

PLENARY ADDRESS

When Spirits Sing and Singers have a Voice

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Most people are coming to Newfoundland this summer to celebrate John Cabot's historic landing in 1497, I am here to celebrate the folks who greeted his arrival and helped him ashore — or maybe they hid.¹ I was pondering how to handle this notion of "discovery" — which First Nations people predictably find both insulting and amusing, last week as the annual multicultural Caravan celebrations were just gearing up in Toronto. The First Nations pavilion there was also recognizing 1497 as an important meeting point but, to quote their spokesperson, they "see 'discovery' more as people looking at native people through new eyes."² I would like to affirm that it is the related task of hearing anew which is my objective here today. In the next hour, I want to reflect with you on how singing, the very sound of Aboriginal and European voices has been and continues to be a site where we — their descendants — negotiate who we are and how we relate.

I start with a very basic question: Who do you think has a singing voice?

I. Who do you think has a (singing) voice and why does it matter?

A well-known Canadian soprano who was teaching for a while at the same university as I commented to me one day, as she finished a round of lessons that "The Lord put good singing voices in the funniest places." She was thinking at the time of one student who produced a stunning operatic sound but had the shyest of personalities, not one seemingly suited for the stage. I certainly shared her view that good singers are physically gifted, though I thought she was being overly modest in ascribing all this to "the Lord." In retrospect, I am struck by the fact that her belief in "natural" voices contrasted rather markedly with a long-standing theme in the history of Euroamerican music education: namely, that it is good training within the European concert tradition that produces not only singers but — here's the insidious bit — high class and sometimes even morally superior individuals.

It takes nothing more than a quick browse through almost any historical study to find examples of 19th- and early 20th century statements which imply this. Paul Woodford's book on concert music in Newfoundland, for example, records such references with regard to the choir of Charles Hutton³:

The immense congregation was delighted with the music of Marcadante's *Mass* which was sung by the choir under the *training* and immediate *supervision* of our own young organist, Mr. Charles Hutton, to whom is due a large portion of their success — the choruses and solos

being rendered very effectively. The latter, chiefly sung by Miss Fisher, sent a thrill through the hearts of her hearers; her *well-trained* voice never seemed more perfectly *under control*; no sweeter than on that occasion. [*Evening Telegram*, 1884; cited in Woodford 1988: 67. Emphasis is mine.]

the acclaimed soprano, Georgina Stirling:

She (Georgina Stirling) ranks among the world's most famous singers and from time to time is very highly complimented in the leading newspapers of Paris as well as in Italy, where she has undergone a thorough course of *training under* the most eminent and distinguished professors of the age." [*Twillingate Sun*, 1892; cited in Woodford 1988: 139. Emphasis is mine.]

and the Inuit of northern Labrador:

Formerly, in their heathen days, they [the Inuit] could merely howl. Now they revel in Moravian chorales. Both old and young *sing correctly in parts*; Nain and Okak possess fine brass bands; and some have mastered the viol and cello." [J.E. Hutton. *A History of the Moravian Missions*, 1922; cited in Woodford 1988: 62. Emphasis is mine.]

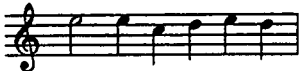
In fact, the third example, concerning the work of Moravians in Nain, Labrador, not only makes the racist suggestion that Inuit singers were regarded as sub-human without appropriate vocal training, but further hints at another questionable judgment, the presumed superiority of instrumental music relative to vocal music. They are stereotypes we need to acknowledge and own as our history and then make sure not to perpetuate, of course.

The distance between these distinctions and the beliefs about what constitutes a singing voice as expressed by elders and musicians in various First Nations communities with whom I have had the privilege to work could hardly be more extreme. Let me try to give you a glimpse of three experiences which lead me to say that.

