers. Probably one of the best fiddlers I ever heard is no longer alive but, and I doubt if he ever was recorded and his name was *Johnny Beaulieu*. Man, could that guy play. I have never heard, it's a crying shame that he was never recorded 'cause this guy was, the master. Like, the best I ever heard. But like, prior to the time the reel to reels or tape was invented I mean you can just imagine what has been lost.

MMS - The songs were passed on, I guess that's when you're talking. Like the older fiddlers that you're talking about, like how, they were coming from different parts of the country or were they from (Fort) Res, how did they learn the songs?

GM - Well, it's just...

MMS - From other fiddlers?

GM - Exactly. It seemed like, if you look at the difference in the way the fiddle is played, just for example, the fiddle. Like it probably started off in the east and everybody headed west, probably with the fur trade and whatever. You can really tell the difference between the sound of the fiddle from the east coast to where the Gwitchins play. I mean, you can just almost tell what district or area they come from.

MMS - Just by the style of their fiddle playing?

GM - Yeah! It just seems like you can almost tell a Manitoba fiddler from a Gwitchin or Manitoba fiddler and somebody from PEI. I mean there is such a difference in styles.

MMS - Same songs..

GM - It's almost like the language itself, I mean. You can tell just by the way a person speaks basically where he's from.

MMS - Their accent.....

GM - A Newfie and somebody from Old Crow or Aklavik, you can just about tell where they are from. And that's basically how the fiddle is too. Different dialects or whatever.

MMS - All the same songs though, same traditional songs, when you talk about coming from the east.....

GM - I tend to say that the fiddle actually originated overseas, right? And it came with the fur trade on the east coast and then it just travelled west.

MMS - I haven't spent a lot of time around the different fiddling styles or where it's come from but you got sort of, you got a style, from what I understand, Irish style, you got, Scottish style...

GM - The French

MMS - French styles

GM - And there is also the Metis style.

MMS - OK, so now the Metis would just sort of be the mixture or the combination of all of those?

GM - Exactly. It's almost, even the bowing action seems different.

MMS - The bowing action and like you say...

GM - The Irish fiddle has got a lot of little trills like in the waltzes, really noticeable in the slower tunes, eh? And the Scottish are different again. I mean, I don't know to really explain it. But it seems like the Irish have a, like you can almost tell who the Irish fiddlers, like. You've watched "River Dance", their style of music? If you were to take that and somebody like *Calvin Volrath* or *Reg Bouvette*, I mean there's a big, big difference there.

MMS - Yeah, yeah OK. In the evolution of the songs themselves they came across as traditional Scottish or Irish jigs or reels or whatever and I think a lot of those are still the staple today, that

way, the same songs. Are they?

GM - The basic song is the same. But like, as it travelled, as one person heard it and it was interpreted by the next one. I mean, he may have missed a few notes or added a few or whatever. And then he taught somebody else and that moved further west, you know. I don't know if it became diluted or...

MMS - developed

GM - Developed, you know. So, I don't know if I'm explaining it right because nothing was recorded, you can't take somebody like from the early 1700s, that's right from Europe, come over here. Like, his song now has been changed, everything has changed as it's passed on. It's probably a good thing in a way.

MMS - Oh yeah, no, for sure.

GM - You can't compare, some people say oh, the best fiddler I ever heard is from here. They've each got their own qualities.

MMS - And their own style, that way.

GM - Sure, like you say traditional, some people say traditional Metis style. Traditions can be borrowed too, you know. Adopted or borrowed because the Sash is not indigenous to the North American Indian or native. That was adopted from the French culture. So it's actually a combination that's...

MMS - So the music like the people that way, because the people themselves are again, the mixed blood, right. So, borrowing like you say on all the traditions.

GM - And isn't that what Canada is all about.

MMS - Yeah, exactly

GM - The big melting pot.

MMS - No, for sure. OK, so if you're a fiddler and you're in (Fort) Res, like OK, *Angus* and I guess I was sort of trying to get that out of him. How, you start playing the fiddle and it's not as if you're with one guy and he knows all of the tunes, right? So, he knows as many tunes as he knows and so you learn those tunes and then you get tired of playing those tunes. Are you looking for other songs to play?

GM - That's when you start writing your own music. I mean, some people say, well, it's not traditional. I mean, what is traditional really, you know? Because it's forever changing, you know that as a musician.

MMS - The music itself is developing that way.

GM - The main thing is you enjoy it and you do it. That's how I look at it. Because my style of guitar playing is so much different than say the next. Even though we've played together, I mean, you develop your own patterns and your own licks and whatever.

MMS - Yeah and your own timing and just the way that you play the rhythm that way. So very much a, like you say, just sort of passed on from fiddler to fiddler to fiddler, that way. I've always thought that would be a really interesting project, I think it has been done to a certain extent, that way, just as far as the fiddle and its travels.

GM - Yeah. The way the fiddle flows.

MMS - All the way up here, for sure and just all those different players, Interesting. So, when you're playing with *Lee*, what kind of places have you played with *Lee* since you started playing with him when he picked up the fiddle? What year would that have been?

