

She's Like the Swallow: Creative Responses to Newfoundland Folksong in the Choral Music of Harry Somers

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On March 9, 1999, the musical world was deeply saddened by the death of Canadian composer Harry Somers, who passed away at the age of 73. Somers was arguably one of Canada's greatest composers of the twentieth century, one of a rare few to receive international acclaim in his lifetime, and one of an even rarer breed who earned his living almost entirely from composition. His influence continues to be felt worldwide through an impressive musical legacy that includes works for choir, voice, orchestra, instrumental ensemble, piano, stage, film, and television. Among the many accolades Dr. Somers received during his distinguished career were three honorary doctorates and, most notably, an appointment to Canada's highest civilian honour, Companion of the Order of Canada.¹ He was a founding member of the Canadian League of Composers and his music has been the subject of significant scholarly attention, spawning a biographical/analytical study by Brian Cherney and several dissertations and theses.² In February of this year, the Canadian Music Centre launched an ambitious multi-disc recording project to commemorate Somers's achievements. Titled *A Window on Somers*, it contains many of the composer's greatest masterworks and represents the largest recording project in Canadian history to feature the music of a single composer.³

Of Somers's entire oeuvre, it is perhaps his landmark opera *Louis Riel* (1967) and a distinctive body of choral and solo vocal literature that he is best remembered for. Certainly the seeds of a lifelong fascination in the human voice were planted at an early age. His mother played the piano and the Somers' Toronto home was alive with song, as family members would gather to sing popular salon pieces from the nineteenth century. Many decades later, the lingering impact of these childhood experiences could still be detected in a decidedly vocal approach to the act of composition that remained with Somers throughout his adult life. As he later recalled to one interviewer in 1984, "Music was constantly in our household. My mother was a natural pianist who played by ear and we sang all the time. To this day I usually sing all my compositions in my own way . . . I stomp the floor, blow the trumpets—I sing every part, and that started at an early age" (Somers, quoted in Margles, 1984, p. 6).

By the 1960s, an eclectic and, at times, experimental approach to the composition of vocal music had become a persistent preoccupation in Somers's mature works, and this in itself represented a striking departure from the predominantly neo-classical instrumental works of the previous decade.⁴ As was the case throughout Somers's career, commissions played a major role in the compositional paths he chose and the vocal works of the 1960s were no exception. Virtually every work of the decade was written to fulfil a commission, and, in the case of many of these, he appears to have been writing with particular individuals and/or ensembles in mind. Most notable among these was unquestionably the great Canadian choral director Elmer Iseler (1927-98), and it was through the finely tuned voices of his choirs that many of Somers's works were introduced to the musical public in their best possible light.⁵ Perhaps the most dominant commissioning body in Somers's creative life was the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, for whom he composed many works in the 1960s. These include the *Twelve Miniatures*, for soprano and instrumental trio (dedicated to the memory of his wife

Catherine)(1963); *Evocations*, for mezzo-soprano and piano (1966); the sacred choral works *Gloria* (1962) and *Crucifixion* (1966), and the focus of the present study, the *Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (1968),⁶ a set of choral arrangements based upon folk songs collected in Kenneth Peacock's *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (1965).

On the surface, Somers's involvement with Newfoundland folk song would appear to have been largely the product of practical considerations, a work conceived (as were so many of his compositions) to fulfil the requirements of a commission. Yet on a deeper level there can be no denying that this was a commission that held special meaning. Somers held a lifelong interest in folk music from around the world and, like many Canadian composers of his generation, felt a special attraction to the diverse musical traditions of his native land. This was, after all, the generation which emerged confidently in the post-WWII years with a steadfast determination to discover a distinctly Canadian voice (or more aptly, Canadian voices) in composition, not unlike the accomplishments of the Group of Seven painters a generation earlier.⁷ Motivated by the optimistic temperament of Canadian society in the post-war years and the wave of cultural nationalism sweeping the nation, many composers of this generation responded creatively to aspects of the nation's history, culture, landscape, and of course, its rich and diverse musical heritage.⁸

