An Opinion and Arguments Against an English Name Change

At the AGM held in November 1993 in Ottawa, the issue of the English name for the Society was raised and a proposal put forth to change it from The Canadian Society for Musical Traditions to The Canadian Society for Traditional Music. I have many reservations about such a change, both in what that change of title signifies to me in meaning and the ramifications that such a change might have on the fortunes of the Society. In the following paragraphs I want to present my case against such a change and conclude by proposing some changes in presentation which might strengthen the connection with our original name of "Canadian Folk Music Society."

A major reason why so many Canadian ethnomusicologists were not comfortable with the original name of "Canadian Folk Music Society" was the connotation of the word "folk." Folk music was a designation first used in Europe to refer to the music performed and enjoyed by Europeans that was not part of the so-called "art music." This connotation is based on a stratification that accepts the view of the coexistence of folk and art music, but there have been numerous studies, including some within Canada, to show that musical culture is much more complex than a division of this nature. In fact, these musics influence one another in rural and urban settings, social functions, and the lineage of individual musicians, among other ways too numerous to mention.

Within Canada, those of us who want to encourage both the performance and the scholarly study of musical traditions that are not part of the generally notated Western-composed tradition have not just the folk songs in French and English in mind. There are the rich expressions of the First Nations within Canada's borders, in which what we refer to as "music" is closely interlinked to many facets of their culture. From the late 19th Century the Canadian government has actively pursued new settlers from continents other than Europe. These Canadians not only have brought "folk music" in the old usage of the term, but have fostered the "art music" traditions of Asian cultures whose antiquity exceeds that of European art music by thousands of years. I, for one, feel particularly blessed as a Canadian to have the opportunity to participate in and experience at first hand this wealth of musical traditions from around the world.

That is why I like the present English name of the Society. For me, it recognizes the fact that we are supportive of and interested in a wide variety of styles and genres of music, the common element of which is its dependence on oral transmission to a greater degree than that found in European-derived concert music. That name reflects the reality of the situation in a multicultural nation that I think would be lost if it were changed to "traditional music." The plural presents connotations of multiplicity and diversity which I think gives a much truer picture of the situation within Canada.

Another strong reason why I do not support a name change is the problems that this would pose for the libraries and institutions who subscribe to our publications. At the AGM referred to above, the institutional rate for subscriptions was raised. That in itself, I think, may cause a cancellation of some subscriptions, because university and municipal libraries are having to cut orders due to no increase of funding for purchasing. A name change would just exacerbate that situation.

I approached some of the professionals in my university library to get their views. They adamantly said that if you make a change to the name, that would cost upwards of $100 to each library to implement the changes in their cataloguing. If that was done at around the same time as a significant increase in subscription cost, the reaction of most libraries would be to cancel the subscription outright. Several also pointed out that many libraries do not deal with societies directly, but through agents. Usually these agents are not notified directly by the societies of a name change. Consequently the agent loses track of the society and the subscription lapses, eventually being cancelled. Of course, the library authorities also referred to the problems and frustrations for scholars when a name change occurs for purposes of proper bibliographic citation. In short, their unanimous opinion was that such a minor change of name was an "unnecessary" exercise that would backfire on the Society.

Having argued against the proposal for a name change, I must admit that I can understand why some members feel that the name is too far removed from the old "Canadian Folk Music Society" moniker. I would like to make two suggestions which I think might underline our connection to that moniker. First of all, I would suggest that the line "formerly the Canadian Folk Music Society" be printed in much bolder typeface and size on all our publications, including stationery. Secondly, I am very fond of the Inuk drummer logo, but I think we need another, balancing one. I know that it is very difficult to come up with an image representing musical expression because of its ephemeral nature. My suggestion would be one of a fiddle player. Perhaps it could be of a woman fiddle player, because women do play a major role in passing down these oral expressions. In my view the presence of such a logo with a clear reference to "folk music" for those who still think along those terms should clarify readily the purpose and interests of the Society.

