



Back issues of and single articles published in *New York Folklore Quarterly*, *New York Folklore*, and *Voices* are available for purchase. Check the tables of contents for availability and titles. To request an article for purchase, contact us at info@nyfolklore.org. Please be aware that some issues are sold out, but most articles are still available.

Copyright of NEW YORK FOLKLORE. Further reproduction prohibited without permission of copyright holder. This PDF or any part of its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv or website without the copyright holder's express permission. Users may print or download article for individual use.

NEW YORK FOLKLORE
129 Jay Street
Schenectady, NY 12305
518/346-7008
Fax 518/346-6617
Email: info@nyfolklore.org
<http://www.nyfolklore.org>

The Fraser Family — Home of Our Hearts

INTERVIEW BY DR. CONSTANCE SULLIVAN-BLUM

Certain places grasp hold of hearts and imaginations of the people who live there. The cadence of language, the rhythms of daily life, the particular way the universal dramas of life, love, and death are played out in a place can lodge themselves under the skin, into the souls of a people. This intense experience of place is shared through the music of the Fraser family on their CD, *Home of Our Hearts*. For the Fraser family, two locations are “home”: Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and the foothills of the Adirondacks in upstate New York.

Cape Breton is a palpable presence in the Fraser family’s music. The patriarch of the clan, Angus Fraser, like many others on Cape Breton Island, came from a family of fishermen. In Cape Breton, he learned to play the fiddle. Angus left his ancestral home, following the lumber camps into New York State. There, he fell in love with and married the camp cook, a story told by Angus’s grandson, Rod, in the song “Cape Breton Breeze.” Angus and his wife raised their family in Briggs Switch, near Oswegatchie, NY. Angus’s son, Don, and his wife, Ethel, moved to Harrisville, where most of the family still lives. Four generations of Frasers have lived in Harrisville, and 14 family members play and sing on the CD. The Frasers still maintain property on Cape Breton and return every summer. Many of the songs on the CD were learned on their trips to the Island and tell the story of people who make their livings from the sea.

The CD is chock full of labor songs. When I asked Kim Fraser Young why, she said, “It’s the plight of the working man. We’re drawn to it.”



Left to right, front row, sitting: Sharon Fraser Collette (vocal), Ebby Fraser (vocal), Kelley Fraser Zimmerman (vocal and mandolin), Meghan Fraser (vocal and whistle), and Kelsey Fraser (vocal and violin). *Middle row:* Amanda Fraser Pignone (vocal, accordion and whistle), Linda LaBow (vocal), Laura Miller (vocal), Sheryl Fraser Luther (vocal), Leean Carbone (vocal and bass), Kim Fraser Young (vocal and guitar), and Johnny Miller (vocal and drum). *Back row:* Cameron Young (vocal), Rod Fraser (vocal), Danielle Fraser (vocal), Pat Fraser (vocal and harmonica), and Steve Miller (guitar). Photo courtesy of the Fraser Family.

Kim’s father, Don, worked hard all his life, in the mines and paper mills of upstate New York. Songs like “Fisherman’s Son” and “Coal Town Road” connect the labor of the common man on Cape Breton with upstate New York. The song, “Farewell to the Rhondda” is about Welsh coal miners facing the closing of the mines. The Frasers love the song because they’ve seen the closure of New York mines and mills, and they know what it means to families who rely on industries for a living. Like the protagonist in “Chemical Worker,” written to honor factory workers exposed to dangers during the Industrial Revolution, Don Fraser’s health was damaged by years of exposure in the mill and the mines. The music on *Home of Our Hearts* honors the resilience of laborers in the face of danger and sorrow.

The Frasers not only work hard, they play hard too. Practically every one of them plays an instrument or sings. Kim said her father played “everything—mandolin, fiddle, guitar, banjo.” Her mother, Ethel, in her 90s, plays piano and guitar. Kim is a self-taught musician, as are her siblings. They all sing. She grew up surrounded

by music, learning the harmonies instinctively. Musicians were always stopping by to play with their dad. Every gathering of family and friends included music. Kim says that music is just as present in her life now. The result is that her children are musicians, as well as many of her siblings’ children and grandchildren.

Their music remains grounded in a sense of place. *Home of Our Hearts* celebrates “home” in all its meanings: a place, heritage, a family, a future.

The Fraser Family’s CD, *Home of Our Hearts*, was the January 2012 featured selection in the New York Folklore Society’s CD-of-the-Month *Voices in New York* membership program and is available for purchase from NYFS’ online store: <http://www.nyfolklore.org/gallery/store/music.html#fraser>

For more information about the group, visit the NYFS Directory of Traditional Artists: <http://www.nyfolklore.org/tradarts/music/artist/fraserfamily.html> ▼

Constance Sullivan-Blum has a PhD in cultural anthropology and works as the Folk Art Coordinator at The ARTS Council of the Southern Finger Lakes (www.earts.org).

Join or Renew your New York Folklore Membership to Receive *Voices* and other Member Benefits

For the General Public

Voices is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal, published twice annually. Join New York Folklore and become part of a community that will deepen your involvement with folklore, folklife, the traditional arts, and contemporary culture. As a member, you'll have early notice of Gallery special exhibits and NYF-sponsored key events. Members receive a discount on NYF Gallery items.

For Artists and Professionals

Become a member and learn about technical assistance programs that will get you the help you may need in your work:

Mentoring and Professional Development
Folk Artists Self-Management Project
Folk Archives Project
Consulting and Referral
Advocacy
A Public Voice

Membership Levels

Individual

\$ 50.00	Basic Membership
\$100.00	Harold W. Thompson Circle
\$150.00	Edith Cutting Folklore in Education

Organizations/Institutions

\$ 75.00	Subscriber
\$100.00	Partner
\$150.00	Edith Cutting Folklore in Education

Please add \$20.00 for non-US addresses.

For payment, choose the option that works best for you:

Use our website, www.nyfolklore.org

or mail a check to us at 129 Jay St., Schenectady NY 12305;

or call the NYF business office, 518-346-7008, to pay with a credit card over the phone.