

STREET SCENE

Celtic fiddler MacIsaac sports an angry attitude



CHRISTINA FUOCO

When Celtic fiddle player Ashley MacIsaac makes it big in the United States, he better look kindly on the Detroit area.

"My first gig ever in the United States was on my 13th or 14th birthday at an IRA club in Livonia," the 21-year-old MacIsaac said. "It was a regular Irish club, but it was IRA-ish that night."

MacIsaac has come a long way in the last seven or eight years. On Friday, July 19, he will open up for the Chieftains at Meadow Brook Music Festival on Oakland University's campus in Rochester. Folk singer Nanci Griffith was originally scheduled to be on the bill, but she dropped out due to personal reasons. A replacement had not been named at press time.

MacIsaac said he's unsure why Griffith left the tour, but he heard her say, "Due to the efforts of Mr. Ashley MacIsaac, Thursday (July 11) is my last night, but now I will no longer be a part of the tour."

"I don't know what those efforts

were," he added.

Last month the musician, who favors kilt, combat boots and bleached hair, released his U.S. major label debut "Hi, How Are You Today?" (A&M), which spawned the 93.9-FM CIDR "The River" hit "Sleepy Maggie." The album features the musician playing traditional fiddle tunes from his native Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada, spiced with his modern musical tastes. They range from grunge to hip-hop, and guest musicians include Baas Is Baas bassist Chin Injeti, Gaelic singer Mary Jane Lammond, the Canadian pop band Jale, and members of the classical group Quarteto Gelato.

"I wanted to do a hip-hop track, and I wanted to do a more Ramones sounding fiddle track or quartet sounding solo track, but these were just my ideas. To be completely honest, the stuff came up because I was around people who could do it," MacIsaac said.

They worked around my structures, and we said, 'How would you make a dance tune, like I'd heard in the New York clubs, out of a fiddle tune?' But it's the same kind of hook. Fiddle tunes are just 16 bars of dance hooks."

MacIsaac, who calls himself a "fiddle

slut," has been playing the fiddle since he was 8 1/2.

"My father once said to me, 'If you want to play the fiddle, get mad at it or don't play it at all.' When I go out and do my live show, I present the image of angry young man when on stage. It's angst or punk, and that's what the Celts were, punks. But it's also about romance because the Celts were also about that."

Cape Breton, MacIsaac said, is one of the last remaining Celtic satellite communities of the world. The city has "an ultimate connection with Detroit. A huge junket of musicians went from Cape Breton to work in the car plants until maybe 15 years ago. There was a huge population living in and around the Michigan and Windsor (Canada) area. Tons of people were playing music. There were step dancers and bagpipers. There's not the same sort of outbreak into other cities," he explained.

Porno for Pyros, the alternative rock band featuring ex-Jane's Addiction singer Perry Farrell and drummer Stephen Perkins, turned St. Andrew's Hall into a zoo on Monday, July 15. The 1,000-plus fans were packed into the main ballroom as the band, lead by an



Fiddlin' into town: Celtic fiddle player Ashley MacIsaac opens for The Chieftains Friday.

Grant Hill's 'Change the Game' is sincere and eloquent



ESTHER LITTMANN

Pro basketball star Grant Hill has been called "smart, unassuming, and modest," rare qualities in a field where money and hero-worship feed already swollen egos.

Too many athletes have forgotten that "celebrity is a privilege... not a right," says Hill, and give their sport a bad name. In his first book "Change the Game" (Warner Books, 1996, \$14.95), the author describes his own developmental years and athletic accomplishments and shares his personal goals as a public figure.

To become a top athlete, writes Hill, you must have talent, ambition, inspired guidance, and luck. The 23-year-old star of the NBA and player for the Detroit Pistons frankly admits he has an abundance of all four.

The only child of Calvin Hill, former football pro with the Dallas Cowboys and Cleveland Browns, and Janet Hill, Wellesley graduate and onetime consultant to the Pentagon, Hill grew up with many advantages that most black — and white — youngsters do not enjoy. He traveled, met prominent people, and attended the best schools. He was also fortunate to have devoted but disciplined parents whose high expectations for him were not limited to sports. Hill's mother, affectionately called "the General" by his friends, stressed hard work and accountability.

"In those days, I thought my mom was so unfair," writes Hill. "By the time I went to college though, I realized that she had

given me a great tool."

Sports came easily to Grant Hill. Initially a soccer player, he switched to basketball when he was 12 and already 6 feet tall. A devoted high school coach encouraged variety in his playing. Later, Coach Krzyzewski of Duke University's "Blue Devils," taught Hill "not to be afraid to be great." Dominating the game was okay, he insisted, "as long as it was in the confines of team play."

But Hill's greatest inspiration came from his father, whose confidence in his son's ability and personal example honed the young athlete's character and career. A key figure in Duke's two successive national championships, Hill won Rookie of the

Year," like his father before him, and played in the All-Star game last year.

At 23, Hill has traveled worldwide and achieved what others only dream of. In addition to basketball fame, his name adorns a line of sneakers and athletic clothes, he advertises for companies such as GMC trucks, Kellogg's, and Sprite, and has been interviewed on "20/20." The life of a top athlete is exciting but also challenging, the author admits. Minimal sleep, constant travel, and the pressure to win take their toll.

You can see the adverse effects in the attitudes of many players. They complain openly, bemoan the coach in public, and miss practice and games. Some are

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