Canada's centennial year of 1967 further fanned the fires of a modernist musical nationalism and, not surprisingly, a host of works on Canadian themes emerged in the late 1960s. Most notable of these perhaps was Somers's opera *Louis Riel* (1967), a work often regarded as the greatest opera in Canadian history and one of the defining works of Somers's career. With a libretto by Mavor Moore based on the nineteenth-century story of Métis leader Louis Riel and his struggle against the Canadian government, *Louis Riel* epitomizes Somers's interest in Canada's history and cultural diversity, as well as the stylistic eclecticism evident in many of his works from the 1960s onward. The characters sing in English, French, Cree, and Latin, one of the main characters is Sir John A. Macdonald (Canada's first prime minister), and the Louis Riel saga represents a potent symbol for many of the polemical issues underlying Canadian history: English versus French, native versus white, frontier wilderness versus civilization, colonization versus independence. Atonal orchestral writing, electronically produced sounds, First Nations music, Anglo-Canadian folk song, and nineteenth-century Protestant hymnody, are each employed, sometimes in stark juxtaposition, to symbolize the varying aspects of the drama.

Whether expressing himself through music, his resonant speaking voice, or his reflective prose, Harry Somers was a complex and deeply philosophical man for whom the culture, society, and natural environment in which he lived his life helped shape what he later described as the "mental landscape" at the heart of his writing. Somers, with his usual eloquence, gave the following response in 1995 to my questions regarding the influence of the Canadian environment on his compositional process:

I was born into a generation for which the "natural world" around us as well as the human history connected to it were profound influences. I feel that there evolved from those influences a "mental landscape," a "sense," a feeling of characteristics and qualities which became such an intrinsic part of ourselves that we were hardly aware of it, and if we were we often tried to give expression to it in one form or another, some subtle, some obvious. (Somers, personal communication, 1995)

It is within this context that the arrangement of five Newfoundland folk songs held much greater significance than merely fulfilling the terms of a commission or expressing an overt gesture of nationalism. While the impetus behind the work may have been influenced by the terms of the commission and an overall sense of cultural nationalism that permeated Canadian society in the late 1960s, the end result was no less than an deeply felt personal expression of a part of his own identity. As Somers revealed to me in 1995,

I've done a lot of music derived from distinctly Canadian subject matter . . . In truth, they came about more by chance than design, unless you consider works created as a result of commissions to come under the heading of, 'design.' Perhaps they have demonstrated more of a concern with distinctly Canadian subject matter on the part of the commissioners than myself. However, that doesn't mean their creation was impersonal on my part. I was delighted and stimulated by the richness and diversity of music of the peoples of Canada and pleased to bring something of it to the attention of others, albeit in my own particular treatment. Yet here too, as with the Canadian landscape, the folk music of Canada was such a natural part of my young years that I never felt it as something apart. (Somers, personal communication, 1995)

The choice of Peacock's collection as the musical and textual basis for the *Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* was likewise a natural one. Peacock was a fine composer as well as a pioneering folk song collector, and shared with Somers the distinction of being a founding member of the Canadian League of Composers. Not surprisingly, he too had written a work inspired by Newfoundland's folk music heritage, the *Essay on Newfoundland Themes*, for orchestra (1961). When Peacock's *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* were published in 1965 by the National Museum of Canada, Somers had found the ethnomusicological source material he needed. He chose five songs from Peacock's collection as the basis for his creative and distinctly personal arrangements: 1. "Si j'avais le bateau," 2. "The Banks of Newfoundland," 3. "The Old Mayflower," 4. "She's Like the Swallow," and 5. "Feller from Fortune." These songs, as collected by Peacock, were notated from performances heard in Newfoundland in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹

