

Awakening to Medicine Dream

Contemporary Native Music from Alaska with Newfoundland Roots

Janice Esther Tulk, Memorial University of Newfoundland

Whenever I begin to discuss my interest in contemporary Native music with someone, almost immediately I am asked how I, an obviously non-Native, red-haired, blue-eyed Newfoundlander, developed such an interest. Indeed, it was one of the first questions asked by John Field, a member of the band Medicine Dream, during his interview. Memory, of course, is a funny thing at times; it can appear as if something was always a part of you – you cannot remember a time when it was not there. Yet, at some point in your life, you were introduced to your current passion.

My first exposure to world music occurred at Memorial University of Newfoundland through a course taught by Dr. Kati Szego. This course, which focussed on the music of Africa and the Americas, quickly developed my appreciation for many different styles of music. Of most interest to me at that time were the syncretic musics I encountered. The term paper for the course afforded the opportunity to conduct an in-depth study of a single piece of music and my mind immediately turned to the music of Medicine Dream.

Not long before I started this course, my friend had played a CD of Native music for me. Her brother, Paul Pike, had released an independent recording in Alaska in 1998. I recalled the pop and rock stylings of the group intermingled with Native drumming and singing, and phoned Chrissy immediately. Within days Paul's CD had arrived in my mailbox and I was trying to understand how this music "worked." Feeling unsatisfied with a purely musical analysis, I began to wonder how and why Paul chose to compose this music in the first place. Another quick call to Corner Brook and I was drafting an e-mail to Paul, whose alias at the time was "mikmaqinak" – Mi'kmaq in Alaska. Paul eagerly responded to my message, willing to teach me about his music and, specifically, the group's use of vocables in the song "Jalasi." Soon, my term paper was complete and I was returning to Corner Brook for the summer. To my delight, Paul would be visiting in July and performing at a Mi'kmaq cultural heritage day.

On Saturday, 24 July 1999, I drove to the centre of town to a place known as Majestic Lawn for what would be the first annual Elmastukwek Mi'kmaq

Mawio'Mi (Bay of Islands Mi'kmaq Gathering). The sun was shining brightly and the grass was a vibrant green. A flatbed truck parked at one end of the field served as a stage, equipment scattered along its entire length. To the right, barbeques and coolers silently sat waiting to provide refreshments to all who joined the gathering. Directly in front of me, in the centre of the lawn, were the Sipu'ji'j Drummers from Conne River drumming and singing.

Throughout the afternoon, I learned about Mi'kmaq culture. Among those at the microphone educating the growing audience were Paul and a Mi'kmaq Elder. I watched the dancers, who were also visiting from Conne River, lead a round dance so that everyone present could join in. Soon I was part of a large circle, largely comprised of people for whom this was an entirely new experience. As the afternoon progressed, I impatiently awaited the performance of Medicine Dream. While only Paul, the lead singer and composer, travelled from Alaska, there would be a full band performing complete renditions of Paul's music. Local musicians were prepared to take the stage, many of them playing a style of music that they had never even heard before.



Medicine Dream in concert

The outdoor concert attracted an enormous audience, everyone intently listening to this new sound and celebrating the culture of the Mi'kmaq people of Western Newfoundland. Song after song, Paul's music was applauded by all. The day ended with an honour song, as all in attendance held hands in a circle around the drum. Later that night I joined the Pike family at their home to celebrate the success of the gathering. At this time, I gave Paul a dream catcher

that I had made to thank him for all he had taught me via e-mail earlier in the year. These first personal experiences have provided the impetus for a sustained interest in contemporary Native music, as well as Mi'kmaq culture.

Birth of a Band

Medicine Dream was formed in Anchorage, Alaska, in 1996. Its members are descendants of several different indigenous groups, including representatives of the Mi'kmaq, Aleut, Inupiaq, Lakota, Yup'ik, and Apache Nations, as well as one non-Native performer who is of German and Scandinavian heritage. Paul Pike, the group's primary composer, lead vocalist, and musician, grew up in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, playing popular music on an electric guitar. After moving to Alaska, he became involved in traditional Native music while still performing popular music. Paul envisioned a fusion of the two and formed Medicine Dream. Their music uses English texts and vocables as a common language among the different indigenous groups and is a synthesis of traditional instruments (flutes and drums) with rock and popular elements (electric guitar, bass, and keyboard). Their first album (entitled *Identity*) appeared in 1998, and reveals a syncretic or fusal style that points to the group's inter-tribal composition, as well as its interaction with a variety of popular music styles.

