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Chair

Mr. Gordon Brown

Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC)):
Good afternoon, everyone.

I'm going to call to order meeting number 31 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Today we are going to be dealing with Bill S-218, an act respecting national fiddling day.

With us today are a number of witnesses, starting with the Honourable Elizabeth Hubley, senator. From the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Association, we have Graham Sheppard, vice-president, as well as Alexander George, musician. Also, by video conference from Halifax, we have Kelli Trotter.

We are going to start with you, Senator Hubley, for eight minutes. You have the floor.

Senator Elizabeth Hubley (Prince Edward Island, L): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, honourable members. Thank you very much for inviting me to appear at today's committee meeting. I'm certainly delighted to be here.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank MP Tilly O'Neill Gordon for bringing this bill forward in the House of Commons. As well, thank you to Senator Carolyn Stewart Olsen, who tirelessly supported this bill in the Senate. I truly appreciate their support.

Also, a big thanks to today's witnesses: Graham Sheppard, Alexander George, and Kelli Trotter. It's nice that Alexander is with us, because he is a young fiddler, and he hails from Almonte, Ontario. Kelli will be joining us by video conference. I think we will have an opportunity to enjoy both her fiddling and her step-dancing today.

Since introducing Bill S-218, an act respecting national fiddling day, in early April of 2014, I have been overwhelmed by the level of support I have received.

A highlight of this journey was the Senate committee hearing, where we not only heard moving testimony on the importance of the fiddle in our country and how it has touched people's lives, but were also very fortunate to hear some of Canada's finest fiddlers playing a few tunes. As well, we were entertained at that time by Kelli and also by Sherry Johnson with their fiery step-dancing.

I would like to begin by sharing some testimony by renowned fiddler Calvin Vollrath from St. Paul, Alberta, which highlights how the fiddle has truly changed people's lives. Amongst Calvin's many

fiddling accomplishments, he is also a fiddle instructor and taught at the first fiddle camp in Canada, held in Emma Lake, Saskatchewan, in 1988.

In 1996, a young teacher from Sherridon, in northern Manitoba, was teaching 24 students in a one-room schoolhouse, in grades 1 to 8, and thought it would be wonderful to teach the fiddle to the students. The teacher didn't own or play a fiddle, but he knew that a lot of the children came from troubled homes and troubled lives, so he set off for the Emma Lake fiddle camp, bought a fiddle along the way, and took the beginner class. He then bought 24 fiddles for his students and taught them how to play, inviting, of course, Calvin and other teachers to instruct them as well.

Through learning to play the fiddle, the children's lives truly started to change, and it wasn't just about the ability to play fiddle music. The teacher would take the students out to play in different community events in the area, and the children learned confidence, self-worth, and social skills.

Other schools started to recognize what was happening at the Frontier School Division in northern Manitoba. They now teach fiddling in all of their schools, to over 5,000 students. Many of these children have gone on to become fiddle performers and instructors throughout Canada. Today, because of teachers like Calvin, as well as the tremendous work being done by hundreds of fiddle associations throughout our country, the fiddle is alive and thriving.

This magnificent instrument, which was introduced to Canada by the Jesuits in the 17th century, has had its ups and downs but still continues to bind our communities together. I am so happy to see young people like Alexander play the fiddle. I truly hope that recognizing a national fiddling day will further grow the popularity of this great instrument.

Honourable members, I envision national fiddling day as an opportunity not only to celebrate the fiddle as an instrument but also to celebrate the fiddling itself; the men and women who bring this music to life; the entertainment; the coming together of family, friends, and community; and the celebration of our unique and distinctive cultures, which find such a melodic expression through the fiddle.

Fiddling represents the preservation and continuity of community. Fiddling is a building block of communities. I believe that an important argument can and should be made for using local music and dance to knit local communities together. I don't have to remind the members of this committee that we live in a rapidly changing world. Technology is changing our world at a dizzying pace, and much of it is for the better, but the homogenizing forces of social media and our ready access to the competing influences of other cultures can also lead to the loss of both individual and community identities. Our unique culture and traditions, so eloquently expressed in the lilt of our accent, the uniqueness of our phrasing, or the distinctiveness of our music, can easily be lost and, once lost, may be difficult to regain.

