

The Canada Songs Project: Music, Musings, and Memoirs

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About a decade and a half ago I felt motivated to start writing songs about Canada: about people, places and, above all, about Canadian history. Since then I have stepped down from my former job as a Social Studies teacher in an Edmonton junior high school to become a “professional” folksinger, traveling the length and breadth of the country, surviving through meager or “zero-based” tour-budgeting, singing in clubs and at festivals as well as in schools and colleges. In the process I have recorded three CDs of original songs, titled respectively *Northern Sightlines*, *Canada Songs*, and *Lonely Heroes*, and worked out what I believe to be a unique approach to multimedia education and entertainment.

I call this blend of song, history, education, suffering, travel and performance the “Canada Songs Project”, and I am honoured and grateful to have this opportunity to share with readers of *Canadian Folk Music* what I have been doing and why. It is difficult to write about such a project without sounding glib, but if I did not believe strongly that Canada needs something like this I would not be dedicating the rest of my life to doing it. Nor would I be so happy to have this opportunity to publicize the work.

Spawned by an acute apathy among school students in social studies classrooms, and nourished by a fervent desire to recognize and popularize

Canada’s bashful heritage of immense global contributions and sacrifices, the “Canada Songs Project” has begun to tweak the interest of media, scholars, historians, musicians, and even politicians. I hope—and believe—that it is now finding its way into the hearts of many Canadians.

Although originally a rather gung-ho effort to popularize newly-written lyrics and music about Canadian history and heritage to festival audiences and classroom students, the project has since shown surprising growth and maturity. The lure of the performing stage, combined with my increasing love for, fascination with, and desire to bring to life the wonderful yet too often untold stories of contributions, experiences and deeds of Canadians, has resulted in the project expanding to the point where it has become recognized by many national institutions and organizations such as Historica, the National History Society, the History Society of Alberta, the CBC, the Association for Canadian Studies, the Hong Kong Veterans of Canada Association, and the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, as well as various folk festival artistic directors and several school curriculum boards and their publishing networks.

I should also mention here that there are several works in the project that are mainstream and more

typically personal...not all the material follows the thematic Canadian mould. I have learned that as an entertainer there is a challenge and responsibility to bond with your audience, and celebrating Canadiana in detail shouldn't be your total package! A helping of diversity and intimacy have to be a part of every successful performer's repertoire.

For me personally, it has been a wonderful odyssey. To see and experience the width and breadth of a country such as Canada is something that only a privileged few can hope to experience, but to do so within the parameters and role of a touring troubadour imparts an additional romantic allure. Visiting the vast reaches of this massive domain, partaking in its most fervent celebrations, meeting the distinctive, amazing, and yet oh so typically humble cross-section of the people from all of its far reaches is fulfilling the dream of a lifetime.

The Project: Rationale and Rewards

Popular adolescent-accepted music from recent decades is generally not very classroom-friendly. It is difficult for teachers to use because it is all too often inappropriate for any school-directed learning or assessment. Currently available popular songs with interesting or appealing lyrical stories that are directly relevant to history or language arts curricula are very few and far between. A major thrust of my "Canada Songs Project" grew out of the need to supply and develop this area of school curriculum. Music is a most obvious major stimulus for sensory and emotional connection and learning, thus song material should be developed and utilized for this purpose. Most of the material composed and recorded for this project emphasizes this. Educators and entertainers alike strive to capture the attention of an audience in a meaningful and memorable way. The material I have created, developed and written for the project aims to meet these criteria head-on by providing, along with integrity and originality, a package that includes catchy, heart-felt lyrical stories, cutting-edge accompaniments, and a pleasant but memorable musical experience. Admittedly a difficult objective! How far I have succeeded is for others to judge, but this has been my goal.

The challenge has been formidable, but in attempting to meet it, I have had my rewards. The travel opportunities derived from the project, experiencing the incredible vastness of this country, have reinforced my positive belief that we Canadians definitely belong to an undiscovered, latent, yet very profound national "family". Being blessed with an occupation that allows two months of summer to recuperate and/or develop my skills and talents has

proven to be most advantageous to the creative process.

My ideas, original song material, sampling, and networking initially came to fruition in the 1990s, and led to invitations to present and perform at Historica's summer institutes for teachers in Montreal, Quebec City, and Sudbury. They also resulted in invitations to the Canadian History Society's autumn conference in Winnipeg and to an Association for Canadian Studies Conference in Ottawa. At much the same time, gigs at music festivals and conventions began to materialize: the Stan Rogers Festival in Canso, N.S., the South Country Fair in Alberta, the Hong Kong Veterans of Canada Association convening in Aurora and Ottawa, and the 60th Anniversary of V-J Day in Ottawa...each gave credence to the cause. To meet and be involved in collaborations with so many talented, scholarly and influential Canadians motivated me to continue my work and reinforced my desire to see the project develop and flourish.

