

# Laura Risk

**"Laura Risk's fiddle is a revelation and achingly beautiful."**

**-- Grammy-winning filmmaker Ken Burns**

A California native, Laura Risk began playing Scottish fiddle music as a teenager. Her love of traditional fiddling has led her into a rich journey of performing and teaching the beautifully diverse repertoires of Scotland, Cape Breton and, most recently, Québec, where she now lives. As evidenced in several highly-praised albums, her playing is extremely expressive and versatile, ranging from elegant music composed for 18th-century Scottish drawing rooms to driving strathspeys and reels suitable for a Cape Breton dance floor.

Laura tours extensively and has performed with many notable names in Celtic and American traditional music, including *Ensemble Galilei*, *The John Whelan Band*, Darol Anger's 'World of Fiddles', *Helicon*, *Hesperus*, Scottish fiddler Alasdair Fraser, Irish singers Aoife Clancy and Aine Minogue, and American roots band *Cordelia's Dad*. She has appeared at the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow and at many of North America's most prestigious acoustic music festivals, including Celtic Colours (Cape Breton), City Stages (Birmingham, AL), the Summer Solstice Festival (Los Angeles), *Memoires et Racines* (Quebec), *Jacob's Pillow* (MA), and the Newport, Winnipeg, and Philadelphia Folk Festivals. Laura currently performs solo, in the duos *Greenfire* (with hammer dulcimer player Ken Kolodner) and *Celtic Dialogue* (with pianist Jacqueline Schwab), and with percussive dancer Sandy Silva.

Laura's new solo recording, *The Merry Making*, features the dance music of Scotland, Cape Breton, Québec, New England, and Ireland. Joining her are Dennis Cahill (guitar), Susie Petrov (piano), and Chris Layer (flutes, bagpipes). "Capturing a glimpse of emotions seldom expressed on any instrument, Risk bows the strings with a delicate grace yet draws unbridled passion from them," writes *Folktales*.

On her 1999 recording *Celtic Dialogue* -- named one of the "Top Ten CDs Of The Year" by the *Boston Globe* -- Laura joined forces with pianist Jacqueline Schwab in a musical exploration of the classical/traditional crossover in 18th-century Scotland. The duo's unusual approach to this rarely-heard repertoire combines scholarly research with modern improvisations informed by a traditional sensibility. "Beautifully performed," says *The Washington Post*. Declares WBUR (Boston), "[*Celtic Dialogue*] presents both artists at their ground-breaking best, very traditional yet compositionally elegant and provocatively improvisational... Equal parts classical chamber set and wild Celtic ceilidh..."

Laura also works with hammer dulcimer player Ken Kolodner in the Celtic duo *Greenfire*. Their first album, *Walking Stones*, sold over 30,000 copies and was the Allegro Corporation's #1 World Music Title for over three months. In October 1998 it was named one of BMG's Top 15 Bestsellers (Encore Record Club). "The beauty and the beat of Celtic music are always well-served," says *The Washington Post* of *Greenfire*, citing Risk's "bittersweet lyricism... [and] aggressive attack." *Greenfire* performances include guest appearances with the Baltimore Choral Arts Society and with *Helicon* at Baltimore's Meyerhoff Symphony Hall. The former concert, which included a suite of traditional tunes arranged for *Greenfire* and string orchestra, was broadcast to over 500,000 viewers in the Washington DC. area on WMAR TV (ABC).

Laura recently completed five years as an Instructor of Fiddling at Wellesley College, where she founded the college's first Celtic music ensemble, the Fiddleheads.

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## **Praise for Laura Risk**

A virtuoso fiddler. Her fluency in fiddle styles from Cape Breton to Appalachia is remarkable.

***The Boston Globe***

It was thrilling to hear [Risk's] expressive treatment of reels, jigs and country dances. She led off the second act of the program with a Scottish tune that had the elegance of a sonata, as if Mozart had come from the Isle of Skye.

