

# BRAD REID'S THE BRIDGE

Seán Laffey in conversation with Brad Reid for Irish Music Magazine.

Photo: Meghan Tansey Whitton



The Angus L. MacDonald Bridge spans the harbour between Halifax and Dartmouth in Nova Scotia. I once got stuck on it in rush hour traffic as I was heading for Stanfield International Airport. Brad Reid's album *The Bridge*, which references the structure is anything but stuck; for him the bridge signifies a fly-over between styles, genres and traditional roots, a link back to ancestral music and forward to visions of the future.

His new album came on the heels of his nominations for East Coast Music Awards in 2022 and 2021 for his 2020 album *NEW Scotland*, the album which can be seen as part of the genesis of his latest album and his fresh take on the tradition. *The Bridge* is recognised as the point in his career where he made a musical link between the old traditions of Scotland and Cape Breton and modern acoustic pop.

Reid cites influences as diverse as Taylor Swift and Herbie Hancock, and he pays due respect to countless composers of traditional tunes from Cape Breton and Scotland and mentions Martin Hayes as a fiddler he admires for being able to find the new in the oldest of music.

His first instrument was the saxophone and he excelled as a jazz player. He even toured for a year with Canada's famous Cirque du Soleil. He came to the fiddle after he'd established himself as a saxophone player. He says, "there was fiddle music in the family, my grandfather played and I loved listening to him, and the more I got into the roots of the music, the more I knew that the fiddle was the instrument for me. And when he passed away, I wanted to carry on the tradition in our family."

Brad is inspired by Cape Breton music and it's no surprise that there's piano on the album as keyboards are an interlocked element in the island's tradition. Brad works with the three guest pianists Troy MacGillivray, Kim Dunn, and Jennifer King to colour and shape the tracks, whilst the double bass players Jamie Gatti and Ron Hynes flesh this out.

The album was recorded at the Peggy Corkum Music Room (Halifax, NS) by Alex Arnold, and at Kim Dunn's home studio (Boutlier's Point, NS) by Alex Burris and Kim Dunn. Brad received some financial support from Music Nova Scotia, who support homegrown talent.

With ten new original compositions on the album, Brad walks me through a few of them. I begin by asking him to tell us something

about his *New Waterford's Finest*. "It's on the East coast of Cape Breton, and has a history of coal mining, but also a notable musical culture. I was thinking of musicians I know from New Waterford, like percussionist Tom Roach who played on my last album and often tells stories from home, as well as the late great Dougie McPhee. It's my homage to a place that is sometimes overlooked in the traditional music world."

One track is called *Sunday Session*; is this a reference to a regular kitchen party? "No, although it could be interpreted as that. I was inspired to write it after hearing some Gospel piano music. I wanted to create some music where everyone is enjoying themselves and having one big jam session. The second tune in the set is *Daniel O'Connell's in Ottawa*, named after a weekly session I attended that inspired the tune.

"I've an Irish sounding tune called *The Lass of Luxury* which is a set of modern jigs with a snappy rhythm. Then there is *Fon T-Seann Drochaid*, that translates as *Under the Old Bridge*. It represents a late night walk under an old bridge, guided by moonlight, the piano adds in a meandering section as if you are in no hurry to get home. It's one of the quieter tracks and I tried to position it in the centre of the album to give the programme a moment to breathe. The tune *MacDonald Bridge* emphasizes this back and forth constant movement, as well as the bridge from old traditions to new popular styles. It also connects with my own roots as there are MacDonalds in my lineage."

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There is humour too in his Puir à beul number *Lads of Liltinton*. Mouth music, it ends the album on a traditional note, reminding us where the music has come from. That's the way of a bridge and it's the way of his album. From beginning to end it's all about connections.

Crossover to Brad's website to see where his music is taking him this summer [www.bradreid.ca](http://www.bradreid.ca)

