

## In Memoriam

### *Kenneth Howard Peacock* *Composer and Folkmusic Specialist* *1922-2000*

Word came to me through Kenneth Peacock's close friends that he had quietly passed away on Tuesday November 22 at St. Vincent de Paul Hospital in Ottawa as a result of pneumonia he had contracted the week previous. He had been ill for quite some time.

A native of Toronto, Peacock led two distinct but complementary careers on the one hand as a musician, teacher and composer and on the other as a researcher and collector of folk music for the National Museum of Canada. With his passing he left a considerable legacy to Canadian folklore, folkmusic and music scholarship.

Musically, Peacock was somewhat of a child prodigy. By the age of 15, he had achieved the highest standing for his musical training, becoming an associate of the Royal Conservatory of Music (A.C.T.M.). His family expected him to carve out a career for himself as a concert pianist. To that end in 1941 he enrolled at the University of Toronto's School of Music, completing a bachelor's degree in 1943. Outside of his classical interests, through the influence of sound recordings, and radio, he developed a particular love of swing and jazz. His favorites included among others Bennie Goodman, Artie Shaw, Woody Herman, Count Basie and Frank Sinatra.

Whilst at University with an American friend who was also studying music at the Conservatory, he made several treks across the border to the Buffalo area to listen to Dizzey Gillespie, Charlie Parker and others play jazz and bebop. It was because of these interests that he subsequently chose to do a dissertation on "Negro Folk Music" (1943) a most unusual choice of topic for the time period, falling well outside the academic scope of the largely British-oriented School of Music.

Having spent much of his early life devoted to studying and performing music, in 1944 Kenneth decided to broaden his horizons, subsequently registering in the Arts program at University College at Toronto University where he spent the next two years concentrating on English and Philosophy. At a time when Canadian musicians found it hard to gain exposure performing in public the university atmosphere undoubtedly provided him with an outlet for his musical talent.

Peacock also turned his interests towards composition and from 1944 to 1950 he studied privately with John Weinsweig, Reginald Godden, Michele Hirvy and Francis Judd Cooke producing a number of creative works. He once told me that his music corpus was not significant and that he was "not a great composer". His own output was nevertheless sizeable. One of his best-known works, 'Bridal Suite', composed in 1947 and published by BMI in 1948, was premiered by Reginald Godden at Hart House in Toronto. Godden was so impressed with the piece that he recorded it in 1949 on English Decca (London T-5697). The *Ottawa Journal* (June 3, 1950) noted that it was the "first recording of Canadian classical music made in another country".

Peacock's musical career peaked in the 1950s. He gave his last public performance at a Canadian League of Composers concert held in Toronto at the Casa Loma in 1958 for which he composed the piano piece 'Toccata'. In the absence of a supporting Canadian infrastructure for young musicians, and before the establishment of the Canada Council he had often struggled to have his works performed. Of his compositions only 'Bridal Suite' was published. By the 1950s Peacock had already begun to move in a different direction: through the collection and transcription of folksongs for the National Museum of Canada.

His decision to take up folkmusic research was not immediate. Instead his entry into the world of folksong collecting took place over a period of years coinciding with reaching his prime as a composer. He had first been introduced to field recordings of native-American Indians through a chance encounter with a former School of Music classmate Margaret Sargent (McTaggart) in 1949. Sargent, who was working at the National Museum of Canada, invited Kenneth to come to the Museum to hear the renowned Canadian folklorist Marius Barbeau's (1883-1969) cylinder recordings of native materials which he had made in 1916. Peacock was fascinated with the music and with Barbeau's blessing began to compose a series of 'Idioms' based on the native material.

Through his contact with Sargent and Barbeau, he subsequently developed an interest in using primitive and folk music as a basis for composition, examples of which included 'Songs of the Cedar' (1950) based on *Songs of the Coast Dwellers* (1930) a series of Haida Indian songs translated into English by Constance Lindsay Skinner (1882-1939) which he found in Barbeau's personal library and his 'Children's Suite' (1950) based on both folk and native melodies.

Largely because he wasn't teaching music during the summer, Peacock took over the

Museum's Newfoundland folksong research in 1951 and 1952 from Sargent who had initiated the work in 1950. At Barbeau's encouragement he started work, learning on the job. During his first two summers, many of the areas he visited were at the time unelectrified, so he could not use the tape recorder provided by the Museum. Undaunted, Peacock drew upon his musical talents taking down a substantial number of songs by hand.

Subsequently, in 1953, he was offered a position with the Museum as their musicologist. Up to this point, with the exception of Sargent's activities, no other individual had been specifically hired to carry out musical transcriptions. Between 1953 and 1954 at the Museum's request he traveled to various reserves in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia eventually collecting several hundred songs and dances mainly from the Cree, Blood, and Blackfoot Indian tribes.

