

# Songs at the Stanley Cup Playoffs

by Tim Rogers

I was rather surprised to hear an entire audience at a National Hockey League playoff game in the Quebec Colisee burst into song during a stoppage in play. Two songs were in evidence: "The Happy Wanderer" was sung lustily - in English - by the crowd on at least two occasions, and there was a chant sung when the home team scored or when it looked like the visitors were about to bow out. For a hockey nut who has watched his favourite game on the tube for many years now, this was indeed a surprise. To my memory it was a first.

The chant caught on quickly and was soon being sung in Boston during the same playoff series with Quebec. Soon it was in evidence during the Vancouver-Chicago series in the Vancouver arena - particularly in the 4th game. Find attached the musical notation for the chant, which is in a minor key - and which creates quite an effect when the entire arena bursts into song bidding "good-bye" to the bad guy. Sometimes the organist would lead-off the chant (in Cm), and often the audience would start it with the key varying between Am and Dm.

The rapid spread of the chant is interesting and signals a possible event worth looking at. Why should singing suddenly become part of the spectator activity at hockey games? Why should this particular chant be accepted, when there are lots of other possibles?

I wrote several people involved with aspects of international sport to determine if this was typical behaviour in other countries. George Kingston, who currently is the coach of the University of Calgary varsity hockey team, and who has done quite a bit of research in international hockey, replied that "the tradition of songs, chants and audience (mass) participation behaviour is very well established in international ice hockey and other sport". He further elaborated on the functions of these behaviours, and I quote at length from his reply:

The behaviour is exhibited in inter-nation, inter-sports club and inter-team contests. Some of the national songs and chants, sports club songs and chants and team songs and chants have a rich and lengthy tradition. In short,

## The Chant

Rogers

Tag

Na, na, Chi - ca - go, Good - bye, Na, na.

Brummitt

Na, na, na, na, na, na, Chi - ca - go, Good - bye. (Na, na)  
optional

there is considerable spectator ritual surrounding international sporting endeavour.

The functions of the ritual are at least the following (a quick interpretation):

- (1) Unity and cohesion of the national/sports club/team supporters.
- (2) Rallying or supporting statement from the spectators to the competitors (gladiators!).
- (3) Definition of we-they boundaries through the use of songs, chants, ritualistic behaviour, dress and paraphernalia - identification/belonging function.
- (4) Special situation ritual to communicate mood or reaction to a contest.

Some illustrations at the international level:

- (1) Singing of international songs, normally the anthems and sometimes symbolic songs such as the "Internationale".
- (2) National chants: "Go Canada Go", "Shaibu", "Do To Ho", "Svomi!", "Sverige", etc.
- (3) Action and participation songs and chants, the equivalent of "Lean to the left - lean to the right - stand up - sit down - fight, fight, fight." Paraphernalia such as national/club/team hats, scarves, pennants, noisemakers, flags are used also in this connection.
- (4) Special situation ritual also prevails. For example, "whistling" (to show displeasure); Shaibu (to rally or applaud a goal or good play); "Bose" (chant to shame an offender); or special chants/actions to communicate special reaction (mass pointing of the forefinger to a player to intimidate or communicate special directions to the penalty box and so on). Another illustration is the "universal" - "We're Number One." This is a demonstration of superiority that seems to be an important part of spectator behaviour in some contests.
- (5) Sports clubs and teams have their

own ritual in all forms including special songs, chants, action/participation behaviours and so on. To wit: the Pittsburgh Steelers yellow towels and Vancouver Canuck's white ones; use of matches, sparklers, sirens, organs, bands etc.

Kingston feels that the Vancouver chant was typically North American in its eloquent lyric - "Na Na Na Na".

