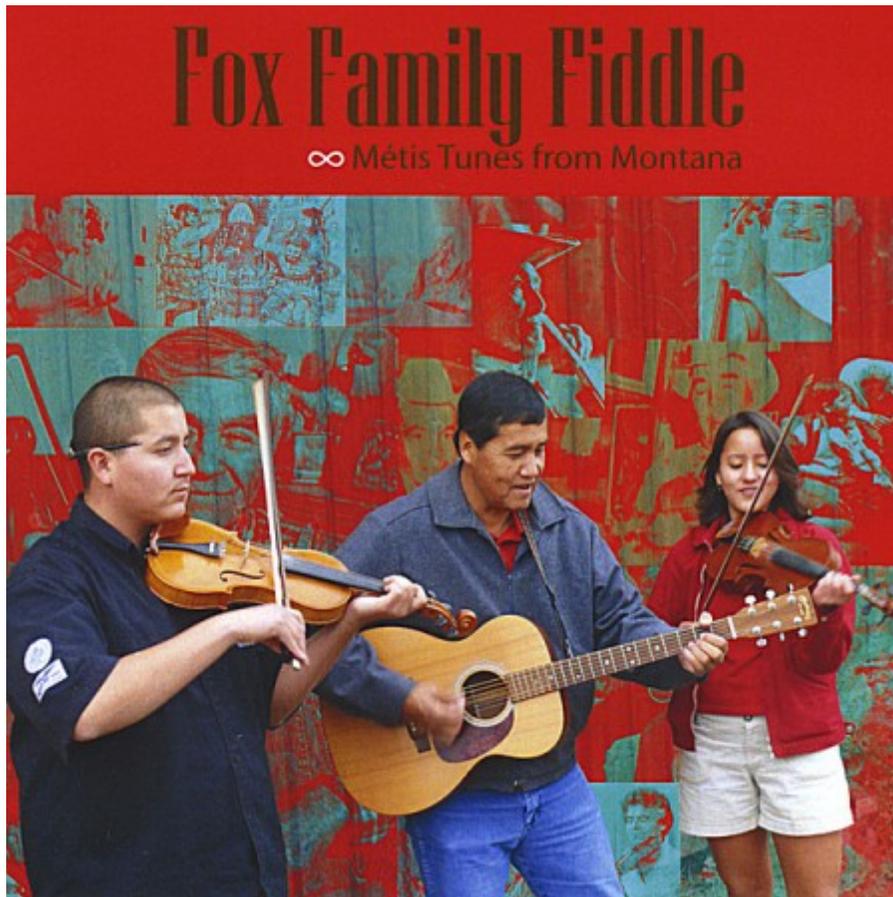


## Fox Family: Michif Music



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell  
Coordinator of Métis Heritage and History Research  
Louis Riel Institute



Vince, Jim and Jamie Fox

Vince and Jamie are the children of Jim and Krystal Fox. Jim is Gros Ventre and Krystal is Métis/Gros Ventre. When Jamie was five she used to go around making like she was a fiddle player. A fiddle came to her that Christmas. When she was seven, she left it out one day. Vince eyed it, picked it up, and without hesitation began to play. They have played together ever since. Jim learned guitar so he could chord for his kids.

The Michif (Métis) tradition of fiddle playing on the Fort Belknap Reservation was on its last legs just as Vince and Jamie fell in love with the tunes. Old Fatty Morin was still

around, and the Doney Brothers were still playing, but that was about it. The kids' playing affirmed their mother's cultural background, bringing great pride. Vince and Jamie, through their love of Michif tunes, brought a new healing between cultural sectors of the tribal society. Others on the reservation and along the Montana Hi-Line were incredibly enthused to see their vitalization of music in jeopardy of vanishing.

Vince and Jamie are fortunate being mentored by master traditional Métis fiddlers Jimmie LaRocque and Mike Page of the Turtle Mountain Reservation, Johnny Arcand of Saskatoon, and Fatty Morin in Montana. Also, they have been guided by Métis elder Al Wiseman of Choteau, an archivist of Michif fiddle tunes. Those old-style, customary example, traditional-lineage players firmly root Vince and Jamie in the Métis tradition deep into the early 19th century. Additionally, they were brought into the fold of contemporary fiddle performance through family friendships with nationally renowned pianist Philip Aaberg and fiddler Darol Anger, both of whom have nurtured the talent you find herein. Coming from within the tradition themselves, they represent this generation maintaining a style and repertoire that dates back to the fur trade era of the 17th century and the first Aboriginal and European mixing in the upper reaches of the North America.

-Nicholas Vrooman, Helena Indian Alliance



Jim and Krystal Fox



Jim, Krystal and Jamie



Jamie, Jim and Vince

Also from Nick Vrooman (<http://infinitynation.blogspot.com/2008/07/fox-family-fiddle.html> )

## The Fox Family

Fiddle players Vince and Jamie are the children of Jim and Krystal Fox. They are citizens of the Gros Ventre Tribe (A'aninin/White Clay People) in north-central Montana. Jim is Gros Ventre and Krystal is Métis/Gros Ventre. The Michif (as the Métis call themselves) are deeply intermarried within the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Tribes of the Fort Belknap Reservation.

Vince was born in 1987 and Jamie in 1989. When Jamie was five she used to go around and make like she

was a fiddle player. A fiddle came to her that Christmas. It was around the house - with her polishing and screeching on it - for the next couple of years. When she was seven, she left it out one day. Vince eyed it, picked it up, and without hesitation began to play. Within a couple of years Vince was showing Jamie what he knew. They have played together ever since. Jim learned to play guitar so he could chord for his kids.

