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Multi-year research project to examine cultural and historic impact of Red River Jig to Métis peoples

For University of Lethbridge researcher [Dr. Suzanne Steele](#), the Red River Jig is so much more than a cultural dance and touchstone of her Métis heritage — rather its dance and tune crosses boundaries among music, dance, politics, history and spirituality. It is those intersections she and Drs. Monique Giroux and Michelle Porter are exploring as part of a multi-year research project examining the cultural and historic impact of the Red River Jig to the Métis peoples.

Titled *La Danse di la Rivyairre Rooj, Oayache Mannin*, the project seeks to trace a “cultural DNA” of scholars, artists, practitioners and community members of the Red River Jig family network. According to the researchers, the Red River Jig is known by some as the Métis national anthem and is heard and danced to widely at cultural events and celebrations, as well as for spiritual practice.

Steele, the first humanities postdoctoral researcher in the ULethbridge Faculty of Fine Arts, says her current work is grounded in a Métis worldview and utilizes a Métis methodology based on community building. She likens the archival component of the work to storing delicious foods in a root cellar; an archive of music, dance, and story, and where the Métis community, and others, may share the contents if they wish.

“The Métis are an open and tolerant society, but little recognized. Many of us are 'hidden in plain view' as the scholar Susan Sleeper remarks in her book on 19th century Indigenous-French women. We are pursuing this current Red River Jig project specifically because we decided we needed a space that focuses on the Métis and their family networks, as we are very underrepresented in academia,” says Steele.

It was through a Métis music and dance network that Steele connected with Giroux, music professor and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Music, Culture and Politics at ULethbridge, and Porter (Memorial University).

“I am absolutely thrilled that Dr. Steele is joining the Faculty of Fine Arts as a postdoctoral researcher,” says Giroux. “She has significant experience doing community-based Indigenous research and brings with her a steadfast commitment to

research-creation that centres relationality and processes that matter to communities. I have no doubt that her vision for a Métis-centred arts-based research practice will support and enliven my own research program, and just as importantly will support and enliven research-creation in the fine arts at the University of Lethbridge.”

Steele’s goal with the project is to culminate with a ground-breaking anthology of scholarship incorporating the words and work of Métis artist-practitioners and other interested participants. The anthology will cut across categories (disciplinary, and academic/non-academic), and integrate creative practices — where the form of the anthology reflects the creativity of practice of the traditions themselves. This will include visual arts, beadwork, poetry, short stories, and more, that express the essence and influence of the Red River Jig.

More than anything she’s excited about the journey and the relationships she’ll establish through the project visits with other artists and practitioners of the Red River Jig, as well as (re)connecting her family throughout the diaspora.

“I don’t know what’s going to come out of this current Red River Jig project, and I think that’s good scholarship, actually, embracing the unknown,” she says.

For more on the Red River Jig Project, follow:

Red River Jig website: www.redriverjig.com

Instagram: @redriverjignetwork
<https://www.instagram.com/redriverjignetwork/>

Twitter: @RedRiverJigNet
<https://twitter.com/RedRiverJigNet>

Facebook: Red River Jig Network - RRJN
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100086664619723>

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/multi-year-research-project-examine-cultural-and-historic-impact-red-river-jig-m%C3%A9tis-peoples>

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