



ALEX STURBAUM  
ATLANTIC DREAMS

**TRADITIONAL MUSIC OF NEWFOUNDLAND**

## **About this album:**

When I was twelve years old, I discovered the traditional music of Newfoundland. While I'd grown up in a musical household, there was something about Newfoundland music that grabbed me in a way that nothing had before; the ripple of the button accordion, the driving power of the bodhran, the full-throated harmony of a sea shanty. I'd never heard anything like it, and all of a sudden, music was no longer something I was content to listen to; it was something I wanted to *do*. Within a year, I was driving my parents crazy as I learned, with more enthusiasm than innate skill, to play the bodhran. A year after that, I was learning my first guitar chords; a year after that, I had my first button accordion. I haven't stopped since.

I soon discovered traditional Irish music, as there was a thriving scene in Cincinnati, OH, where I grew up. Irish and Newfoundland music are close cousins, and I spent years in the Irish tradition, learning anything that anyone would teach me. Later, at Oberlin College, I began playing for contra dances. The contra dance tradition casts a wide net, and gleefully accepts fiddle tunes from all over; Irish, Scottish, Cape Breton, American old-time, Quebecois, New England, and more besides. One style of music, though, seemed conspicuously absent: the very style that had made me a devotee of traditional music all those years ago.

Newfoundland music is itself a melting-pot style. In the dance tunes of Newfoundland, you can hear lilt and phrasing characteristic of Irish tunes, the bounce and occasional exciting crookedness typical of Quebecois music, the drive and attack characteristic of Cape Breton, the swagger of English morris tunes, the lovely flow of French waltzes, and the influence of the music of the Mi'kmaq people of Atlantic Canada. In the songs, you can hear English, Celtic, and French traditional song stylings, as well as the ever-present maritime influence. However, Newfoundland music is more than just an amalgamation of different styles; it is its own tradition, and deserves recognition as such. It is also just really, *really* good music.

When I found myself unable to tour in 2020-2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I went back to the well, and immersed myself in Newfoundland music. I listened to old recordings of Emile Benoit, Rufus Guinchar, Vince Collins, and other great players, as well as a wealth of newly released material by the current generation of Newfoundland musicians, such as the Dardanelles, Rum Ragged, Daniel Payne, and Matthew Byrne. Before I knew it, I had learned an album's worth of tunes and songs, and, with nothing but time on my hands, I decided to capture them on tape and share them with the world.

I hope that you all enjoy my tribute to an amazing and vibrant musical tradition. If you like this album, I strongly encourage you to join me in diving into this excellent music. There's a seemingly never-ending supply of awesome tunes and songs in the woodpile, and they should be heard.

*Alex Sturbaum, 4/11/2021, Olympia, WA*

### **1: Stan Rogers / Calvin Payne's Step Dance Tune / Hound's Tune (Reels)**

*"Stan Rogers" and "Hound's Tune" are from the repertoire of master Newfoundland fiddler Rufus Guinchar; "Stan Rogers" is one of his compositions. I learned the middle tune from the playing of Aaron Collis and Emelia Bartellas.*

### **2: Good Morning You Would Like Some Tea / The Sook / Blueberry Quadrille (Jigs)**

*Three sprightly jigs. "Good Morning You Would Like Some Tea" is another tune from the repertoire of Rufus Guinchar. I love the title of the tune - it's not a question, just a simple statement of fact. Anyone who has ever stayed at my house is familiar with the non-negotiable nature of tea. I learned the second tune from the playing of Bob Hallett and Great Big Sea, and the third from Graham Wells, Colin Carrigan, and Jason Whalen on the album "Island to Island".*

### **3: Jim Harris / MacCormack's Breakdown (Song/Reel)**

*"Jim Harris" was composed by Peter Leonard; I heard it from the singing of Matthew Byrne. Newfoundland has a deep tradition of shipwreck songs, and I love this one's haunting reminder that even the most experienced person can make a grave error. "MacCormack's Breakdown" is a composition of Emile Benoit.*

### **4: The Boys from Dildo / Joey Clement's / Form a Line (Singles)**

*Three singles (Newfoundland tunes similar to Irish polkas). I learned the first and last tunes from Aaron Collis and Emelia Bartellas, and the middle one from Daniel Payne.*

### **5: Old Country Waltz**

*A simple yet lovely waltz from the playing of Vince Collins.*

### **6: She Broke The Leg of Her Coffee Pot / Lizzie's Jig / Up the Southern Shore (Jigs)**

*Three fast jigs! The first tune is a square dance tune from Baxter Wareham of Placentia Bay, the second comes from Rufus Guinchard, and the third is Newfoundland's answer to the English tune "Mrs. Casey".*