Since being premiered by the Festival Singers of Canada under the direction of Elmer Iseler, the *Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* have enjoyed a remarkable performance history, taking their rightful place as standard repertoire on choral programs by school, university, community and professional choirs across Canada and around the world. Cherney (1975) claims that the premiere took place in Toronto in 1969, however the findings of my research suggest a different conclusion. The archives of the Canadian Music Centre in Toronto do indeed contain a concert program documenting that the work was performed in Toronto on February 15, 1969, yet the program notes make reference to an earlier premiere by the Festival Singers in St. John's, Newfoundland, likely in late 1968 or early 1969. Further evidence of a Newfoundland premiere is contained in a 1977 article by John Fraser, who offered the following colourful perceptions of the event, the composition, and audience response to both:

Part of the advertised concert was to include something called *Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*, and a lot of people had trooped out to see what this dumb

mainland choir was going to do with "our songs." Newfoundlanders are remarkably proprietorial about their mostly Victorian dirges and work songs. They constitute the richest and most original musical folk tradition in Canada outside of Québec, and everyone and his brother can do nifty versions of *Lukey's Boat* and *I'se the B'y*; but by the time the Festival Singers came I was so thoroughly sick of these damn ditties that I nearly didn't go to the concert. It was only the reputation of the choir that brought me there; certainly not a composer who couldn't find anything better to do than rearrange *Feller From Fortune*.

But Somers had taken these songs, two of which most Newfoundlanders had never heard of before, and completely rethought and reworked them—in rhythm, in texture, in tonality. It was a strange experience. I'd never heard anything like it, and neither had anyone else at that concert. We were transfixed by two things: the newness of something that had seemed so unchangeable and the absolute, immediate knowledge that the approach was dead right. These songs were now seen to be cool and sprightly where once they had been hot and turgid. Don't ask me how he managed to do it, but Somers also captured both the bitter irony and that wild core of pure sentiment that sets true Newfoundlanders apart from other Canadians far more than their accents do (Fraser, 1977, pp. 59-60).

The definitive recording of the work is contained on an aptly named Canadian Music Centre disc by the Elmer Iseler Singers titled *Sacred and Profane Somers* (the "sacred" referring to the meditative beauty of the *Kyrie* [1970], the "profane" to the bawdy comedy of the *Three Limericks* [1980]).¹⁰ When the Canadian League of Composers celebrated its thirtieth anniversary with an international conference and festival in Windsor, Ontario, in 1981, the *Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* were performed (as well as the Piano Sonata No. 1) as representative Somers masterworks.

The *Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* are fascinating pieces not only for what they reveal about Somers's approach to the choral medium but also for the many rewarding glimpses they afford into both the sacred and profane sides of Somers's personality. Far from literal arrangements, the songs reveal an imaginative use of the human voice that adds a new dimension to Somers's exploration of experimental vocal techniques in the late 1960s and 1970s. Vocal glissandi, phonetic sounds, and improvisation are just some of the many techniques explored elsewhere in works such as the *Twelve Miniatures*, *Crucifixion*, and the theatrically conceived *Voiceplay*, for singer and actor (1971). The use of comparable techniques here adds distinctive elements from Newfoundland's culture and soundscape to the mixture, the latter reflected in the suggestion of cold breezes through the wordless vocalizing of upper voices in "The Banks of Newfoundland." In "Si j'avais le bateau" and "The Old Mayflower," the wordless vocalizing is rooted in actual practice and used for very different effect. Both pieces appropriate a vocal technique known as "chin music," described by Peacock as "a vocal imitation of instrumental music . . . used for dancing when a fiddle or accordion is not handy" (Peacock, 1965, p. 61). The choral imitation of trumpets and drums as accompaniment and interlude material in "Si j'avais le bateau" gives a vivid illustration of this technique. The rollicking "Feller from Fortune" that closes the set provided Somers with the perfect vehicle for expressing the playful, witty side of personality, with just a touch of the profane:

Oh - Uncle George got up in the mornin'
He got up in an 'ell of a tear,
And he ripped the arse right out of his britches,
Now he's got ne'er pair to wear (Peacock, 1965, p. 54).