Building the Project

Noodling away on guitar to nurture a favourite passion, while coping with the seemingly 24-hour working day that is truly a part of the teaching profession, led me to brainstorm a way of motivating social studies students: by the re-creation of events and stories in lyrics and guitar accompaniments. It was not a novel idea, but it was one that seemed not to have been tried much in practice. After a couple of fairly successful trial attempts, using this medium to create material to grab the attention of the classroom audience became a true fixation for me. There is magic in music, and young people are naturally fascinated by musical instruments. The ability to plunk a piano or tweak a guitar instantly makes a classroom teacher someone special in the eyes of the students. Playing Christmas songs for the imminent annual Christmas concert, or pulling out the instrument for the occasional singalong, definitely puts that individual teacher in a very special spotlight. Striving to develop and improve, and learning skills as a musician, is also something that students truly latch on to with excitement as word gets around. This is not rocket science, and it is something that can easily be capitalized on by the skillful classroom teacher.

Singing and playing in the classroom was the beginning. The next stage was seeking the kinship that generates through interaction with other musicians. There is no question that the most creative stimulus for the songwriter comes from the meeting, interaction, sharing, jamming, starving, vagabonding,

brainstorming, eating halibut, and partying with other musicians and local people one meets at festivals. Quite often, especially for performers, billeting results in close living quarters, and musicians discover that they share amazing experiences, friendships with other musicians, all in common with each other; new friendships are soon developed that often carry over vast distances.

Musicians seem to automatically accept that once you're introduced, you're one of the kinfolk, and there's a solid possibility that you will do a fest or show together again at some point down the road. Typically, festival directors book musicians of similar styles, and love to put them in touch with each other to see what develops. The payoff is when the new circle of musical friends become inspired by the amazing quality of material presented by each other, which results in the challenge to step up and improve one's own material and performing dynamics, and ultimately to use such impressive influences to collaborate and develop even better performing and recording material.

The third stage of the developing project was making the necessary professional contacts. Most music industry people agree that it is imperative in the music business to have the right people hear you at the right time. An influential teaching colleague (Carol Arnold) overheard a sample selection as used in the social studies classroom (one of my first originals, the "Ballad Of John Franklin"), and this resulted in an interview with a locally successful textbook publisher's new projects director (Andrew Gambier of Reidmore Books, an Alberta-based, independent textbook company owned by Pat Reid).

The First CD and Teacher's Book: *Northern Sightlines*

In the late 1990s I recorded a sample of these original compositions and offered them as a possible publication product to Reidmore. The idea was that a CD of Canadian songs combined with an accompanying Teacher's Resource Book might make for a successful educational product. The Reidmore team thought the concept was innovative and viable, so a collaborative development was initiated. Months and months of work, and many nights of plugging away till the wee hours of the morning, resulted in a CD of twelve songs and a 90-page teacher's resource, designed with reproducible classroom listening, learning, information, and evaluation materials. This was *Northern Sightlines*.

Topics of the songs included the fabled and fatal Franklin expedition of 1845-48, the battle of Batoche and the death of Louis Riel, the demise of the

notorious bandit Billy Miner, the WW1 tragedy of nurse Edith Cavell and the subsequent naming of the mountain in Jasper National Park, the life of Oblate missionary Albert Lacombe, and tributes to homesteaders, immigrants, and Chinese railroad workers.

The accompanying *Northern Sightlines Student Resource Book*, a colorful 90-page, coil-bound booklet, contained information about the stories, people, and events that the songs are about. Provided for each song were suggested classroom listening tasks, fun activities, and assessment methods. Finally finished in 1999, the teaching resource was ready for a market test. An invitation to present this material at Historica's Summer Institute for Teachers, a week-long professional development and collaboration between Canadian historians, authors, and educators in Montreal, started things off on a high note. Other invitations followed, including the Canadian History Society conference in Winnipeg, the Association for Canadian Studies conference in Montreal, and several Alberta Teachers Conventions. Thankfully the product was acknowledged, and not only by school teachers: it apparently intrigued listeners in higher academic circles as well as some individuals in the entertainment industry.

