The Irish Question in Newfoundland Music
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The “Irishness” of Newfoundland is strongly contested. While this “Irishness” is both perceived and asserted in many ways, by Newfoundlanders and non-Newfoundlanders alike, many also reject the portrayal of the province as being distinctly Irish in character. Yet, amidst these debates, there clearly are many musicians in Newfoundland who play “traditional Irish music.” I will use participant observation, interviews, self-reporting exercises and archival/library research to understand the meaning these musicians attribute to their music in the context of this contestation. My project will explore the musical biographies of musicians, including the role of Irish music in their lives, how musicians define and distinguish Irish music from other musical styles, how such music may relate to ethnic or national identity as “Irish” or as “Newfoundlander,” and perceptions and negotiations of “authenticity” surrounding the government promotion of arts and culture as industries, including the promotion of Irish music. These questions will be situated against the background questions of to what extent and in what ways does the historical, cultural, political and economic context affect musicians playing Irish music in Newfoundland.