

# Sabra MacGillivray

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*“...Sabra MacGillivray, the glory of the world, whose subtle choreography, flawless execution and breathtaking lightness – her feet tap and kick and point but the centre of her body is still and her arms float in arabesques above – outline the finest kind of highland dancing and step-dancing you will ever see.”*

*- (Stephen Pedersen – Halifax Herald, October 10, 2003)*

She is a champion highland dancer, a spectacular step dancer and a talented musician. A star of Nova Scotia tourism commercials and a guest on many television specials, **Sabra MacGillivray** is probably one of Atlantic region’s leading ambassadors of Highland and Scottish step dancing. She tours and performs with her sister, Kendra and brother, Troy most often as a highland dancer or step dancer or accompanying the fiddle and piano on bodhran. Kendra is a fiddler-phenomenon and Troy is a fiddler and piano player extraordinaire, both possessing fantastic musical recordings in the Scottish tradition. The three have performed all over the world including Canada, United States, Europe, Nunavut, and Australia.

It was Sabra’s highland dancing teacher, Janice MacQuarrie, who trained Sabra from the age of 5, and influenced her desire to choreograph. Sabra has choreographed award-winning dances including “Chattan”, which placed first at the Loon Mountain Highland Games in New Hampshire in 2002. One of Sabra’s proudest moments was when she was invited to perform at the Royal Military Edinburgh Tattoo in Scotland as a soloist. Sabra was one of six dancers from Canada to be invited to be a guest highland dancer.

Sabra is a member of the award-winning dance group Macquarrie Dancers and has had the opportunity to perform in CBC’s productions of the 2001 ECMA Gala Award Show, Celtic Electric, and most recently, “DRUM!”. She also danced at the Boston Tree Lighting and Tall Ships 2000 in Halifax.

Sabra’s list of awards is an impressive one... 5 time Nova Scotia Champion, 10 Interprovincial representative at the Canadian Championships, 8<sup>th</sup> overall at the World Highland Dancing Championships in Dunoon, Scotland, International Gathering of the Clans Champion, and 2-time Atlantic Canadian High Aggregate winner just to name a few.

Step dancing is another one of Sabra’s loves. She choreographs her own steps which garnered her mention in newspaper articles saying that she should be patenting her moves. Her quick and intricate footwork are also a crowd pleaser. She combines movements that she has learned in Cape Breton step, Highland, Irish, and Flamenco

dancing. Her most memorable experience with teaching step dancing was in March of 2004 in Bathurst, Australia where she taught a group of dancers steps of the traditional Cape Breton style. Sabra has also had the pleasure of working alongside other recognized step-dancers including Kelly MacArthur and Bonnie-Jean MacDonald in shows that featured their unified, percussive steps, often leaving audiences on their feet.

The rhythm of the steps with hard shoe is what drew Sabra to pursue step dancing. It led her work with drummer, Ian MacMillan who introduced her to the Percussion group SQUID where the explosive percussion mimics the rhythm of Sabra's feet. They have performed at the Ottawa National Arts Center, the Granville Green concert series in Cape Breton, and are a crowd favorite at the annual Halifax Drum Fest.

Sabra's desire to express her rhythm has led her to become an accomplished bodhran player. She is mostly self-taught but has had direction from Michelle Stewart of Scotland. Most recently she had the opportunity to give a bodhran workshop in Iqaluit, Nunavut in May of 2004, a memorable experience. She has also tried her hand in pipe band snare drumming and played with the Antigonish Highland Society Pipe Band at the North American Championships in August, 2003 in Maxville, Ontario.

Another group that Sabra has the honor of working with is Ferintosh, a Celtic band whose repertoire is of Baroque Scottish. The band consists of fiddler David Greenberg, cellist Abby Newton, and harpist Kim Robertson. The collaboration of the exceptional music played by Ferintosh, which is often of ancient Scottish descent, and Sabra's highland and step dancing has impressed audiences. Sabra was a guest performer with Ferintosh at the Baroque Music Festival in Lemeque, New Brunswick in 2002, the St. Cecelia Concert Series in Halifax in 2003 as well as the Celtic Colors Festival in Cape Breton. in 2003. They will be performing at the Chamber Festival in Ottawa in July, 2004.

Currently, Sabra is teaching highland dancing and step dancing in Cape Breton and has taught numerous workshops internationally including the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts & Crafts in St. Anne's, Cape Breton.

Sabra also holds a Bachelor of Science in Human Nutrition from St. Francis Xavier University (1998) and a diploma in Massage Therapy from Northumberland College (2000). She owns her own business called "Celtic Touch Massage Therapy" and works in Port Hawkesbury, NS.