Of the five songs in the set, Somers appears to have had a special affinity for the hauntingly beautiful "She's Like the Swallow." The melody of the song had already inspired him to use it as the basis for the middle movement of the 1955 work *Little Suite for String Orchestra*, and here it inspires a creative response that goes well beyond mere arranging to create his own personal dialogue with Newfoundland's folk music heritage.¹¹ To be certain, Somers's rediscovery of this meditative love tragedy¹² places him in good company. There have been numerous arrangements of the song since it was first collected in Newfoundland by Maud Karpeles (1971) in 1930, including versions for solo voice, choir, orchestra, and a wide variety of solo instruments and chamber ensembles. Among the more notable versions are arrangements for solo voice and piano by Ralph Vaughan Williams (based on the version collected by Karpeles), Godfrey Ridout, Keith Bissell, and Benjamin Britten (the second of his *Eight Folk Song Arrangements* (1976)). The song has been the basis for a flood of recent choral arrangements, including those by Edward Chapman, Steven Chatman, Lori-Anne Dolloff, Richard Johnston, Stephen Smith, Judy Specht, and Carl Strommen, a student piano piece by Nancy Telfer, and a chamber work by Michael Parker, serving as the basis for the fifth movement of *The Maiden's Lament, A Song-Cycle based on Newfoundland Folksongs* (1991), for soprano, clarinet, and piano.¹³ No less intriguing are some of the more unorthodox settings, such as an organ arrangement by Timothy Cooper, a version for accordion and piano by Andrew Hugget, and an arrangement for carillon by Gordon Slater, Dominion Carillonneur at the Peace Tower Carillon in Ottawa. Pop musicians have tried their hand at rendering the song as well, including Canadian pop singers Melanie Doan and Jane Siberry, while a captivating folk revival arrangement by eminent Newfoundland singer Pamela Morgan exists in a recording that features the voices of Morgan and Anita Best.¹⁴ The song has likewise been the focal point of significant scholarly attention, as evidenced in the work of Neil Rosenberg (1999).

How then, does Harry Somers make his own unique contribution to the living history of this beloved folk song and, conversely, how does his personal interaction with Newfoundland's musical heritage cast new light on aspects of his compositional style? In true Somers fashion, the piano introduction presents a motivic cell which serves as the basis for further development and a unifying gesture amidst shifting, evolving references to the folk song melody.¹⁵ This cell, introduced in the first two measures, comprises a conjunct ascending tetrachord (M2-m2-M2) which is repeated with rhythmic alteration in mm. 3-4 and fragmented into a dyad at mm. 5-6.¹⁶ The tetrachord, a model of motivic concision of which Beethoven himself would have surely approved, initially appears to be little more than a simple preamble to the folk song melody, alluding to its melodic contour and establishing the tempo and mood to follow. It is only retrospectively that its full structural significance—and the true magic of Somers's arrangement—is revealed.

The first verse of Somers's arrangement, "She's like the swallow that flies so high," follows the notated folk melody closely with subtle rhythmic and intervallic changes, most notably on the words "so high." The substitution of slurred eighth notes for a quarter on the word "so" gives additional emphasis through accelerated rhythmic motion, while Somers's insertion of a

disjunct ascending fourth—one of his favourite intervals—gives vivid representation to the images of flight suggested by the text. In the manner of Medieval organum, a technique well suited to the austere beauty of the folk song, the two parts diverge from unison A in Line Two to move in oblique motion. The sopranos state the folk song melody while the altos remain stationary until the two parts have reached the interval of a fifth.