Dave Brummitt (one of our members) is a music teacher in Langley BC, just outside of Vancouver. He is also a referee in the North American Soccer League - so I wrote him about the chanting. He feels that the increasing amounts of TV coverage of international sports in North America may have had an effect on the emergence of the chant in the NHL. He indicated that, in Vancouver, the chant "took on all the fervor of a revolutionary song or national anthem". He sent along a variant of the chant which is included here. He went on to observe:

Another noteworthy aspect of this phenomenon is the fact that singing in public happened at all, spontaneous or otherwise, but at a hockey game?! This sort of goes against the macho, male myth that "singing is for sissies", but at the same time reinforces the folk tradition of singing being the most expressive form of communication in the human tradition. It was almost like shouting, stamping, whistling and applauding weren't enough. The singing chant filled the void. It was something special as witnessed by "outsiders" on TV, but strongly **felt** by those in the audience - as several people at the games reported to me. An interesting situation.

A phone call to a local radio station, CKXL, located the source of the tune used for the chant. It is entitled "Na-Na-Hey-Hey, Kiss Him Goodbye" by the group "Steam". It was

number 11 on the year-end hit list in 1969, indicating that it was a very popular tune 13 years ago - not an obscure "lost" song. Just why it should have been revived in 1982 is a mystery at this point.

There are several interesting points raised by these observations. First, the functions of chants etc described by Kingston bear a striking resemblance to the functions of folklore articulated by scholars such as Bascom (see for example his classic article "The four functions of folklore", *Journal of American Folklore*, 1954, 67, 333-349). The chants certainly serve the function of validating the group and are entertaining, both of which are significant parts of folklore. The



chants are learned and transmitted orally which is another aspect of traditional definitions of folklore and folksong (e.g. List's article in R. M. Dorson's *Folklore and Folklife*, University of Chicago Press, 1972). The existence of variation in these chants (e.g. local adaptations to fit the team) has also been noted; all of which suggests that these chants are folksongs!

But even more intriguing is the relative absence of these chants in the Canadian context. Why is it that chants have not become as popular here as they have in Europe? What is it about Canadian culture that has shaped this? Aspects of folk music are evident at hockey games in Canada - witness the use of traditional dance tunes (e.g. St. Anne's Reel, I'se the B'y and others) by the organists in the rinks. But why is it that only recently songs and chants have emerged? (Unfortunately for Vancouver fans, the history of chants in the NHL was rather short-lived as well).

At first blush one might cite the relative reluctance of Canadians to sing as part of this. However, I think there are some other much more important factors involved. First, the identities of the cities and teams in the NHL are rather blurred. Most of the players for all teams are Canadian, so even if you are a Vancouver fan you might find yourself pulling for a New York player because he is from your home province. This means that the we-they boundaries are difficult to draw. The transient professional athlete who often does not even live in the city he represents makes it difficult to develop the kinds of bonds that characterize aspects of the European experience. In cases where there are more "local" players the chanting behaviour is a bit stronger. For instance, there is more evidence of chanting in Canadian university hockey than in the professional leagues (e.g. St. Mary's University has a distinctive chant that has been in use for some time now). Thus, the lack of chanting etc in Canadian NHL rinks is due, in part, to the relative diffusion of the identities of the teams. When an upstart underdog team (like Vancouver) takes on the "big apple" (the Islanders) some identity emerges, and chanting behaviour is enhanced.

Another difference between the NHL and European experience is that the sports clubs and teams in Europe often come from a very long line of tradition - perhaps spanning centuries. The team concept, then, is firmly entrenched over generations. This leads to distinctiveness, thereby facilitating ritualistic forms of spectator behaviour. Canadian teams do not have such extensive histories - although some of them are relatively long (e.g. Montreal).

Another factor is the current image of the game of hockey. The current joke of "going to the fights and having a hockey game break out" seems a good summary of a lot of peoples' views of the game. It's pretty hard to be proud of a national game that condones violence and milks the public with excessively long schedules. Thus ritualistic "flagwaving" behaviours are less likely to occur.

In sum, then, the relative lack of singing and chants in Canadian professional hockey appears to be born of certain contextual factors - the indistinctiveness of the teams, their short histories, attitudes toward the game - rather than to some inherent "unwillingness to sing". What is most interesting now will be to observe whether the Vancouver experience lasts. Was it a flash in the pan? Will the chant become part of an emerging Vancouver tradition? I guess we'll have to wait for next year to find out.