At the end of 1954, partially in an attempt to re-activate his musical career as a composer and pianist, Peacock resigned from the Museum. During this period, as the Canadian folk revival movement began to take shape, he found opportunities to use his Newfoundland and native material in a series of radio programs for the CBC. At the encouragement of Samuel Gesser, Folkways Records of New York's Canadian representative, he also compiled materials from his Newfoundland and native research into two recordings, *Indian Music of the Canadian Plains* (1955) and *Songs and Ballads of Newfoundland*, (1956). Shortly thereafter he collaborated with Alan Mills providing both songs and piano arrangements for *Favorite Songs of Newfoundland* (1958), a publication which is still in print today.

As a musician Peacock had the ability to quickly convert folksongs he had collected by hand and /or by tape recorder in the field into useable transcripts thereby making such material of greater use. Materials from his Newfoundland collection were as a consequence quickly incorporated into such publications as Gerald S. Doyle's 1955 songster *Old Time Songs of Newfoundland*, and Edith Fowke and Richard Johnston's *Folksongs of Canada* (1954). Similarly, professional singers such as Tom Kines and Joyce Sullivan quickly drew upon his Newfoundland collection for their own musical representations of Canada's folk music.

At first Peacock was reluctant to be pulled in the direction of folk music research. After some soul-searching about career directions he had made up his mind to publish a definitive collection of Newfoundland folksongs. Each summer between 1958 and 1961 he returned to the province to expand his collection. By 1961 he had

collected almost 800 songs, 128 of which he had transcribed by hand. His three volume work *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* was the largest single publication of its kind pertaining to one province ever published.

In 1961, Kenneth compiled his last major musical composition "Essay on Newfoundland Themes," commissioned by Sir Earnest MacMillan for the opening celebration concert as part of the International Folk Music Council Conference held for the first time in Canada in August of that year. This was hosted by the newly organized Canadian Folk Music Society of which he was a founding member. Woven throughout the piece was one of his favorite songs the 'Green Shores of Fogo' (Pea MS-47) which he had collected in 1952.

By 1962 he had all but put aside his composition work. Following the completion of the Newfoundland research, at the suggestion of Carmen Roy, then head of the Museum's Folklore Division, he launched the first-ever ethnic music survey for the Museum. Up to this period the Museum had focused its attention on the collection of French, British and Indian music, while neglecting the contributions of Canada's sizeable ethnic populations.

Traveling across central and western Canada that summer he carried out a preliminary field investigation of the folk music of 33 ethnic groups. Conducting his research in both rural areas and several cities between Ottawa and Vancouver, and drawing upon contacts who could serve as translators and/or as community informants, he successfully gathered materials from the Chinese, Croatian, Doukhobor, Dutch, Hungarian, Hutterite, Icelandic, Japanese, Lithuanian, Mennonite, Negro, Norwegian, Polish, Sikh and Ukrainian communities, documenting preliminary information on an additional 15 groups.

The collection of this material, along with the identification of potential informants, and transcription of the music greatly altered the direction of folk culture research at the National Museum. By 1971 when he retired, the newly-established Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies at the Museum had a decidedly multi-cultural emphasis.

The 1962 ethnic survey also provided Peacock with a template for his own research. Between 1963 and 1971, working for the Museum on contracts, he spent considerable time on the road traveling to rural communities and cities across the country in an attempt to capture some of the imagery of the ethnic cultures through audio recordings and through his photography. Several landmark works came out of this research including *Twenty Ethnic Songs from Western Canada* (1966), *Songs of the Doukhobours-An*

*Introductory Outline* (1970) and *A Garland of Rue: Lithuanian Folksongs of Love and Betrothal* (1971). As with his Newfoundland work, each publication included vivid images of the singers he'd captured on film.

As a musician Peacock's talent was greatly appreciated by other researchers. As one of the first field researchers at the Museum with formal musical training he was able to assist colleagues involved in the business of folksong collecting. Helen Creighton (1899-1989) benefitted from his musical talents, hiring him to transcribe most of her Nova Scotia collection. Over the years they developed a close working relationship and he provided the musical transcriptions for several of her important works among them *Maritime Folksongs* (1961) and *Folk Songs From Southern New Brunswick* (1970). He also provided musical transcriptions for two of Robert Klymasz's major works *The Ukrainian Winter Folksong Cycle* (1970) and *The Ukrainian Folk Ballad in Canada* (1989).

As with any collector Peacock often had his own personal preferences in terms of music. When collecting in Newfoundland, for example, he noted that he was not inclined to look for country and western music as he could find this in Alberta and it didn't really interest him. In terms of the Anglophone material he had a preference for songs with modal tunes, considering this music to be of a higher quality. His focus was on traditional material and therefore he had little time for musics with popular connections. He also had a great appreciation for locally-composed songs and in addition to collecting British, Canadian, Irish and American, Gaelic and French songs he specifically sought out this material. While certain songs were to him of a lesser quality musically, he saw their historic importance. In this sense he cast a wide net in terms of his collecting.

Peacock once referred to his collection as a "sort of Personal Encyclopedia of Canadian Cultures - ranging from Aborigines to Zealots - which inspired me to report on each one as accurately as possible" (1995, 33). In this sense he had an insatiable curiosity about the music of various cultures within Canada's borders. Consequently his survey work with the National Museum contributed greatly to the mapping out of Canada's musical heritage. Seeing no boundaries he made it a mission to capture on tape the sounds of many cultures; a smattering of which includes Newfoundland chin music, Scots fiddling from Cape Breton, Cree hand-game songs and Blood folktales, Doukhobour traditional choral singing, Ukrainian Christmas Carols, Mennonite folksongs, Okinawan-Japanese songs accompanied

by shamisen, and Chinese vocal and instrumental music.