• (1535)

All across our country, fiddling is an integral part of our expression of who we are and where we have come from. You can find fiddle entertainment almost anywhere, from church basements to legion halls, and from nursing homes to local pubs. Fiddlers and their accompaniment are known to eagerly and unselfishly share their talent with others.

Honourable members, I am convinced that fiddling is the perfect metaphor for Canada. Like Canada, it has deep classical roots but it is strong and confident enough to allow for many regional differences and nuances that give rise to a beautiful harmonic unity. Like Canada, it is a study in contrast. It is modest, yet it is extremely complex; it is accessible in terms of availability and affordability, yet difficult to master, as any player will attest. Like Canada, it embraces and accommodates many different styles and traditions, allowing each to thrive and flourish even while we create an entirely new sound.

Honourable members, I ask you to think about your own experiences. Think about the number of times we come together as a community to celebrate a sporting victory, to welcome soldiers home from war, to mark the birth of our nation, to honour the gifts of our forefathers, and to revel in the reunion of family. On many of these important occasions we turn to fiddlers to help us celebrate.

Today I ask you to join me in celebrating this humble, proud, simple, complex, worldly yet uniquely local instrument and to celebrate the talented fiddlers in whose hands music becomes magic, and to support an act respecting national fiddling day.

I thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Senator.

We'll now go to Kelli Trotter, in Halifax.

You have eight minutes.

Ms. Kelli Trotter (Musician, As an Individual): Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and everyone there.

It's a pleasure for me to be here—or there, as I'm not quite exactly with you today—and I'm proud to be representing Canadian fiddlers in support of this proposed bill.

That was so beautiful, Senator Hubley. I'm trying to catch my own breath now.

I don't want to elaborate any further on the historical or cultural importance of fiddle music in Canada, because I think that has been well established. What I'd like to do instead is share with you some of my first-hand experiences as a Canadian fiddler.

I was fortunate to grow up in a musical home with step-dancing and fiddling, so from a very early age I had the passion and knew the joy that we had in our home. It quickly rippled into our community, as we performed for many years at local fairs, festivals, strawberry socials, old age homes, and the like.

Our summers were spent at fiddle and step-dancing contests across Ontario and Quebec, where it quickly became obvious that it wasn't so much about the competitions but about the friendships we were building and the long night jam sessions we had with our fellow fiddlers and step dancers. Those friendships remain strong today.

When I was 13, we were approached by neighbours and friends asking me if I would teach their children how to play the fiddle. Of course, I had no teaching credentials, but that didn't matter. They wanted to share in this energetic, contagious instrument. My teaching career began when I was 13.

Since then, I have had the opportunity to travel across the country teaching at workshops and various fiddle camps from P.E.I. to Vancouver Island and even into the New England states. I had the chance to work with fiddlers young and old, with brand new fiddlers, and with people who had played for years and still wanted the inspiration. We shared an immediate kinship that is really inexplicable. I'm really fortunate that I've had those opportunities.

The Canadian Grand Masters Fiddle Camp celebrated its 25th year last year. Fortunately, I've been an instructor there for many years. Last year I had a chance to work with Alexander there. He is our future. It makes me very proud to know that I'm playing a part in inspiring and nurturing some of these gifts in these young people, because they are our fiddling future for Canada.

One other thing I wanted to talk about is the opportunities that being a Canadian fiddler have given me. I've had the chance to perform across North America extensively, and into Europe, China, and Taiwan, and to witness the reactions of audience members, whether they're tapping their toes, crying a tear, or getting up and doing a random step dance whether they know how to or not. In talking to them in the lobby and just feeling the effects that fiddle music has, it's a wonderful feeling to be able to share that.

A couple of moments come to mind. I remember being draped over an iceberg up in Alert in our Canadian north and realizing that it was my fiddle music that got me there and that the reason I was in that position came from all my hard work and from just embracing this wonderful instrument. I had the same feeling when I was riding a camel in the Middle East, knowing that it was my fiddle music that got me there. On both occasions, it was our Canadian military that invited me to perform for them, and that was another honour.

I have two other quick stories, if you don't mind.

