

Canadian Folk Music: A Renewed Statement of Purpose

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Canadian Folk Music/Musique folklorique canadienne is, in the parlance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, a “transfer journal,” that is to say, it aims at translating into ordinary language for a general public the knowledge that academics and professional musicians may express in specialized terminology or jargon. The periodical, which has for many years been published quarterly, employs a magazine format, but it is not a commercial magazine. Rather, in its provenance, mandate and aims, it falls halfway between a research journal such as *Musicultures* or *Folk Music Journal* and a glossy magazine such as *Penguin Eggs* or *Canadian Musician*. In this it appears unique in Canada, although to some degree precedents may be found in the UK and the USA in such publications as *English Dance and Song* and *Sing Out!*.

The subjects covered by *Canadian Folk Music* are any and all of those of interest to researchers, practitioners, and lovers of Canadian folk music. The term “folk music” is rather vague and somewhat ambiguous, but it is still a useful way of denoting the sum of a number of related musical traditions. As employed in *Canadian Folk Music*, the label does include the commercial music of singer-songwriters and folk-rock artists who make a living in the music business but who nonetheless still trace the roots of their music to the post-war folksong revival or older folk traditions.

However, the main focus of *Canadian Folk Music* is on the variety of vernacular music traditions that flourish outside, or on the fringes of, the commercial music industry. Such traditions find expression in oral transmission, in print (in particular in broadsheets and songbooks), and in self-financed recordings. They are living continuations of a “bottom-up” form of do-it-yourself popular culture that has existed for many centuries alongside the culture of the more educated classes. Music has always been an integral part of such lower class culture; in the past it has mainly taken the form of what is usually called “traditional music” (as in the title of the *Canadian Society for Traditional Music*). Nowadays, it draws on a variety of musical heritages from all parts of the world and also from such musical genres as blues, gospel, jazz and rock music. Because of this broadening and interaction between different strains of traditional music, and because Canada has become a multi-ethnic and multicultural society, *Canadian*

Folk Music is of necessity more eclectic in its subject matter than such a periodical would have been fifty years ago.

Canadian Folk Music thus seeks to give reflective voice to the multitude of vernacular musics found in Canada today. It does so in ordinary language designed to be accessible to students, musicians, *aficionados* and any members of the general public interested in finding out more about Canadian musical traditions. Since most Canadians are either immigrants or descendants of immigrants, this entails exploring a wide variety of source traditions, including the musics of Asia, Africa and the Americas, as well as those of Europe (including, especially, France, Britain and Ireland). It entails studying the early stages of music-making in the geographical regions that now make up Canada, beginning with the music of First Nations and that of the original European settlers. It means tracing the history of traditional song and dance in Canada from the colonial era to the present day and researching the role of music in our ancestors’ social life and culture. It means reminding readers of the legacy of traditional song and instrumental music collected by Marius Barbeau, Helen Creighton, Edith Fowke, Kenneth Peacock and other Canadian folklorists, while at the same time exploring, studying and celebrating the work of contemporary artists following in the footsteps of the tradition-bearers they recorded for posterity. And it means exploring and studying the burst of creative musical energy evident in the post-war folk music revival that has continued, albeit with some ebbs and flows, to the present day.

To attempt all of this is a formidable task, and if the magazine achieves only a few of these goals perhaps it may still be counted a success. It is worth emphasizing again that *Canadian Folk Music* is open to printing articles on a wide range of Canadian and non-Canadian traditional and contemporary folk music, but that such pieces must be aimed at the ordinary reader and not couched in the kind of esoteric jargon that makes so much academic writing impenetrable to the non-specialist. The content of the magazine will naturally reflect what its contributors submit: articles, regular columns, reports on local and regional activities, opinion pieces, letters, book reviews, CD reviews, instrumental compositions, and, above all, songs, lots of songs. So it’s mainly up to you!