Kenneth was able to record so much music because he was by all accounts an excellent field-operator. Having spent so much time traversing the country he was subsequently asked by the Canadian Folk Music Society to prepare a *Practical Guide for Field Collectors* (1966). Here he conveyed the importance of good field documentation in terms of recordings, sources, handling informants and doing musical transcriptions. Self-taught in every aspect, he was methodical, organized and cost-efficient. He set his own guidelines for doing fieldwork noting, "It is my view that we should gather material from as many groups as possible, always keeping in mind the original environment of the informants and their length of stay in Canada".

During his extensive career Peacock was variously called a "folklorist", "musicologist", "folk music specialist", "ethno-musicologist" and "multicultural folksong collector". While these are all titles he grew into, the fact is that his first training was in the field of music and it was from this basis that all of his work was carried out. He did not perceive himself to be an ethnographer in the classic sense and saw no purpose for self-reflective fieldnotes. He often preferred to see others better suited to analysis and annotation handle these tasks. On the other hand as the Museum learned new ways of researching Canadian folk culture, his own style of collecting expanded accordingly.

As a collector Kenneth did leave a lasting impression on those who he recorded in the field. Those of his Newfoundland informants whom I subsequently interviewed spoke with warmth and affection regarding his work and interest in their lives, and showed me copies of Songs of the Newfoundland Outports which they had received with his personal note of thanks. These books showed the wear and tear of constant circulation. High value is placed on these books from within the community. Newfoundland is not the exception. This kind of impact has registered among many of the other cultures Kenneth documented across the country.

Peacock's research and collecting inspired many to follow in his path. Since the late 1960s the "Peacock collection" as it is locally known, has provided a guide for Newfoundlanders interested in their own musical traditions. After the collection was released other Canadian composers among them Harry Somers, Violet Archer, John Beckwith and Keith Bissell - quickly drew upon this material for their own arrangements of Newfoundland folksongs.

By the end of his collecting career Peacock had made over 3300 recordings on 560 tapes. Supplemented by his amazing photography which includes hundreds of visual images of the singers of this traditional material from one side of the country to the other, his audio-recordings and transcriptions are an immense ethnographic encapsulation of the diversity of Canada's traditional folk music and folk culture. He was never satisfied to see the material he collected simply end up in an archive. His desire was to have the songs and music in the public domain. To this end Peacock was always generous with allowing the use of his material by so many others.

My own research has greatly benefitted from that generosity. In 1994, I approached Kenneth about doing some work on his Newfoundland collection. This grew into a doctoral dissertation and launched us both into a seven year relationship carried out by many taped phone interviews, letters and visits. Over the years he sent me letters and various pieces of memorabilia to help me with my research. Through an examination of his affiliation with the National Museum and his work in Newfoundland I gained a new appreciation for the nature of folklore research in Canada; a discipline which by the 1950s was just beginning to develop its professional legs. As a graduate student I had much to learn and many questions to ask. At the time I didn't expect to be in a position to say something about his life's work. Along with his peers, among them Marius Barbeau, Edith Fowke, Alan Mills, Helen Creighton and Tom Kines, Kenneth Peacock's research was undoubtedly shaped in part by overtones of romanticism and survivalism, threaded with an intense feeling of Canadian nationalism. Like many of them he was also influenced by the American and British folk revival movement. As his career unfolded at the Museum he helped give shape to the Canadian folk revival movement. In this sense his activities like many of his peers were frequently the result of a desire to introduce Canadians to the wealth of music in their own country.

Kenneth Peacock consequently influenced the direction of folk music scholarship leaving his own personal mark upon the discipline. Much to his credit, he ensured that a considerable amount of the music he had recorded ended up being published or used by others. Through his survey work from coast to coast and through his many publications he helped Canadians of many nationalities and origins to discover their musical roots. As a lasting legacy he has brought us all much closer to understanding both the cultural diversity and the cultural common-ness of our country.

In 1984 in recognition of his life's work, Peacock was presented with the Order of Canada. In 1998 he was particularly pleased to have been awarded the Marius Barbeau medal by the Canadian Folklore Studies Association for his outstanding contribution to folklore studies in Canada. A small number of his compositions are registered with Canadian Music Centre in Toronto. His audio recordings, photographic collection and papers are housed at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. His personal papers, compositions and other audio and visual materials are housed at the Saskatchewan Archives in Saskatoon.

*Anna Kearney Guigne is a doctoral student at Memorial University of Newfoundland's Department of Folklore.*

*She first developed an interest in Peacock's Newfoundland collection as a musician in St. John's in the 1970s. Her dissertation "Kenneth Peacock and the Songs of the Newfoundland Outports: the Politics Behind the Making of a Newfoundland Song Collection" is to be completed by the winter of 2001.*