

The Knowledge keepers Diary

MÉTIS NATION OF ALBERTA REGION 1

I have nothing but my heart and I have given it long ago to my country...
Louis Riel

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MÉTIS MUSIC AND DANCE

The traditions of Métis song and dance have survived over the centuries, and still to this day, maintains an important role in our culture.



Music

The Métis have always been social and festive people with a love of songs and dance, blending their First Nations and European ancestral cultures into unique fiddle playing and dance styles. As Europeans brought violins to North America, the Métis embraced the instrument and began playing and making their own tunes, often mixing First Nations, Scots and French-Canadian rhythms, but with unique beats. These new songs also led to the creation of new dances. Later, other fiddling traditions from English-speaking North America also contributed to Métis fiddling.



The Métis created their own songs, in the style of traditional folk song, which commented on the immediate events of their lives: religious, agricultural, and particularly on the political turmoil of the times as well as being attributed to the 19th century Métis leader, Louis Riel. With the late-20th century upsurge of political consciousness several of these songs are becoming well known again.

Did you know, experienced jiggers can perform up to 10,000 steps in a 30-minute time frame.

Dance

THE RED RIVER JIG HAS ALWAYS SERVED AS A DANCE, PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE CULTURES CAN ENGAGE IN TOGETHER, THROW IN A COUPLE SQUARE DANCES, A FEW SHARED STORIES, AND MANY, MANY LAUGHS AND YOUR ALL SET FOR A NIGHT OF MAKING MEMORIES THAT LAST UNTIL THE MORNING HOURS.

The history of Métis jigging lies in the traditional dances of their Irish and Scottish ancestors and was also influenced by First Nations dance as well; however, Métis Jigging is different. The original music of the Métis is up-tempo and lively, which made it perfect for dancing. Then as time went on, extra and irregular beats were added to give more bounce to the music, making the dance a lot faster.

Impromptu dances and community gatherings happened weekly in some communities and as word of the evening's entertainment spread around the community, the family hosting the dance would stack their furniture in a corner of the house, or even outside. Everyone was welcome to come to these dances and the music along with the dancing would last throughout the night. The the sound of the music could often be heard across the community.

Musical Instruments

Métis music instruments are portable, easy to tune and to play by ear, such as the fiddle (violin), mouth-organ, accordion, spoons, comb, and jaw harp. There is one folk saying, there was rarely a Métis home that didn't have a fiddle hanging on the wall, and when they could not afford to order one from a catalogue they would often make them from maple wood and birch bark.



THE RED RIVER JIG IS THE PRIDE OF MÉTIS FAMILIES, AND THEY LIKE TO JOKE BY SAYING THAT THE WAY TO DRIVE A MÉTIS CRAZY IS TO NAIL HIS MOCCASINS TO THE FLOOR AND PLAY THE RED RIVER JIG