The Second CD: *Canada Songs*

An award nomination for *Northern Sightlines* from ARIA (the Alberta Recording Industry Association), several successful festival performances, and news of a new Social Studies Curriculum that was coming into place in Alberta, gave rise to a decision to create and produce a second CD, to be named the same as the project: *Canada Songs*. Released in 2002, this contains 12 original songs (plus an instrumental) that attempt to personalize, pay tribute to, or help stimulate an appreciation or understanding of an event or aspect of Canadiana: something that needs to be shared or understood, or a story that needs to be told. This time the song topics took on a more international focus, and included selections on Irish emigration to Canada (on a personal note of interest: the *Spearin* family house has survived from 1831 and is one of the focal points of the Simcoe County Museum in Barrie), mail order brides, and Canada's sacrifices at Vimy Ridge in 1917, Dieppe in 1942, and during the Battle of the Atlantic 1939-45 (a tribute to HMCS Sackville, the last remaining Halifax-docked corvette from Canada's powerful WW2 navy). There were also songs about the Northwest Company, the taking refuge of Sitting Bull and his 6,000 Sioux in the Cypress Hills, an epitaph

for the Marquis de Montcalm, and a tribute to Terry Fox.

“Run, Terry Fox, Run” garnered national attention. On the 25th Anniversary of the Terry Fox Marathon of Hope in 2005, the song received national airplay on CBC radio. A decision was made to send 10 per cent of the CD sales of *Canada Songs*, all residual royalties, plus a portion of the funds earned from festivals, to the Terry Fox Foundation in honour of Terry’s sacrifice. The song has also been offered to the Foundation for use in fundraising. This is in acknowledgment of Terry’s own wish (spelled out during his marathon to his brother Darrell) of not wanting any corporate input, individuals, or sponsorship-gaining self-promotion from his fundraising effort....what a superb citizen he was! Receiving a wonderful letter from Terry’s parents, Rollie and Betty, and subsequent correspondence from his brother Darrell, have been heart-warming events for me.

Befriending so many Canadians with fascinating tales to tell was at this point the most enriching and rewarding part of the project work. Conferences, conventions, and festivals afforded audiences many opportunities to hear my ballads about Canadian heroes and it became obvious that they were indeed meeting a need within the nation to have such stories brought to light.

A project-related friendship with an educator from Edmonton, Richard Mack, stimulated the song “Dieppe”. Richard was visiting the memorial site on the beaches in France when he saw Corporal David Mack’s name on the memorial. He knew nothing of the story, wondered what had happened, and subsequently found out that this person was his great-uncle, who had been killed in the heroic Canadian assault on August 19th, 1942. His emotion was profound. Through collaboration with Richard and his story, “Dieppe” became a tribute to Richard’s great uncle, as well as a very personal memento.

Another friendship that developed with two educators/authors from Ontario, Nick Brune and Larry O’Mally, led to the creation of the song “Hong Kong Christmas, 1941”, which would be included on the next CD. It portrayed the fate of two regiments of Canadian soldiers stationed at Hong Kong at the time of the Japanese attack, which occurred almost simultaneously with the attack on Pearl Harbour. An amazing yet seldom-heard story of how this small garrison, despite terrible losses and no hope of rescue, let alone reinforcement, bravely held off the Japanese invasion force for more than two weeks, is enough to make anyone’s head shake in astonishment. The subsequent horror stories while in captivity under the Japanese are yet another

unbelievable saga. The survivors have become members of the HKVCA, an organization created to recognize their immense experiences and contributions. At the time of writing about sixty of these veterans remain, scattered at various points across Canada.

This second CD definitely helped to expand my audience. A nomination for a Western Canadian Music (WCMA) award took me to Regina, where I had an opportunity to rub shoulders with many of Western Canada’s elite music industry personalities. Festival directors, conference chairs, and radio/media personalities all professed an interest in the project. Moreover, subsequent meetings with curriculum directors and publishers resulted in my inclusion in a project team assigned the task of creating a sample of a new social studies textbook. This effort was successful, meaning that the publisher was now authorized to write, publish, and market the planned textbook as an authorized classroom resource in Alberta. The spin-off was an offer (from Thomson Nelson Canada) to co-author a new Alberta-authorized Grade Seven Social Studies Textbook Teacher’s Resource (approved for Alberta, 2006). The series, *Canada: Peoples, Places, and Perspectives*, has been a huge success. The Teacher’s Resource Book contains an audio CD and related activities that involve and include six original song selections from the “Canada Songs Project”.

The Third CD: *Lonely Heroes*

The idea for my third CD of original material had been conceived early on but nurtured over a five-year period while I gradually collected together a batch of suitable new songs. At some point along this five-year path my music had found a convenient label, coming to be known as “Canadiana/folk/roots/celtic”. *Lonely Heroes*, eventually released in 2007, thus fell into this promotional category. Once again the lion’s share of the 14 selections fit the bill of being both classroom-friendly and festival-audience-friendly. The songs offer a blend of melodic, catchy, well-defined vocals with fiery or romantic guitar accompaniments (I believe my finger-style acoustic guitar style is shown to good effect). I think the quality of singing has improved, the result of dedicating several years to voice coaching, and I felt confident enough to record the album virtually “live to tape”.

