

Introduction

Music in Canada in the Nineteenth Century

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The contributors to this special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, devoted to Canadian topics, have found themselves in a challenging position. On the one hand, music in Canada has been the subject of a great deal of accomplished scholarship – Robin Elliott’s bibliography of Canadian music studies from 1996 to 2004 lists 895 works, and much more has been published since that time – and notwithstanding that a considerable majority of that scholarship treats more recent topics, nineteenth-century Canadian music studies are by no means a novelty.¹ On the other hand, for the international audience of a journal such as this, the near-complete absence of Canadian studies from general histories and musicological journals, and its only occasional presence even in those devoted to the Americas, meant that, like the contributions to this journal’s earlier special issue devoted to Greece, our work would almost inevitably be situated as dealing with a perhaps interesting but certainly peripheral topic relative to any ‘mainstream’ of music history.² So our challenge has been to contribute to an existing body of scholarship that takes as a given the value of Canadian music studies within Canada, while also demonstrating the general interest of studying music and practices of an area remote not only from the British imperial metropolis whose colony it was (to say nothing of the continental European musical traditions that could view the British world itself as peripheral) but also from the growing American economic and cultural centre constituted by the United States.

At this point in the history of musicology, of course, suspicion of notions of mainstream, centre and periphery is nearly as pervasive as those framing

¹ See Robin Elliott, ‘A Canadian Music Bibliography, 1996–2004’, *Institute for Canadian Music Newsletter* 2/3 (2004), available online at <http://www.utoronto.ca/icm/vol02no3.pdf> (accessed 29 January 2014). Elliott’s bibliography updates that provided in Carl Morey, *Music in Canada: A Research and Information Guide* (New York and London: Garland, 1997). Beverley Diamond, ‘Narratives in Canadian Music History’, in *Taking a Stand: Essays in Honor of John Beckwith*, ed. Timothy J. McGee (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995): pp. 273–305, remains the most extended critical examination of Canadian music historiography, although it was written before the publication of a substantial new text in the field, Elaine Keillor, *Music in Canada: Capturing Landscape and Diversity* (Montreal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006).

² See especially Anastasia Siopsi’s discussion of Greece as a margin in her ‘Introduction’, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 8 (2011): 5–7.

ideologies themselves once were – and yet the quite real impact of notions of centre and periphery are among the common themes in the essays that follow. They are indeed unavoidable in understanding the cultural history of any state that originated as a colonial enterprise, as did all the states of the Americas, varied though their colonial origins and later histories are. And therein lies one of those elusive points of ‘general interest’: if issues of colonization, centre and periphery continue to resonate in Canadian musical life long after the nominal origin of the nation as the Dominion of Canada in the British North America Act of 1867, their presence may remind us of processes shared throughout a hemisphere fundamentally shaped by colonization, despite narratives of national exceptionalism that are equally pervasive.

And yet, to argue that the value of these essays consists in how they may contribute to understanding more familiar areas and issues is to fall back into the same structure of values that attention to the supposedly peripheral is meant to counter; hence the challenge with which I began, and which can be answered by acknowledging the persistence of peripheral status even as it seeks to counter it – a stance familiar in the world of postcolonial studies. And one need not look far in Canadian music studies to encounter both eagerness to distance them from a colonialist past and alignment with postcolonial studies.³ The studies collected here, however, suggest that the dynamics of colonial musical undertakings, whether in musical celebrations of the exploits of empire (Boyd), staged representations of Euro-Canadian interaction with indigenous peoples (Ingraham) or the development of music in a settler colonial city (Gramit), are by no means uniform or transparent, and that better understanding the colonial can contribute to moving beyond it.

The scale of a single issue required limitation of coverage, so our contributions focus on developments within the second half of the long nineteenth century. To be sure, there is a variety of interesting work on the first part of the century, ranging from the music brought to the Inuit of Labrador by Moravian missionaries, to ideologies of domestic concerts in Ontario and the soundscape of interactions of fur traders and explorers with First Nations peoples of the west.⁴ This issue, however, provides only a single study of musical life before Confederation, Michelle Boyd’s study of a song published in Halifax, Nova

³ The most vehement castigation of Canada’s colonial musical status is undoubtedly R. Murray Schafer, ‘Canadian Culture: Colonial Culture’, *Canadian Forum* 63 (1984): 14–19, reprinted in *Canadian Music: Issues of Hegemony and Identity*, ed. Beverley Diamond and Robert Witmer (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 1994): 221–37. But see Beverley Diamond, ‘Canadian Reflections on Palindromes, Inversions, and Other Challenges to Ethnomusicology’s Coherence’, *Ethnomusicology* 50/2 (2006): 324–36, here 325 for a more casual characterization of the colonial as a condition to be superseded. Studies situating music in Canada in relation to postcolonial studies include *Post-Colonial Distances: the Study of Popular Music in Canada and Australia*, ed. Beverley Diamond, Denis Crowdey and Daniel Downes (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2008), and Jody Berland, ‘The Musicking Machine’ and ‘Locating Listening’, in *North of Empire: Essays on the Cultural Technologies of Space* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009): 155–84 and 185–209.