The little house concerts, which are a far cry from icebergs and camels, are just as important. I remember a little four-year-old sitting in the front row at one of my house concerts. I thought there was no way that he was going to sit through a two-hour fiddle concert, but he sat there mesmerized the whole time. As soon as the show was done, he ran into the other room and brought back his own little fiddle, took it out of the case, and scratched a few notes for me.

In a concert two days later, I had a 90-year-old man request his favourite fiddle tune. I finished the last note, and he was up out of his chair, across the room, and giving me a big hug faster than I could imagine.

Those moments are to me proof of the contagious nature and the beauty of this instrument in how it can reach people at any age.

• (1540)

This bill would celebrate, as Senator Hubley so eloquently said, all that fiddle music has been in our country and all that it will be. It will encourage and inspire our younger generations to come to keep this music alive.

It's been a huge honour for me to be here, and I thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of all Canadian fiddle players.

I don't know if there is time for me to play a fiddle tune or not.

The Chair: Well, you still have about two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kelli Trotter: Okay.

Senator Hubley, I will apologize, because I have my shoes in my bag but there's carpet here. Unless I dance on the table, which is probably not a good idea, I'll just stick to a fiddle tune. If you want to get up, Senator Hubley, please do.

Senator Elizabeth Hubley: Thanks, Kelli, but I think I'll pass.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Kelli Trotter: Here's a little bit of a French fiddle tune called *Le reel de Sherbrooke*.

Thank you again.

[Musical performance]

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you very much for that wonderful performance.

We'll now move to Graham Sheppard from the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Association for a presentation of up to eight minutes.

• (1545)

Mr. Graham Sheppard (Vice-President, Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Association): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Committee members, Senator Hubley, and fellow witnesses, good afternoon and *bonjour*. Thank you for your kind invitation.

I'm here today representing the Canadian Grand Masters Fiddling Association, an organization devoted to the preservation and advancement of the art of Canadian fiddling. Incorporated in 1988, the Canadian Grand Masters is led by a board of directors from across Canada interested in preserving all styles of Canadian

fiddling. The annual competition, first held in 1990, is now viewed as an event of national prominence that gives well-deserved recognition to Canada's top fiddlers. Today the organization is a national arts service organization with charitable status.

The public record of the Senate proceedings is rich with information on the history of Canadian fiddle music and on why this bill is important. I will endeavour to address a few key aspects relating to the importance of the bill to Canadian people.

First, why have a national fiddling day?

[Translation]

In terms of preserving Canada's culture and artistic heritage, we can say that the fiddle has been a catalyst in Canada's cultural development. Since the earliest days of New France and the Ordre de Bon Temps, the fiddle has been front and centre in Canada's musical identity.

[English]

The musical underpinning of our culture as a nation has been fiddle music. Indeed, the different styles of fiddling serve to illustrate the regional diversity of this great land. From the Scots Celtic music of Cape Breton to the deeply moving Ukrainian melodies on the prairies, the fiddle has enabled different provinces and regions to proudly define their unique identities and their deep ethnic roots. With a national fiddling day, Canada as a nation would have an occasion to celebrate fiddle playing in all its regions.

The fiddle represents the preservation and continuation of community. In sharp contrast to the homogenizing forces of popular media, as Senator Hubley mentioned, and the arguable influence of the information age on identity, the fiddle is a building block of community. Have you ever attended a P.E.I. fiddle do? What would a maritime ceilidh be without a fiddle? Have you witnessed a Manitoba barn dance?

[Translation]

Have you ever listened to the Métis' complex dance tunes?

[English]

These are but a few examples of the prominence of the fiddle in our Canadian communities. A national fiddling day would facilitate this celebration of community.

Fiddling, just like all music, is good for the brain. There is scientific evidence to show that music supports human cognition. As Canadians, we cherish the value of music, and the fiddle is central to this Canadian value.

Our educators have embraced it. The initiative taken by Frontier schools in Manitoba was noted by the Senate, and the efforts of teachers like Brian Hebert to bring fiddle playing into the curriculum of Ontario schools are perfect examples.

Fiddling is not only a social pursuit, however, but also often a family affair that helps build strong family ties. Calvin Vollrath, who wrote the fiddle music for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics opening ceremony says, "I am a proud third generation Canadian Fiddler and am thrilled to support this initiative." The Leahys, the Schreyers, the Beatons, the Fitzgeralds, the Arsenaults, and the MacMasters are but a few of Canada's fiddling families.

