

Like a Bridge Over Troubled Waters: The Use of Folk Song in the Intermediate Music Curriculum

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One of the goals of music education in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is to "provide meaningful and challenging music experiences in order to develop the musicality innate in all students" (*Program of Studies*, 1996, p. 13). A key ingredient of these experiences is use of Newfoundland folk songs at all levels and in all instructional settings, from classroom to rehearsal room. At the primary/elementary level, folk songs are used as teaching songs for developing musical reading and writing skills, while at the secondary level, folk songs are an essential component of performance repertoire, both choral and instrumental. At all levels, folk songs provide an exceptional opportunity for personal and cultural expression.

Between 1989 and 1991, the Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador¹, introduced two new music education programs for students at the intermediate level. As curriculum development in Newfoundland is centralized at the provincial level, these programs articulate the goals and objectives of music education for all students in grades 7-9 in the province. *Intermediate Music* (1993) was designed as a continuation of the developmental sequence of concepts, skills, and understandings which began in the primary and elementary levels. *Exploring Music* (1991), on the other hand, was developed for implementation in schools where, for whatever reason, students did not have the opportunity to follow a sequential K-6 music program. It was designed for delivery by a non-specialist classroom teacher with some musical background and appropriate professional development.

While these two intermediate programs are different from each other due to the musical experiences of their respective target audience and the expertise of the teacher, both curricula contain a core unit on Newfoundland folk music. This study of the music in our own province is designed as an inquiry approach in which the "students discover something about themselves and their relationships with music; something about their community and its relationship with music; and something about their role in the musical life of the community" (*Exploring Music*, 1991, p. 115). A major component of this exploration involves students researching music, in particular folk songs, in their own community.

In this paper, I will provide a rationale for the inclusion of indigenous music², specifically folk song, in the music education curriculum; present a brief background to Newfoundland folk songs, including the major collectors and published collections; examine the role and function of our folk songs in relation to the Intermediate Folk Song Project; compare two versions of a Newfoundland folk song to illustrate a research component in this curriculum project; and, finally, offer some suggestions

for pre-service and in-service professional development toward the implementation of this course of study.

Indigenous music in music education

In the keynote address for the focus topic "Implications of Teaching Music Indigenous to Various Cultures" at the 1994 ISME conference, Rose (1995) provides a compelling argument for indigenous music in formal music education:

Active participation with music-in-the-making generally, and with indigenous music specifically, provides a solid foundation for meaningful interaction with a living and productive culture. Indigenous music is a valuable art form that can teach about life and at the same time, make us feel a part of life. Given that part of the educational process involves the reproduction of knowledge, beliefs and traditions of a society, indigenous music provides an invaluable forum for cultural reproduction. It is like a thread running through history in that it helps connect the past, present and the future. It is steeped in reality, yet provides for possibility and potential. Indigenous music can aid in the formation of one's cultural identity, as well as help in developing an appreciation of other cultural identities. In this regard, indigenous music can serve as a basis for understanding how various cultural identities interact to form society. Such fundamental understanding is critical to cultural production (p. 46).

The use of indigenous music in school music education holds the potential for developing musical understandings while connecting individuals, culture, and society. Simultaneously, as connections are made between formal and informal music in education, music programmes will be relevant and meaningful to students and the wider community. "Through indigenous music, there exist both challenges and opportunities for educators to help individuals develop their cultural and spiritual potential, and to be informed, active and independent participants in the production of their own culture" (Rose, 1995, p. 52).

Every culture has its own body of songs. Whether they are called folk songs, traditional songs, old-time songs (Doyle, 1940), vernacular songs (Narváez, 1995) or, simply, songs (Lehr, 1985), this living music is an integral part of every person's cultural heritage. Zoltán Kodály, the Hungarian educator and ethnomusicologist who developed a methodology for teaching music using indigenous music, suggests that "folk music is the mirror of the people's soul" (1974, p. 190). Folk music is a repository for the beliefs, customs, practices, and observances of a group of people. Folk songs, then, are one means through which students can better understand the human spirit of a particular society, their own as well as others: "To understand other people, we must first understand ourselves. Nothing is better for that than folk song; as to know other peoples, their folk song is the best means as well" (Kodály, 1985, p. 19). As Hungarians began collecting and publishing their own folk songs, Kodály made the observation that "we know we are a branch of an ancient tree, our roots are deep, and since we differ from so many peoples, we do have something new to say to others" (Kodály, 1974, p. 38).³ Consequently, the role of using folk song in music education goes far beyond a tool for developing musical literacy to a vehicle for helping students understand their lives and the world around them.