⁴ See, for instance, Tom Gordon, ‘Found in Translation: The Inuit Voice in Moravian Music’, *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* (January 2007), <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/NFLDS/article/view/10106/10369> (accessed 30 January 2014); Kristina Marie Guiguet, *The Ideal World of Mrs. Widder’s Soirée musicale: Social Identity and Musical Life in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, Cultural Studies Papers (Canadian Museum of Civilization) 77 (Gatineau, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2004); and Daniel Robert Laxer,

Scotia, commemorating an incident in the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Boyd's study makes clear the extent to which this colony was linked to the British Empire and its concerns while also grounding that interest in the particular social and commercial world of the maritime colony. A single printed work becomes the springboard for a multifaceted exploration of the intersection of imperial ideologies, local pride, the musical conventions of popular song and commercial enterprise.

Montreal, the setting of Brian Thompson's study of the Société Canadienne d'Opérette et d'Opéra de Montréal in the 1870s, remained Canada's largest city well into the twentieth century; Thompson's essay provides a close examination of the challenges that the complex social and political situation of the new Dominion's cultural centre provided for those who sought to develop its musical institutions. Although the works that the Society performed – by Gounod and Boieldieu – were of European origin, and the larger goal of establishing a conservatory system was a frank emulation of European cultural models, the circumstances that brought the organization into being and that determined the particular choice of repertoire were fundamentally shaped by the local realities of the powerful influence of Roman Catholic Church authorities, the attractions and availability of American popular entertainment and the need to appeal both to the French and the Anglophone components of the city's population, the latter far from united in itself. Thompson reveals a conscious and careful, if not ultimately successful, attempt at consensus- and institution-building through the efforts of determined musician-entrepreneurs.

Such individual contribution to civic musical life is at the heart of Robin Elliott's contribution. He focuses on the ambiguously documented life of Luigi von Kunits, a musician solidly grounded in the nineteenth-century musical practices of central Europe who went on to play a founding role in the musical life of the growing Anglophone city of Toronto. Here issues of centre and periphery come to the fore once again: Kunits's authoritative status in Toronto grew not only from his considerable musical skills and long experience in more established urban musical institutions in the United States, but also from the aura accruing from direct connections to the likes of Bruckner, Hanslick and Brahms. The challenge of separating documentable reality from astutely cultivated legend in this case points toward the significance of an imagined world of associations in the cultural life of new cities.

Mary Ingraham's essay focuses not on institutions but on musical-dramatic works. Nonetheless, the social remains crucial to her examination of the place of First Nations peoples in *Canada's Welcome*, a masque staged to welcome Canada's new Governor General in 1879, and *Le Fétiche*, an *opéra-comique* first presented in 1912. Her intertextual consideration of the social and political settings that they structure and in which they existed, and in particular of the changing politics of Canada's policy towards indigenous peoples, reveals how in each of these works, libretto, music and staging, despite – indeed, *through* – stereotyped gestures of 'Indian-ness', construct distinct model 'Indians' and modes of interaction, while enacting models of citizenship and integration based on colonialist ideals that justified dispossession and assimilation.

My own essay on civic music and the development of musical life in Edmonton, Alberta, provides a case study of musical aspects of that dispossession and the

'The Musical Landscape of Paul Kane's Western Journey, 1845–8', *Boulder Pavement: Arts and Ideas* 1/1 (2013), <http://www.boulderpavement.ca/issue001/the-musical-landscape/> (accessed 30 January 2014).

urban growth that followed it. Here the distinctive dynamics of a settler-colonial boom brought about the dramatic transformation of a town in which civic events routinely included participation by local First Nations, who, although they had been moved to reserves, were nonetheless familiar if marginalized participants in daily life. Within a decade, though, they had effectively been rendered invisible and inaudible, except as (again, stereotyped) representatives of a primitive and now superseded past. The musical life that developed thereafter imported both classical and popular practices (and a discourse that denigrated the latter in favour of the former) and reveals the attraction of both American and British metropolitan models.

Nancy Yunhwa Rao's contribution closes this issue by shifting its focus from transatlantic immigrant populations to what Henry Yu has termed the 'Cantonese Pacific';⁵ her study of the complex transnational history of the genre of Cantonese opera and its centrality in Chinese-Canadian and Chinese-American cultural life serves as an apt reminder of the multiple and interacting centres and peripheries that shape any society, but are particularly apparent in a diverse settler dominion like Canada. Her account reveals how Cantonese opera survived and eventually grew despite overtly racist policies aimed at curbing Chinese immigration – and indeed, how the differences between those policies in the US and Canada eventually allowed performers and theatres to establish themselves in both countries. To an extent not previously documented, then, the existence of a thriving Cantonese opera world in North America depended not only on the international mobility of Chinese performers but on the abilities of entrepreneurial managers to work to their advantage regulations designed to exclude them on both sides of the US–Canadian border.

No issue such as this, of course, can make any claims to completeness, and I am acutely aware of what is not represented here, from oral histories of First Nations peoples to substantial consideration of rural musical practices, and from accounts of other immigrant groups to a more substantial representation of French Canadian experience. Nonetheless, it is our hope that the essays collected here begin to suggest both the diversity of music histories to be written concerning Canada in the long nineteenth century and the potential for musicological study – in a national context but without teleological nationalist assumptions – to write (drawing on Beverley Diamond's desiderata for an historicized ethnomusicology) 'careful, localized history' that also contributes to 'interpreting larger social issues'.⁶

⁵ Henry Yu, 'The Intermittent Rhythms of the Cantonese Pacific', in *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims*, ed. Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerde (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 393–414.

⁶ Diamond, 'Canadian Reflections', 329 and 330.