From Rigolet, Labrador, to Salt Spring Island, B.C., we, the citizens of Canada, can experience the joy and togetherness expressed by fiddle music. There are no language barriers in the language of the fiddle. Canada should recognize this togetherness, make it official, and capitalize on the opportunity to celebrate the fiddle culture of Canada each year.

Yes, there is a strong sense of history associated with fiddle music. Imagine the power of learning about Canada's history and culture through fiddle music. Such a learning opportunity is Canada's national fiddling day.

Regarding its economic importance, in 2008, Memorial University of St. John's, Newfoundland, was the first place outside Europe to host the North Atlantic fiddlers convention. Founded by the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen, the North Atlantic fiddlers convention holds a biennial convention that brings together academics and musicians to examine the impact of fiddle music on culture and society. The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency recognized the economic value of this event, anticipating at that time over 4,700 attendees.

In 2015, the North Atlantic fiddlers convention will again be held in Canada, in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, coinciding with the 2015 Celtic Colours International Festival.

• (1550)

Each year, there are many fiddle camps and festivals across Canada that attract significant numbers of tourists. Many visitors from the United States and other countries come here to participate. One of the biggest Canadian fiddle events is the Annual Pembroke Old Time Fiddle and Step Dancing Championships, which bring thousands of tourists to the Ottawa Valley.

[Translation]

Also, every year, Camp Violon Trad Québec offers a unique adventure in Quebec's world of folk music.

[English]

The Canadian Grand Masters national competition was held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in 2013. All events associated with that weekend were filled to capacity. In 2015 the competition will be held in Moncton, New Brunswick, in August. Already, the main events are 80% sold out, over 100 hotel rooms have been booked, and numerous bus tours from various parts of Canada have been fully subscribed.

A national fiddling day would provide a focal point for many tourist activities of a cultural nature. As our economists tell us, for each tourism dollar raised, there is a multiplier effect. A national fiddling day will give Canadians a chance to celebrate our musical culture while pursuing our entrepreneurial spirit.

With respect to Canada in the fiddle world, Canada has produced many internationally acclaimed artists who continue to promote our Canadian fiddle culture throughout the world.

[Translation]

Natalie MacMaster, the Leahys, Ashley MacIsaac, André Brunet and others continue to play a role as ambassadors of fiddle music in Canada by following in the footsteps of the greatest fiddlers, such as Jean Carignan, Don Messer and Graham Townsend.

[English]

Likewise, when Troy MacGillivray of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, performs or teaches a master class in Denmark, it is a Canadian fiddle that the world sees and hears.

Our neighbours to the south have recently taken quite an interest in Canadian fiddle music.

[Translation]

Quebec's fiddle music is the point of reference in New England.

[English]

Canadian Grand Masters Shane Cook and April Verch are sought-after instructors for fiddle camps throughout the American midwest. Erynn Marshall of Gibsons, British Columbia, was the first woman and first non-U.S. citizen to win the fiddle category at the Appalachian String Band Festival in West Virginia. This festival is recognized as the premier venue for Appalachian music. Recently, I was contacted by fiddlers in Pittsburgh looking for sheet music to some Canadian fiddle tunes for their session.

In recent years Canada has also been recognized internationally for the art of violin making. Raymond Schryer, brother of four-time Canadian Grand Master Louis Schryer of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, was awarded a gold medal in lutherie—that's violin making—in October 2003 at the Triennale Internazionale, in Cremona, Italy, the home of Antonio Stradivari. Also, Raymond Schryer currently serves on the board of directors of the Violin Society of America.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, these are but a few vignettes regarding the need to recognize Canadian fiddling. While there is a World Fiddle Day that recognizes the instrument, none of the participating countries have celebrated fiddling with a national day of recognition. Based on what you have heard, I urge you to embrace fiddle playing within our Canadian cultural mosaic and to have a national fiddling day.

Mesdames and messieurs, merci. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sheppard.

The bells are going to go in about two minutes, so I'd like to see if there would be consent to go for about another six or seven minutes after that so we could fully hear from Mr. George.