In 2000, the group released their second album (and first recording with Canyon Records), entitled *Mawio'Mi* (Mi'kmaq meaning 'Gathering'). This album increasingly emphasizes Paul Pike's Mi'kmaq heritage in both the cover design, a piece of quill work displaying a Mi'kmaq eight-point star made by Paul which he wears on his regalia, and the liner notes, which provide background information on the plight of the Mi'kmaq people of Newfoundland. The recently released *Tomegan Gospem* (2002) makes a political statement about the government of Newfoundland and its treatment of the Mi'kmaq people, addressing issues such as the mercenary myth (colonial powers taught school children until the 1980s that the Mi'kmaq had massacred the Beothuk people), the residential schools, and the idea that the only indigenous people of Newfoundland are the now-extinct Beothuk. It also uses the Mi'kmaq language for some of the lyrics and includes instrumental works which were inspired by places in *Ktagmkuk* (Newfoundland).

The Significance of Place

It was not until the Spring of 2002 that I realised there

was a certain significance to Paul Pike's e-mail alias "mikmaqinak," to being a Mi'kmaq in Alaska. My second week there I spent a great deal of time with Paul. I learned much from him about his Native culture, his music, and the audience for his music. Most often, this learning occurred while driving around Anchorage or on the highway to Wasilla through informal conversations. Several themes recurred in our conversations each time we met, the most significant being that of place.



Janice Tulk with Medicine Dream

My first day with Paul started with a trip to a recording studio where he was recording commercials for a local business. Once they were finished, we went to a diner called Blondies for breakfast. It was here that Paul first described Newfoundland as "colonial." At first I was not quite certain what he meant; however, it soon all became clear. By colonial, Paul was referring to the fact that the only acknowledged culture in Newfoundland is that of the English and Irish (Celtic). He felt that there was no cultural diversity there, but found in Alaska the multiculturalism on which he thrives.

Two days later, our conversation regarding the "colonial" nature of Newfoundland continued. It was then that Paul told me that he believes, and has been told by others, that if he had tried to start Medicine Dream in Newfoundland, it never would have happened and would still be a dream. The music is "too different" for the people there. Reiterating the Irish-centric nature of Newfoundland, Paul pointed out the incredibly strong ties that exist between Newfoundland and Ireland. But he noted that the Newfoundland population is far more diverse than merely Irish. Mi'kmaq music is rarely (if ever) aired on the radio and during the Newfoundland hour, primarily Irish-Newfoundland music is played. The Native population is not the only one ignored in this manner; little French music is aired on radio stations. It was in Alaska, a place of encouraged and visible multiculturalism, of a strong Native population, of

radio support for Native musicians, that Medicine Dream could flourish.

While the group Medicine Dream is physically based in Alaska, its music is placed in Newfoundland. Thus, it is important to note from the start that the location where a music is produced is not necessarily the place being referenced or for which it is produced. Language, themes, and references to places in Newfoundland all contribute to the particularity of Paul Pike's music. Paul uses the Mi'kmaq language, especially on the album *Tomegan Gospem*, to refer to a specific people, the people who understand it. Some of the Mi'kmaq words used in songs and as titles for songs are direct references to places that are significant for Paul. For example, *Ktaqmkuk* is the Mi'kmaq word for Newfoundland, which translates as "the far shore over the waves." Further, *Tomegan Gospem* is an area in Newfoundland that is also known as Gabriel's Lake, "the traditional caribou hunting territory of the Gabriel family" (*Tomegan Gospem*). Paul is a descendant of the Gabriel family and in this instrumental piece portrays his ancestral relationship to this location. Location is intricately linked with the identity of a person and the naming of specific locales reinforces the significance of place in relation to a person's identity.¹

Expanding upon the idea that referring to specific places in a song places the music, I suggest that references to political leaders of an area also locates the music in a particular place. One of Paul's songs makes reference to Joey Smallwood, a former Premier of Newfoundland and one of the fathers of the Canadian Confederation. The reference to this political leader, "Joey Smallwood was wrong, he was so wrong. We've been here all along," points to the fact that during the negotiations that led to confederation, Smallwood did not secure any rights for the Mi'kmaq people of the island. While some Canadians may recognize the Smallwood name, it is unlikely that the Alaskan audience would have knowledge of the history of confederation or of Smallwood. This reference, then, firmly locates Medicine Dream's music in Newfoundland and is directed at the broader listening audience as a means of educating them.

In the same manner, using the term *L'nuk* refers to a specific people located in Newfoundland. The *L'nuk* are the Mi'kmaq people of *Ktaqmkuk*, as Paul points out in the song "Time Immemorial": "We are the *L'nuk*, our home is known as *Ktaqmkuk*, but somebody came and called it Newfoundland." Here the term that refers to the Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland is immediately followed by a place locator, showing

how intricately linked identity is to place.

