



## BOOK RELEASE

### ***Don Messer: The Man Behind the Music*** By Johanna Bertin

Non-fiction / Biography  
ISBN 13: 978-0-86492-531-2  
\$19.95 / 280 pp / 6 x 9 / pb  
Pub Date: July 10, 2009

**“It wasn’t just by chance that when they took Don Messer off the air people marched on Parliament Hill.”**

**— Catherine McKinnon**

At the height of his popularity, Don Messer drew almost three million fans to his weekly television show. *Don Messer’s Jubilee*, featuring Marg Osborne, Charlie Chamberlain, and the Buchta Dancers, is an essential part of our cultural history. Messer’s popularity stretched from coast to coast to coast and continues to this day.

Yet, Don Messer — the man — has remained largely an enigma. Not much has been known about the private life of this Canadian music pioneer with the shy smile and self-deprecating manner. ***Don Messer: The Man Behind the Music*** reveals the little boy who snuck into his brother’s room to find and play a hidden violin. Author Johanna Bertin takes us to country barn dances where Messer honed his craft — you can almost feel the dancers’ enthusiasm and the sawdust under their feet. Interviews with friends, family, and former colleagues reveal a man not always comfortable with his fame but nevertheless devoted to his audience as well as his loved ones. A loving family man, his life was marked by personal tragedy — his youngest daughter Brenda died before her second birthday, his wife suffered a bout of tuberculosis and depression after their daughter’s death, and Don himself suffered several heart attacks.

Still, he was a hard-nosed businessman and a great innovator. He crossed Canada 19 times, four times by automobile. He once performed 70 shows in 64 days — travelling from Newfoundland to Yukon. He was the first performer to charter airplanes to get to gigs and was the leading force behind a law to protect musician copyright. Halifax entertainment lawyer Chip Sutherland points out that Messer “pioneered the idea of convergence media, with radio, and television, and live concerts, and he did it fifty years ago. That was groundbreaking stuff.”

Illustrated with rare photographs, ***Don Messer: The Man Behind the Music*** is for anyone who has ever picked up a fiddle and longed to coax that same sweet sound from it; for those whose pulse quickened at the first strains of the his signature tune “Goin’ to the Barn Dance Tonight”; and for anyone who ever dreamed big in a small town.

— more —

Susan Baker, Publicity & Promotions  
Tel. (506) 450 4251 / Toll free 1 (888) 926 8377  
[sbaker@gooselane.com](mailto:sbaker@gooselane.com) [www.gooselane.com](http://www.gooselane.com)

**JOHANNA BERTIN** lives in Don Messer country, in rural New Brunswick. She is the author of two non-fiction books focusing on unusual events in Canadian history, a narrative history of Sable Island, a children’s biography of Sir Charles Tupper, and an anthology of unusual Christmas stories.

She possesses a gift for bringing history and personalities to life with vivid imagery and tells the tales of everyday people whose stories tell us so much about Canada and the spirit of Canadians. She feels incredibly privileged to have written the personal biography of Don Messer, and it is her goal to ensure that this pioneering musician be recognized not only for his musical talent but for the unique role that he played in the preservation of rural, folk, Celtic, and Old-Time Music in Canada.

Johanna travels at every opportunity. She has camel trekked in Morocco, hiked in China, pony trekked in Iceland, and ridden in a horse race in Inner Mongolia. She rides a motorbike to work. Lucky enough to live on a farm in Smithfield, New Brunswick, with her husband Bruce Pendrel, she has two children — Geoff and Catharine — many animals, and hundreds of books.

— 30 —

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

For review copies, author interviews, or publication excerpts, please contact Susan Baker at [sbaker@gooselane.com](mailto:sbaker@gooselane.com) or call (888) 926.8377.

High-res book cover and author image files are available at [www.gooselane.com](http://www.gooselane.com).