Is there consent to continue after the bells?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. George, you have the floor for up to eight minutes.

Mr. Alexander George (Musician, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members.

I have just turned 14 years old and I have been playing the fiddle for six years. I'm honoured to be here representing young fiddlers and speaking on something that is truly my passion. I love playing the fiddle and sharing music with others.

Fiddling is an important part of our society. It is found throughout our country's past. It is special because it recounts our history and our peoples. Fiddle music is still very much alive today.

I want to relate a little bit about my own experiences playing the fiddle as an example of how this music can impact people and their communities. My mother grew up in Nova Scotia, so I have musical roots in the Maritimes. I've been inspired by my cousin Megan and kitchen parties at my grandparents' home. Many, many people have inspired me through music. I really don't have the time to name them all, but I am fortunate to have had great teachers and mentors. I wish to thank them all. They have taught me about the importance of fiddle music, and they are wonderful musicians who represent our Canadian fiddling tradition. They have opened doors for me and given me great opportunities.

I hope I can carry on the tradition that is being passed down to me by my instructors through the years: Beth Bartley, a wonderful performer from St. Catharines, Ontario; Karen Reed, a Canadian fiddle champion who now lives in Kitchener; Cindy Thompson, another Canadian fiddle champion who is a great mentor and friend; and Denis Lanctot, who was inducted into the Canadian fiddle hall of fame last year.

I began performing fiddle music in the Niagara region, in St. Catharines, and I started playing in the Niagara Old Tyme Fiddlers Association. At the start, I acquired many mentors, mostly fiddlers in their sixties, seventies, and eighties. I brought the average age down to about 60. I joined a band with two of my mentors, Cassandra Swan and Mike Mattie, and they renamed the band Alexander's Old Time Band. Seniors really enjoyed our show and our music—their day's pop music.

I now live in the Ottawa Valley, which has a rich history of Celtic, country, and valley fiddle music. The Ottawa Valley has the Heritage radio station and Renfrew's Valley Stage to keep our history alive. In the valley there are weekly jams and gatherings in pubs and homes. As a matter of fact, I go to a jam session every Wednesday night. I drink my ginger beer and play until my bedtime of 9:30.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander George: I would like to mention Charlie Kitts and Jim Hunter, who have done a great job of promoting Ottawa Valley fiddle music and have helped fiddlers get performances around the valley.

Let me tell you a little bit about where I perform. Fiddle music is welcomed in many places. It is an important part of our community. I've volunteered at many seniors' residences. The music provides great enjoyment, and I feel that this gives back to the community. Fiddle music is welcomed at heritage and community fairs. A couple of places I've played at are the St. Catharines fiddle festival, the Niagara-on-the-Lake strawberry social, puppet festivals, and Celtic festivals, just to name a few; I've played at many. There are also larger venues across Canada. I've played at shindigs that feature the

Fitzgeralds and Patti Lamoureux, and even before 500-plus people who are at historic fairs just to hear the fiddle music.

I've also volunteered at not the flashiest but certainly the most important community events—fundraisers for the Niagara soup kitchen and for Out of the Cold support programs for disadvantaged people. This past weekend I played in the Country Music Heart jamboree in Carleton Place, which was a fundraiser for the Ottawa Heart Institute, just to name a recent performance I've played at.

The fiddle community across Canada is very close. Fiddlers show a lot of respect for each other and their unique styles of fiddling. We enjoy many styles in Canada: Celtic, French Canadian, old-time, Ottawa Valley, and Prairie, also known as Métis music. Fiddlers are part of a sharing community that has a proud tradition of coming together to play and entertain. I really can't explain it, but fiddling is a great feeling. Playing with fellow musicians and seeing the smiles on people's faces, I'm very happy to be part of Canada's fiddle community.

Mr. Chairman, let me tell you that there is support and excitement for a national fiddling day. People all over Canada will appreciate and celebrate the day. Since fiddling is a social thing, people will come together to play music, dance, and enjoy themselves on Canada's fiddling day. I hope my personal story helps to demonstrate how fiddle music has impacted me, the people around me, and my community.

I would like to conclude my presentation by playing a tune on my fiddle called *Lieutenant Governor's Waltz*. It's a waltz composed by the great fiddler Calvin Vollrath, who's from Saskatchewan.

