

## MLA in Pittsburgh, PA (Part 2)

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by  
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[The reports of these sessions were inadvertently omitted from the MLA report in v. 35, no. 1.]

#### MLA Plenary Session: Musical Canons and American Library Collections

In “Women and the Western Art Canon,” Marcia Citron (Rice University) discussed the changes that have occurred in the field of musicology since the publication of her 1993 study, *Gender and the Musical Canon*. She noted a greater reliance on interdisciplinary approaches, as well as the importance of placing music within its cultural context, with reception studies being especially popular today. Citron believes that women and gender topics are now integrated thoroughly in musicology studies, especially since there are now more female musicologists, and because of the impact of “Third wave feminism” from the early 1990's onward. She closed by recommending that librarians continue to acquire as many works as possible by women composers.

David Schiff (Reed College) described his teaching of jazz history in “Teaching with and Without a Canon: My Experience with the Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz.” He vividly described his own experience of “canonic trauma,” when, as an English major at Cambridge in 1967, he was obliged to study only a highly select list of a few authors. He subsequently switched to music, and taught jazz history without a textbook but with the Smithsonian Collection of

Classic Jazz as a guide. The set of six LPs, arranged chronologically, was first issued in 1973. Schiff liked the fact that it made the jazz tradition accessible and portable, featuring good quality performances. However, the chronological approach created the impression of cause and effect, that is, the “begats.” He also described this edition as “conscientiously elitist,” and sexist (only women singers, not instrumentalists, appear). Schiff mentioned that the Internet has caused him to change his teaching methods, and that the appearance on CD of so many early jazz recordings, from as far back as 1891, has made him change his approach from a chronological “Introduction to jazz history” class to one focusing on different topics within the field.

Virginia Danielson (Harvard University) in “The Ethnomusicological ‘Canon’” detailed the development of ethnomusicology over 150 years as it followed the “political economy of Europe and America.” She stated that some repertoires attracted more attention than others, noting the progression from the music of Native America and Eastern Europe to India, Africa, gamelan (representing all of South Asia), then East Asia, and last of all, the Middle East. The “canon” is now engaged with social theory, based on the anthropology model of what is shared rather than unique. Danielson

mentioned Ruth Stone, Kay Kaufmann Shelemay and Jeff Titon as major scholars in the field. She concluded with a discussion of the role of the music library for studies in ethnomusicology, stating that the library should abandon the notion of bibliographic control, focus on heavily-documented field and commercial recordings and video recordings, and collect the multimedia documents so essential to the discipline. Danielson hopes that the *Basic Music Library* will expand its coverage, but cautions against trying to cover everything.

The session closed with Ed Komara (SUNY Potsdam) speaking on “A Basic Music Library and the Challenge of Musical Canons.” He described the process of preparing the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the work, stating that, although every musical item has the possibility to be an important work, choices must be made about what will be included, so selectivity is inevitable. Komara felt that “something like canonicity evolves.” Yet he stated that *A Basic Music Library* must not be mistaken for a canon, because its planned number of 11,000 items is simply too large. While it cannot be complete, it can aim to be comprehensive. The intent is to have the work cover Western Art Music, Jazz and Popular Music, and some World Music, with the broadening of scope to include world music allowing the book’s users to understand basic music around the entire world.

### **“Tradition” in Contemporary Aboriginal Music in Canada**

In her presentation “Contradictions of ‘Tradition’: Postcolonialism, Indigenous Feminism and Canadian Powwows,” Anna Hoefnagels (Carleton University) discussed the use of the term “tradition” as a tool to define appropriate behaviour at powwows

(intertribal gatherings featuring music and dance), and as a means of giving a sense of community to those involved. Although the powwow itself is a tradition borrowed from the Plains communities, they are indicative of the survival of native peoples, and demonstrate affirmation and regeneration of their culture. First Nations dancing was banned in Canada from 1871 to 1954, except in shows for non-natives. In some communities the powwow was not established until the 1960’s and 1970’s. As an example of how the powwow structure could be reshaped, Hoefnagels cited the example of the smoke dance, a late 1990’s addition that reflects Iroquois technique. She also explored the idea of “tradition” as a means of restricting the activities of women musicians and dancers. Tradition dictates that women cannot participate when they are pregnant or menstruating, nor can they strike the drum, for there is a need to maintain the gender balance between the female drum and the male drummer. In southwestern Ontario First Nations communities, these restrictions are maintained, but at some other locations in Canada they are being ignored. Hoefnagels recommended two websites: [www.powwows.com](http://www.powwows.com) and [www.aptn.ca](http://www.aptn.ca).

Janice Esther Tulk (Memorial University of Newfoundland) explored the concept of “invented tradition” in “Swing and Sway the Mi’kmaq Way: A Performance Study of the Powwow ‘Tradition’ in Miqpukek, Newfoundland.” The community achieved First Nations status in 1984, and held its first powwow in 1987. Tulk talked about the role of the MC at these events, giving four main functions: 1) to help facilitate the flow of the event; 2) to supply contextual information about the dances and songs that reinforces the collective memory; 3) to make sure tradition is followed; and 4) to

make announcements. In addition to playing several musical examples, Tulk spoke about two MCs in particular: Jimmy Augustine, and Mike Doucette, who wrote the lines “C’mon out here, don’t be shy, Swing and sway the Mi’kmaq way.”

Klisala Harrison (York University) analyzed the role of music in aboriginal healing in: “Pan-tribal Northwest Coast Hand Drumming and Powwow Singing.” The pan-tribal music styles of the Northwest Coast are related to the Plains powwows, and show evidence of borrowings from more eastern communities through the 1980's and 1990's. They also borrow from the song style of the North West Indians, including the use of microtones. In contrast to the First Nations communities of southwestern Ontario, women also drum. Harrison described her work with the communities in Vancouver’s inner city, discussing in detail how two individuals used music to deal with the issues of poverty, homelessness, and addictions prevalent in their neighbourhoods. Brenda Wells, named Little Eagle Drummer, has spent time in jail, and continues to struggle with addiction, but has become a motivational speaker for conferences across Canada. She credits music with giving her the power to develop and maintain her positive outlook. Frank McAllister, who first heard the drum when he was incarcerated at the Drumheller penitentiary, became a successful songwriter. Harrison played his song “Creator” as an example of his work. McAllister, however, was unable to maintain his healing process, and he died on the streets of Vancouver in December of 2005.