While this music is obviously locally placed, it is at the same time universal or placeless. Often it is the messages in songs sung by Medicine Dream that are noted as being universal. Specifically Paul is describing the experience of the Mi'kmaq people. However, the message is also heard and understood universally; other Native people can relate to it. When asked how he relates to Paul's music and the themes featured therein, George Newton, a member of Medicine Dream who is of Aleut and Inupiaq heritage, replied that the music speaks to "generally everybody" (Newton, personal communication). The concerns that are expressed in the music, of the changes that occurred in Native life after contact with Europeans, of the oppression they suffered at the hands of the Europeans, are understood by all oppressed peoples. George explains:

Hearing Paul's stories of what's happened back there, a lot of false truths, people not understanding where they came from, acknowledgement of who they are, crosses over to a lot of people who are just trying to find their own identity. You know, music is a strong way of expressing via words, if not in a musical sense, that understanding of what happened to a certain people. The commonality of everybody in some way or another means everybody could easily understand the stories of the Mi'kmaq people, be it all they've gone through, how they've persevered, and how they're refining themselves in today's society. It's very similar to where my heritage comes from. As much as Paul's on a journey, I myself am on a journey. (Newton, personal communication)

In general, there was a feeling of universality in Paul's music and its message. While the members of the group have not lived the Mi'kmaq experience, enough similarity exists in the oppression of Native people in general that they could relate to it. Former band member Cea Anderson expressed her personal connection with the music she performs as part of Medicine Dream:

When [Paul] speaks of the problems that his people have had, I understand. I know about my blood line. My great-grandmother was relocated off the Aleutian Islands in the forties, when the Japanese attacked. When the Japanese attacked the Aleutian Islands, they moved everyone who was an eighth value or more and evacuated them off the Island. And they went into camps, and when they were in these camps they didn't have adequate water and sanitation, so the elders and the children passed. There were a lot of grave markers left there. My great-grandmother passed in that camp. There's a kind of sadness that comes

with all that and I think it's something that's left in you, but you can't really explain it. But you know that your people have suffered a lot of sadness and that you might carry that in your heart. (Anderson, personal communication)

It is this suffering that has generally been felt by all Native peoples oppressed by those outside their cultures. It is a common theme that they can relate to. Steven Alvarez, the band's drummer, makes this point more overtly:

Well, I can relate to a lot of [Paul's music] because most of the issues in one Native group pretty much are the same issues with all Native groups, dealing with the loss of sovereignty, the loss of land, dealing with a warped view or historical writings in history books or Hollywood, stereotyping. I can relate to a lot of it, because they're pretty much Native issues across the board. The Mi'kmaq people, there may be specific issues that they are dealing with, but you can find those same kind of issues in one aspect or another with most Native groups. (Alvarez, personal communication, 2002)

Gilbert "Buz" Daney, who provides traditional vocals and drumming for the group's music, in much the same way notes that the issues that the Mi'kmaq have faced are similar to those that Alaska Natives have endured (Daney, personal communication, 2002). He also pointed out the atrocities perpetrated on the Choctaw people when they were relocated to Oklahoma, a journey during which many died. The themes of Paul's music and the issues he addresses, though specifically referring to and describing the Mi'kmaq experience, are widely understood by Native people in general. They are the issues that all Native nations face.

In addition to universal themes, there are other elements which add to the universal nature of Medicine Dream's music. While the Mi'kmaq language specifically points to the Mi'kmaq people, the use of vocables (such as we, he, ya, ho) as a common mode of expression between all Native groups removes the music from its particular place, rendering it placeless. The use of vocables is significant; vocables provide a means of expressing complex emotions. In Paul's words, "We call [vocables] the language of our souls. Anyone can sing them. They're not actual words, per se, but they're feelings. They're sounds of feelings and . . . sometimes there are feelings that words just cannot express" (Pike, personal communication). Multiple communications with Paul emphasized the fact that vocables can be sung by anyone. They do not require an intricate knowledge of a language, nor are they difficult to pronounce. Having heard them once,

someone new to the music is able to sing along because of their universal nature. I also believe that the use of the English language is a marker of universality. Like vocables, English may be used as a common language among many diverse Native Nations.

The drumming and singing heard on a Medicine Dream CD is in an inter-tribal powwow style. This style of music emerged with the rise of powwows as social and cultural events, and has greatly influenced the music of Medicine Dream. Medicine Dream uses a powwow drum in their music; a large double-headed drum that sits in a frame with the heads parallel to the ground, so that the top head can be played, usually by 4-6 men striking it with padded beaters. This drum is played throughout the concert, sometimes by Buz and sometimes by the entire group gathered around it. The drumming and singing styles employed by Paul's group, then, are in inter-tribal powwow style, in which regional characteristics are not featured.