An Innu Perspective:

In the 80s, I had the privilege of spending most of a sabbatical and several weeks of several summers in Innu communities in northern Labrador and along the north shore of the St. Lawrence. I learned a lot about the rich culture of people there by listening as often as possible to storytellers. The great classic myths, or *atnuhana*, are still told in family settings during long winters evenings, usually narrated undramatically — as the storyteller sits with elbows on knees and looks at the floor as he (usually *he*) speaks. While the acting is understated, if you listen very carefully, you will hear the voice of the narrator moving from quiet declamation, to more intense dialogue, to singing, from prosody to measured rhythm⁴. An excerpt which illustrates several of these styles is the segment of the great myth of Mistapeo, a story which is said to explain why winter and summer came to exist. There are many references to song in this myth but in the several times I have heard it nar-

rated, there is only one place where the narrator performs in song. That is the place where the hero is transformed into a bird at the point of his death. The following translation of this excerpt,⁵ while failing to convey the texture of the Innu language, indicates some performative shifts — from flat speech, to a wider pitch range, to singing or whistling delivery:

NARRATIVE TEXT	CHANGES IN DELIVERY
Maybe that's the song:	<flat speech>
	<whistling or singing>
Yes that one, that's the song. Yes, that song, that song. And now the boy was in the tree. And the people said to him, they said, "Are you?" They said. "Yes," he said, And he sang in a small voice:	<flat speech> <dramatic speech; wider pitch range> <flat speech>
	<whistling or singing>
He sang and that's the song.	<flat speech>
	<whistling or singing>
"Are you," they said, "the Mistapeo of the grandfather," they said. "Yes," he said, "I am."	<dramatic speech; wider pitch range>

I was describing this rich vocal delivery at a conference many years ago when a colleague stopped me short by saying: "But you haven't explained why the narrator has to sing at all." So I started searching for reasons. This is one of many myths where the act of singing itself signals transformation, where the voices become those of beings beyond the human social pantheon, and where the power of song relates, at least in part, to the ability to communicate when visual contact is not possible.

Innu recognize other traces of sentient and spiritually present beings. The Northern Lights are thought to be traces of their departed — the lights dance in

invitation to those who still inhabit the earth. I was warned not to whistle because such sounds attract the lights to dance closer.⁶

Attention to the voices of the larger world was usually described very practically, in the words of Innu hunters and elders. Knowing the ways of birds, animals, or ancestors so closely that one can live in harmony requires knowledge of their languages of sound. The voices and energies of the spirit world may be heard in the sound of the wind, or the songs which emerge in people's dreams.

An Anishnabe perspective:

A few years later, an Anishnabe elder from northern Ontario was helping me and two colleagues understand some of the design elements on musical instruments and similar ideas were explained, but a bit differently. "When you sing," he said, "the spirit of the sky world comes down and the spirit of the earth comes up and meets at the center [of the drum], the heart. The song is a response to that spirit and uses an instrument (the human voice) and breath to give voice to its answer, to send its response back in the four directions, to the Creator."⁷ The same elder helped us understand the thunder to be particularly potent with a voice that signalled its force. He spoke about the family of thunderbirds whose voices were so strong that they must hide behind the clouds. Each voice was different; the grandfather's so powerful that if we were ever to hear him, we would fear its devastation. One of the thunderers, a rare one you hear on a clear day, has a ringing sound inside the loud boom; that is why metal is sometimes used for instruments that are associated with the thunderers, he taught us.

As in the case of the Innu storyteller, for this Anishnabe elder, a competent knowledge of singing voices involves detailed, practical distinction among environmental sounds. Unlike those European accounts, "training" to produce a voice is not mentioned but the need to pay attention, to listen constantly is repeatedly referenced in these accounts of basic voice competence. Human singing is frequently described as a response to environmental voices. And powerful song is not the responsibility of the singer alone but involves the meeting of all the right elements, when the spirit of two worlds meet, as the elder explained.

A Haudenosaunee perspective:

The third experience I want to tell you about took place at a class at York University. Sadie Buck, an Iroquois clan mother from Six Nations Reserve in Ontario and Tonawanda Reserve in New York, was offering a course on Iroquois arts for us as a Visiting Professor. She was teaching us to sing a few *eskanye*, women's shuffle dances, the social dance genre which is the most actively composed at the present time. In the formation appropriate for all Iroquois social dance music, the entire class was seated in two rows, facing one another along two parallel benches. *Eskanye* groups may number 20 singers or so but there can be as few as two (one to lead with the water drum and one to respond with the cowhorn rattle). Most often there are 6-8. She described how her group, the Six Nations Women Singers came to arrange itself. Her own voice was strong, she said. So they discovered that her cousin needed to face her and match that strength. They had tried different orders until each person found her place where the sound was right and the blend was good.