The feedback received on *Canada Songs* had included observations that the CD versions of the songs were not a good representation of my concert performances of them. I have come to be known mainly as a solo performer, and so for the new CD I

decided to eschew elaborate arrangements requiring many other musicians. Little studio instrumentation/ layering or enhancement is evident in these recordings.

The songs pay tribute to Canada's Peacekeepers, bomber crews of WW2, war brides, the Canadian Flag, Canada's sacrifices at war with Imperial Japan, the Dieppe experience (an unplugged version), and the sacrifices of Canadians abroad. There is also a traditional sea shanty ("Canadee-i-o"), and two arrangements (vocal and instrumental) of the National Anthem. Other more personal—even romantic—lyrics still retain a Canadian flavour. I aimed for an interspersing of up-tempo, high energy, happy-go-lucky songs between the softer, more melodic and heavily emotional pieces. This, I hope, makes a good blend for the listener. Musically speaking, certain influences are evident in this newer material, particularly the British acoustic/Celtic roots tradition but also reflections of Appalachian, French-Canadian, and Irish music. The inclusion of a Canadian maritime flavour on some songs is deliberate, as is the minimal smattering of bluesy material.

By the way, samples of four songs from this CD can be heard on Myspace, and two songs performed live are on Youtube. And at my website www.canadasongs.com you can find directions for accessing these samples, as well as pictures, lyrics, and some song transcriptions with melodies and chords.

Festivals Large, Small, and Truly Amazing!

One of the joys of the "Canada Songs Project" has been exploring the different regions of Canada and playing at a variety of folk festivals, each of which is distinctive and special in its own way. I do not have space to describe them all, but the following gives you some of my impressions in the form of a quick journey from Atlantic to Pacific.

Nova Scotia

Flying from Edmonton to Toronto (4 hours), and then on to Halifax (another 3 hours), and then driving north for 5 hours through to the northeastern shore of Nova Scotia, where the town and citizens of Canso host a now-famous musical event called the Stan Rogers Festival, has afforded an amazing, eye-opening opportunity. To experience that people so far apart can have so much appreciation, culture, and kinship for each other is nothing less than profound.

The Maritime experience is definitely an eye-opener for a western Canadian flatlander. Most westerners experience the Pacific coast and Vancouver's lower mainland at some time in their

lives, but it is apparent that many don't realize the amazing sights and sounds of the Atlantic. Nova Scotia is much larger than meets the prairie boy's eye, and experiencing the splendid, quaint, and tranquil townships, history, and seaside heritage is an invigorating experience of tradition and timelessness.

The rocky beauty of the coast and rugged, peaceful forests create a sensation of timelessness that leads one to recognize that this region is no doubt the place where Canada's music is the most deep-rooted. Exploring the Canso area and discovering the local people's affinity for acoustic, original music gives the visiting performer a priceless sense of belonging to this tradition and the fellowship that is part of it. The Stan Rogers Festival, which is held there in early July, is nothing short of brilliant and totally unforgettable. At some point soon, to complete the circle, visits to Newfoundland, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island will hopefully come my way.

Quebec

There is a sense of urgency amongst the citizens of Quebec. The further north and east you go, the more isolated from the anglophone element things become. There is a definite language distinction, and becoming frustrated with this is the worst thing the traveling Canadian can do.

One visit to the old city of Quebec is all it takes to convince you that Quebec is Canada...of this there can be no doubt. What a magnificent city! How many places can you go in North America and be returned to the 1600s? Quebecers have very solid cultural roots, and their traditional music has a wonderful flavour that often blends French and Celtic influences (who can forget the Irish who showed up here en masse in the 1840s?). There are so many more competent, deep-rooted musicians in Quebec than westerners realize. I have experienced first-hand the touring musician's mistake in thinking his material will sound original here. Experiencing the Montreal jazz festival, with its outrageously delirious crowds totally jamming the streets from wall to wall, is a humbling experience for anyone. Total bliss is imminent and takes hold of everyone in sight. No words can adequately describe the experience.

Ultimately, the best advice here is to make a pleasant and honest bid to try and learn the local ways: the language, culture, and heritage, while you're here. When you do, you'll find that these people will welcome you with happy, open arms, and you will have the experience of a lifetime in their wonderfully hospitable and capable hands. Vive le Québec!

Ontario

Canada's "centre" or MTA (I think that stands for Toronto Metropolitan Area, if you're up on the local lingo) is a place where people are too busy to notice the songwriter who is passing through and doing a couple of gigs. Everyone appears caught up in their own sense of importance...not necessarily a bad thing, but connecting with the locals requires you to break through the personal mental wall that each of them has built into their psyche as their survival/coping mechanism; a few moments are required before the real person appears and starts to communicate with you.