Newfoundland folk song collections

Newfoundland has long been recognized as having one of the richest storehouses of traditional songs to be found in North America (Fowke, 1973; Johnston, 1984; Peacock, 1965). It is generally thought that the isolation of the hundreds of small outports scattered around the winding coast has encouraged and preserved the practice of singing and composing songs to a greater degree than has occurred in other regions on the mainland. Indeed, the scholarly publications of Newfoundland folk songs (Greenleaf and Mansfield, 1933; Karpeles, 1971; Leach, 1965; Lehr, 1985; Peacock, 1965) represent a field collection of over 1300 texts, tunes, and variants (Mercer, 1979). However, it is important to note the distinct possibility that the "intensity of research" in Newfoundland produced what appears to be "an unevenly distributed cultural resource" (Rosenberg, 1994, fn. 46). There may be a direct correlation between the quantity of Newfoundland folk songs and the degree to which scholarly research which has been supported in this province.

Speaking the nature of Newfoundland folk songs in general, Gerald S. Doyle, the first collector to publish and disseminate Newfoundland folk songs widely, writes, "These old songs are part of the web and woof of the life of Newfoundland. They tell the story of the joys, sorrows, tragedies, habits, and customs of the people" (1966, p. 2). While many are variants of songs brought from the Old World by early settlers, some are entirely of local origin. Some describe the means of livelihood in this province and some are simply an expression of the sheer joy of living. Some have an element of drama and pathos, and others are full of Irish wit and humour. Collectively, these songs are an expression of ways of life that have developed in these circumstances and in this environment. The Forward to the 1966 edition of *Old-time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland* declares:

Of no people can it be said with greater truth than of the Newfoundland people that their songs and ballads mirror their history and culture. Our songs tell of privation, courage, fidelity; here will be found the genuine humour of an unsophisticated, kindly people; here, too, will be found tragedy and heartbreak, for we have always been a seafaring people carrying on our activities under conditions as hazardous as any to be found on earth. So every year brings its tragedies and these tragedies have invariably been recorded in song or poem. Let us treasure them for what they really are— an integral part of our inheritance mirroring the very soul of our Newfoundland people. (Doyle, 1966, p. 5)

The image woven by this narrative is dramatic. Doyle's vision of Newfoundland and its people is coloured by his urban experiences and is reflected in the language of the Forward as well in the types of songs published in his songster. In fact, each collector constructs his/her unique vision of Newfoundland through the songs s/he chooses to publish.

There are seven major collections of Newfoundland songs which are available as resources for music educators and their students.

Old-time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland

Gerald S. Doyle, owner of a St. John's mercantile firm, ensured that many local songs became known to Newfoundlanders through the five editions of his songster (1927, 1940, 1955, 1966, 1978). While not a collector himself, Doyle's publication was "motivated by nationalistic interest and pride in Newfoundland's heritage" (Mercer, 1979, p. 36), and served as a medium for the advertising of a line of patent medicines. As the songbooks were distributed free to every household in the province, this collection forms what is probably the core of the popular Newfoundland folk song repertoire (Rosenberg, 1989; Rosenberg, 1991).

Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland

Elisabeth Greenleaf, a Vassar graduate, first went to Newfoundland in 1920 to teach at a Grenfell Mission school. Upon hearing Newfoundland folk songs sung in her boarding house, she wrote down the texts and tunes but found the notation difficult as she was not a musician. In 1929 she returned to Newfoundland with Grace Mansfield, a Vassar music graduate, to continue her collection of folk songs. During three collecting periods they gathered 185 ballads and songs, primarily around Twillingate, Sally's Cove, and Sandy Cove, which were published in 1933 and reprinted in 1968. The published collection includes an informative introduction describing their experiences collecting songs in the outports.

