

André “Andy” Dejarlis: Metis Fiddler. (1914-1975)

By Marcel Meilleur

Dejarlis, who won his first fiddling contest in 1935, was one of the most popular entertainers on the Prairies, performing 1935-43 on Winnipeg's CJRC radio and touring 1937-43 in northern Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. His band was known initially as the *Red River Mates* and later as the *Early Settlers*. Though less active from 1948-54, due to poor health, Dejarlis had won over 20 fiddling contests in western Canada by 1952. He later appeared on *Don Messer's Jubilee* and was featured 1962-3 on CFTM-TV in Montreal. In 1965 he returned to Winnipeg.

Andy Dejarlis was one of Manitoba's best-known Metis fiddlers and bandleaders. He was born near Woodridge, Manitoba in 1914 and named Joseph Patrice E. Desjarlais. He comes from a family of Métis fiddlers. One of his ancestors, Pierre Falcon, was called the “Red River Bard.” Andy Dejarlis was introduced to the violin at the age of 15. He came to Winnipeg in 1934 and won his first fiddling competition in 1935. He was a regular on the radio (CJRC) from 1937 to 1948 and in the 1960s appeared on CBC television with the Don Messer show. He came out with 25 LP's containing 175 original songs, and sold over half a million records.

Andy came from a long line of fiddlers; his father, Pierre Desjarlais, was a good player. Andy changed the spelling of his name from “Desjarlais” to “Dejarlis,” because radio announcers couldn't say his name correctly. At an early age his father would take him along to various fiddling jam sessions, where his fiddler fiends were artists such as Frederick Genthon and Pete Payette. In 1962, Andy was signed by London Records and asked to go to Montreal to record. While there he was hired by Channel 10 TV to lead off a weekly music show with his band, The Early Settlers. In 1965 Don Messer asked him to join the network show in Halifax. After a sojourn in Winnipeg, Andy returned to the on Messer show in 1967. In 1968/69, he received an award for Best composer of Old time Music and Canada's Best Seller of Old Time Music. In 1969, he also became the first Canadian to win the annual Broadcast Music Canada Inc. prize.

When he died in 1975, Andy Dejarlis had more than 200 musical compositions to his credit (jigs, reels, polkas and waltzes) as well as 38 records. Dejarlis is particularly remembered for his way with waltz music and his synthesis of Messer's ‘down east’ style with Native and Métis repertoires.



Contributed by the late Marcel Meilleur a long time friend and fiddling partner of Andy Dejarlis.

Reference:

Marcel Meilleur, "Fond Recollections of Fiddling Great Andy Dejarlis." *Red River Echoes: The Life and Music of Marcel Meilleur*. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2003: 43-49.



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