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## LIFESTYLES

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### The voices of home

Homesickness inspires author to write book about P.E.I. musicians

By Sally Cole  
The Guardian

Growing up on P.E.I., Jay Scott Kanes took little notice of musicians and their music.

His passion was hockey.

"The on-ice feats of Ken Dryden and Guy Lafleur interested me far more than the on-stage antics of Angele Arsenault or Stompin' Tom Connors," says Kanes, the pen name for John Cairns, who was raised on a farm in Lower Freetown and graduated from Athena regional high school in 1976 and from UPEI in 1980, with a major in Canadian history.

But after living in Asia for more over a decade, his perspective has changed.

Kanes longs for the language and the music of his native P.E.I., he says during a telephone interview.

"Coming back here in the summers delights me, especially my ears," says Kanes, who has collected new listening pleasures to take back with him to Hong Kong where he resides with his wife, Eva.

Becoming aware of individual P.E.I. artists made him think of the bigger picture.

"Consistently returning home made me realize that P.E.I. has abundant musical talent, vastly more than most places.

"I would estimate that the number of musicians on P.E.I. is not in the hundreds but in the thousands," says the Canadian journalist who has written a book on the subject and has come home to launch it.

Island Toes A'Tapping not only asks how does Canada's province produce so many talented musicians, it profiles bands including Bluebreak, Wayne Brown, the Celtic Ladies, Chiquisa, Fiddlers' Sons, Chas Guay, the Lazy Jacks, Lennie Gallant, Roy MacCaull, Catherine MacLellan, Cynthia MacLeod, Janet McGarry, Michael Pendergast, Rodney Savidant and Keelin Wedge and countless others.

With a guest introduction from P.E.I. singer-songwriter Eddy Quinn and a tribute to the late Urban Carmichael, the paperback is getting positive reviews.

"It's just a wonderful idea. And an idea whose time has come. I credit Kanes for putting together telling profiles of this magical musical community," says radio personality Eddy MacEwen.

And that's good news for Kanes who has been working on the project since early 2005.

"It turned my yearly visit to P.E.I. into a research expedition as I conducted interviews and took photos. Once back in Hong Kong, I continued the research.

"E-mail addresses became precious as I tried to track down the main players," he says.

Luckily, many people replied and even sent along more photos.

"The greatest challenge in writing the book was to collect information from so many sources about so many people. Many people helped by consenting to interviews or offering suggestions, information and photos.

"Some incredibly helpful people actually drove my questions to non-e-mail-savvy fellow musicians before e-mailing me the answers. I'm very appreciative," says Kanes who calls himself a Johnny-come-lately music writer.

"The real experts are the people who have been playing music on P.E.I. for decades and decades," he says.

Now that the book is out, it's having a ripple effect.

It has prompted Sandcastle Recording of Borden to create a two-disc compilation also called Island Toes A'Tapping.

"From the time he started the interviews we wanted to get involved," says Wayne Walsh, during a telephone interview.

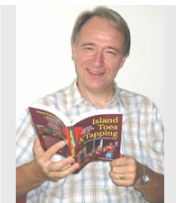
"I think it's going to be one of the most exciting vehicles to promote Island music that has come along," he says.

Kanes hopes it's just the beginning.

There's a huge musical resource that's just waiting to be tapped into.

"Summer visitors list many reasons to regard P.E.I. as a paradise. They mention the friendly people, sandy beaches, challenging golf courses.

"Those things are nice, but to me, they're not the main attraction. That distinction belongs to thousands of impressive musicians. I'd rate great music as P.E.I.'s best product," Kanes says.



Jay Scott Kanes holds a copy of his new book, *Island Toes A'Tapping*. Kanes, a self-professed Johnny-come-lately music writer, wants the recognition to go to the artists. "The real experts are the people who have been playing music on P.E.I. for decades and decades," says the P.E.I. native, who lives in Hong Kong. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)

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