As in the previous stories, vocal competence lay not in learning how to produce a perfect sound, but in having the listening skill to know how to best make use of the individuality of voices. Several students who sing in Ontario choirs responded to this story by describing experiences in which they were asked to blend in, to sing whiter, or colour their voices differently. They sensed a somewhat different aesthetic in the Six Nations group emerging from the fundamental respect for individuals, for their different abilities, and a faith that each of those abilities was equally needed.

To return to Sadie, for a moment, many of you will already know that her family is highly respected for its musical skills and knowledge. She has described the intense immersion, she herself experienced as a young person, where her grandfather would "sing from the minute we woke up." After they were bathed and fed, "[her mother would] put us back on his lap, and he'd sing again until lunch. He'd hold us and sing until it was time for us to go to bed. She said she never needed a babysitter.⁸ " In the same interview she commented to her cousin that "your dad came over and said, 'Can I have my kids back!' Because you were always over at our house, usually dancing after supper, and [George Buck] would sing all the time...I think that's where I learned the twist in the songs, because George could do things with a song without changing it somehow" (*ibid.*). This, of course, is the equivalent of intensive musical training. She now works to provide the same sort of environment for her own young son. Encouragement to pay attention. Non-intervention but lots of listening access. These are the emphases which really strike me about her approach.

My three stories are not uniform. And I ramble over three of them because I want to emphasize that there is no homogeneous perspective on who has a singing voice among the over 300 aboriginal nations in North America. But there are coherences among them, perhaps relating to the shared history of being so often ignored or erased, perhaps relating to the need for sophisticated environmental knowledge to survive in the face of this. The first two experiences I related are both from Algonquian speaking Nations. Both indicate a conception that is larger than a human-centred one. Their regard for the voices of all living creatures, including unseen forces and ancestors, not only extends the idea of voice but implies a way of thinking that is environmentally aware and responsive. Attention to the aural messages which come from unseen sources are particularly important.⁹ All of the stories regard vocal expertise as something related to the act of listening carefully to the power of voices, and responding. All indicate respect for the individuality of voices, whether or not they are especially skilled voices. And they all imply, some more obliquely than others, that the physical and emotional power of a voice relates not to specific training or talent but to the coincidence of all the right elements, to moments when everything comes together in the right way, when "our minds are as one."

Most of the things I learned from these experiences are rooted in the habits of a "community" — a word which implies folks who live in a place, who share lots of experiences and values perhaps. But I would next like to turn your attention to the margins of the community — the places where it intersects with other communities, other cultures, other values, and other agendas.

II. Who is listening?

Recently a number of scholars, among them Canadian colleagues Will Straw, Line Grenier and Val Morrison (Straw 1991: 373; Grenier and Morrison 1995: 128) have suggested that we should distinguish the notion of community from the concept of *scene*. The latter implies a landscape where lots of different things are happening, where not everyone shares the same experiences and values, where success is defined not by the acceptance of insiders but by negotiations along the boundaries with outsiders, variously defined. Now this distinction, between community and scene is perhaps more convenient than it is true as the aforementioned scholars acknowledge. But Straw observes that "this distinction simply concretizes two countervailing pressures within spaces of musical activity: one towards the stabilization of local historical continuities, and another which works to disrupt such continuities, to cosmopolitanize and relativize them" (1991: 373). I now take you on an exploration of some of the "border activity" of contemporary Aboriginal musicians but, my exploration leads me to conclude that a simple opposition between the needs of community and the imperatives of a larger scene, between the local and the global, is not quite the right model for what is happening here.

Before exploring several examples of contemporary Aboriginal popular music, however, there are a couple of really big historical, contextual issues which are specific to the Cabot complex (what I'll call the 500 years after 1497 between Aboriginals and Euroamericans).

