

THE CANADIAN STUDIES CENTER PRESENTS AN INTRODUCTION TO CANADIAN MUSIC



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Be it the rousing maritime work songs and village fiddlers of eastern Canada, the throat singing of Inuit women or the chansonniers of Québec, creating an all-inclusive definition of the music of Canada is nearly impossible. The music of Canada is as diverse as the landscape, and has made many significant contributions to popular, classical, traditional and indigenous musical spheres of the world.

Each region in Canada has its own sounds and traditions, lending unique qualities to the tapestry of Canadian music. The French, English, Scottish and Irish immigrants brought with them their instruments and traditional sounds, finding new roots in a new land. As waves of settlers moved westward they brought their traditions and instruments with them, and their music reflected their new surroundings and interactions with the indigenous people. Canada has become home to people from all over the globe, all of whom contribute to the uniquely Canadian soundscape. As a result of this cultural mélange, several distinct Canadian hybrid genres have emerged.

Eastern Canadian is known internationally for its myriad of fiddle styles, and has paved the way for the creation of an international “Celtic” music. Québec has combined the traditional music elements of Brittany, Ireland, Scotland and indigenous peoples to create a uniquely Québécois sound that has become synonymous with Québécois pride. The Great Lakes and Prairie region is home to many Francophone and Anglophone balladeers. The western provinces have

their own fiddle styles, indigenous and popular music which have made notable contributions to the conceptualization of the music of North America. In addition, traditional work songs and shanties can be found all over Canada, and continue to manifest in contemporary Canadian song.

Many of the First Nation’s traditional music can be heard in various festivals and broadcasts across Canada. Perhaps the most widely recognized and unique First Nation music are the throat singing games of the Inuit people. This tradition is enjoying a rekindled interest by Inuit youths, and is breaking into the realm of popular music with fusion groups such as Tûdjaat. The indigenous population has embraced sounds from all over the world, in turn creating a new wave of interest and pride in the First Nation communities.

The cosmopolitan nature of Canadian music is the result of their embrace of the world’s music. Canadian music can not be limited to specific genres or regions, as the music itself is a reflection of a diverse and receptive population.

About the Author:

As an ethnomusicologist, Erin Maloney is primarily interested in the role of music in Celtic revivalism in the New World, nationalism, and the dynamics of tradition. As a Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellow through the Canadian Studies Center, Erin has been afforded the opportunity to focus on these issues in Québec, in preparation for fieldwork in Québec and the Maritimes this fall.