The Michif tradition of fiddle playing on the Fort Belknap Reservation was on its last legs just as Vince and Jamie fell in love with the tunes. Old Fatty Morin was still around, and the Doney Brothers were still playing, but that was about it. The kids' playing affirmed their mother's cultural background and brought great pride. Memories of the old Michif fiddlers and the community camaraderie they engendered were good memories. Vince and Jamie, through their love of the Michif tunes, brought a new healing to an old discord between cultural sectors of the tribal society. As word got out, others on the reservation and along the Montana Hi-Line were incredibly enthused to see youngsters taking on a music that was in jeopardy of vanishing.

As Vince and Jamie grew, opportunities came to them. Over their early years they have been fortunate to play with master traditional Métis fiddlers Jimmie LaRocque and Mike Page of the Turtle Mountain reservation, Johnny Arcand of Saskatoon, and Fatty Morin in Montana. Additionally, they have been mentored by Métis elder Al Wiseman of Choteau, who is a community-based archivist of Michif fiddle tunes. To top it off, both Vince and Jamie were brought into the fold of contemporary fiddle performance through family friendships with nationally renowned pianist Philip Aaberg and fiddler Darol Anger, both of whom have nurtured the talent you find herein. Although having expanded musical interests, and learning numerous tunes and styles from many traditions, their experience with elder Métis fiddlers is exceptional and singular. Those old-style, customary example, traditional-lineage players firmly root Vince and Jamie in the Métis tradition deep into the 19th century. Coming from within the tradition themselves, they represent the continuance of this generation maintaining a style and repertoire that dates back to the fur trade era of the 17th century and the first generation of European and Aboriginal mixing in the upper reaches of the North American continent.

## Métis Fiddle

Métis music as it exists today is our closest living touch with the Fur Trade Era of North American history. Métis is a French word that means "mixblood." The Métis are an Aboriginal group descended from primarily Cree, Assiniboine, Chippewa, Gros Ventre, and other tribes on the Northern Plains during the

18th through 19th century. They intermarried with predominantly Orkney Islanders, Highland Scots, Irish, and Celtic Normandy/Brittany French, who were all workers in the fur trade. They also married with numerous refugee mixbloods and Indian from all the tribes south of the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Appalachians to the Mississippi, who traveled to the Upper Missouri and Saskatchewan River Basin following the fall of New France in 1763 and the displacements of the American Revolution after the 1780s.

The historically concurrent national American and Canadian epic narratives of Lewis & Clark, Alexander Mackenzie, and David Thompson occurred in the context of a pervasive Métis society and its 200 years of existence before the “glory days” of Euroamerican exploration. Many of the voyageurs of those epic origin stories that comprise our national mythologies were Métis.

The mixblood peoples of the northern tier played a critical and pivotal role in Canadian/United States economics and politics as these two countries developed into nation-states. As the largest single group of people from the Great Lakes to Seattle/Vancouver as the fur trade became obsolete, and territories and provinces of the west were being brought into union, and treaties were being made with the First Nations Peoples, the Métis were ignored and excluded from all aboriginal claims, their people deemed illegitimate. Métis, on both sides of the “Medicine Line,” sought formal recognition of their inherent rights as Aboriginal peoples, culminating in an armed struggle for independence from 1870 to 1885, referred to by Canada and the United States as the Northwest Rebellion. Since that time, having no status with either Ottawa or Washington, the Métis have lived as a displaced and deprived people in utter poverty across Canada and the United States.

All the old issues of race, prejudice, greed, and oppression are tied up in how the dominant society has historically related to the Métis – those “halfbreed” people with their “bastard” culture. In today’s parlance, we know it as hybrid, vibrant, and beautiful. Suffice it to say, the Métis are a ‘concealed’ people, invisible in mainstream America, yet very much alive and present in the wider population – especially on the Northern Plains.

Métis music represents a true synthesis of Euroamerican and Amerindian blood and culture like no other. The Métis preserve a 17th century Celtic fiddle and dance style that is melded with indigenous music and dance forms, heard and seen most clearly in the rhythms, steps, and approach. The tunes you listen to here grafted on quickly to the native population. They were played in buffalo camps, bush dances, and house

parties across the Northern Plains. New composition of tunes based on ancient styling continues to be created. Once ostracized from both sides of their heritage, it is exactly those elements of “Métisness” which gives us the opportunity to bridge the legacy of old and recognize and honor all that we hold in common, as is embodied in the Métis and their music.

In the face of incredible odds, the Métis have maintained a distinct cultural and national identity. They recouped a political voice in the 1930s, from which their civil rights era of the 1960s was based. In 1982 the Métis were formally included in the Canadian Constitution as one of the three Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Although the Métis continue to have no distinct Aboriginal status in the United States, they are included in the Greater Historic Métis Nation, with governmental leadership based in Canada. In the 1990s, the Métis fully affirmed their nationhood and are currently asserting their Aboriginal rights on the international scene.

For the first time since the late 19th century the name Métis is re-entering the American vocabulary. People are gaining an awareness that calls for deeper understanding. An area of cultural and scholarly study long ignored and forgotten, the notion of Métisness serves the greater society as a vehicle of reconciling the truth of our collective past with very current issues in our society.

The age-old Celtic tunes and dances mixed with Indian rhythms show the relationship of fundamental forms traversing boundaries of people, time, and place. There are deep layers of intangible cultural geography represented in the tunes presented here. This music is an example of how history and culture makes history and culture. This is the “medicine” in the fiddle, the “journey” in the dance, and the “power” in the art that is Métis music.

POSTED BY NORTHERN NICK