

# CSTM at New Westminster: A Participant's Perspective

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For those of us who are inveterate culture vultures, as are all ethnomusicologists, the recent CSTM conference was a feast of home-grown ethnography. One moment we were quietly contemplating a paper presentation in true academic fashion. Another moment we were in the midst of a labour rally, listening to music from British Columbia's Old and New Left. During one panel, ballad singers gave us their 'research' almost entirely in mixolydian or dorian modes as they lived, rather than problematized, their ballads.

The weekend was invigorating and even heady, thanks to the work of Rika Ruebsaat, the new President, her husband, Jon Bartlett, and David Gregory, who organized the paper and panel sessions, all veteran CSTM shipmates.

The Friday night concert and several parts of the following day's proceedings vividly portrayed the labour and left wing which is a hallmark of BC. Even the Saturday night sing-around in an authentic west coast 'kitchen' (Jon and Rika's house) had a distinct 'populist' feel to it. The official CSTM folders spoke volumes on their own. They wore the crest of the Canadian Union of Public Employees because they were donated by CUPE.

One of the highlights of the Friday evening concert was the men and women of the Solidarity Notes Labour Choir, dressed in a motley of red shirts and jeans. The Saturday night 'fire in the kitchen' was filled with local folk singers roaring out the choruses and verses of one 'vernacular' song after another, mostly sea shanties likely familiar to the sailors who visited New Westminster in those magnificent three-masters that once filled the harbour. We also sang some rip-roaring Québécois patter songs. The Honourable Lisa Frulla, the Minister for Cultural Affairs, would have been proud of us if she had been there, stout ale in hand (an incongruous picture, but what the heck). I shudder to think of the mess we must have left in Jon and Rika's 3-room 'kitchen', but that's the nature of the beast, I suppose. I tried to get the teenagers in the room to join me in a roaring version of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" by firing up the chorus ("hello, hello, hello, how low"), but they didn't seem to recognize it. Must have been my voice. Or maybe my age. Later I learned that they were only in grade five when the song came out. How time flies. Still, I was surprised

at their lack of interest in Nickelback's latest hit, "Photograph", which is chock full of Canadian and prairie sensibility, as well as being in the top ten of the Canadian charts right now. There is a lesson to be learned there.

The Annual General Meeting on Sunday morning was the most productive of the four I have had the privilege of presiding over. There was no end of great ideas, hampered only by lack of money. However, it could be that sheer enthusiasm will defeat our very modest finances (i.e., poverty). Hopefully the papers will somehow make their way into one publication or another, although their print versions could not possibly substitute for the impact of seeing them read. The fire in Kim Kobayashi's words as she explored women's issues in Japanese-Canadian music-making was palpable. The eureka of discovery in the other papers was also well worth the effort.

As I drove back and forth to the sessions, sometimes in the pouring rain, other times in the weak light of a day filtered through Pacific clouds, I listened to Diana Krall singing "Departure Bay (Nanaimo)" at least a hundred times. Those who attended the conference from 'away' will now be able to listen to that song and nod their heads in total understanding. The land and the people were entirely present and accounted for at our CSTM conference. Well done, everybody.

Next year is the big five-oh, fiftieth anniversary conference. Stay tuned for news about exciting plans already in the works.