The opening tetrachord returns as transitional material at the close of Verse One. Unison Ds (m. 25) create an elision with the ending of the folk song melody, while frequent changes in meter, a characteristic Somers trait, create a stark contrast to the metrical uniformity of the preceding material. Sung by tenors on the words "Swallow fly" and echoed by sopranos, the passage evokes the perception of commentary, as if a chorus of modern day observers urging on the heroine in an ancient drama.¹⁷ Development of the tetrachord continues in the upper voices in Verse Two ("Twas down in the meadow this fair maid bent"), while the lower voices present a modified version of the folk song melody. Here, perhaps more than any other point in the piece, we have a seamless blend of tradition and innovation, as Somers's motives evolve into a gently flowing line that blends perfectly as a counterpoint to the folk song melody. It is almost as if the song might have been originally conceived that way, and one senses a composer whose goal is to enhance, imbuing the song with the unmistakable imprint of his own personality yet remaining true to the spirit and emotional meaning of the original.

With Verse Three ("She climbed on yonder hill above"), Somers embarks upon something of a departure from the melodic and structural basis of the folk song. The tetrachord, stated by sopranos and altos, is now developed into the principal melodic material, making possible the effective use of word painting on the words "She climbed on yonder hill above" (set to an ascending melodic line and accompanied by a crescendo). Throughout the verse, short, rhythmic interjections on the words "Swallow, Fly now" offer a sparse, episodic commentary on the drama that is unfolding while, at the same time, heightening the mounting urgency suggested by the text (a sense of cumulative musical excitement not possible with the strophic setting of the original song). Once again, motivic unity is paramount, as these interjections comprise repetition (at exact pitch) of the dyad (A-B) from the opening tetrachord. The offbeat accents and crisp staccato articulation are quintessential Somers traits that may be traced to his former composition teacher John Weinzweig, as well as his exploration of jazz music with Toronto jazz musicians in the 1950s.¹⁸ Significantly, Somers recalls a modified version of the folk song melody at Line Four, the passage of text which begins to address affairs of the heart (see Appendix 1). The effect is one of a nostalgic reminiscence well suited to the emotional content of the poetry.

The cumulative momentum of Somers's setting is further intensified in Verses Four through Six via further metrical changes and offbeat accents, a faster tempo, and enriched harmonies. Development of the tetrachord as the principal melodic material continues, and one senses a continued evolution from a relatively "faithful" arrangement (Verses One and Two), to a striking departure from the original folk song in which elements of Somers's distinctive style come vividly to the fore. It is as if, having acknowledged the beauty inherent in the original folk song melody, Somers now imparts his own distinctive reading on the poetry. Note, for example, the mounting urgency at Verse Five, Line 3 ("But now my apron is to my chin"), an explicit reference to the poignant symbol of pregnancy at the heart of the textual drama. Dynamics (*f*), accentuation, and interval content (Somers's characteristic perfect fourth) give special emphasis on the words "But now," while the incisive rhythmic commentary of the

tenors and basses on the words "so high" proposes a dual meaning. Superimposed against the soprano statement of Line 3, the accompanimental motives in this context suggest both the flying swallow metaphor that dominates the poem as well as a literal reference to the relative height of the apron.

Somers's deft use of the choral medium likewise serves to underscore poetic meaning. All four parts sing together for the first time in the pivotal fourth verse: "And as they sat on yonder hill," heightening the cumulative effect of the afore-mentioned musical gestures. The principal melody is presented solely by sopranos in Verse Five, underscoring the thoughts of the lone female speaker ("When I carried my apron low"), while the melody of Verse Six, the harsh rebuke from the male character in the poem, is stated by tenors and basses. Here as elsewhere, Somers's juxtaposition of textual references is highly effective. Against the stinging pronouncement of the male voices, sopranos and altos sound short rhythmic interjections on the words "Oh swallow. Go now," evoking the perception of a sympathetic commentary on the heroine's plight.