GM - He started playing in 1990, like actually you know, it's a funny thing. We were heading to Fort Simpson to play in the talent show there and he was going to enter in the open category which was playing the guitar. He had been playing for like 5 years. I says to him, you know, why don't you play a couple of fiddle tunes while you're down there, I mean. We've got a week, I'm sure you could learn one or two songs and if there's only one other fiddler shows and if you enter and just by the fact that you got up and played the tune, it could be the most God awful tunes, it doesn't matter, the first prize is \$500, the second prize is \$400, third prize is \$300. I mean, even if there was 3 fiddlers and he come in last place, they have to pay you that \$300. By golly, you know, he got all excited. Are you sure? *Lee*, just for the fact that you get up on stage and scratch out the most terrible sound out of that fiddle, they can't deny you, they have to pay you. So money was the motivator there. So, we got, we hired, there happened to be a fiddler playing at the Gold Range, so *Darlene (Mandeville)* went up there and asked, I can't remember her name but she came over to give *Lee* 3 one hour lessons over a 3 day period. And those 3 one hour lessons he learned 3 songs, a waltz, a reel and a jig. We went into (Fort) Simpson, it sounded god awful but that got him going on the fiddle, you know.

MMS - Did he come in first, second or third?

GM - He actually tied for first with *Stanley Beaulieu*, I mean there was no comparison, Stanley was so far superior but I think it was just the fact that he was a kid and he got a terrific audience response, you know and that probably influenced the judges quite a bit but they gave him first along with Stanley.

MMS - So that was it, he was hooked, eh, I bet from that point on. Just being able to get onto the stage for the first time, people really enjoyed and he got a prize for it, OK, this sounds good to me, I'll keep doing this.

GM - That's basically how he got going. Never went back to playing guitar after that.

MMS - Just jumped right on the fiddle. So you guys have recorded, you guys have put out CDs and you've done travelling. How many CDs?

GM - Two. He's done two so far and we'll probably be doing another one this summer.

MMS - And your travels have taken you to?

GM - As far as Spain, all across Canada, except for, well, we haven't done Newfoundland and Newfoundland and I think we've done every other province except Newfoundland. Done the Canada Games, Arctic Winter Games, all the way down to Inuvik, all the communities towards Inuvik, except for (Fort) Wrigley, I think. He's done shows up in the eastern Arctic too. The "True North Concert", he's been to I think 3 of them now.

MMS - Just keep doing it. So how does, do you guys write songs, does *Lee* songs, does he write his own songs?

GM - He's working on it, I think the next album we're going to do a few.

MMS - So if he is looking for other songs that were written by other fiddlers and stuff like that, who are his influences as far as like, the fiddlers who are still playing today?

GM - *Reg Bouvette* would probably be one of his favorites. Him and *Calvin Volrath*, *Pete Dorian* would be another guy, from PEI. *Lee Crimeau*, there's so many different fiddlers though. But (*Reg*) *Bouvette* would probably be one of his favourites.

MMS - Why do you think *Reg Bouvette* is his favourite that way?

GM - He just, a lot of his songs are very exciting you know, good, good. I guess it's the type of music that he enjoys. I don't know how else to explain it.

MMS - Something speaks to him, as far as that goes. Your musical playing and contributions and stuff like that and into the fiddle but it sounds like the fiddle is pretty important to you, like that way. Your backing it up that's where you feel most comfortable is when you are on the guitar and playing for a fiddler.

GM- I play lead but I prefer to play rhythm. What I enjoy is basically playing along with a fiddler.

MMS - That's good. You're going to keep doing it. Do you have goals?

GM - No, I'll never quit, I enjoy it so much.

MMS - There's lots of opportunities. Do you still go out and play at the talent shows?

GM - The only time I play talent shows is, a lot of times somebody will come to me and ask me to accompany them on stage and I do that. I go to talent shows and I usually enter in the jigging or whatever, you know, because I enjoy that part of it.

MMS - OK, enjoy the dancing part of it as well.

GM - There again, it ties in with the fiddle.

MMS - Ties in with your heritage and your culture and your people, that way, that's an expression.

GM - A lot of people in my family are actually fiddlers, like I'm related to the *Laffertys'*, the *Mandevilles'*, *Laffertys'*, *Beaulieus'*, you know, *Bouviars'* and you'll find fiddlers in each one of those families because we are all related, inter-related. Because my Grand Mother, my great Grand Father is a *Lafferty*, *Alexis Lafferty* and *Joe Bouvier* is my Grand Father, he was a fiddler. I got uncles on the *Mandeville* side who are fiddlers too. *Alphonse Mandeville* and there are a lot of *Laffertys'* and *Beaulieu* fiddlers too. It's just something we enjoy.

MMS - It runs in the family that way, something in the blood there, eh, for sure. In the gene pool

GM - There's something about that fiddle is very exciting, you know. When I hear a fiddle tune, I just perk right up.

MMS - It just speaks to you right away.

GM - Oh yeah, I just love it. I know a lot of other people like, from my home town that enjoy it. It's probably an instrument that is enjoyed universally you know?