• (1555)

[Musical Presentation]

Voices: Hear, hear!

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The bells are going now. It's my intention that we will return after the vote. If our witnesses could stay, we could have at least one round of questions and then we would move to clause-by-clause.

I'm sorry but we have a vote now.

If you could bear with us we'd like to continue with this bill in about 40 minutes or so.

Thank you.

We will suspend.

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_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1650)

The Chair: We're going to call meeting number 31 of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage back to order. We are dealing with Bill S-218, an act respecting national fiddling day.

We do have a little bit of time to do this. Two witnesses are still with us. We've lost Senator Hubley and Ms. Trotter.

With the indulgence of the committee, I thought we might do one five-minute round of questioning if that works for committee members. That will give us time for clause-by-clause. With the consent of the committee, we'll go ahead on that.

Mr. Young, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Alexander, thank you for your performance. It was really excellent.

How popular is fiddling in your age group or among those who are younger, and how do young Canadians get into fiddling?

Mr. Alexander George: I was inspired by my cousin from Nova Scotia, but I have a lot of friends who were inspired and they wanted to have a little bit more freedom from classical music for which you have to do exactly what's on the page. In fiddling there is a lot of improvisation. They wanted a little bit more freedom in how they played music. The competition stream is also pretty fun. It's just a competition to showcase your talent.

Mr. Terence Young: When I was in high school, it was guitar. Everybody played guitar and we did guitar leads. You can do all your creative activity playing guitar lead, but you do it on the violin, right?

Mr. Alexander George: Yes.

Mr. Terence Young: Do you often get asked for your autograph?

Mr. Alexander George: No.

Mr. Terence Young: No? I thought you might be like the Justin Bieber of fiddling.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander George: No.

Mr. Terence Young: I know you have a brilliant future, so thanks again for playing for us today.

Mr. Sheppard, can you estimate—or maybe you know—how many festivals and competitions there are for fiddling music across Canada in a year? Do you have any idea how many people might attend all these events?

Mr. Graham Sheppard: I'll just look at five. I'm adding up for five festivals right now, and I'm seeing 10,000 in that number. If you add up the smaller ones that I'm aware of across the country, you can add on, let's say, 40,000 or 50,000 people who will attend these across Canada in a year. That doesn't include the cross-border component. There is also an exportation of fiddlers to play in festivals in the U.S. as well. So you're seeing a lot of people in a lot of locations who take part in these festivals, but there's not only the festivals themselves. The fiddle music is an essential part of a festival, but there's also the spinoff effect, what goes on elsewhere in the communities. As I mentioned, there are the bus tours and the hotel rooms.

When I lived on the east coast in New Brunswick, every second Saturday throughout this time of year, you would have a community fiddle do, and people would go from one to the other. You would probably be in Saint-Antoine on one Saturday, Sussex the next Saturday, and up in Plaster Rock or somewhere like that the following Saturday.

All these people moved around, and they kept it alive, but the advantage there is that it's spread by word of mouth.

What we see this bill doing is creating a point of reference, a focal point.

Mr. Terence Young: That makes perfect sense. Thank you.

Thank you, Chair. Mr. Dykstra wants to ask a question.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Thank you. Alexander, thanks for being here this afternoon.

You are still growing up, and I have had the pleasure of watching you learn how to play this instrument from a very young age, and I know how much it means to you and to your family.

The tradition of maintaining that in Canada is critical. Part of the preamble of the bill really talks about the art of fiddle playing having a significant role in the culture and social history of Canada, and it being practised in all the regions of our country.

I thought perhaps from your perspective and your vantage point, you could fill us in on why you think the fiddle and Canada mean so much to each other, and why it's an art we should continue to, obviously, showcase to the world, and why it's important for young people especially to learn this art and to keep this Canadian tradition alive.

• (1655)

Mr. Alexander George: When the pioneers came over on the ships to settle the Americas, they didn't really have access to Mozart, and Bach, and Beethoven, composers of the time, per se so they created their own music, which is Canadian. Right now it's played all over the world.

It really is our music. It isn't written by anyone in Europe. So it's very important to keep the tradition of our music going, because it was written around the time we became a nation.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thanks.

