

# Laura Risk

From driving reels and passionate strathspeys to lilting jigs, melancholy Gaelic airs, and elegant 18th-century minuets, Laura Risk's fiddling takes you on a rich journey through the diverse repertoires of Scotland and Québec. Her expressive, versatile playing is described by filmmaker Ken Burns as "a revelation and achingly beautiful."

Originally from California, Laura grew up in the thriving San Francisco Scottish fiddle scene, learning her craft from master fiddler Alasdair Fraser. Her teenage collaboration with fiddler Athena Tergis resulted in the acclaimed album *Journey Begun*, featuring original compositions and innovative arrangements of traditional Scottish tunes. "Tergis and Risk [are] the toast of northern California's Celtic renaissance," declared *Strings Magazine*.

Upon moving to Boston in 1996, Laura joined American roots band Cordelia's Dad. Their 1998 CD, *Spine*, was named Folk Album of the Month by MOJO and lauded by *CMJ New Music Monthly*: "If traditional American music has a future, it's probably Cordelia's Dad." The band toured North America and England extensively, including performances at London's Barbican Centre, the Newport, Winnipeg, and Philadelphia Folk Festivals, and City Stages (Birmingham, AL).

On her 1999 recording *Celtic Dialogue* – named one of the "Top Ten CDs Of The Year" by the Boston Globe – Laura joined forces with pianist Jacqueline Schwab in a musical exploration of the classical/traditional crossover in 18th-century Scotland. "[*Celtic Dialogue*] presents both artists at their ground-breaking best, very traditional yet compositionally elegant and provocatively improvisational... Equal parts classical chamber set and wild Celtic ceilidh," (Scott Alarik, WBUR, Boston) Recently, Grammy-winning filmmaker Ken Burns used selections from *Celtic Dialogue* in the soundtrack to his PBS series *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*.



In 1997, hammered dulcimer virtuoso Ken Kolodner invited Laura and guitarist Robin Bullock to join him for a week of recording at the acoustically magnificent Troy Savings Bank Music Hall in upstate New York. The resulting album, *Walking Stones*, sold over 50,000 copies, hit the top of the World Music charts and was a BMG Record Club Top 15 Bestseller. Ken, Laura and Robin then toured for several years as the trio Greenfire, recording the CD *Greenfire* in 1998. After Robin moved to France, Ken and Laura continued to tour as a duo and recorded *A Roof for the Rain*. Greenfire and duo performances include a "Memoires Vives" concert / broadcast for Radio-Canada, a performance at Pennsylvania's spectacular Longwood Gardens, featured soloists in "Christmas with the Baltimore Choral Arts Society," broadcast to over 500,000 viewers in the Washington DC. area on WMAR TV (ABC), and, unforgettably, the annual convention of the Society for Gynecological Investigation!

By 2001, Laura had moved to Montreal and begun to collaborate with pioneering percussive dancer Sandy Silva (La Bottine Souriante, Open House). "A brilliant musical dialogue" is *The Glasgow Herald's* description of their duo show. Together, the two women presented a dramatic interplay of traditional music and dance, innovative choreography, and raw improvisation. Appearances include the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow, Scotland, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (MA), D'Amour et de Danse (Centre Pierre-Peladeau, Montreal), Wheatlands Music and Dance Weekend (MI), the Mission Folk Festival (BC), the Chico World Music Festival (CA), and a concert at the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art.

Laura released her latest solo recording, *2000 Miles*, in 2004. The album finds Laura joining forces with some of Quebec's hottest traditional and jazz musicians: Eric Beaudry (La Bottine Souriante, De Temps Antan) on guitar, Rachel

Aucoin (Raz de Marée, Domino) on piano, Eric Breton (Perdu l'Nord) on percussion, and Michel Donato (Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson) on bass. The repertoire, however, is pure Scottish, with a particular emphasis on tunes from the great Scottish collectors and composers of the 18th and 19th centuries. States Australia's ABC Radio National, "2000 Miles is an excellent, imaginative new album of Scottish music... Verve and lyricism are both abundantly evident."

In addition to her solo work, Laura currently tours with guitarist/percussionist/vocalist Paddy League and percussive dancer Kieran Jordan in the trio Triptych. Delivering soulful yet gutsy renderings of traditional music and step dance from the Irish, Scottish, and Québécois traditions, Triptych has just released its debut CD. Past performances include the Festival Mémoire et Racines (QC), the Festival International des Arts Traditionnels de Québec, nationally-syndicated radio host Brian O'Donovan's "A St. Patrick's Day Celtic Sojourn," and the Touhill Performing Arts Center at the University of Missouri, St. Louis.

Over the years, Laura has worked as a freelance musician with a number of ensembles, including baroque-Celtic crossover group Ensemble Galilei, the touring band of Irish powerhouse accordionist John Whelan, and the contemporary Irish musical theatre company Kiltartan Road. In 2005, Laura performed in "Le Bal des Ménestriers," a Danse Cadence production at the Montréal Baroque Festival, and in 2006 she was the featured fiddler in "La traverse miraculeuse," a CBC/McGill-sponsored collaboration between early music ensemble La Nef and Québécois acapella quintet Les Charbonniers de l'enfer. Laura also plays for Scottish Country Dancing with her Montreal-based band Les Joueurs de Bon Accord (with Nicholas Williams on piano and Eric Breton on percussion).

Laura is known as an outstanding teacher, able to inspire students at any level. She has taught at the Valley of the Moon Scottish Fiddling School, The Swannanoa Gathering (Celtic Week), Fiddlekids, Alasdair Fraser's Sierra Fiddle Camp, the Southern Hemisphere School of Scottish Fiddling (New Zealand), Boston Harbor Scottish Fiddle School, Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp, and the Southern California Suzuki Institute. While living in Boston, Laura was an Instructor of Fiddling at Wellesley College, where she led the Fiddleheads student ensemble.