



[Contemporary Musical Expressions in Canada.](#)

Edited by Anna Hoefnagels, Judith Klassen and Sherry Johnson. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019. 536 pp. ISBN: 9780773558809.

Reviewed by: Hannah Willmann

Contemporary Musical Expressions in Canada, edited by Anna Hoefnagels, Judith Klassen, and Sherry Johnson, is a welcome addition to the increasing efforts of scholars to decenter a Eurocentric narrative of music history. The editors and authors seek to provide a collection of subversive microhistories of music in Canada, put in dialogue in order to avoid the superficiality that can occur when merely matching diversity and inclusion quotas under the guise of multiculturalism (6). The editors even take a reflective position, questioning their own work, and acknowledging that research and writing can do damage and reinforce

hierarchies (6). They dedicate the volume to Beverley Diamond, whose work has profoundly impacted the development of ethnomusicology in Canada, and whose contributions to the field are evident throughout. In addition to noting Diamond's work, the first chapter provides an extensive (though not comprehensive) state of the research of ethnomusicology in Canada since 1990.

The three main sections of the volume provide structure while avoiding framing the stories within a narrative that promotes cultural homogeneity. The first section of the book is organized around the concept of tradition. Recognizing that tradition is a loaded term, the authors in this section examine the interplay of tradition and development, especially in response to changing technology, performance, and reception. In her chapter on French Canadian *veillées* (social gatherings which may include singing and dancing), Laura Risk explains the interrelated histories of staged versions (which are structured and performed in commercial settings) and unstaged versions (which continue to be part of Québec culture). Her comparison is not for the sake of arguing for the authenticity of the unstaged over the staged, but rather to show how the staged versions



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contributed to the understanding of folklore and tradition in the early twentieth century, and how unstaged events blur distinctions between genres through the breadth of music they include.

To further complicate the relationship between tradition and innovation, Margaret Walker investigates kathak dance in Canada. This classical Indian dance, with roots in Vedic practices of the Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan regions, continues to develop in Canada and around the world (87). Walker's explanation of tradition as a foundation for creativity, rather than as a rigorous standard which must be maintained, provides a helpful framing as the purpose of the genre shifts based on its various contexts – contexts which provide opportunity for intercultural dialogue and collaboration.

As ethnomusicology seeks to rid itself of the vestiges of imperialism and coloniality, researchers continue to acknowledge the biases of song collecting as a practice that impacts the legacy and the present of the original song cultures. Chris McDonald's chapter on folk music in Nova Scotia serves as an example of how this canon shaping process continues to impact how future generations accept or refuse these stereotypes (or perceived traditions) in their performances.

In section two of this volume, each of the chapters treat genre and musical practices as a point of connection and creation rather than as distinct, bounded entities. Through these chapters it is evident that negotiations between tradition and innovation can apply both to music practices and generic categorizations. For instance, in addressing Metis (style) fiddling, Monique Giroux notes that there are particular style markers, including clogging, cross-tuning, and asymmetrical phrasing which have meant that scholars tend to see the genre as fixed.¹ In practice, however, this interpretation is complicated by the changing social context and cultural relevance of the practice which Giroux sees as bridging past and present, static and evolving.

Fiddling is also the subject of Ian Hayes's contribution to the volume where he investigates the disparate ways through which the "liveness" of Cape Breton fiddling events is replicated in recording. Although it is not as much about genre as it is about replicating or invoking a particular aesthetic and communal environment, the chapter echoes this section's theme of the flexibility of artistic practices via Hayes's analysis of the recording medium.

¹ Giroux uses the term Metis without an accent following the work of Metis scholar Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (UBC Press, Vancouver: 2010), who argues that including the accent emphasises French heritages over Indigenous identity or other European backgrounds. Giroux's use of the term "style" in parentheses serves to show that this type of fiddling is also practiced outside of Metis culture, but that to Metis fiddlers in particular, community is more important than style (234).

Although the book's title refers specifically to musical expressions in Canada, Colin McGuire demonstrates the intricacy of cross-genre interaction in his discussion of lion dance in Toronto. This practice, which bridges martial art and percussion, functions as a core aspect of reinforcing Chinese identity and countering racism.

Like Hayes' chapter, Jesse Stewart and Niel Scobie do not focus as much on generic characteristics as on the socio-cultural role that Canadian hip-hop artists (e.g., Michelle "Michie Mee" McCulloch and Wes Williams) play in communicating aspects of diasporic and hybridized identities. Stewart and Scobie identify this hybridization particularly through the use of "code-switching" (using multiple languages) and sampling as a reflection of the primary "trope" of call and response in African diasporic music (308–9).

The third and final section focuses on the construction of difference. Beginning with Louise Wrazen's chapter on how the practices of Polish Górale (or Highlanders) contribute to ethnocultural diversity in Toronto, the chapters in this section challenge notions of diversity as simply a twenty-first century buzzword and instead address tangible practices (especially those which have lacked funding and attention) that shape diversity. These chapters serve the editors' goals of centering microhistories by countering the fact that some instances of diversity get more attention than others. For example, Rebecca Draisey-Collishaw addresses how broadcasting can serve as a gatekeeper of intercultural encounters. Modelling her discussion around "fusion programming" on the CBC, Draisey-Collishaw presents a nuanced argument that acknowledges the potential for programming to inadvertently reinforce inequality by how such programs are framed. In one instance, Draisey-Collishaw notes that while the radio's first "Come By Concerts" program from St John's, Newfoundland featured a choir with mixed Eastern European heritage and repertoire, the positioning of the choir in an accompaniment role to local musician Pamela Morgan reinforced a hierarchical structure of culture around Western ideals (400).

Similarly, Judith Klassen's examination of "heterogeneity" and "permeability" amongst Mennonite communities in rural Manitoba is a helpful reminder against the tendency towards essentializing that can occur in cross-cultural dialogues and artistic practice. Klassen describes the impact and evolution of Mennonite practices such as *Brommtopp* (a mumming tradition) and "circle games" as examples of the flexibility within various cultural communities. Like Klassen, Marcia Ostashewski counters the idea of cultural homogeneity by examining the role of church music practice in preserving Ukrainian identity, but makes note of the ways these practices have been developed and changed, and are localized rather than homogeneous.

This volume offers a potent reminder and helpful investigation of the complexity of such terms as tradition, genre, authenticity, and diversity. The authors took care to explain their use of these terms and to show how they are neither fixed nor impermeable. What also makes this text valuable is not only the diversity of the subject matter but of approaches to that subject matter, for example,

in the three different chapters on fiddling and in the interdisciplinary nature of the two chapters focused not on music but on dance (kathak and lion dance).

Students and scholars of all levels will find this to be an excellent resource whether they are addressing music within Canada or looking for examples of the progress that is being made in how ethnomusicological research is responding to the broader social movements of decoloniality and anti-racism.² *Contemporary Musical Expressions in Canada* represents a step towards centering diverse stories and practices in ethnomusicology.

² Following Walter Mignolo, I make the distinction between “decolonization” as a physical, political act and “decoloniality” as its epistemological, intellectual accompaniment. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 13. See also Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.