It's the age-old question: what's the difference between a fiddle and a violin?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander George: It's how you play it. They're the exact same instrument. It's just the style you play.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dykstra.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nantel, you have five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

[*Translation*]

Mr. George, let me tell you that you have written a page in history by playing the fiddle right here. You turned yourself into a fiddler before the committee. I think that represents just how relevant it is to highlight the work and tradition of fiddlers and the fiddle.

In these meetings, which are very political and often very partisan by nature, we parliamentarians don't often leave saying that we had a good time and that we were happy to hear a young boy play the fiddle. This has brought us closer together. We all share these roots, that is part of our Canadian fabric, of our origins. I don't think we can be against it, we can't be against virtue. This is a good idea.

If I remember correctly, the date that was chosen was Mr. Stradivari's birthday. What is that date exactly?

[English]

Mr. Alexander George: Which date?

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Maybe Mr. Sheppard knows.

Mr. Graham Sheppard: Yes. The day identified is May 17. That's the third Saturday in May. The World Fiddle Day people identified that day as the date of the death of Stradivari because they did not know his date of birth.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thanks.

Mr. Graham Sheppard: So they've identified it.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Thank you. It was a tough question.

[Translation]

It was a trick question.

[English]

I'm sorry about that.

[Translation]

Mr. Sheppard, I would like to ask you the following question.

I think we all find this very pleasant. It is like choosing a frame for a wonderful photograph to hang it up properly on the wall. The art of fiddlers and traditional music makes perfect sense. Recognizing this day is like providing a frame, making it official, which is wonderful. In your view, how will the association and the fiddlers celebrate the day?

We are also talking about highlighting an event or a discipline such as yours. Have you had the opportunity to submit something for Canada's 150th anniversary?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It is the anniversary of Confederation.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Yes, I apologize, Mr. Dion is quite right; it is the 150th anniversary of Confederation.

[English]

Mr. Graham Sheppard: I think I hear three questions there. I'll take them in order.

Number one, how do I see this day helping fiddlers across the country? I'll use an example. Last year on World Fiddle Day, through our board of directors, we contacted people and asked if there was anything going on in their areas with respect to World Fiddle Day. We said to let us know if there was and to send us a picture, a video, or a clip. I also sent the request to some of my colleagues in the United States.

In actual fact, by mentioning it, we actually got attention in—without checking the record—at least five provinces, an immediate record. Winnipeg, Manitoba had a huge event. Alberta had one, and Ontario did for sure. Also, two locations in the United States

submitted their videos to us. That is without the benefit of national fiddling day. Having that focus would allow us to expand the awareness amongst our own people. It would also allow us to capitalize on the event as a major proponent of an event to advance fiddling across the country in its many forms. I think we need to not lose sight of the fact that this is community driven, in large part, and the other thing is that we need to preserve the identities of these forms.

That answers those two questions.

On the last one, with the 150th, that's how far away now? About one year?

• (1700)

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Two years.

Mr. Graham Sheppard: Two years, yes, and it's one year to submission. As soon as you announce this national fiddling day, we look forward to having that as one of the flagship events for the celebration of the 150th.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel: For instance, just imagine if fiddlers from across Canada could be invited to participate in an event all across the country, which becomes integrated with various music shows in various categories. Just think of all the unifying activities.

[English]

Mr. Graham Sheppard: Yes. With the upcoming 150th, I envisage a couple of things. One is exactly what you said—having location events all across the country under the umbrella of the national fiddling day but giving some structure to it, because we want to make it uniquely Canadian. With technology today, everything we do is generated around the world.

Let's take that a step further. We give it the structure of a national fiddling day. We add to it some key components that are uniquely Canadian. For example, we play two or three of the Canadian signature fiddle tunes everywhere across the country at the same time, on the same day. Then we add the components of uniqueness, the ethnicity, the varying styles. You would get the Celtic music of Cape Breton. You would get the *musique folklorique du Québec*.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sheppard.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Nantel.

Mr. Dion, you have five minutes.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I will give my five minutes to Mr. George.

Alexander, would you like to play something? If I'm satisfied with it, I will vote for the bill.

Voices: Oh, oh!

A voice: Pressure.

Mr. Stéphane Dion: Please, go ahead.

