

# ALANA & LEIGH CLINE

Seán Laffey talks to two Toronto musicians, Alana & Leigh Cline, fiddler and guitar player, daughter and father, both of whom have a grá for Celtic music.



**A**lana told me she “started playing the fiddle at 7, after asking my Dad if I could play violin. I did a year of Classical music, and by 8 I decided I wanted to play Celtic music, and have been playing it ever since. I did attend many festivals, clubs, and dances with my Dad, and I do think it gave me a love of live performance.”

Leigh says, “I come out of the North American folk scene and was involved both as Tech Director and later as Artistic Director for the Mariposa Folk Festival, at the time the largest in Canada. Irish musicians then, such as the Clancys, were just as much a part of the folk scene as the Irish scene. We brought in Cape Breton musicians, including Sandy MacIntyre and Winston “Scotty” Fitzgerald and Scottish/Irish players like Aly Bain and the Boys of the Lough, so that was my first exposure to that kind of music. Sandy MacIntyre and I co-authored a tune book for Mel Bay Publications called *Cape Breton Traditional Style Fiddle Sets with Guitar Tablature*, which features 21 sets of tunes in set order with chords and guitar tab.”

with over Skype for a couple of years. I’ve also studied at two summer courses, the Meitheal Summer School, and The Gaelic College in Cape Breton.”

In addition to festivals, concerts, clubs and private events, the duo are also in demand for corporate work both together and as solo artists. Alana adds modestly, “I recently performed at a Tourism Ireland event in Toronto attended by An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar.”

What role did Leigh play in the technical recording of their CD *Alana & Leigh Cline*? “Because I produced it, I was involved in all the technical aspects. We used two of the best engineers in Canada, Jeremy Darby, who tracked and mixed it, and Peter Letros, who mastered it. We wanted to do as little editing as possible because we wanted it to sound natural and the CD is actually a pretty good representation of how we sound live. We decided to have the cover art in a style that mirrors the music on the CD which is all trad, with much of it from the 18th and 19th centuries, except for one Balkan inspired tune that I wrote.”

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Alana learned Cape Breton style fiddling from Sandy MacIntyre, who lives in Toronto. “When I was younger, he and his band performed weekly at a pub called the Bow & Arrow in Toronto. I attended his performances (and often performed a set or two), and really learned a lot about Cape Breton musical performance there. Cape Breton musicians who were in town (such as Ashley MacIsaac) would often stop in to perform there. Sandy really influenced my style. People often tell me they can see Sandy’s influence in my bowing. Sandy also taught me a lot about thinking about music, including the use of sheet music, which helps me now in looking up old books of Celtic music.”

I’ve noticed that one feature of traditional Cape Breton fiddlers is the angle at which they hold the violin, almost vertical; I asked Alana if she too has this traditional hold?

“As I started off with a year of Classical music I would say my hold is a mixture of Classical and Cape Breton styles. My bowing also has a hard driving style, which I learned from Maeve Donnelly, who I studied

I was intrigued by the duo’s versions of *Drowsy Maggie* on the CD. “*Drowsy Maggie* is a favourite set of mine,” Alana says, and continues, “it incorporates versions from Cape Breton, Irish, and Scottish music. It lets me show the different styles I perform all in one set, and show the differences in the styles. We play the tunes *Drowsy Maggie*, *Glass of Beer*, *Sleepy Maggie*, and *Jenny’s Chickens*, which are all tunes from the same tune family. Two versions of *Drowsy Maggie* are played, the more common version, and a Donegal version, which I learned from Paul O’Shaughnessy at the Meitheal Summer School in 2008. There are also two Cape Breton versions of *Sleepy Maggie*, one I learned from Sandy MacIntyre, and the other is a version by Winston “Scotty” Fitzgerald.”

Alana says “We are now working with Marilyn Gilbert Artists Management for bookings, [www.mgam.com](http://www.mgam.com)”. The duo are very busy performing in the next 6 months, and are hoping to come over to Ireland in the near future.

Find out more at [www.leighcline.com/alanaleigh.html](http://www.leighcline.com/alanaleigh.html)