



[*Métis Music: Stories of Recognition and Resurgence*](#) by Monique Giroux. McGill-Queen's Indigenous and Northern Studies 108. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2024. 9 photos, 3 tables, 288 pp. ISBN 9780228022268.

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When I first saw the cover art of *Métis Music: Stories of Recognition and Resurgence*, I was struck by Métis artist Lisa Shepherd's beautiful image of a beaded fiddle and colourful flowers that signal Métis music and people. It was perfect for this book. The contents and writing of Monique Giroux's volume *Métis Music* celebrate the

vitality and richness of Métis music, while engaging with important discussions around Métis identity erasure and recognition, cultural celebration, and resurgence. The book is grounded in Giroux's years of personal experience as a fiddler, and extensive fieldwork and research on Métis music, solidifying Giroux's position as a, if not the, leading scholar of Métis music in Canada. This work is rooted in stories and analyses that are shared to provide readers with knowledges about Métis peoples, histories, and music practices, while demonstrating the impacts of ongoing interactions with settlers and their "fickle" understanding and recognition of Métis people and music. As Giroux states, *Métis Music* is not a definitive account: "I situate this book as stories rather than a grand narrative about Metis music and intercultural relations" (p. 27).

Opening the book with a description of her identity, lineage, and connection to place, Giroux demonstrates her deep knowledge and respect of Métis music, its complicated history, and its entanglement with settler society in Canada. With a goal to "understand the shifting relationships between Métis peoples and Canada through music" (p. 12), Giroux explores many tensions and fluctuations in Métis music and identity politics in Canada, shifting between recognition, erasure, and resurgence. Giroux also problematizes the separation of Métis music from Métis peoples and cultures, evident in descriptions about fiddle music categories in fiddle competitions, and other musical representations of Métis.

The opening chapter, "Recognition, Resurgence, and Ethical Responsiveness" establishes the main theoretical concepts that are woven throughout the book. Giroux explores the politics of recognition, resurgence, and resurgent music, highlighting the ethics of responsiveness that informed the research and writing of this work. The politics of recognition have been problematized by many Indigenous scholars and ethnomusicologists and is a critical lens through which Giroux examines Métis music in Canada. Illustrating the complexity and variability of Métis recognition



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(and erasure) by the Canadian public, Giroux demonstrates how the settler state has operationalized recognition of Métis peoples over time to suit its goals. Giroux also engages the notion of resurgence, which “nurtures revolution and Indigenous life for future generations” (p. 20). The intersection of the politics of recognition and resurgence in regard to Métis music is complemented with the urgency of Giroux’s encouragement for non-Métis to learn from and listen (differently) to Métis, what she calls ethical responsiveness.

This book is primarily dedicated to an exploration of Métis “fiddle dance – “a term borrowed from Sarah Quick to indicate the intricate and ‘essential relationship between music and dance’” (p. 30) – and settler engagement, erasure, and recognition of Métis within this tradition. Giroux weaves first-hand accounts of Métis music-making with analyses of historic documents and narratives about Métis fiddle dance to create a compelling volume that is essential reading for fiddle enthusiasts, ethnomusicologists, and Canadian music scholars. “Fiddle Dance across the Métis Homeland” explores different accounts of and perspectives about Métis fiddle dance histories, using the model of two-eyed seeing to complement testimonials provided by fur traders – revealed to be racist towards Indigenous peoples and their cultural expressions – with Métis oral histories and narratives of fiddle dance, demonstrating “the importance of social relations and responsibilities enacted through fiddle dance and ... musical connections to the land (including its people and animals)” (p. 58). In “Writing Métis Music in Manitoba Newspapers” Giroux reviews representations of Métis music through her analysis of English-language newspapers published in southern Manitoba since the late nineteenth century. Accounting as much for what is not said about Métis as what is written, Giroux explores the shifting narratives held by settlers about Métis music, notably demonstrating the “fickleness and instrumentalization” of recognition (p. 61) to suit settler agendas. Giroux also accounts for shifts in public attitudes and knowledge about Métis starting in the 1960s, in response to political activism and national discussions around multiculturalism, and then again in 1982, following the official recognition of Métis in the Canadian Constitution. Giroux’s analysis shows the separation of Métis from Métis music and the erasure of Métis in Métis fiddle music. Similar analytic framing is engaged throughout the book to illustrate the waxing and waning of understandings of Métis and Métis music.

One of the richest and most compelling chapters is “Exchange, Multicultural Compartmentalization, and the New Old-Time Style”, giving readers a clear explanation of the emergence of the old-time fiddle style, the role of Métis fiddlers in popularizing this style locally (e.g., in Manitoba) and nationally, and the relationship between old-time style and the Métis fiddle style. Tracing the emergence of old-time style in lumber camps and traveling shows (and sheet music), Giroux demonstrates the significant influence of key fiddlers in the Winnipeg area on Canadian old-time fiddling, including renowned Métis fiddler Andy Desjarlis. Discussion of Canadian fiddling icon Don Messer stresses that he actively learned from fiddlers, including Métis fiddlers, on his cross-Canada tours, incorporating new repertoire to share on his show. Giroux details the relationship between this popular, nationally viewed show and emerging notions of multiculturalism and Canadian identity.

Public, large-scale competitions and festivals remain important sites for expressions of Métis identity and Métis fiddle dance. Further demonstrating the erasure of Métis musicians and their detachment from “Métis music,” Giroux argues that Métis have always been featured at fiddle contests in Manitoba since their emergence in the 1920s but were often not identified as Métis. Exploring these narratives of erasure through the lens of intercultural encounter, Giroux concludes that although there has been an increase in identifying Métis music at old-time fiddle contests, there remains a lack of recognition of long-time Métis fiddlers and their contributions to the tradition. Conversely, in “Cultural Festivals as Recognition and Resurgence,” Giroux compares Métis-led gatherings within and beyond the Métis Homeland, demonstrating the cultural work of festivals. Largely drawing on field work attending Métis festivals in Saskatchewan (“Back to Batoche”), Montana (“Métis Music and Art Festival”) and Ontario (“Oshawa Métis Heritage Festival”), Giroux offers a description of the origins, goals, and practices of these festivals and how they are shaped to serve and respond to their respective local communities.

The final chapter in the book moves away from Métis fiddle dance to instead engage in representations of Métis hero Louis Riel in Harry Somers’ 1967 opera *Louis Riel* and Métis poet, librettist and scholar Suzanne Steele’s 2023 work *Li Keur: Riel’s Heart of the North*. Reviewing various stagings and reviews of Somers’ opera and scholars’ engagement with it, Giroux identifies the ongoing erasure of Métis voices from this narrative and the “salvage” rhetoric about the opera and its place in Canadian music history offered by various music scholars in Canada. Conversely, drawing on her analysis of *Li Keur*, and enhanced by conversations with Steele, Giroux explores a model for Métis engagement in creative representations of Métis culture, but also identifies the erasure and attempted silencing of the Métis creator of the work. Discussion of these works reminds readers that recognition and good intentions are often ineffective for change.

Giroux provides a compelling, thought-provoking, and engaged account of some of the stories related to Métis music, demonstrating the ways in which intercultural exchange fostered Métis fiddle dance and old-time fiddling in Canada, as well as the erasure and complicated nature of recognition of Métis music and musicians. It is an excellent resource for readers interested in Métis music and culture, fiddling traditions in Canada, and the effects and consequences of ongoing intercultural relations between Indigenous and settler peoples in Canada.