## A musical shape-shifter

## Composer/conductor Scott Macmillan likes creative challenges

cott Macmillan was 14 when he composed his first melody, a short riff plucked on a guitar. "I remember

thinking that nobody had composed that before — it was mine," says Macmillan. Not that the musical epiphany had an immediate effect: "I still wasn't convinced then that music was my life."

Now in his early 50s with an established, multi-faceted career, there's no question he followed the right path. A musical shape-shifter, Macmillan, who divides his time between Halifax and Cape Breton, comfortably straddles musical genres, metamorphosing from performer and composer to conductor, teacher, arranger and producer. He is as comfortable playing the blues, jazz or Celtic music as he is conducting a symphony orchestra in a classical work. Among his many accomplishments is a largescale choral work, Celtic Mass for the Sea, which has been performed over 60 times around the world, including at Carnegie Hall (his wife, Jennyfer Brickenden, wrote the libretto). He also heads a 12piece jazz ensemble, Scott 'n The Rocks, that performs in Halifax twice a month. Buddy MacMaster, Lennie Gallant and Jimmy Rankin are among the countless musicians with whom he has shared the stage.

But music was not a part of his early life. "Music," he says with a

laugh, "was something we put on the record player at Christmas." He gravitated to it naturally, however, teaching himself to play his older brother's guitar. At university, he studied math but paid for his schooling by playing in a blues band. During his third year he took an elective in classical guitar and things got more serious. He found himself learning theory and classical history, later honing his skills as a full-time music student at

Dalhousie University and in the jazz program at Toronto's Humber College.

Macmillan intended to

terns, ratios, relationships," he says, "because simple mathematics is in all music."

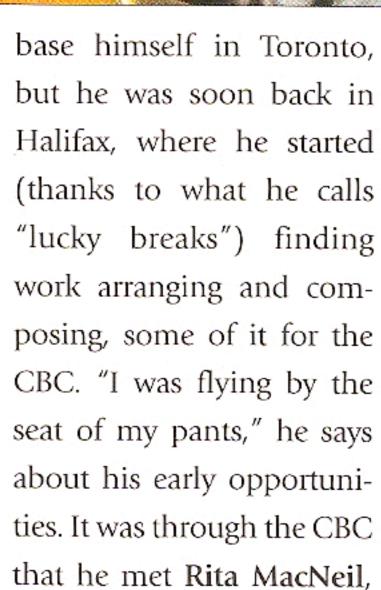
April saw the Halifax premiere of Within Sight of Shore, Macmillan's musical reflection on the last Canadian warship sunk in World War II, on which Macmillan's father was the commanding officer (he survived, but 44



Scott Macmillan has
been nominated for
seven ECMAs and has
won three: Instrumental
Artist of the Year (1998)
and Best Classical
Recording (1995
and 2002).

He has served as a conductor for Symphony
Nova Scotia, the
National Arts Centre
Orchestra, the
Kitchener-Waterloo
Symphony, the Vancouver
Symphony (with whom
he has recorded with
Rita MacNeil), the
Calgary Philharmonic,
the Winnipeg Symphony
and the Royal Scottish
National Orchestra.

He holds an honorary doctorate from Cape Breton University (1997) and an honorary diploma from Nova Scotia Community College (2008).



a singer who has since acknowledged Macmillan as being an "integral contributor" to her success. Macmillan became interested in the challenge of Celtic music, finding ways to fuse it with other musical styles. As a composer, he says his background in mathematics serves him well. "I'm always looking for pat-

lives were lost). And in July, he premiered *Currents of Sable Island*, also in Halifax. Meanwhile, he's still juggling a busy teaching and performing schedule. But it's a lifestyle that suits him. "I challenge myself to do something creative every day," he says. "Any creative job that comes my way, that's what I want to do." —*Meredith Dault* 



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Selected discography: Scott Macmillan

Presents The Minnie Sessions Vol. 1-3, (composer/co-producer/guitarist; 1996, 1997, 1998), Celtic Mass for the Sea (composer/arranger; 1993).

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