

## *Music at Gros Morne* by Kathleen Winter

*“She said she couldn’t dance,  
Because she had her bloomers on;  
But when she took them off,  
She could dance as good as anyone.”*  
(Traditional folksong)

For the last week of summer, we took the kids to their grandparents, and escaped to camp. Vinland Music Camp started last summer as a three-day camp for young people. This year, its founder Eric West ran it for a full week and invited adults, too. Teachers Jean Hewson, Christina Smith, Daniel Payne, Gayle Tapper and West teach traditional Newfoundland music on guitar, fiddle, accordion, harp and tin whistle, as well as traditional singing, in a setting that rivals anywhere in the world for grandeur and drama.

### **The Tablelands**

For me, the week was a reintroduction to the Gros Morne area, which I remembered in vague childhood snippets that included fighting with my brothers in the back seat of the car. You could say this was the first time I’d really seen the place.

It goes beyond seeing, since the power of the land, especially the area known as the Tablelands, is magnetic. The place commands you to be present in it. The wind over the Tablelands blows cobwebs from your mind and inspires you with new ideas, while the strange red rock from deep within the earth grounds you in a here and now filled with possibilities.

It’s fun to be taught as an adult by good teachers, and Vinland’s instructors are impeccable and kind. Anything I learned about music I have learned as an adult, and I think that has made me respect the depth of music as art, mathematics and science combined. It seems to me that you can never get to the bottom of it, and for that reason it’s a privilege to get good teachers who can present music in any of its depths and aspects, and still be understood.

While the camp builds on West’s interest in sharing traditional and modern music of Newfoundland and Labrador, there is also a sharing of broader elements of music. You remember that a fiddle is a violin, too, and there is Paraguayan harp around the campfire.

### **Alternative drums**

I think the Tablelands area falls on one of Earth’s ley lines, or areas where there is more to the land and sky than meets the logical mind. To set up anything as open as a music camp there invites sympathetic, wonderful circumstances to occur.

Into one harp workshop walked a maker of European medieval-style harps. At the park’s interpretation centre, there happened to be a local alternative rock group hand-carving drums from birch, using tools forged by a descendant of the man who was the blacksmith for Bowaters, in the company’s early days.

Tin whistle and accordion instructor Daniel Payne ended up calling a square dance for our group combined with 50 women who came to Killdevil for a weekend workshop in matters connecting body, mind and spirit.

If you want more laughter in your life, you just need to watch or join a hall full of people learning to circle around, meet in the middle, form a men’s and women’s star, go through the woods and thread the needle, while fiddlers, guitarists, accordion players and their apprentices duck flying bloomers and illustrate in loud and melodious company the difference between a jig and a reel.

***Kathleen Winter** is a Newfoundland writer who presently lives in Montreal. The above is from a weekly column she wrote in the St. John’s Telegram.*