***The St. Petersburg Times (Florida)***

Laura Risk plays her fiddle with passion and finesse...Capturing a glimpse of emotions seldom expressed on any instrument, Risk bows the strings with a delicate grace, yet draws unbridled passion from them... Startlingly beautiful and deftly executed. [Her fiddling] gives spark, vitality, and grace to these unforgettable tunes.

***Folktales***

Only in her mid-twenties, Risk has become a formidable player with a clear stylistic vision.

***The East Bay Express (California)***

Brilliant... Risk's fiddle dances through the music like a live thing, and you can't help but wonder if her nimble fingers have ever missed a note. Her playing is emotional, sincere, gorgeous.

***Rambles, on-line cultural arts magazine***

## **Praise for Celtic Dialogue**

Top 10 CDs of 1999... At once pastoral and sweeping.

***The Boston Globe***

These are soul-stirring tunes. Jacqueline Schwab's genius at the piano is known to be delicate, bare, and utterly expressive. But Laura Risk's fiddle is a revelation and achingly beautiful.

***Ken Burns, Grammy-winning filmmaker***

Beautifully performed... Fiddler Laura Risk and pianist Jacqueline Schwab give a refined chamber music treatment to some exquisite 18th-century melodies.

***The Washington Post***

The first notes sound classical, with lush and proper piano chords meeting the high sweet arc of a violin. As the rhythmic pulse thickens, you're sure it's traditional music, some dark, ancient Celtic air. Then, Laura Risk's fiddle pushes the melody's pedal to the floor, and you don't care what it is. It's just beautiful... *Celtic Dialogue* is a gently daring new CD of Scottish traditional music... It sounds unlike any music you've heard before, because it is: Most of its eighteen selections have not been performed for more than 200 years. Yet they seem almost to have been composed with the 24-year-old Risk's gifts in mind.

***The Boston Globe***

Gorgeous... *Celtic Dialogue* helps unearth a forgotten era in Scottish fiddle music. This CD is always expressive, freshly contemplative, hauntingly emotional.

***The Boston Herald***

The tunes have a dreamlike quality that charmed me -- and haunted me long after the disc was over.

***Stereophile***

## **Praise for Greenfire**

[Greenfire] plays with the soul, emotion, inspiration, and (when needed) the oomph that should be the envy of many a Celtic band... The repertoire runs the stylistic gamut from hornpipes to polkas to slow airs to jigs to strathspeys, and the geographic gamut from Ireland to Cape Breton to Scotland to Chicago, and even to Finland... Fresh, authentic, invigorating.

***Dirty Linen***

Exceptional musicians... Greenfire's approach combines a loving respect for tradition and a thoroughly playful sense of creativity. The result is controlled artistry that should appeal to all fans of Celtic music... Clearly this is a 'must have' album for Celtic fans.

***Dulcimer Player News***

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## **Praise for Greenfire (continued)**

Greenfire, a Baltimore-based Celtic group featuring Ken Kolodner on hammered dulcimer and Laura Risk on fiddle, played an inspiring set of tunes on Thursday, Aug. 16, at beautiful Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pa. The perfect summer evening was a fine complement to the musicianship of these two, which, as always, was first-rate. Opening with two Kerry polkas, "Salmon Tails Up the Water" and "Knocknaboul," they moved seamlessly through French-Canadian, old-timey, Scottish and Cape Breton styles, as well as an original tune by Kolodner... The interplay between the hammered dulcimer's precise percussive qualities and the graceful fluidity of Risk's fiddling was a real treat... This was a fine performance by two veterans who obviously enjoy working together. **Rambles**

*A Roof for the Rain* is an instrumental CD that sparkles through excellent musicianship, a great selection of tunes, and superb production... [It] is assertive but not overbearing, a delight to the ears. **Green Man Review**

[Greenfire] explores the spirit and soul and mysticism of Irish music and kindred styles... [On *Walking Stones*] the combination of Kolodner's deft touch and the dulcimer's shimmering tones inevitably conjure contemplative and sometimes courtly moods, but not before we're treated to a lively set of Irish, Scottish, and Irish-American reels. Risk's aggressive attack, which accounts for much of the music's rhythmic force early on, is later supplanted by a bittersweet lyricism, but it returns again, vigorously. The beauty and the beat of Celtic music are always well served. **The Washington Post**