Folk Songs from Newfoundland

Maud Karpeles came to Newfoundland from England in 1929-30 and transcribed many of the songs of British origin that she found in the bays around St. John's and along the south coast of the island. Although delighted with the old-world English and Irish "traditional" songs she discovered, Karpeles was not impressed with those of local composition. Consequently, her collection omits them. The original 1934 publication was entitled *Folk Songs of Newfoundland* and contained 30 songs with piano accompaniments by Ralph Vaughan Williams. In 1971 the collection was reprinted as *Folk Songs from Newfoundland* with 150 songs.

Songs of the Newfoundland Outports

The best-known collection of Newfoundland folk songs was compiled by Canadian Kenneth Peacock who made six separate field trips to Newfoundland during 1951-61. His three-volume collection was published in 1965 and contains 350 songs, just over half of the total he collected. The songs, many with annotations by the collector recounting the field recording event, are grouped in the following categories: children's songs, comic ditties, fishing songs, laments, love adventures, love comedies, love disguises and other impersonations, love eulogies and other songs of praise, love ghosts, love laments, love lyrics, love murders, love tragedies, lumbering ballads, miscellaneous songs, murder ballads, pirate songs, sailor songs, tragic sea ballads, and war songs.

Folk Ballads and Songs of the Lower Labrador Coast

During the summer of 1960, MacEdward Leach, an American, collected songs from the coastal fishing villages on the southeastern Labrador coast. The collection, published in 1965, contains 185 local and traditional songs with an extensive introduction in which Leach describes the context in which the songs were sung. It is interesting to note that the tunes were transcribed by ethnomusicologist Bruno

Nettl. Leach also collected extensively on the Avalon Peninsula during the summers of 1950 and 1951. While some of these field recordings were released on a Folkways recordings, none of these songs have been published (Mercer, 1979).

Come and I Will Sing You

Published in 1985, this is the first collection undertaken by Newfoundlanders. The songs were collected by Anita Best and Genevieve Lehr between 1975 and 1983 and a large proportion of the 120 songs are previously unpublished material. Like the Peacock collection, this publication contains short notes following each song about the singer, the text, or the song itself. Of special significance is the number of locally composed or native shipwreck songs compared to previous collections. This addition "reflects a greater valuing of local composition traditions and hence provides a much-needed insider's view of the song traditions" (Rogers, 1986, 63).

Songs of Labrador

Originally published by the Labrador East Integrated School Board in 1982, this collection of 130 Labrador songs was compiled by Tim Borlase. The collection includes songs composed in Inuktitut, Innu-Amin, English, and French. The topical groupings of the songs includes the big land, the people, young 'uns, carcashos and others, furrin', jiggin', hard times, songs of faith, and ballads. The volume also contains supplementary information about the history and culture of the people of Labrador.

Intermediate folk song project

The Intermediate Folk Song Project was designed to examine Newfoundland folk songs not only in terms of structure, style, and performance, but also in terms of the role folk songs play and/or have played in society. Recognizing that there are probably as many ways of categorizing folk songs as there have been people collecting them, four broad functional categories were established: educational, entertainment, historical, and expression of culture. These categories serve both as a classification model for students as well as an instructional framework for the teacher. The classification model was not intended to constrain in any way; they were encouraged to use their own categories as they saw fit.

Educational

Many songs are of didactic value in that they help children learn the alphabet, count numbers and items, and name the days of the week. These game songs are an important part of a child's growth and development. In addition to meeting physical, social, and aesthetic needs, these songs fulfill the need to experience and practice cognitive concepts and skills such as counting, sequencing, and memorizing. Alphabet songs are very popular in Newfoundland as demonstrated by the Fisherman's Alphabet, the Lumberman's Alphabet, the Trapper's Alphabet, the Sailor's Alphabet, the Labrador Alphabet, and most recently, the Oil-Rigger's Alphabet. There are also extraordinary cumulative songs, such as The Mallard and The Herring, along with a really tongue-twisting counting song, My Father Gave Me.

Entertainment

Many songs are written to amuse, to provide cheer, or to temporarily provide relief from the hardships and realities of existence: the North Atlantic climate, the non-arable land, and the hazards of the sea. It is no surprise that the collections are also filled with folk songs sung to dance tunes or fiddle tunes. This category includes some of the most well-known Newfoundland folk songs, such as *The Ryans and the Pittmans*, *A Great Big Sea Hove in Long Beach*, *Jack Was Every Inch a Sailor*, *The Kelligrew's Soiree*, *That St. John's Girl*, and many others. As well, there are numerous love songs, many of which are modal (dorian or mixolydian), such as *She's Like the Swallow* and *The Morning Dew*.