Medicine Dream

An in-depth study of two of Medicine Dream's songs from the recording *Tomegan Gospem* can illustrate the layering of both Native and non-Native elements to create contemporary Native music. First, I will examine "Time Immemorial," a song which makes use of the Mi'kmaq language, along with English, as well as a synthesis of Native and popular musical elements. Then I will turn to "People of the Dawn," which takes as its basis a round dance and is mixed with contemporary influences.

"Time Immemorial" was written by Paul Pike to describe the relationship between the Mi'kmaq and Beothuk Nations in *Ktagmkuk*, and their relationship to the land as First Nations people. The text of this song locates the music in a specific place, *Ktagmkuk*, by naming the place, as well as the *L'nuk* people. This song also names the Red Ochre People, or Beothuk Nation, who were indigenous to Newfoundland. The

following song text retains Paul Pike's own pronunciation guide of the Mi'kmaq words and a translation of that text by Paul, who was aided by Mike Doucette of the Eskasoni Mi'kmaq Nation:

Go inside yourself, what do you believe?
Do you want to know the truth about our Island?
We lived on this land since time immemorial,
We shared it with the Red Ochre People.

Chorus: [Spelled as pronounced]
Unkee-dayden...dun-delli-gen-eye-eck [Think of our strength]
Mini-goo-eek dook-ay-meck
Wes-co wee-dyke. [We are on the Island]
Unkee-dayden...dun-de-jick sooloo-look. [How much I love you]
Oooh...meema-jool-dee-eck [We are alive]
Mel-gee-genoo-aw-see. [We're made strong]

We are the *L'nuk*, our home is known as
Ktaqmkuk,
But somebody came and called it Newfoundland.
The Beothuk Nation, they lived just north of us,
And even though they're gone, we still pray for them.

Bridge: Their Spirits are dancing, along side our people.
Even in death, we're so alive.
Chorus

"Time Immemorial" features two measures of solo guitar in duple time as an introduction. The first verse is voiced only by Paul and accompanied by guitar, in the manner of a rock ballad. At the chorus, the group joins in singing the Mi'kmaq text with the addition of synthesizer. Of particular note here is the contour of the phrasing. The start of each of the two phrases of the chorus begins on a high note and continues in a descending fashion, in the manner of some traditional Native singing. The second verse returns to the same melodic contour and thin texture of the first verse, incorporating drum kit and synthesizer. The group joins Paul again for a short bridge that emphasizes Western harmony, followed by the second iteration of the chorus. This is immediately followed by a guitar solo, with more active drum kit and keyboards. Next there is a significant stylistic shift in the music – group voices sing the chorus accompanied only by the powwow drum in a steady eighth-note rhythm. The texture then returns to that of the second time through the chorus and the chorus is repeated. The song ends with four measures of solo guitar in a manner similar to the introduction.

This song, then, demonstrates the fusion of both Native and non-Native elements. The non-Native elements of guitar and drum kit, along with popular vocal style and verse-chorus form, are part of a

universal pop/rock style. The inter-tribal vocals which feature a descending melodic contour point to a Native style; however, the addition of the Mi'kmaq language unmistakably places the music among the Mi'kmaq people and the text, with words such as *L'nuk*, among the Mi'kmaq people of Newfoundland. Finally, the drum from the powwow tradition informs the drumming style used. Throughout *Medicine Dream's* music, there is a balance of Native and non-Native elements, as well as universal aspects of the music with the particular. A study of "People of the Dawn" will further demonstrate this.

"People of the Dawn" is another song which makes reference to the Mi'kmaq specifically, as these people are known as the People of the Dawn. It reinforces the connection of the people to their ancestors and the land, describing the cultural activities that celebrate the coming of summer and the thanks that is given for the gifts of shelter and food.

When the summertime has come
To the People of the Dawn
We'll be fishing on the coasts
Like our ancestors have done.
When we crawled out of the earth
Our spirit was born
We were purified and ready
We were thankful evermore.

Chorus:
When the summertime has come
To the People of the Dawn
We'll be dancing for our elders
We'll be dancing for the young
When the summertime has come
To the People of the Dawn.
We, we yo he yo, we yo he yo,
we yo we yo, we yo hi yo, we yo hi yo
we yo he he yo ho

For the gifts that we were given
The shelter and the food
Our families that surround us
Oh, and the strength to keep us true
All the times that we've been lonely
When we took the wrong path
The stars came out to guide us
In our journeys on the land.

First Half Chorus:
When the summertime has come
To the People of the Dawn
We'll be dancing for our elders
We'll be dancing for the young
When the summertime has come
To the People of the Dawn.

Bridge: Dawn. . . dawn. . .