What's most impressive is the tight interplay among the musicians. **The Baltimore Messenger**

## **Praise for Cordelia's Dad with Laura Risk**

If traditional American music has a future, it's probably Cordelia's Dad, a former rock band that discovered the joys of the traditional American vocal form of shape-note singing and fiddle tunes and became an acoustic marvel with copies of *The Sacred Harp* in hand... The foursome brings dazzling exuberance to this material, along with interpretive thoughtfulness. **CMJ**

Folk Album of the Month (*Spine*)... [Cordelia's Dad] examines the full, rich depth of the American folk tradition with startling conviction... Tim Eriksen is a charismatically disturbing focus, but he has profound support, notably from Laura Risk's authentic fiddle, and Steve Albini's courageously stark production. Absurdly good. **MOJO, U.K.**

Tim Eriksen, Cath Oss, Peter Irvine, and Laura Risk have been dusting off the reputation of traditional American tunes as mere 'folk' music and electrifying them with all the fire, heartache, and lust that befits the growing pains of a country and its endless personal comedies and tragedies. *Spine* is a revelation, a record rich with voice, fiddle, guitar, banjo, drum, and dulcimer that is so raw, naked, real and up front that if it weren't for the instruments and singing style, one could easily crown it the year's only true punk record. **Magnet, U.K.**

## **Praise for Laura Risk and Athena Tergis**

Laura and Athena play with fury and excitement, weaving together dazzling harmonies and intricate patterns in strathspeys, jigs, and reels. **The Boston Irish Reporter**

Tergis and Risk have become the toast of northern California's Celtic renaissance... Preeminent promulgators of the Scottish fiddling tradition. **Strings**

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## Discography

### Solo Recordings

- **The Merry Making** (Dorian 90282), with Susie Petrov, piano, Dennis Cahill, guitar, Christopher Layer, flutes and bagpipes
- **Celtic Dialogue** (Dorian 90264), with Jacqueline Schwab, piano  
\*\*\*Top 10 CDs of 1999 – *The Boston Globe*

### Recordings by Greenfire (Laura Risk, fiddle, and Ken Kolodner, hammer dulcimer)

- **A Roof for the Rain** (Dorian 90295), with Keith Murphy, guitar, Joseph Sobol, guitar and cittern
- **Greenfire** (Dorian 90265), with Robin Bullock, guitar, piano, cittern
- **Walking Stones** (Dorian 90248), with Robin Bullock, guitar, piano, cittern  
\*\*\*BMG Record Club's Top 15 Bestsellers  
\*\*\*Allegro Corporation's #1 World Music Title

### Other Bands

- **Journey Begun**, Laura Risk and Athena Tergis (Culburnie 105), with Steve Baughman, guitar, Peter Maund, percussion, Pat Klobas, bass; produced by Alasdair Fraser
- **Spine**, Cordelia's Dad (Appleseed 1023) – Tim Eriksen, vocals, guitar, Cath Oss, vocals, lap dulcimer, accordion, Peter Irvine, vocals, percussion; produced by Steve Albini
- **Host of the Air: Contemporary Music for Scottish Country Dancing**, with Susie Petrov, accordion, James Gray, piano

### Recordings produced by Laura Risk

- **My Joy**, Hanneke Cassel (Cassel Records 2001)

### Guest Appearances

- **Petit Fou**, Matapat (Borealis 113)
- **The Honey on the Mountain**, Rob Laurens (Attic Light 339-002)
- **My Joy**, Hanneke Cassel (Cassel 2001)
- **Different Game**, Lissa Schneckenberger (Footprint Records)
- **The Harper's Masque: A Celebration of Celtic Harps**, Knodel & Valencia

### Compilations

- **The Road from Erin: Ireland's Musical Legacy** (Dorian 90021), various artists
- **Commuter Classics: Drive Time A.M.** (Dorian 90018), various artists
- **Visions of Bach: Transcriptions and arrangements inspired by Bach** (Dorian 90016), various artists
- **Christmas Giff** (Dorian 90321), various artists