Many Native song repertoires are simply not appropriately shared with outsiders; they involve the taking on of responsibilities which outsiders have neither knowledge nor intention to assume. In the visual arts, a division emerged certainly by the 19th century, between image-making that was associated with ceremony, on one hand, and tourist art, on the other, some of which borrowed European conventions quite effectively. In music, I'm not sure that there was ever a similar division. There were lots of borrowed repertoires but these were often used in traditional contexts or adapted in culturally appropriate ways. I've written elsewhere¹⁰ of ways in which hymns were and are used in traditional religious contexts; and even fiddling was sometimes associated with visions or dreams. Whatever its style, Native music has been intensely bound up with local knowledge and belief systems and many continue to believe that it should remain community-based. I was speaking recently with a Cree faculty colleague from the an Indian College in Western Canada, and he was telling me that the elders in his province do not want music of any kind to be a part of their fine arts curriculum; they feel that music is not appropriately taught within the university system. In Ontario, on the other hand, a number of fine teachers from Native communities have found ways to speak about certain speech and traditional song repertoires (social dance music, for instance), certain beliefs and ceremonies, and to share that knowledge with insiders as well as outsiders in the university as well as special "new" contexts such as "elder's conferences" and "gatherings." One elder explained that this was now possible because the fire which had been so fragile that one person stumbling could put it out, was now burning quite vigorously and so could warm a larger crowd.

But there is another side to the story. We sometimes forget that the Canadian government narrative of assimilation and erasure of Native languages impacted differently on Native music and visual art, especially during the 19th and early 20th

centuries. Art historian Ruth Philips has recently demonstrated that active and extensive Canadian government support for Native visual arts (since WWII) is a continuation of a narrative which argued that the ancient mythic and ritual world was no longer enacted in performance but wrought in stone, paint, etc. and cast in saleable images. Philips regards the work of visual artists as a response "to a perceived threat of the 'loss' of orally transmitted traditional culture" (1993: 234). The assault on Native languages was, I think, linked to a great phobia about hearing Native music as anything but static and vestigial.

So these various factors worked together then, to make traditional song seem like a local, community phenomenon, rather than a relational inter-community "scene." These factors made it possible for mainstream Euroamerican society to largely ignore the protest songs of La Farge or Westernman which paralleled the 1960s and 70s folk revivalists they were stirred by and simultaneously it led Buffy Ste. Marie to delay her writing of protest songs until she was well established. Mainstream society has also largely ignored that a number of "traditional" styles were accommodating references to and quotations of different musics. Southwestern chicken scratch dances on Spanish-American polka beats, Plains war dances which switch from a Native language to English, Iroquois *eskanye* (women's shuffle dance) songs which quote popular tunes, vernacular phrases ("Bingo" for instance), or even Dr. Seuss titles (there's one called "Green Ham and Eggs") Inuit throat singing based on Anglican hymns or the sound of new machines in their midst — these are some of the musical practices which borrowed, responded to and commented on non-Native culture. There was a "scene" along the margins of Native communities. "Scene" but not heard.¹¹

Then in the late 80s, the world music explosion made it impossible to hear within the same framework. While every singer has to negotiate who they are and what they represent within this new commercial world — a world which I've heard described as the "modern nowhere" — the task of establishing a musical presence, a vocal identity for contemporary Aboriginal artists is not unaffected by the historical factors I've just described and the different conceptions of the singing voice that I discussed earlier.

III. Between singer and listener: Establishing a (vocal) identity

Three contemporary Haudenosaunee singers:

What are some of the responsibilities and other factors influencing decisions about vocal identity of different aboriginal musicians in the 1990s¹²? I would like to begin exploring this complex question by considering the work of three women who are all members of the Haudenosaunee or Iroquois Confederacy Nations in which the 30 or so social dance genres (especially the *eskanye*, the women's shuffle dance, to which I just referred) are still central to community celebrations. These social dances are accompanied by a single water drum, carefully tuned to relate to the lead singer's range, and cowhorn rattles played by the other singers.

Two of the three singers have used traditional social dances on their recordings but in very different arrangements. Compare recordings of a well known rabbit dance, for example. A community based recording by an older generation of singers from the Seneca nation, made at Allegany Reserve in Salamanca, New York is an interesting point of reference.¹³ On her 1995 album, *Life Blood*,¹⁴ Joanne Shenandoah takes the same rabbit dance (and other traditional songs) but assumes

the voice of a new-age style entertainer, transforming the aesthetic and, I might add, erasing the text. This rabbit dance song is now called "Messenger," and is described as follows in the liner notes written by Shenandoah together with three of her collaborators on the album:

We have much to learn from our animal brothers and sisters. They tell us whether the natural world is still healthy enough to provide for its children and they offer us many signs as to the moods of the earth. The rabbit's journey through the snow creates a perfect pattern, a frozen sculpture of nature imprinting upon itself.