Second Half Chorus:

We, we yo he ya, we yo he ya,
we yo we yo, we yo hi ya, we yo hi ya
we yo we yo he he.he

[second half of chorus (slight variation) in
background throughout]

All the men will be singing
Singing songs from the heart
And are all women
Life givers. . .

First Half Chorus

To the People of the Dawn
When the summertime has come
To the People of the Dawn.

Once again, this song demonstrates the blending of two styles. It makes use of the English language and vocables as a common language that is understood by all, and once again features Western harmonies and pop/rock influences. However, the Native elements are foregrounded against a Western sonic background. “People of the Dawn” begins with a drum intro, a round dance played on a hand drum. The technique used is unique – the head is struck by a padded beater and a finger on the hand holding the frame drum flicks against the underside of the head to create a buzzing timbre when it makes contact with the already vibrating membrane. The first verse features Paul with guitar. The group joins in on the chorus, which features vocables in a descending melodic contour. Verse two, which reverts back to Paul’s voice accompanied by guitar, also features synthesizer and drum. The first half of the chorus is sung by the entire group, followed by a bridge with voices and guitar. Then the second half of the chorus, the vocables, are sung with slight variation. The third verse is half the length of the first and second verses, layered over the vocables, which are once again sung in slight variation. The chorus returns for a final time, sung by the entire group, followed by Paul singing “To the People of the Dawn/When the summertime has come to the People of the Dawn.” The song ends with the drumming that opened the song. This round dance is prominent in the opening and closing sections, but it is not heard in the sections that are more heavily rock-oriented.

The text of “People of the Dawn,” while specifically referring to the Mi’kmaq of Newfoundland, has a universal character in that it describes the events that accompany the arrival of summer. Certainly these events would apply to many different Native peoples, not just the Mi’kmaq. While it mentions the fishing on the coasts of Newfoundland and the ancestors of a specific people, it does not include the naming of

places and the audience can relate to the general nature of the events. Again we hear the universal appeal of pop/rock elements, inter-tribal vocals, vocables, and the rhythms of the hand drum. Here we find that the lyrics are specific to a locale, but the underlying music is of a universal nature.

The music of Medicine Dream, then, is both general and nation-specific at the same time. The Alaskan audience, listeners around the world, and the band members relate to Paul’s music on a global or universal level in that they can relate to many of the themes featured within it. Further, there is a universal element to the music that does not indicate a specific place. Both pop/rock and inter-tribal powwow music are non-specific styles which speak to many and reflect little in the way of regional styles. However, Paul’s songs are specifically placed in Newfoundland with references to the island and the use of the Mi’kmaq language, providing an interesting discrepancy as the ‘local’ aspect of Medicine Dream’s music resides thousands of kilometres away from the place that it is made and performed.

Creating CDs, Performing, and Upholding Native Values

In the creation of CDs, Paul Pike has the opportunity to present his personal identity. The cover artwork of *Mawio’Mi* (2000) features the Mi’kmaq eight-point star on a piece of quillwork made by Paul. Paul told me that seven of the points of the star signify the seven tribes of the Mi’kmaq people. The eighth point represents the Queen and European contact. It is a symbol of peace and of the Mi’kmaq people. He regularly wears this on his regalia. As an image on a CD cover it also represents Paul, who created it and wears it. It displays his participation and membership in a Native community. In a similar manner, the artwork for *Tomegan Gospem* (2002) is also representative of who Paul is as a Mi’kmaq of Newfoundland; it is a traditional birch bark carving that Paul himself carved. These symbols are also used on posters advertising upcoming performances of Medicine Dream and are featured on the Medicine Dream website (www.medicinedream.com).

The liner notes of Medicine Dream’s most recent CD with Canyon Records reinforce the members’ heritages and cultures, which are essential to their identities. Those of *Tomegan Gospem* emphasize the role of elders in Native communities. They are honoured people who “pass on stories to us and they help teach us about who we are and where we came from” (*Mawio’Mi*). Further, it points out the importance of giving in a Native community, a value

featured in give-aways at powwows and potlatch ceremonies: “When a member of our community is in need, we don’t turn our backs on them, we hold on to our traditional ways and by ‘giving’ of ourselves, in this way we also bring blessings to our own families” (*Tomegan Gospem*). These Native values are presented as a common characteristic of all Native peoples, a common identity among diverse heritages.

The importance of family is stressed in Native communities and is a significant aspect of Medicine Dream’s music. Their CDs are dedicated to family and friends, and usually include lengthy lists of family members. The song “Missing You” was composed for “msit nokamaq”, literally meaning “all my relations,” an expression used by many Native people to indicate that we are all family, all related to one another (*Tomegan Gospem*). “Missing You” begins with vocables, followed by Mi’kmaq text and then an English translation that expresses the love Paul has for his family and that he will return to them. “Msit Nokamaq,” a track from the first CD with Canyon Records (*Mawio’Mi*), is an instrumental piece that incorporates vocables; neither the Mi’kmaq nor English language are sung in this song. In this case, the vocables and flute are expressing the connectedness of all people. The use of vocables is significant here; it can be difficult to express the emotions one feels regarding one’s family. Vocables provide a means of expressing these complex emotions, as Paul points out. They are sounds that express emotion without the use of words that may interfere.