### Books

- **Fiddler Magazine's Favorites: Tunes from and Interviews with 36 of the World's Greatest Fiddlers** (book and CD set), various artists

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## Selected Appearances

### Festivals

Celtic Connections, Glasgow, Scotland  
Celtic Colours International Festival, Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Canada  
Newport Folk Festival, RI  
Winnipeg Folk Festival, Manitoba, Canada  
Philadelphia Folk Festival, PA  
City Stages, Birmingham, AL  
Jacob's Pillow, Lee, MA □  
Chico World Music Festival, CA  
Falcon Ridge Folk Festival, NY  
Champlain Valley Festival, Burlington, VT  
Summer Solstice Festival, Los Angeles, CA  
Sebastopol Celtic Festival, CA  
Grass Valley Festival of World Music, CA  
Dingwall Festival, Scotland  
Bracknell Festival, England  
Ely Festival, England  
Crawley Festival of American Music, England  
Redditch Festival, England  
Mémoire et Racines, Joliette, PQ, Canada  
La Grande Rencontre, Montréal, PQ, Canada  
Harbourfront Centre Celtic Festival, Toronto, ON, Canada  
Wheatlands Traditional Arts Weekend, Greenville, MI  
Pittsburgh Irish Festival, PA  
Philadelphia Irish Festival, PA  
Grandfather Mountain Scottish Highland Games, Banner Elk, NC  
Stone Mountain Scottish Highland Games, Atlanta, GA  
Pleasanton Scottish Highland Games, Pleasanton, CA  
Columbia Folk Festival, PA  
Clarion Folk Festival, Clarion, PA  
Virginia Highlands Festival, Abington, VA

### Performing Arts Centers

Myerhoff Symphony Hall, Baltimore, MD (*Winter Solstice Celebration with Helicon*)  
Centre Pierre Péladeau, Montréal, PQ, Canada (*D'Amour et de Danse*)  
Les Salles du Gesù, Montréal, PQ, Canada  
The Basilica of the Assumption, Baltimore, MD  
Longwood Gardens, Kennett Square, PA  
Pinecone, Raleigh, NC  
Ivy & Stone, Summersville, WV

### Performing Arts Centers (continued)

Maison de Culture Frontenac, Montréal, PQ, Canada (*Memoires Vives*, sponsored by Radio-Canada)  
The Roda Theater, Berkeley, CA (*Fiddle Summit* with Alasdair Fraser, Darol Anger and Mike Marshall)  
Alys Robinson Stephens Performing Arts Center, University of Alabama, Birmingham, AL  
Strathmore Hall, Rockville, MD  
Hoover Auditorium, Lakeside, OH  
Rochester Civic Music, Rochester, MN (week-long residency)  
Fairlane Music Guild, The Henry Ford Estate, Dearborn, MI  
The Concert Society at Maryland, College Park, MD  
Museum of Our National Heritage, Lexington, MA  
Museum of Fine Art, Philadelphia, PA  
Porter-Phelps Museum, Hadley, MA  
Common Fence Music, Portsmouth, RI  
The Barbican Centre, London, England  
The Palace Theatre, Redditch, England  
Newcastle Arts Centre, England  
Gainsborough Arts Centre, England

### Colleges

University of Arkansas at Little Rock, AK  
University of Georgia at Athens, GA  
Palm Beach Community College, Lake Worth, FL  
Carleton College, Carleton, IN  
Antioch College, Yellow Springs, OH  
Elon College, Elon, NC  
Regis College, Weston, MA  
Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA  
Hagerstown Community College, MD  
St. John's College, Annapolis, MD  
College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, ME  
Miami University, Hamilton, OH  
Reed College, Portland, OR  
Marlboro College, Marlboro, VT  
Evergreen College, Olympia, WA  
University of Wisconsin, Platteville, WI  
Averett College, Danville, WV

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## Selected Appearances (continued)