Respectfully submitted,
Elaine Keillor
Opinions et arguments contre un changement pour le nom anglais de la société

L'auteur explique pourquoi elle préfère conserver le nom anglais de la société (Canadian Society for Musical Traditions), plutôt que le nom proposé à la réunion annuelle en novembre 1993 (Canadian Society for Traditional Music). Elle oppose un changement de nom qui mettrait l'emphasis sur la musique traditionnelle plutôt que sur les traditions musicales. Le concept de traditions musicales est plus large que le concept de musique traditionnelle, et reflète mieux la diversité de traditions musicales au Canada. De plus, un autre changement de nom compliquerait la situation pour les bibliothèques et les institutions qui achètent le Bulletin. Aujourd'hui, ces institutions ont bien des soucis économiques et un autre changement de nom pourrait être fatal pour certains abonnements.

Pour conserver les liens de la société avec l'ancien nom et la musique folklorique, l'auteur nous suggère de marquer en caractères gras l'ancien nom de la société, et recommande aussi une figure de violoneux(se) (féminin pour illustrer le rôle des femmes dans la tradition orale), qui serait ajoutée au logo de l'Inuit avec le tambour. Ceci aiderait à conserver le lien entre la société et la musique folklorique sans perdre le bénéfice de l'ampleur accrue d'un nom qui met en relief les traditions musicales.

The Woods: An Experience of Music and Community

Thirteen years ago, when most folk festivals were striving to become better by getting bigger, a small group within the Mariposa Folk Foundation struck out in a different direction. They wanted to become better by getting smaller, more intimate, and more participatory. "Mariposa in the Woods" was a residential music and dance camp held just outside Toronto, where campers and performer/teachers came together for four days of classes, workshops, concerts, dances, special events and general fun built around sharing musical experiences.

Since 1982, this camp has been held every summer, and is now called simply "The Woods," as it has long been independent of the Mariposa organization. Over the years, many outstanding Canadian and American folk performers have shared their talents with campers. This summer's camp will be held August 4 to 9 on the campus of Lake Rosseau College (about 2½ hours' drive northwest of Toronto).

Participating staff includes James Keelaghan, who will teach songwriting and performance; Lorraine Lee Hammond, New England's "first lady of the dulcimer," who will teach (you guessed it!) dulcimer and "singing for the confidence-impaired," and Don Ross, an awesome fingerpicking guitarist, who will teach guitar and composition. For the dancers, Julie Young, an energetic and enthusiastic proponent of "urban clogging", will be keeping the dancers on their heels, while Bob Walser will call the evening dances and teach songs and dances of Brittany. Steve Fuller, one of Ontario's most popular and busiest dance fiddlers, will lead the dance band, ably assisted by special guest Kate Murphy on piano and an array of other instruments.

More information is available from The Woods Music and Dance Society, c/o Laskin, 18 Simpson Ave., Toronto, Ont. M4K 1A2; phone (416)-461-1864.

Sue Goldberg

The Inglewood [Ontario] station was the source of probably the first piped-in music which ever found its way into a railway station. Freddie Martin, the night operator in the early 1920s, used to fill in his spare time at the station, playing his fiddle. "Dixie" Ireland would bring in his bass fiddle, and Jack Ramsay joined them with his banjo. The trio invited the night operator at Allandale to tune in on their concerts, and soon, night operators from Toronto to North Bay were sending in requests for their favourite music.

Elizabeth A. Willmot, Meet Me at the Station, McBain Publications Inc., 70 Otonabee Drive, Kitchener, ON N2C 1L6

[This passage thrilled me when I came upon it by accident in a book about railway stations of Ontario. Not only is Inglewood my home village, but the men were people of my parents' generation whom I vaguely remember as a child—but I never knew they were musicians. —JL]

Bowery dances were only held in the summer. The men would build a plank floor. Then everyone would go to the bush to gather aspens. They cut down the ones about ten feet tall. They were fastened at the bottom and allowed to drape over towards the centre of the floor. That evening the dance would be in full swing with local talent providing the music.

Unattributed, Lanterns on the Prairie (Strome, Alberta)