In an interview with Andrew McConnell for *Aboriginal Voices* magazine, she does admit this appropriation is controversial but says the majority of elders encouraged her: "If I took these songs and embellished them to show the world how beautiful they were, to show how beautiful Iroquois culture is — it would be good" she is quoted as saying (1996: 12). The same article explains an interesting detail about the circulation of her work; it has been, perhaps not surprisingly, sought by movie producers (a cut from one of her 8 albums was used in the film *Dance Me Outside*) and therein lay another problem for her. It was used to accompany a car theft and she was deeply offended. She now stipulates in all her contracts that her music may not be used to accompany any scene of violence, reaffirming her straightforward commitment to the promotion of beauty and harmony (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, from the same Iroquois social dance tradition Sadie Buck has opted to stay true to the community tradition in order to inform the larger world about nuances of vocal aesthetics and stylistic diversity *within* her community. Namely, she and the Six Nations Women Singers record many of the songs on their 1996 album, *We will all sing*,¹⁵ first in Cayuga and then in Seneca. Sadie explains that Seneca is the rounder, smoother language and is, hence, the one preferred by singers even if their mother tongue is one of the other Iroquoian languages. The same "rabbit dance" may be heard on Band 9. She takes a different stance on the issue of appropriation, making a strong statement that homogenization is not possible within her multilingual community, let alone outside it. I first wondered whether this group's decision, which seems directed to Iroquoian listeners who would recognize the linguistic nuances, might preclude a wider audience, but that is not the case. Already known as frequent guests for such events as the annual Folklife festivals on the Mall in Washington, D.C., and this year, invited to the New Orleans jazz festival, the Six Nations Women Singers are in heavy demand.

The American singer Pura Fe (family is Tuscaroran from North Carolina, daughter of an opera singer who also worked with Duke Ellington), compartmentalizes her work, producing traditionally influenced material with her ensemble Ulali under the Corn, Beans and Squash Music label, while her contemporary ballads and jazz recordings are each under a different label, all, I believe, owned by her. In the song, "Great Grandpa's Banjo,"¹⁶ we can still hear traces of the traditional social dance sound — in the gentle, crisp sound of the cowhorn rattle, for example — but the textures and close harmony are original.

The point of listening comparatively to the work of these three remarkable women is more than the obvious one that they are in charge of their stylistic choices, or that there is incredible diversity within the contemporary Aboriginal music scene — although I think that diversity is important and exciting. It has to do with the

clarity of their social agendas, particularly with regard to the appropriate use of community based knowledge, with issues of appropriation. As well, by directing their work to specific audiences for different musics, they each respect the individuality of not only singers, but listeners.

But by looking primarily at the products of these singers, their CDs, we still don't have much insight into the struggle about voice. How exactly in the spaces of production — the rehearsals, the recording studios, the performances before different audiences, the consultations with advisors and elders, the TV interviews — do the conversations go? Whose voice is it anyway? My last example will address this question.

IV. Between singer and listener: Negotiating a vocal identity

Jerry Alfred hits the world music scene:

We've all been privy to weeks and months when there's lots of talk about a star musician — whether its Ice-T or the three tenors. This was the case with the northern Yukon musician Jerry Alfred who was the most recent musical star a few years ago when I initiated a Yukon oral history case study in conjunction with a larger project, the Canadian Musical Pathways project. Since 1993, Alfred has achieved regional stardom and national recognition as a Juno award winner in 1995. In the summer of 1997, he toured Germany.¹⁷

The interviewer for the Yukon case study was Daniel Janke, who is extensively involved in the Yukon music scene himself when he is not playing jazz in Toronto or Gambian kora (he's known as the Yukon's only kora player!) . Since Daniel did this series of interviews, the Yukon scene has become even livelier — new production companies,¹⁸ many new CDs, and both Asian and European deals in the making, including a German contract for Jerry Alfred. So the "negotiation of identity" I describe here is already something of a frozen historical moment.

The conversations about Alfred's authenticity — poised as they were somewhere between critical theory and gossip — coincided with the production of the first of three recordings all recorded at Old Crow studios in Whitehorse. In "the negotiation of identity," Yukon identity, Tutchone aboriginal identity, and Alfred's individual identity, the discourse about music and the making of the music itself are tightly interwoven. The discussion centres around three issues: his use of technology and instrumentation, the depth of his knowledge of the repertoire and his right to use it, and his idiosyncratic way of working with other musicians.