Deep-rooted here, however, is a very strong passion for things Canadian, as one soon determines that these people really enjoy being unique and will stand forward right away when the threat or aspect of "American", or "Foreign" comes to bear. Music festivals all over Ontario are huge events, and have an amazing and profound affinity and appreciation for Canada's own. These communities organize, commandeer, and host wonderful celebrations. Sudbury's Northern Lights Festival, Ottawa, and the Mariposa Fest are highly coveted, receiving thousands of performer applications each year.

The Prairies

Manitobans are much more laid back than the MTA crowd, but similar in many respects. The Winnipeg Folk Festival has a huge reputation and is highly valued by performers. Moving westward, one starts to sense a change in political climate as soon as the Ontario border passes, and for the musician it is also apparent that Winnipeegers are very proud of their musical heritage: the likes of the Guess Who and Neil Young have seen to that. Here we find a huge appreciation for things Canadian, and a fierce pride in being the true geographic center of a country with so much cultural heritage and so much musical potential still to be developed.

Alberta and Saskatchewan each maintain their own sense of what a music festival should be about. There is no question that the Calgary, Edmonton, and Regina festivals, North Country Fair and its counterpart South Country Fair, and many other local fests such as Canmore, Peace Fest, Jasper, and Ness Creek, are among the gigs most coveted by the traveling musician. Somehow both Alberta and Saskatchewan seem to be able to fund their artistic community quite adequately, and the local citizens continue to turn out in droves to support these long-running events. Volunteer support for the set-up, operation, and take-down of these events is always in huge supply. The perk of being able to mingle and rub shoulders with the incoming talent is a huge

bonus for the large array of willing helpers, and a genuinely international line-up of performers has come to be accepted by the ticket-buying public.

The North

I traveled the magnificent Alaska Highway on two summer road/camping tours through Northern British Columbia and the Yukon to perform at festivals such as Atlin (a beautiful place!... half Peggy's Cove and half Lake Louise). The wonderful people of the Canadian Northwest embody the notion that we are an absolutely amazing national "family", with more bonds, culture, and national fervor than would ever be superficially evident to any browser of the media.

And then there's Inuvik. A four-hour flight from Edmonton takes you there for the "End of the Road" Festival, and subsequent "fitting in" with the local citizenry is as if you've "always" been there...as if everybody commonly knows who everybody else is.

These places afford the musician the chance to meet the most hospitable and laid-back of all Canadians. The "need to celebrate", particularly in the summer, becomes the "modus operandi" when one lives or visits in these parts. The scenery is almost enough, but the "good-time weekend" is the dessert of life for these hardy folk. It's the hearty, cordial (and oh so serious!) invitation to come back in the fall for the last big fishing trip that sticks so warmly in one's heart (the two Ricks are both famous for their fish stories!).

The people of the high North are a definite wonder. On an amazing junket to Inuvik (be sure you say "In OO' vik", because the wrong syllable accent will have all the locals laughing... the word then means something totally gross and different...thanks to Dave for pointing this out!) to perform at the "End of the Road" Festival (complete with a courtesy flight from Canadian North Airlines), one becomes urgently aware of the need to be "out while the sun shines", because it literally does for twenty-plus hours or thereabouts...in mid-summer...a time that feels like the October of the southern Canadian regions. One senses that the winter darkness is a scary time for all. To experience such total darkness is definitely a time for the collective, fearful huddling together of the entire community. This need for warmth is evident in all of the locals, who know who everybody is long before they arrive...and expect that you know who they are without any need for introduction!

Such a strong sense of the importance of community is a unique quality that people of the extreme north all share, even if you're only here for a little while. A real town of 3,000 does exist here, many people perhaps don't realize this, and one can

find a typical main street (called Franklin Avenue...for obvious reasons!), hotels, stores, gas stations, churches, houses, and apartments...all built on stilted, above-ground foundations, and attached together by small “service tubes” that carry in the water, power and natural gas, and carry out the sewage. All of the vehicles were driven up the “Dempster”...the famous shale highway from Dawson City that ends in Inuvik. If you decide to try the drive, bring lots of extra gas in jerry cans, blankets, food, water, and at least two spare tires. Don’t try it in a small car!

British Columbia

Canada’s west coast is something else again. It’s very true that the city of Vancouver and the lower mainland hold the lion’s share of human activities and interaction, with many wonderful music festivals to choose from throughout the summer, but some real fine fests in this province can be found in the beautiful interior (Kispiox, Bulkley Valley and Salmon Arm, to name a few) and outer reaches of the province, particularly in places like Haida Gwaii (the politically correct name for the Queen Charlotte Islands). “The Edge of the World” is something else again for Canfolk aficionados.