The tragic seventh verse of the poem, "She took her roses and made her bed," signals a dramatic reprise in which Somers recalls the slow tempo, meditative mood, and melodic contour of Verse Three (based on the tetrachord). This nostalgic recall serves to heighten the dark irony of the poetry, creating implicit links between the images of death and despair suggested by Verse Seven and the remembrance of happier times (Verse Three)(see Appendix 1). The symbol of the rose, used in Verse Three as an emblem of fertility, is transformed here into one of bleakness and solitude, and Somers was clearly inspired by the emotional meaning embodied in the transformation:

The apron is often used as a symbol of pregnancy. Meadows, gardens, and flowers in general are often used as fertility symbols. Perhaps in no other lyric has the rose symbolism been used so exquisitely and with such persistent emotional logic, right to the bitter end (Somers, 1981).

Fittingly, the expressive context is markedly different from the earlier presentation of this material. Gone are the offbeat accents, short accompanimental motives, and dynamic swells, replaced instead by subdued, antiphonal entries by female and male voices, respectively.

The cyclical impulse is extended with a modified return of the original folk song melody at Verse Eight.¹⁹ The texture is thinner than its initial presentation and frequent rests within the melodic line serve as dramatic points of repose (as if pausing, with a mixture of nostalgia and regret, to reflect upon days gone by). As Somers later remarked with respect to this technique, a characteristic of his work over the years was a use of silence in the conventional sense of those periods of cessation of intended sounds. It was used as an inherently dramatic element in the way Romantic composers from Beethoven on used it. This also has gone through subtle transformations over the years 'till it becomes an essential element which does not break continuity, but is more like subterranean channels into which the sound disappears and from which it emerges. Another analogy might be to that of periods in which memory of sound ceases, and memory joins to actuality when the sound returns (Somers, 1971).

The pointillistic distribution of the melody between soprano and alto imbues the final line with additional meaning, allowing certain key words to be isolated for heightened impact (most notably, the word "lost" in the phrase "She lost her love," and the word "no" in the phrase "She'll love no more"). The final touch of magic, however, occurs in the coda (mm. 193-215), in which the introductory dyad is recalled, this time on the words "away" (first tenors and

basses, subsequently by all voices) and "swallow" (sopranos and altos), with entrances of the motive interspersed with halting episodes of silence. One final, fleeting remembrance of the motive is heard on the word "away," at which point a dissonant E \flat is sounded by the sopranos against the implied E9 chord in the other voices. A gradual downward glissando resolves much of the harmonic tension as well as the accumulated emotional tension of the poetry.²⁰ The effect could not be more sublime, a poignant epilogue to the tragedy that brings musical and emotional closure.

Considered in another light, the return of introductory motives in the coda functions as a framing gesture, parenthetically enclosing both the folk song references and Somers's cumulative development of the tetrachord and its variants. In a broader sense, the cyclical return of melodic ideas, coupled with changes in tempo, meter, textural density and other expressive parameters, transforms the strophic form of the original folk song into one of Somers's most characteristic formal archetypes, the arch form (see Figure 1).²¹ Yet against this seemingly rigid formal mould one senses a process of organic growth from within as sections flow and merge into one another and ideas which initially appear incidental to the drama ultimately define it. If one accepts the continued validity of Johann Mattheson's catchy slogan "borrowing is a permitted matter, but one must repay the loan with interest" (Mattheson, 1739, p. 298), there can be no denying that Harry Somers has indeed lived up to his part of the bargain and that contemporary choral literature is much richer for it. In his creative arrangement of "She's Like the Swallow," Somers forges a compelling blend of formal symmetry and organic growth, traditional folk music and modern compositional techniques, all of which combine to shed new light on one of Newfoundland's most celebrated love tragedies.

Figure 1

Measure	1	9	51	77	141	171	193
Section	Introduction (piano)	A	B	C	B1	A1	Coda
Principal text		Verses 1 and 2 of folk song	Verse 3	Verses 4-6	Verse 7	Verse 8	"Swallow," "Away"
Principal melodic material	Tetrachord (T)	Modified folk song melody	Development of T	Development of T	Modified reprise of B material	Modified reprise of A material	Modified reprise of T material
	D	D	E	A	E	D	E

Appendix I

"She's Like the Swallow" (as collected by Kenneth Peacock based on a performance by Mrs. Charlotte Decker, Parsons Pond, Newfoundland, August 1959) (Peacock, 1965, pp. 711-12).