He emerged into the local limelight from anonymity in the small community of Pelly Crossing when he was asked to sing at an Elder's gathering in 1992. That first year, his repertoire consisted mostly of four songs, including a traditional gambling song which he subsequently recorded on each of his first two albums.¹⁹ A local radio producer described the event like this: "He brought in his little amp with him. Yah, got the echo and the reverb. Nobody had heard this before and everybody in the whole room was just totally shocked, even the elders. They recognized the song, but the technology, they didn't know what to say, whether it was good or bad." (I: 73). At least one elder however was non-plussed suggesting that maybe his own storytelling should be put on video. Another expressed pleasure that a young person was learning and maintaining the old songs. One commented that Alfred was authentic because he sang with simple drum accompaniment, unlike some other Yukon Native

singers who accompanied traditional songs on guitar.

Alfred explains the electronics as a translation of the Yukon soundscape — it conveys spaciousness. His own vision was an even more complex simulation of nature, a vision he never realized. Here is his explanation of it: “I still need to do the details a bit, you know, when you get right into the song. You hear a duck coming in landing; you hear it from one speaker and it goes into the water and you hear it from that, and when it takes off you can hear the water dripping right off the other side of the speaker” (II: 103). He was still looking for an eagle cry, thunder, and raindrops to incorporate on the album at the time of this interview.

On his second album, the acoustic space is strikingly different even though the artists involved are mostly the same people. The hand drum is still acoustically foregrounded and electronically reverberant but the quality is closer to its acoustic sound. The lead guitar now assumes a more important solo role in the texture as do the “back-up” singers who enter at the end of the song with independent material. Alfred’s voice is now conveyed without reverberation and consequently is the most acoustic sounding element in the mix. In fact, he is acoustically backgrounded, relative to the band — both acoustic and electric guitarists, keyboardists and percussionists, accordion, harmonica and *kora* player, as well as three back-up women vocalists whose close harmony is as characteristic of the Medicine Beat sound as Jerry’s lead. Yukon musicians consistently boast about their love of diversity. Alfred’s simplicity seems to have given way to the eclecticism more characteristic of the territorial identity. This becomes clearer in conjunction with comments cited below.

A second aspect of his work which received comment related to his knowledge of musical repertoire. Jerry’s musical background is a complex mixture (probably like yours or mine). He says he first remembered the singing of national anthems in school and the hymns in the church choir he was made to join because he had a good voice, it seems. He talks about visitors to his parents house and evenings of singing in harmony (the repertoire is not indicated). Jerry also casually mentions that he had to learn guitar because his brother is a fiddler in need of an accompanist.

He drops hints of other musics, some associated with his father’s way of relating to the cycle of the day,

...we’d be away up in fish camp. Some mornings he’d [his dad] get up and start singing. The day, start early in the morning when it’s quiet out. You get up early, go out, you don’t hear nothing... And my dad would go out singing a song. It was sort of like, after he completed a song you would see the sun start to get up and the birds start to sing. Everything start to come alive completely. [II: 101]

Other comments relating to traditional community events and the proscriptions associated with the music of these events, proscriptions which of course operate in relation to recorded as well as live performance:

The old songs are mostly what I learned at the time I was small. They travel with me everywhere I go, those songs, in my head all the time. Every time I feel lonely, I think of one of those songs. I feel bad away from home. Basically, a lot of old songs I learned, at a lot of these gatherings like potlatches I’d listen to them. Sometimes some of the songs, they say you can’t sing another person’s song. You get bad luck. So I try not to do too much of anybody’s songs. [II: 102]

He explains though that a lot of people are now approaching him to say they don't want a certain song of their family to get lost and to ask him to sing it "for the family" (*ibid.*)

His own song-writing activity is firmly rooted in his observations of the way sound communication functions in the environment. He explains that the new songs he writes are "about the old theory, the old life, the old law," as well as "values we carry with us." These things had to be put in the form of songs to "pass the message out" to the youth of the nation. He uses the analogy of the crow who, if you hear it late at night, you know that it is doing something unusual, and hence foreshadows the loss of a family member. "So things always speak a different language all over the world. Sometimes they bring bad news to you. Those kinds of things, I like to honour; all these different kinds of values these younger people should know." (*ibid.*). I'm not certain whether knowledge of the habits of other creatures are the point of this story or whether he feels that his songs, like the crows message, are bearers of significant information and values. Either way, the analogy frames a view of singing that, like the stories at the outset of this paper, is larger than an androcentric one.