Paul wrote “People of the Dawn” as an expression of solidarity with all indigenous peoples who have lost land to European powers and whose treaties securing their land rights have not been upheld (*Tomegan Gospem*). Similarly, “We Belong” was composed for Alaska Natives fighting for their land rights and for sovereignty (*Mawio’Mi*). Its lyrics best express the Native position on the European encroachment of their lands:

Since time immemorial, say the people of this land,
We care about our Mother, we care and understand,
That the poisoning of life and the taking of our lands,
You can’t justify the arrogance. We belong to this land.

An anthem to support land claims, this song also expresses the desire for Native people to be able to live in traditional ways and express their Native identity: “And with this prayer, we pray for peace and understanding, that we might be free to be ourselves.”

Sovereignty and self-determination are important issues for Native peoples. Paul wrote “If We Were Wolves” to express “the frustration of trying to be free as an Indigenous person in North America” where tribal sovereignty has been lost to “the hands of law makers and even average citizens” (*Mawio’Mi*). The striking message of this song, “If we were wolves, we’d be on endangered lists, points out the situation of Native peoples. They are an oppressed people whose culture is being lost as they lose their rights; they have no one taking up their cause and fighting for their survival. Yet, people take up the cause of endangered animals all the time. Why not endangered peoples? Paul notes,

We’ve often heard or read about how people, environmentalists, will chain themselves to the front of a ship to protect whales, and other indigenous creatures, wolves or whatever. But you rarely see anyone standing up to protect indigenous peoples in the same way. It’s just kind of interesting, but if indigenous people were wolves, we’d be all in endangered lists. It was this tongue-in-cheek kind of look at it. (Pike, personal communication)

Sovereignty is essential for Native peoples to be able to make decisions as a people and live life as they wish, to freely express their Native identity.

Paul’s stories, conveyed in song, and informative CD liner notes have a didactic purpose; they are meant to teach listeners about culture and alternate accounts of history. Further, they are political and attempt to raise awareness about political issues, such as Native rights to land. Their messages, which reflect Native culture and beliefs, model the behaviours valued among Native people, such as strong connections to family and respect for Elders.

In actual performances on stage, Medicine Dream displays their respect for tradition. The use of tobacco and the prayer at the start of each concert is significant, as described by Paul:

We always say a prayer before we perform, usually for if someone is struggling or having a hard time, or for a family member, or anything. In the traditional way, we pray with tobacco. Tobacco is like an offering and for what the drum represents, of all our cultures, we pay respects to the drum when we go out there. Even though it’s not a blessed drum, we still treat it with that same respect. So, before we go to our different instruments, that’s the first thing we do, we pay respects to the drum with that prayer in our hand, and we put that tobacco on the drum. It’s all symbolic. But we do that and it seems to give us that much more of a unity – I don’t know, I can’t

explain it. Something happens, people . . . feel something when they're [at a Medicine Dream concert]. There's like a vibration in the room. (Pike, personal communication)

This act, then, is an important part of the performance process which incorporates tradition and brings unity to the group.



Medicine Dream: onstage communication

In performance, Paul describes events that led to the creation of his music and explains the significance of these songs to his audience. In these stories of oppression, the audience members, both Native and non-Native, Alaskan and non-Alaskan, ranging in age from small children to elders, find something to which they relate. Through the cultivation of collective memory, experiences that can be seen as universals among Native peoples are called into the minds of the audience members, and they find some 'truth' in Paul's performance and stories even though his stories specifically refer to the experience of the Mi'kmaq people. Like an emcee at a powwow, Paul introduces songs and explains who is being honoured with each song. Further, when describing the events that occurred in Newfoundland, he relates them to those that occurred in Alaska, helping to create a general consciousness. For example, when Paul talks about the residential schools in Newfoundland, he reminds the audience that in Alaska the residential schools were called boarding schools, something to which they can relate.

The reminder of similar events between Newfoundland and Alaska is a technique that calls to mind a collective memory of events and was used to introduce the song "People of the Dawn" at the Medicine Dream concert I attended at the Alaska Native Heritage Center on 9 June 2002. Following the song "Tomegan Gospem," Paul explained:

Back where I'm from, Mi'kmaq people are known as the People of the Dawn. And a lot of them, like many other nations, even here in Alaska, many people have had a lot of wrongful things said about them over the generations and in the history

book and what not. I kept picturing for myself, for my own culture, a little boy or a little girl looking on the Internet and looking up stories of the Newfoundland Micmac or Mi'kmaq people and constantly seeing these untrue stories of mercenaries and I wanted to try to tell our Elder's side of the story on some of the songs on this CD. And this song is called "People of the Dawn" and I hope that you enjoy it.