Historical

Folk songs often provide a first-hand account of key events in a society's history. They provide the opportunity for students to know how people felt at that time. Greenleaf collected so many local songs that she writes, "a complete collection of them would, I am sure, give a complete history of the island, from the early 'gams' aboard the fishing vessels of all nations who came to fish the Banks and to dry their catch ashore, through social movements like the emigration of the nineties, to politics, wars, sea disasters and everyday life, including folk-motifs, and of a tone quite different from the historical ballads composed by the ruling classes" (1933, xxxvii). The topics of historical folk songs in Newfoundland are principally sea disasters and labour disputes.

Expression of Culture

This category includes songs which help to validate Newfoundland culture. These songs show how Newfoundlanders live and how they survive. They express a pride in the land, the people, what they do, and what they have done. The need to justify one's very existence is often met in the writing and singing of songs. These cultural validation songs may be grouped into categories which correspond to the ways Newfoundlanders make a living. These include fishing, sealing, trapping, and lumbering.

Pedagogy of the Newfoundland folk song project

An essential component of the project requires that students participate in qualitative research in order to gain an understanding of how, when, where, and why people in their community include music in their lives. Through interviews and observations, the students attempt to develop a clearer picture of the role and importance of music in their own community and their potential role in evolution or production of culture in that community.

In preparation for their interviewing of singers, students listen to a field recording made by one of the early Newfoundland collectors and then compare it with a contemporary setting or performance of the same folk song. They are encouraged to discover the similarities and differences in these recordings separated by time and context, and to discuss their reactions to each performance.

For example, *The Ferryland Sealer* was collected by Peacock in July 1960 from Leonard Hulan in Jeffrey's, on the west coast of the island. It is a detailed and accurate description of a sealing voyage that can be dated back to the 1860s. The text in the Peacock collection is slightly different from what Mr. Hulan performs. This is because Peacock's printed texts are often composites of different versions of the songs and may include corrections or additions that the singers gave him later. While this practice may be considered 'variation', a natural feature of folk song, it should be noted that Peacock did take the unusual liberty of editing his published texts, and perhaps some of the tunes, in order to published "good singable versions" (Peacock, 1965).

(Listening example: *The Ferryland Sealer* [Recorded by Leonard Hulan]. On *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* [record]. St. John's, NF: Pigeon Inlet Production. (1960)

The educational value of engaging students in 'comparison' operations cannot be over-emphasized. First, the thinking processes engaged by posing the all-important question why is integral to the development of a critical pedagogy in the music classroom. Second, this activity is essential in establishing a basis for appreciation and evaluation, including the ability to formulate criteria with which the validity of change can be assessed. Third, treating folk songs in this comparative mode counters the popular notion that folk songs are static and immutable. This danger is always present around anything 'traditional' because we "collect and conserve it and turn what should be a dynamic force into a museum piece" (Sell, 1993, p. 30). These are not museum pieces but "living entities developing organically and always adapting themselves to contemporary needs" (Dobbs, 1978, p. 57). In an educational setting, it is all too easy for folk songs to take on a fixed form and lose the dynamism that is the essence of true folk music. The comparative research component in the Intermediate Folk Song Project provides for these three essential learnings.

What is happening in non-educational, musical settings in Newfoundland during the 1990s provides fertile soil for the cultivation of this approach in formal music education. Folk songs are not viewed solely as artifacts to be archived and studied. "New bands, new sounds, and new variations of folk songs are surfacing and attracting eager followings. Young bands are appropriating and popularizing folk songs in very interesting and creative ways" (Rose, 1995, p. 41). More and more young musicians are emerging with "a penchant for using the familiar in order to present the unusual" (Narváez, 1982, p. 10). A performance of *The Ferryland Sealer* by a local band, The Punters, fuses folk song elements with rock rhythms and harmonies and combines traditional instruments (fiddle, tin whistle, accordion, bodhran) with electronic sounds (electric guitar and bass, synthesizer, and drum set).

(Listening example: *Ferryland Sealer* [Recorded by The Punters]. On *The Punters* [CD]. St. John's, NF: The Sound Solution.