In order to make his CD, however, he needed financial help and turned to a Yukon Territorial Government program which subsidized artists who wished to research community-based traditions. A logical choice since not only did he get some production money but he could pay elders as consultants. One administrative official, however, damned him with faint praise for this strategic move:

A²⁰: He used to play country western in the bars with a drum machine apparently... And then he wanted to learn some traditional songs and stories and drumming of the Northern Tutchone people so he received an award. It was a small award that got him money to pay elders to sew things for him, to make him a drum, to discuss things, to teach him songs. Now he's ... well he's merchandized now. We're sending him to the Canada games. He's a really good example because, it's not feasible to fund a guy to go around with a drum machine to sing C & W cover tunes but once he wants to do something unique and fresh then it's definitely eligible and really exciting.

Q: But what if his choice is to go around singing his version of a C & W tune?

A: Well, that can be discussed too, because we have funded <name of recipient> who is doing just that, a Native performer who is singing C and W tunes, not hers but Yukon tunes, in a style that's very close to Nashville.

Q: Whose tunes does she sing?

A: Brian Levi's. He writes most of her music. It's all about the north but it's done in a very specific style. That's a really valuable use of taxpayers money in some ways because she's out there now promoting the Yukon and she's developing her own personal style but it's within a certain genre. [II: 28]

This is an interesting segment of conversation. The modest funding program is certainly credited with connecting Alfred with his own tradition — no question of acknowledging that he lives that tradition. Furthermore, it is almost framed as a

way of "training" him, getting him past the C & W stage to a more viable "voice" for a Yukon Native person (remember those early quotes on "training"). It seems that even country and western style is acceptable if the tunes are "Yukon tunes," "all about the north." Jerry's image of the Yukon, one tied closely to the actual sounds of the environment there, has now been turned in a new direction, toward a thematic and symbolic statement about the North.

But returning to Alfred, a third aspect of his work involved the working relations among band members. Jerry seems to feel in charge especially with regard to the singers:

He describes how he coaches his female backup singers: "constantly trying to get them comfortable with the words, get them comfortable with the timing, get them keyed in to their notes. They help me in balancing in the verses and lines." He speaks about moving the voices around, spacing the harmonies differently: "I would move it further up because she's too deep," he said as he demonstrated the new line (II: 103).

His producer at the time concedes that Alfred is in charge, explaining "I had to make sort of an effort to find people who were open enough to just play with Jerry, the way he plays, not trying to fit him to any kind of form" (II: 89). This very thing, he connects to his own creativity. "What we're doing with Jerry is the apex of what I like about it [the recording studio] right now: taking something that's completely raw and making it into something that's not so raw, but open enough. That's the thing" (II: 90). As owner and producer of Old Crow studios, where most of the Yukon recordings are currently being made, this vision constructs the kind of sound which comes to be identified as Yukon sound, a "raw" sound made into something "not so raw, but open enough" (*ibid.*).

While Jerry focussed on the singing voices, the producer is concerned with the instrumentalists. Different agency seems operative for different parts of the mix. Furthermore, the band members differed in their affinity for the "rawness." Two of them are experienced professionals in larger cities and felt that "open enough" was perhaps a bit too loose. Hence the tension between "raw" as a quality symbolic of the Yukon sound and the finesse expected in the industry, as it functions in urban centres further south, becomes apparent.

My objective here is not to judge whose opinion is right, who is ending up with more control, or which identity is prevailing. The point is simply that the simple act of one artist making a record can become a site for complex and varied negotiations of what voices are and what they should sound like. It is the ongoingness of the conversation, the relocations, resignifications, and resoundings, that are, in my view, as much a part of the music as the music.