### **7: Aunt Maggie Gambin's / A Dose of White Owls (Reel/Song)**

*I learned "A Dose of White Owls" from the band Rum Ragged. Apparently Cape Freels was at one point inundated with snowy owls and it caused quite a commotion. "Aunt Maggie Gambin's" comes from the playing of Vince Collins.*

### **8: Uncle Harry's Out of Shape / West Bay Centre / Lover's Reel (Jigs/Reel)**

*The first tune comes from the playing of Rufus Guinchard; the other two are compositions of master fiddler Emile Benoit. I find the crookedness of the first two tunes utterly delightful.*

### **9: Like You Would / Kitty Got A Clinkin' / Buffett Double (Hornpipe/Reels)**

*"Like You Would" was written by accordion player Geoff Butler, of the band Figgy Duff. I learned it as a teenager from the album "Island to Island" and have been playing it ever since. "Kitty Got a Clinkin'" appears on the Dardanelles' fantastic second album, "The Eastern Light". I first heard "Buffett Double" from the playing of Bob Hallett.*

### **10: The White Winged Diver / Ladies in the Salt Pound / Mussels in the Corner (Jig/Singles)**

*"The White Winged Diver" was written by Aaron Collis, accordionist with The Dardanelles and Rum Ragged. I learned "Ladies in the Salt Pound" from the playing of Doug Dorward. In 2005, nine hundred and eighty-nine accordionists gathered in St. John's to play "Mussels in the Corner", setting the world record for simultaneous accordion playing - which is one of the single best things I've ever heard. Someday, it will happen again, and I hope to make it nine hundred and ninety.*

## 11: Captains and Ships (Song)

*A portrait of the St. John's waterfront, circa 1917. I fell in love with this song's chorus and ending line the moment I heard it. It came to me from the band A Crowd of Bold Sharemen. May we all come back with big beards on our lips.*

**All tunes and songs are traditional except where otherwise noted.**

### The instruments:



**Guitar:** Santa Cruz Vintage Jumbo, 2003

**Accordion:** B/C Hohner Erica, refurbished by Martin Quinn

**Bodhran:** Christian Hedwitschak "TrHED"

**Octave Mandolin:** short-scale bouzouki built by Nikos Apollonio, 2019

**Bouzouki:** Long-scale bouzouki built by Joe Foley, 2003

**Mandolin:** 1963 Gibson A-50

**Tenor Banjo:** 1920's Leedy "Olympian"

**Bass (not pictured):** MTD KZ4

**Recorded, mixed, and mastered by Alex Sturbaum at Scrub Jay Studio, Olympia, WA  
Album art by Amy Bogard**

This album is the most “solo” project I have ever embarked on; I arranged all the tracks, performed all the parts, recorded it in my home studio, and did the mixing and mastering. That said, there are many people without whom I could not have completed this project, so some thanks are in order.

First, **thank you** to Aaron Collis, Geoff Butler, Gerry Strong, Matthew Byrne, Billy Sutton, Bob Hallett, Glen Collins, Kelly Russell, Daniel Payne, and all the wonderful Newfoundland musicians who responded when I reached out to ask questions about these songs and tunes. Thank you for your inspiration, the depth of your knowledge, and your willingness to share the culture of your home with me.

**Thank you** to Brian Lindsay for all your work on building the studio in which this album was recorded, as well as your keen ear, trusted guidance, and patience with all of my elementary mixing questions. Without your talents and knowledge, this album wouldn't sound half as good.

**Thank you** to my father, Arthur Sturbaum, for teaching me so much of what I know about playing music, for supporting my musical exploits for the past two decades, for exposing me to Newfoundland music in the first place, and for, when my need was most dire, mailing me a banjo.

**Thank you** to River Scheuerell, Brian Lindsay, Audrey Knuth, Alicia Healey, Leah Wollenberg, Mike Winch, and Gerard Hranek for your feedback during the mixing and mastering process. I had never before mixed and mastered a full album, and your input was invaluable.

**Thank you** to Amy Bogard for the exquisite album art.

**Thank you** to Laura Bassett for being an excellent housemate over the course of this album, and for sharing in my successes and frustrations when I complained to you in the kitchen.

**Thank you** to Brennan Kessenich for the music nights during the process of making this album. I love the way you think about music, and our discussions influenced the way these tunes were played.

Finally, **thank you** to my partner, Rae Eaton, for your unwavering love, patience, and support for my music and for this project, even when it was “bodhran week” and your home office was being shaken by hours of nonstop noise. You are awesome and I love you. Newfoundland is often called The Rock; you are mine.