In such a way, a song that is specific to a particular group of people, the Mi'kmaq, is understood by an audience that does not include Mi'kmaq people but who still are able to relate to the stories told by Paul. On stage, Paul does not wear his regalia or the quillwork featured on the *Mawio'Mi* CD; however, his Native identity is shown through his dress. Dress is one way in which each member of the band can express an individual identity. Paul purposefully decided that while everyone in the band should wear something of his or her heritage, it need not be something as overt as 'buckskin and feathers.' Instead, as a contemporary band he deemed it appropriate to wear vests to unify their look while each person's vest would be a unique expression of their heritage:

We're trying to represent all these different cultures, all these different people. We don't want us all to look the same because as human beings, we're all unique. But we also want to show the pride of our own ethnic backgrounds that we come from when we do perform. (Pike, personal communication)

Paul's vest is made of caribou hide and has bone beadwork on it. These materials are used because the Mi'kmaq people traditionally used caribou hides for clothing.

Both Gilbert "Buz" Daney and Steven Alvarez have worn ribbon shirts in performance. These shirts identify them as drummers of a particular group, such as the Sleeping Lady Drum Group of which Buz is a member. Again this clothing shows who they are and what they value in their lives. A Mescalero Apache, Steve wears turquoise and a bear's claw in performance, as well as eagle feathers in his long hair. When I asked Steve to tell me what he wears on stage and the significance of it, he explained: "I wear turquoise. It is part of the Apache tradition as the stone is believed to hold power. I also wear a bear's claw. The Apache believe that the bear is our cousin" (Alvarez, personal communication 2003). These symbols, then, are an expression of his heritage. Asked the same question, Buz noted that he wears his ivory wedding band on a chain around his neck at every concert. Artist James Afcan carved Buz's and his wife's wedding bands from the same piece of ivory

and both display a carved rose. Buz noted that Uncle Walter Austin, a respected elder in Alaska, has said that the rose is a symbol for Native Americans (Daney, personal communication, 2003). During the Medicine Dream concert on 9 June 2002, Buz also wore a Medicine Dream hair clip around his ponytail that was created by the band's friend and supporter Don LaVonne.

George Newton, part Aleut and part Inupiaq from Alaska, wears a vest of fur seal and a choker around his neck. This fur seal vest is particularly significant for George, as it was his father's:

It was a gift to my father. It has his initials on the inside, D.T.N, Donald T. Newton. I forget the lady who made it, she's from Nome, a very well-known artist. She made it for my father and we had one of our very first gigs to do, that was for Native Voices, I believe. Paul was like, maybe we'll wear something, some kind of regalia, not up there in suits and ties, something that represents your heritage. And my dad just pulled it out of the closet and he said, "Hey, how about you wear this?" It does not really cover my Aleut heritage, but more from the North, Inupiaq. It's just been really nice to wear. (Newton, personal communication)

In wearing it, George is displaying who he is, both as an individual and as a member of the Native community. Further, in wearing a vest owned by his father, George is also reinforcing his familial ties.

Former band member Cea Anderson used her dress to portray the multiple aspects of her heritage. Showing her Aleut-Russian heritage, Cea wore a black, gold, and red belt that was woven by the Russians. Her black vest trimmed in fur was created by a friend, and Patrick Lind, a former Medicine Dream member, painted the scene depicted on it. Her beaded headpiece was made by a woman in Southeast Alaska. All of these items display Cea's background and connection to a community and to important individuals in her life. The connection continues to the drum that she plays on stage which she constructed with her daughter when she was four. This drum is made with deer skin because there are deer on Kodiak Island, the island where Cea's grandmother lived (Anderson, personal communication).

Thus far, we have considered how the Native members of Medicine Dream express their individual identities through dress. But how does this play out for the one non-Native member in the group? John Field enjoys the accepting atmosphere and strong sense of community exhibited by Alaska Natives and is happy to be part of a Native band. He is a musician first and foremost who enjoys playing good music. When asked

if he wears anything from his heritage onstage, he revealed that he has no idea what to wear without looking ridiculous. He jokingly suggested that he wear a blond wig and horns to show his German and Scandinavian heritage.

What colour, then, is John's vest? When John takes the stage, it is in a black vest, seemingly without significance. When I asked why John chose to wear a black vest, he proudly and humourously replied, "Black is the colour of rock 'n' roll!" He listed a few musicians who were known for their black clothing, the most prominent being Johnny Cash.