V. When singers have a voice

In widely divergent music cultures, ethnomusicologists and popular music scholars have described many musical practices in which the sound, the aesthetic codes, of the singing voice helps to construct a stronger political "voice." And as I have attempted to demonstrate in this paper, many First Nations singers in North America are using their voices with an awareness of the politics of identity from which we can learn: They present the fragile world we all share with alternative ways to relate to the environment, to position our singing voices relative to different communities and across the spaces of different scenes. I've tried to suggest that we

think not so much of voices but of identity making, not just of social and cultural situations but of the constructing of relationships by means of the music we/they do. Such an enterprise may not help us create voices but rather it may enable us to find voices we need in a complex contemporary world. Perhaps it is the incredible interdependency of the planet that is making it both necessary and possible to hear all our voices in these new ways. Perhaps it is the fact that we are beginning to own our history in a different way, not to celebrate "discovery" but to rethink the relations which began at important junctures such as 1497.

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Endnotes

¹ Historical evidence supports the latter. According to an oft-quoted letter written in London shortly after Cabot returned, by a Venetian friend of one of the crew, "He coasted for 300 leagues and landed: saw no human beings, but has brought hither to the King certain snares which had been set to catch game, and a needle for making nets; he also found some felled trees, whereof he supposed there were inhabitants,

and returned to his ship in alarm" (cited in Howley, (1980, 1915), p. 1).

² *Toronto Star*, Thurs, June 12, 1997.

³ In the Music building of Memorial University of Newfoundland, I delivered this paper standing below and in front of a portrait of Charles Hutton, grateful that the coincidences of locale are sometimes relevant to one's words.

⁴ My own attempt to understand this style of performance resulted in the article, "La myth et la musique naskapi," in *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec*, 15/4: 5-18. Other scholars of Native American oral narrative have described this highly nuanced performance style in other areas. Dennis Tedlock, for example, transcribes oral narrative as poetry, conveying the flow and emphasis of the presentation by means of various typographic conventions (see, e.g., Tedlock 1982). Franziska von Rosen has used Tedlock's methodology for the transcription of Micmac myths (see, e.g., Diamond, Cronk and von Rosen 1994, p. 78).

⁵ The excerpt was transcribed and translated from a version narrated by Mani Shan Nui, Davis Inlet, 1981.

⁶ A similar belief of the Cree of Northern Ontario has been incorporated by Lawrence Martin into his Juno award-winning song "Wawatay" on the album *Wapistan* (First Nations Music, 1994).

⁷ SPINC research files: notes recorded by Franziska von Rosen, Nov 7, 1988.

⁸ Interview in M.S. Cronk, comp. *Sound of the Drum*, 1990: 93.

⁹ As an aside, I am often amused by occasional comments (see for example, Frith 1996, p.196) about modern technologies such as audio recordings, radio, or telephone, as things which, for the first time, facilitated "hearing a voice without a body," without visual contact with the speaker. That view seems implicitly to erase from the concept of the "singing voice," the sounds of birds and animals which are often heard but not seen.

¹⁰ See Cavanagh 1987; also see Keillor in the same volume.

¹¹ I've borrowed the pun from an unpublished article by James Robbins on the jazz scene in Canada.

¹² Other publications relevant to this huge question include the magazine *Aboriginal Voices*, which has extensive coverage of the music scene in every issue so far, as well as articles by Diamond (in press), Diamond et al. (1994), Grenier and Morrison (1995), Keillor (1995), Neuenfeld (1995), and Whidden (1984), and the paper by Scales (1996).

¹³ Part of the Recorded anthology of American Music produced by New World Records, produced by ethnomusicologist Charlotte Heth, the disc / cassette is entitled *Songs and Dances of the Eastern Indians from Medicine Spring and Allegany (Cherokee, Seneca)*, NW337-4, 1975.

¹⁴ Produced with Peter Kater for Silver Wave Records, SC 809.

¹⁵ Soar Records, 175-CD, 1996.

¹⁶ On the CD *Caution to the Wind*, a compilation album of various styles, produced by James McBride and Danny Weiss, executive producer, Dave Wilkes (Shanachie Entertainment Corp., 1996).

¹⁷ Thanks to Jerry's producer, David Petkovich, of Caribou Records for this information via e-mail.

¹⁸ Those that have web sites as of June 1997 include Caribou Records, which produces Inconnu as well as Jerry Alfred; Motherlode, producer of Rusty May; and Whispering Willows Records, producer of Matthew Lien.

¹⁹ Jerry Alfred and the Medicine Beat. Etsi Shon, recorded at Old Crow, Whitehorse, 1994; *Nendaa (go back)*, produced by Bob Hamilton, Old Crow Records, Whitehorse, 1995.

²⁰ A and Q represent Answer and Question respectively.