She's like the swallow that flies so high,
She's like the river that never runs dry,
She's like the sunshine on the lee shore,
She loves her love but she'll love no more.

'Twas down in the meadow this fair maid bent
A-picking the primrose just as she went,
The more she picked and the more she pulled
Until she gathered her apron full.

She climbed on yonder hill above
To give a rose unto her love,
She gave him one, she gave him three,
She gave her heart in company.

And as they sat on yonder hill
His heart grew hard, so harder still.
He has two hearts instead of one.
She says, "Young man, what have you done?"

"When I carried my apron low
My love followed me through the frost and snow,
But now my apron is to my chin,
My love passes by and won't call in."

"How foolish, foolish you must be
To think I love no one but thee,
The world's not made for one alone,
I take delight in everyone."

She took her roses and made a bed,
A stony pillow for her head,
She lay her down, no more did say,
Just let her roses fade away.

She's like the swallow that flies so high,
She's like the river that never runs dry,
She's like the sunshine on the lee shore,
She lost her love and she'll love no more.

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Endnotes

¹ Somers received honorary degrees from the University of Ottawa (1975), the University of Toronto (1976), and York University (1977). He was named a Companion of the Order of Canada in 1972 (Cherney and Beckwith, 1992, pp. 1235-7).

² Among the major studies devoted to Somers's music are the following: Brian Cherney, *Harry Somers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975); Andrew M. Zinck, "Music and dramatic structure in the operas of Harry Somers" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1996); Leonard Jacob Enns, "The Sacred Choral Music of Harry Somers: An Analytical Study" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1982); Diane Houghton, "The Solo Vocal Works of Harry Somers" (D.M.A. diss., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1980); E. Gregory Butler, "The Five Piano Sonatas of Harry Somers" (D.M.A. diss., University of Rochester, 1974); and David Gordon Duke, "Neo-Classical Procedures in Selected Works of Harry Somers, 1949-1959" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1973).

³ The first three recordings of *A Window on Somers* are now available. They are as follows: *Songs from the Heart of Somers* (featuring Ben Heppner, tenor; Valdine Anderson, soprano; and Jean Stilwell, mezzo-soprano); *The Glorious Sounds of Somers* (featuring the Elmer Iseler Singers under the direction of Lydia Adams; Ruth Watson Henderson, piano; and others); and *Singing Somers Theatre* (featuring Monica Whicher, soprano; Kristina Szabó, mezzo-soprano; Michael Colvin, tenor; and others) (Toronto: CMC Centrediscs, 2001). Also noteworthy among recent recordings of Somers's music is *Harry Somers: Celebration* (featuring James Parker, piano; Jean Stilwell, mezzo-soprano; and the Esprit Orchestra under the direction of Alex Pauk) (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Records, 2000).

⁴ Among the more notable instrumental works composed during the early part of Somers career were *North Country*, for string orchestra (1948); *Symphony No. 1* (1951); *Little Suite for String Orchestra on Canadian Folk Songs* (1955); three string quartets (1943-59); two piano concertos (1947-56); and five piano sonatas (1945-57). The concertos and sonatas may largely be viewed as a manifestation of Harry Somers the concert pianist. He was a gifted performer on the instrument and, until the late 1940s, frequently performed his music and that of other Canadian composers in recital.

⁵ Dr. Iseler, a true icon in Canadian choral music, founded and directed the Festival Singers of Canada, the Elmer Iseler Singers, and conducted the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir for 33 years. Like Somers, he was the recipient of three honorary doctorates and the Order of Canada for his magnificent contributions to the musical life of Canada. He frequently commissioned and programmed new works and was considered an authoritative interpreter of Somers's choral music. For further information on Iseler's remarkable contributions, see McLean (1992).