Haida Gwaii is a place so enchanting and haunting that one cannot help but feel the incredible presence of the past and present spirits of the earth. Considering the horrific impact that the first Europeans had on the native totem-pole and longhouse builders—“peoples of the Raven and the Eagle” (commonly known as the Haida), where in one tragic decade 90 percent of the original 7000 residents succumbed to smallpox and tuberculosis—is for the visitor to these parts a sobering thought. The locals live and thrive as bearers of Mother Earth’s spirit and as stewards of one of her last remaining strongholds. Many believe that Haida Gwaii is the actual “last place on earth” where there is some hope for the survival of any kind of quality of life for mankind on this planet. This is an obvious and definite focal point of our Canadian heritage, where you will be greeted by bald eagles, ravens, and totems...who will accept your presence if your heart is true.

At the brilliant “Edge of the World” music festival each August in Tlell (40 km up the island from the Skidegate ferry port), this belief maintains its presence amongst all participants for the entire event and well beyond. The wonderful scenery of wide beaches on the east sloping up to massive snow-capped mountains on the west and an “outside the perimeter view” of the rest of Canada, where only a few remote mountain tips can be seen across the

ocean/ strait, is enough to put even the non-artist into the most creative of moods. And don’t forget the now traditional 2:00 AM supper of instantly-fresh-cooked halibut, caught that evening, brought in to the kitchen by the hostess as a complete fish (by the tail...a massive, eye-popping 40-pounder, albeit fairly typical for the locals), pan-fried with butter, pepper, and spices, and then totally devoured by every one of the billeted musicians (Elizabeth and Keith, you rock!). If you haven’t acknowledged Haida Gwaii you cannot call yourself a citizen of earth...this is where art and music become part of nature.

Robson Valley is another amazing festival event that shouldn’t be missed. Situated on the remote headwaters of the mighty Fraser, this event is the most “down home” of its kind. A brilliant array of different kinds of music can be enjoyed amongst the amazing, rural, rugged scenery. Put together in late August by a huge effort of the locals (the village of Dunster, B.C.), and hosted by the amazing band Mamaguroove, this magical place is the ultimate getaway. Haida Gwaii and Robson Valley—not Toronto and the 401—are the *real* Canada!

On Being a Canadian Musician: Some Concluding Thoughts

The process of songwriting is an interesting, exhilarating, and sometimes frustrating one. Many composers have pointed out that a song does not simply just appear in mind and then get written down. One does not usually create a song successfully from a predetermined idea or topic, either chosen or already at hand. I truly second this! In my experience, a good song will come into existence only in the wake of a heavy, emotional inspiration. All too often a songwriter will devise what he/she feels is a great, moving, catchy piece (usually in the wee hours of the morning!), only to be disheartened several days later by the discovery that the song doesn’t have anything that makes it stick in the listener’s psyche. The artist is then forced to remove the piece to the scrapheap, a pile often so large that it frustrates even the finest lyricists/composers. Countless one-hit wonder songwriters along the trail can testify to this.

Only a few of the previous generation of songwriters can be reckoned as truly prolific, although they include Neil Young, Gordon Lightfoot, Bruce Cockburn and Joni Mitchell, as well as such favourite non-Canadian artists as Paul Simon, Neil Diamond and Dougie MacLean. Some of them have even written songs about Canadian places and/or Canadian heroes. Yet, all the while, a large number of themes for project-worthy songs are frustratingly still waiting to “happen”. There remains a long,

unnerving list of incredible Canadian stories that need songs. Thankfully, quite a number of recent songwriters have been developing their ideas, successfully drawing upon their influences to create a Canadian kind of material. Mike Ford's recent CD *Canada Needs You* is a superb array of upscale, original material that is bound to appeal to adolescent school audiences. Kate and Anna McGarrigle, Valdi, Garry Fjellgard, Michael Mitchell, Buffy Sainte Marie, Terry Tufts, David Francey, John Wort Hannam, and Maria Dunn have all written wonderful songs that fall within the range of this theme. So now we are collectively building the solid body of Canadian material that we have lacked for too long.

Another important consideration for performers is the variety of audiences. Some are receptive and enthusiastic. Others are tough and very critical. Performing a concert or presentation with a project such as "Canada Songs" presents more than a few challenges. All too often an audience assumes incorrectly that the show will consist of previously-released songs by established Canadian artists, or that the performer should cover a particular Canadian song as a request. Junior high students in particular are one very tough crowd when it comes to music appreciation. A group of adolescents knows when a song-work has a certain "moxie". Recognizing this as a proving ground was a major factor in the grooming of my original material for other public audiences. Having this school environment as a place to cut one's teeth as a performer was of huge benefit in improving the calibre of the project material. Another challenging way of trying out new songs is by performing before veterans. I'm not normally afflicted with stage fright, but at a booking in Ottawa for the 60th anniversary of VJ Day celebrations, my nerves were rattling! Try to imagine: *standing there alone* as a solo act, a songwriter from western Canada in front of hundreds of military veterans and their families, Government ministers, Forces brass, and high profile media, attempting to retell as songs the stories of those present in the audience. Talk about pressure!