In my interactions with John, he did not express any personal connection or experience that he relates to the themes found in Medicine Dream's music. For him, Medicine Dream has been a learning experience that teaches him more about Native American issues and Indigenous rights. He believes strongly that these issues need to be addressed and that music is the way to do so.

Sobriety became a mission statement of sorts for this band after Paul's friend K.C. LaFevre committed suicide, having lost his battle with drugs and alcohol. Alcohol has been particularly destructive among the Native population. It is for this reason that all of the proceeds from the sale of *Identity* were given to the K.C. LaFevre Memorial Fund and the band continues to make contributions to substance abuse programs. John pointed out that statistics show that Alaska has the highest per capita incidence of alcoholism of all the states. Further, he noted that the health problems associated with alcoholism, be they physical or sociological, are significantly high in Alaska. The belief among band members is that educating people about their identity is the path to sobriety: "We're trying to provide a positive message about being strong, learning about who you are, and where you come from, and not abusing alcohol and drugs" (Field, personal communication).

Buz spoke to the importance of sobriety as a first step towards wellness for Native peoples. For Buz, sobriety means not only abstinence from alcohol and drugs, but also from other damaging behaviours. According to Buz, sobriety frees him from his obsessions and his anger, permitting a new beginning. Sobriety, then, is not the end of alcohol and drug abuse, but the beginning of healing and the opportunity to revive a Native culture free of substance abuse.ⁱⁱ

Conclusions about Contemporary Native Music

Individual identities, then, find expression in the

collective identity cultivated in contemporary Native music. This is possible because people have many groups with which they identify at one time. The Native members of Medicine Dream, it has been shown, have both a tribal identity and an over-arching Native identity. The tribal identity is expressed in the collective identity in various ways, such as individual dress. The more general identity as a Native person is possible because of the similarity of experience shared by oppressed peoples, such as loss of land, sovereignty, language, religion, *et cetera*.

These shared experiences find expression in contemporary Native music, through lyrics and musical language. The use of Native language can serve as an indicator of both individual identity to the person who understands that particular language and collective identity to the general audience that recognizes it as a Native language. Vocables also express Native identity and clearly mark music as Native. Using lyrics, as well as the liner notes of CDs, to discuss Native issues and themes expresses both the specific experience of one tribe and the general experience of all tribes because of the similarity of experience.

In terms of musical characteristics, the singing and drumming in powwow style are of a general nature expressing a collective identity. Powwow style has become a general style that diminishes regional characteristics as specific markers of tribal identity and emphasizes a collective identity as Natives. With regards to the contemporary aspect of the music, or the non-Native aspects, the elements of pop and rock that are incorporated into the music by Paul can express both an individual and collective identity. Everyone is exposed to this style of music and can relate to it on a variety of levels. For Paul, however, it is his history as a musician and as a person who grew up as a non-Native. Therefore it specifically expresses his experiences as the composer of the music.

Contemporary Native music, then, is a site where identities are in constant flux and negotiation. The individual identity can be seen as something specific against the background of the general collective identity. The collective identity is a space into which the individual identity fits. It relies on these individual identities to complete it, as Buz pointed out, because each individual joins into a common song. However, this common song relies on individuals to give it a voice. It is in this collective voice that Natives join together and are empowered to contest stereotypes that exist and replace them with the Native identity of their choice.

References

- Alvarez, Steven. 2002. Personal Interview.
---. 2003. "RE: Question." Personal E-mail. April 3.
Anderson, Cea. 2002. Personal Interview.
Daney, Gilbert. 2002. Personal Interview.
---. 2003. "RE: Question." Personal e-mail. April 3.
Field, John. 2002. Personal Interview. Newton,
George. 2002. Personal Interview.
Pike, Paul. 2002. Personal Interview.

Discography

- Medicine Dream. 2002. *Tomegan Gospem*. Canyon Records CR-7048.
---. 2000. *Mawio'Mi*. Canyon Records CR-7039.
---. 1998. *Identity*. Independent.

Notes

ⁱ Throughout this paper I refer to the concept of "placed" and "placeless," or local and global, or particular and universal. I draw these concepts from various academic publications on the significance of place in relation to music, including: George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads*. London: Verso, 1994; Andrew Leyshon, David Mattless, and George Revill, eds., *The Place of Music*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1998; Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

ⁱⁱ I must express my gratitude to the members of Medicine Dream for participating in my research and teaching me about Native culture and contemporary Native music. The research for this paper was generously funded by the University of Alberta Master's Scholarship, the Mary Louise Imrie Graduate Student Award (Research Travel Grant), and the Graduate Students Association Travel Grant.