⁶ Somers's *Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* were published by Gordon V. Thompson Music in 1969 as part of The Elmer Iseler Choral Series (Elmer Iseler, Ed.).

⁷ The Governor General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson, paid tribute to Somers at the launch of *A Window on Somers*, describing him as "quintessentially Canadian" and an artist "who gave us a sense of ourselves" (Clarkson, quoted in Littler, 2001, p. F8).

⁸ As a representative sampling of some of the many diverse folk-inspired works composed in Canada since the 1940s, one could mention compositions such as Violet Archer's *Ten Folk Songs*, for piano four hands (1953), Roger Matton's *L'Escaounette*, for solo voices, choir, and orchestra (1957), and Jean Coulthard's *Canada Mosaic*, for orchestra (1974). For a more extensive listing of such works, see Kallmann and Willis (1992).

⁹ The performers of these songs, as notated in Peacock's collection, were as follows: "Si j'avais le bateau": Joséphine Costard, Loretto, September 1961; "The Banks of Newfoundland": Jim Rice, Cape Broyle, July 1952; "The Old Mayflower": Nellie Musseau, Mouse Island, June 1960; "She's Like the Swallow":

Charlotte Decker, Parson's Pond, August 1959; "Feller from Fortune:" Lloyd Soper and Bob McLeod, St. John's, June 1951.

¹⁰ Elmer Iseler Singers, *Sacred and Profane Somers* (Canadian Music Centre: CMC Centrediscs, 1981; 1986; 1995).

¹¹ Cherney (1975) describes Somers's setting of "She's Like the Swallow" as "the most outstanding of this group of songs" (p. 118), while Fraser (1977) notes that "In the fourth song particularly, 'She's Like the Swallow,' he accomplished the sort of simple and perfect evocation of place and context that distinguishes the best of the genre, like Vaughan Williams's *Linden Lea* or Britten's *Sally Gardens*" (p. 59).

¹² "Love tragedy" is the categorization Peacock applies to "She's Like the Swallow" (Peacock 1965, xii-xiii).

¹³ Michael Parker, *Lyre: Chamber Music for Clarinet* (Etienne Lamaison, clarinet/bass clarinet; Catherine Cornick, soprano; Cheryl Hickman, soprano; Annick Mabile, flute; Kristina Szutor, piano)(CBC Radio Newfoundland & Labrador, 1997).

¹⁴ Anita Best and Pamela Morgan, *The Colour of Amber* (Topsail, Newfoundland: Amber Music, 1991).

¹⁵ Somers's use of motivic cells may be traced to his composition studies with John Weinzweig in the 1940s. As Somers once wrote, "Weinzweig has always had certain idiosyncrasies. One in particular is the working around particular 'cells' of notes, constantly varying their individual stresses and durations like someone turning an object around and around to reveal all its shapes and colours. This crept into my work here and there" (Somers, 1971, p. 95).

¹⁶ The introduction is underpinned by a D pedal, which affirms the modality of the song.

¹⁷ Similar usage of the tetrachord as transitional material continues throughout the piece.

¹⁸ As Somers later recalled with characteristic candor, "In the early mid fifties there was a group of young musicians, who have since become the bulk of the successful 'studio' musicians in Toronto, who used to get together weekly to try out new things and to experiment. They gathered loosely under the heading of 'The Rehearsal Band.' Norm Symonds introduced me to the group, for whom he wrote regularly... They were a great bunch, by the way. After rehearsals we'd go to a local beer hall and talk by the hour about musical and instrumental problems while those who had any money would take turns buying the rounds" (Somers, 1971, p. 93).

¹⁹ The text of Verse Eight is itself a modified version of Verse One (see Appendix 1).

²⁰ The dissonant E \flat persists nonetheless in the piano part.

²¹ These tendencies, suggesting the influence of Bartók, are evident in works such as the *Twelve Miniatures* and the sacred choral work *Kyrie* (1972).