Becoming an adept stringed instrument player and proficient vocalist are definite prerequisites for anyone with a hankering to become a successful performer. All too often, it's a simple, acoustic sound that becomes the basic cement for a truly great song. Some performers are lucky to find that one instrument: an acoustic guitar, mandolin, or fiddle that simply finds its way into the soul and becomes a life mate. Other musicians are too busy enjoying the many different tonal characters of what new-found instruments can provide.

Many performers are quite fussy when it comes to the choice, selection and particular features or qualities of their personal musical instruments. For the "Canada Songs Project", I have been fortunate enough to acquire three Canadian-built acoustic guitars: a Morgan CR standard rosewood 6-string, a Morgan CR rosewood with a Venetian cutaway, and an older Larrivée deluxe 12-string. All of these instruments were expensive...Canadian-built in Vancouver. Morgan is a company founded by David Ianonne, who was a protégé of Jean Larrivée for many years. The Larrivée guitar is no stranger to fame. The company has become a worldwide success story, with its wonderfully traditional, no-plywood approach to instrument building and unique designs. Canada's instrument builders, with their access to some of the finest tone woods in the world, have become justifiably renowned.

Singing is an art that requires constant nurturing and improvement. Some advice: a good vocal coach can definitely make all the difference for the aspiring artist. Several years spent on weekly sessions or lessons will make the most profound difference in the professionalism, confidence, tonality, originality, and attitude of any performer. And always...perform each show like it's your last!

The bottom line, of course, is that it's all worth it...Driving a long, picturesque and scenic highway, living on the road, camping and sightseeing, waking up almost frozen, picnicking and hiking, foraging, sitting in a cozy library in a festival or conference city (as I write, that site is Prince Rupert, B.C., en route home from the Queen Charlotte Islands), and performing for an appreciative audience, all this makes for a wonderful, enriching life experience. Having an ambitious project that warrants such adventures is priceless! Seizing the opportunity to see our Canada (usually over the long highway) is something to cherish...and is definitely the *raison d'être* for all the efforts of this songsmith.

A land so vast, and with so many places and festivals to visit and experience, and so many other possibilities—the ever-present humble hospitality, the quality and calibre of the musicians and their material, the wonderful homes and festival sites, the people of the road, the sound techs and volunteers, the demeanour of the fest-goers, the dedicated media and their valuable feedback for performers—all these things continue to inspire me.

If you can share your reactions to the "Canada Songs Project" or wish to contact me for any other reason, please do so through the website www.canadasongs.com or e-mail directly at johns@shaw.ca.

Edith Cavell

John Spearn

Voice

John-ny worked on the farms of the Al-ber-ta prai-ries, and
thrived in the land of his birth. Then the war to end all wars, and ad-
ven-ture in Europe, he signed up to prove out his worth. He ad-
vanced with the charge through the barb-wire and can-nons, pressed on with his proud bra-ver-
y, When the ground ex-plo-ded in his tracks, he just float-ed right down in the mud and de-
bris. [second verse as first, then coda] She cared for the woun-ded, her heart to share, the
luck-y ones there did tell. Thanks and praise for a smile so rare, the
sol-diers, sur-viv-ors of hell.... at the feet of nurse Edith Ca-vell.

Johnny worked on the farms of the Alberta prairies
And thrived in the land of his birth.
Then the war to end all wars, and adventure in Europe,
He signed up to prove out his worth.
He advanced with the charge through the barbwire and cannons,
Pressed on with his proud bravery.
When the ground exploded in his tracks, he just floated
Right down in the mud and debris.

Jerry fought for the Kaiser when wars made us wiser
In the trenches near Alsace-Lorraine.
He dreamed of the Rhineland and a fräulein so fine,
But a chest wound! He struggled in vain.
In a hospice near Brussels they awoke near each other,
“Thank God, we’re alive...” they did pray.
“I was sure I was a goner!” they agreed with each other,
Through a sweet British nurse there that day.

She cared for the wounded, her heart to share,
The lucky ones there did tell.
Thanks and praise for a smile so rare,
The soldiers...survivors of hell,
At the foot of nurse Edith Cavell.

She calmed all the wounded, wherever they came from,
She healed them and toiled with no fear.
In a German advance she was caught and was questioned,
She was executed that year.
How could they know this fine lady so kind
Would be taken from them that way?
The grief and the sorrow all mankind would borrow,
In tears, all the world did pray.