Mr. Alexander George: Okay.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: How about *Orange Blossom Special*?

Mr. Alexander George: *Orange Blossom Special*?

Do you think I can pull that off?

A voice: Play a set of jigs.

Mr. Alexander George: Sure.

[*Musical Presentation*]

Voices: Hear, hear!

• (1705)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you, Alexander. You have my vote.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We now will go to Mr. Hillyer for up to five minutes.

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): I thank you for coming, both of you.

Alexander, thank you for letting me play your fiddle. I was the only kid in my town who took violin lessons. There was only one guy to take them from, and he was a fiddle player. Right now I live in a town of about 3,500 people. Unless I'm teaching, there's usually not a violin teacher in town.

You explained the difference between the violin and the fiddle. You also said that you take classical lessons, or that you go to a school where you take them?

Mr. Alexander George: Yes.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Do most of the kids you take violin lessons with also fiddle?

Mr. Alexander George: Not really; I have a couple of friends who play fiddle, and it's just been more the adventure of it. They want to have more freedom with their music. I have 21 people in my class who play an assortment of violas, cellos, and violins, and about four people play fiddle.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: I found the same thing with most of the kids I met who were taking violin lessons—very few of them fiddled.

What was it that caught your ear or caught your interest so that you also fiddle?

Mr. Alexander George: I started fiddling. What really happened was that I was inspired by my cousin, so I wanted to fiddle. I started with six months of Suzuki training. I didn't like it—I wanted to learn fiddle tunes—but those six months of Suzuki training taught me how to hold the instrument properly and everything, and all the techniques that go along with it. Once I'd fiddled for four years or so, I got interested in classical music, and when we moved to the Ottawa Valley I wanted to audition for Canterbury just to build a better foundation of my knowledge of the instrument in general.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Do you think there is anything we can do to help more violinists get an itch for the fiddle? If there is something we can do, should we even bother? Should we just say to each his own?

Mr. Alexander George: Really, it just needs to be better known. I know a lot of people who don't even know what a fiddle is per se or what fiddling is in general. I think National Fiddle Day will really

help promote fiddle music. I just think it really needs to be publicized more. Some people aren't going to like it, but I'm sure that a lot of people will like the freedom of the music a lot more if they just know about it.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Mr. Sheppard, I assume you play the violin or the fiddle?

Mr. Graham Sheppard: Yes.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: What's your experience? Did you take classical lessons first?

Mr. Graham Sheppard: That's an interesting story. I was a classically trained pianist and then later in life I lived in Cape Breton where I was the odd man out because I didn't play fiddle. Unlike Alexander's experience, there everybody seems to have an interest in it or plays it. So at age 40 I picked up the fiddle and I haven't turned back since.

I'll just add one more comment, though, to something Alexander said about the difference between violin and fiddle. Itzhak Perlman and maestro Pinchas Zukerman both refer to their instruments as the "fiddle" and they play beautifully the colloquial music of their own homeland.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: That's true.

I think there are more classical violinists than fiddlers around. That's my experience, but I haven't been to Cape Breton. Do you think it is important to encourage classical violinists to get into the fiddle movement or do you think this Fiddle Day should encompass the violin as well?

• (1710)

Mr. Graham Sheppard: I'll refer to the example of playing guitar, which was mentioned earlier. There are great guitarists in every genre of guitar—Spanish, flamenco, rock and roll, whatever. In the fiddle and in the violin vein, it's the same thing.

I think you're right that we have to expand the music, but nobody says that it has to be narrowed into one particular area. Alexander is a perfect example. During the break we talked about his vibrato and we talked about his shifting. He said, "Oh, that's a classical shift". I said that I recognized that, but it works very well on the fiddle.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That wraps up our questioning.

We will now move to clause-by-clause, and our witnesses are welcome to stay for that.

First, the preamble and the short title will be postponed, pursuant to Standing Order 75(1).

I will move to the clause-by-clause.

(Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to)

The Chair: Under the short title, shall clause 1 carry?

(Clause 1 agreed to)

The Chair: Shall the preamble carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall I report the bill to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The bill will be reported back to the House a week from Tuesday.

Thank you very much. Great job.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you to our witnesses.

The meeting is adjourned.

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