In a recent interview with members of Great Big Sea, the most popular local band quickly gaining international recognition, Alan Doyle, one of the lead singers and songwriters for the band, explains:

Our stuff isn't rock music at its base, it's folk. It's sing-a-long stuff and it works with one guitar in the kitchen, or with 15 playing the tunes in a 5,000-seat arena. Our goal is to play kitchen music that works on a big level....I think the biggest thing that makes us different from the other bands is that we play a very old style of music but we play it in the real contemporary form. We approach our records and live stuff in the same way that a rock band does, with a lot of energy.

Folk music is ageless and I think if it's presented in a way that's exciting to young people, they'll come out and listen. The songs are so good. The idea is to keep these folk songs going for another generation...when I hear kids singing these songs while they're skipping rope, I honestly feel like we've done something really good. It's like we've done something for the province. (Stockwood, 1996, p. 10)

Recently a senior high student wrote the following in a review of Great Big Sea's latest CD in the local paper, *The Evening Telegram*, St. John's.

I love the way they can take a song that I've heard my grandparents sing a million times and turn it into a hit which I now find myself singing....It's fantastic that young people are beginning to appreciate our musical culture. If someone had told me last year that my Tragically Hip and Our Lady Peace CDs would be lying next to traditional stuff, I would have laughed, and I think a lot of kids have the same opinion. (Fleming, 1997, p. 17)

The Intermediate Folk Song Project flourishes in this milieu where past and present merge.

Implementation of the folk song project

Two initiatives have been undertaken to support the implementation of the Intermediate Folk Song Project. As part of in-service professional development, the Department of Education produced a video entitled *Music in our Community* (Department of Education, 1993). The video, which is divided into four segments (church music, traditional music, jazz & classical music, and popular music) is anchored by two teenage women who are 'researching music in their own community'. In the segment on traditional music, the women interview Jim Payne, a well-known St. John's folk musician. The interview serves a two-fold purpose. It provides a model of interviewing for those who will be talking with musicians in their own communities. It also provides valuable insight into the life and career of a traditional performer who has performed Newfoundland folk songs all over the world.

As part of pre-service professional development, this year I offered the opportunity to collect a field recording to the students in my Elementary Music Methods Course. Although initially apprehensive and concerned that they would not be able to find someone to sing for them, most students really enjoyed the assignment and gained insights into how students begin such research. Further, the exercise prompted the students to consider the potential use of folk music in the classroom, many for the first time.

Two students wrote about their experience in their journals:

The rich language and culture expressed in our music is ample reason to include folk songs in our school music programs. Now I will have the courage to go a lot further in using various types and categories of folk songs, not just the entertain (sic)hook.

The segment on folk songs was my favourite section of the course as it encouraged me to think that I will be able to utilise some of the traditional musical background I have gained throughout my life. I loved collecting the folk song as I actually felt as if I had made a major discovery and I had added to the traditional library of my province.

Implications for intermediate music education

The discrepancies, or "lack of connection" between adolescents' out-of-school and in-school involvement with music are striking (Rutkowski, 1994). Adolescents rate music high on the list of activities important to their life, but rate general music class third from last on the list of preferred classes in school. There is little doubt that adolescents love music. Music educators must find creative ways to facilitate learning that is personally relevant and meaningful for our students. I believe that a new look at the use of folk song in the classroom has the potential for building these bridges . . . bridges between the classroom and the community, bridges between in school and out-of-school music, bridges between musicians who are classically trained and those who "can't read a note," bridges between music and other subjects . . . the possibilities are unlimited.

Intermediate students are right in the middle: between dependence and independence, between elementary school and high school, between childhood and adulthood. These adolescents must not be 'thrown' into the water, but led over a carefully designed bridge which connects themselves and the world around them. Folk songs have the potential for being an important part of the 'bridge over troubled waters' for the youth of the 21st century in helping them construct their own cultural identities through musical understandings.

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Endnotes

¹ The people of Newfoundland and Labrador are referred to as *Newfoundlanders and Labradorians*. For the sake of brevity, *Newfoundlanders* will be used in this paper to include all people in the province.

² Indigenous music is variously defined. Most definitions make reference to music that grows out of the experience of a place. The indigenous music that is the focus of this paper is born of the experience of living in Newfoundland. That, however, is not to deny the roots of this music in the Anglo and Celtic cultures of Europe.

³ Kodály's emphasis on difference and historical depth reflects his nationalist sentiments.