She cared for the wounded, her heart to share,
The lucky ones there did tell.
Thanks and praise for a smile so rare,
The soldiers...survivors of hell,
At the foot of nurse Edith Cavell.

Johnny and Jerry saw Armistice come,
Soldiers’ stories to tell.
Then it happened one day, by chance two were there,
Two veteran survivors of hell...
In the world’s most beautiful dell
At the foot of Mount Edith Cavell.

Oh why, fair Meaghan, did you come to the west
To join me out here on this unbroken ground,
And give up your life, all the finest and best
Out of fair Charlottetown,
Out of fair Charlottetown?

Come dance, pretty Meaghan, my partner, my wife,
Tell me what made you choose such a hard, lonely
life,
No doubt we could never afford to go down
To see again fair Charlottetown,
To see again fair Charlottetown?

But when the crop comes in, we'll dance again,
We'll paint these bare walls if a good rain falls.
And the bad news from France about your brother
We'll pray for him
When the crop comes in.

And when the crop comes in, we'll dance again,
When the threshing crew is through I'll be home to
you.

And the bad news from France about your brother
We'll pray for him
When the crop comes in.

Oh how, Mother dear, did you stay in the west,
And bear these five sons and a daughter so fair,
With only the riches of the grand-kids at best,
And a sweet song when Sunday comes 'round,
And a sweet song when Sunday comes 'round?

Now at last your spirit is free to go down...
To see again fair Charlottetown,
To see again fair Charlottetown.

The Chilkoot Mountain Trail

John Spearn

Voice

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The lyrics are: 'There's gold dust fev - er where I'm trav-ellin', A cold old moun-tain that I'll climb. There's a north wind blow - in', in a valley, By a brook so clear I'll spend my time. On the Chilkoot moun-tain trail, With one more hill to go, There's gold a plent-y and souls for sellin'... But there ain't no love I know.'

There's gold-dust fever where I'm travellin'
A cold old mountain that I'll climb,
There's a north wind blowin' in a valley
By a brook so clear, I'll spend my time.

On the Chilkoot Mountain Trail,
With one more hill to go,
There's gold a-plenty and souls for sellin'
But there ain't no love...I know.

There's a rumour tellin', folks are yellin'
 'Bout a hidden river filled with gold!
 And a poor man's riches, liquor spillin'
 It's a tale of freedom...and I'm sold.

Up the Chilkoot Mountain Trail
 The Klondike heavy haul,
 There's claims a-plenty and lives for sellin'
 But there ain't no love...at all.

Well, they stole my pack and took my saddle,
 Left me out here, sure is cold!
 There'll be no more gamblin', no more ramblin'
 Frozen toes won't find no gold.

Up the Chilkoot Mountain Trail
 The Klondike heavy haul,
 There's claims a-plenty and lives for sellin'
 But there ain't no love...at all.

Guess I got lucky, just survivin'
 Dawson graveyard's got no room.
 Twelve men got rich...out of sixty thousand,
 Not too many got back home.

On the Chilkoot Mountain Trail
 The Yukon river flows,
 There's demons a-plenty and death foretellin'
 And there ain't no gold...I know.

Dieppe

John Spearn

Voice

We rode on a wave ___ to Di - eppe ___ that day, There was ___
 Fren - chy, Mack, 'n me in our proud Black Ber-ets. Can - a-di-an com-man-dos, ___ five
 thous-and strong were we, So glad to be de - liv-er-ing lib - er - ty, ___ But the
 Ger-mans ___ were there on the shore. [after second verse] Cry ___ no more... _____
 A

We rode on a wave to Dieppe that day,
There was Frenchy, Mack, 'n' me, in our proud Black Berets.
Canadian commandos, five thousand strong were we,
So glad to be delivering liberty,
But the Germans were there, on the shore.

Dave Mack ran a gamut, way out in front of the boys,
We just couldn't see, through the smoke, fire, and noise.
We knew he could run, but rock sand, his pack, and his gun...
In a blinding flash on the shore...
Cry no more.

Frenchy led the way past the gun-caves we could see,
With a fine eye and luck he knocked out two or three.
The boys heard armour rollin', closer than they wanted to be,
It seemed so sudden for Frenchy... "Pousser des cris."

With as many dead as wounded, pinned down we can't break free,
I just want to go back to my Saskatoon prairie.
They're picking us off like flies, I can't take it no more,
Dear Lord, please sail us off this shore,
One thousand men lay dyin', dear Lord...
Cry no more.

One thousand men lay dyin', dear Lord...
Cry no more.
We rode on a wave to Dieppe that day,
We rode on a wave to Dieppe that day.