### Clubs

The Bottom Line, New York, NY  
Makor, New York, NY  
Cedar Cultural Center, Minneapolis, MN  
Old Town School of Folk Music, Chicago, IL  
The Ark, Ann Arbor, MI  
Ten Pound Fiddle, East Lansing, MI  
Iron Horse, Northampton, MA  
Club Passim, Cambridge, MA  
Johnny D's, Somerville, MA  
Tractor Tavern, Seattle, WA  
McCabe's, Santa Monica, CA  
The Ash Grove, Los Angeles, CA  
Freight and Salvage, Berkeley, CA  
Kuumbwa Jazz Center, Santa Cruz, CA  
Noe Valley Ministry, San Francisco, CA  
Focal Point, St Louis, MO  
Prism Coffeehouse, Charlottesville, VA  
Acoustic Renaissance, Hinsdale, IL  
Living Traditions, Orange County, CA  
Kirkland Arts Center, Utica, NY  
Skylight Exchange, Chapel Hill, NC  
Godfrey Daniels, Bethlehem, PA  
12 Bar Club, London, England  
Lewes Folk Club, England  
The Mean Fiddler, London, England  
The Boat Race, Cambridge, England  
The Library, Perth, ON, Canada  
Rogue Folk Club, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
Mouton Noir, Wakefield, PQ, Canada  
The Yellow Door, Montreal, PQ, Canada  
Cowichan Folk Guild, Duncan, BC, Canada  
Utopia, Nelson, BC, Canada

### Radio/TV Appearances

"Christmas with the Baltimore Choral Arts Society", WMAR TV, Baltimore, MD  
"Eye on Toronto", CFTO TV, Toronto, ON, Canada  
'Memoires Vives', Radio-Canada, Montreal, PQ, Canada  
"Caught in the Act", WGBY TV, Springfield, MA  
"Women Creating", C3TV, Yarmouth, MA  
"West Coast Live", KQED, San Francisco, CA  
"FolkScene", KPFF, Los Angeles, CA  
Public Radio Stations nationwide, including WGBH, WUMB, WERS, WBRS, WETA, KALW, KPFA, KCRW, WDIY, CKUT, CIBL

### Selected Community Concerts

AL: Ft. Payne  
CA: Alameda, Mariposa, Oakhurst  
CT: Farmington, Glastonbury  
NC: Gray Eagle  
NH: Concord  
NY: St James  
OR: Pistol River, Umatilla, Pendelton, Ashland  
PA: Harrisburg  
WI: Hayward, Madison

### Music Camps and Workshops

The Swannanoa Gathering, Asheville, CA  
Valley of the Moon Scottish Fiddling School, Boulder Creek, CA  
Festival of American Fiddle Tunes, Port Townsend, WA  
Rocky Mountain Fiddle Camp, Estes Park, CO  
Fiddlekids, El Cerrito, CA  
Pinewoods Dance Camp, English-Scottish Session, MA (Scottish band leader)  
Lark in the Morning,, Mendocino, CA  
Suzuki Institute of So. California, Pasadena, CA  
Summer Strings (Suzuki), North Andover, MA  
Fiddle Tent (Founder and Workshop Leader), Stone Mountain Scottish Games, Atlanta, GA  
Scottish Fiddling Seminar, San Luis Obispo, CA  
Scottish Fiddling Seminar, Bowen Island, BC, Canada  
L'ecole des arts de la veillée, Montreal, PQ, Canada (workshop)  
Suzuki Strings of Madison, WI (workshop)

### Other Events

Scottish Heritage USA Convention, Boston, MA  
International Conference of Immunologists, T Breakers, Palm Beach, FL  
International Conference of Ophthalmologists, Baltimore, MD  
Society for Gynecological Investigation Annual Convention, Toronto, ON  
Hayward Half-Marathon, Hayward, WI  
Saturday Evening Balls at Stone Mountain and Pleasanton Scottish Games  
Kilts and Ghillies Ball, Wilton, CT  
Westchester Ball, Westchester, NY  
Hogmany Ball, Philadelphia, PA  
Folk Alliance Official Showcase, Wash., D.C.