"Singing my Spirit of Identity": Aboriginal Music for Well-being in a Canadian Inner City

KLISALA HARRISON

Abstract: In this article the author explores relationships between Aboriginal Canadian music-making, personal meaningfulness, identity and well-being in urban Canada, through a case study of Aboriginal singing in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Healing programs for remediating situations of substance misuse, crime, and violence, are examined as contexts for revealing how Aboriginal musical expressions, including ceremony, and associated teachings and world views, become significant as individuals choose and affirm lifestyles of wellness and dignity.

Vancouver, BC's Downtown Eastside offers several examples of a widespread trend of Aboriginal cultural healing programs that proliferate across urban and rural Canada, and the USA (Ramirez 2006, Skye 2002). In Canada, such programs respond to a situation where addictions, abuse and violence issues disproportionately affect Aboriginals compared to non-Aboriginals (Long and Dickason 2000); and where Aboriginals are over-represented in prisons compared to other ethno-cultural groups (La Prairie 2002). Although Canadian cities tend to be highly intercultural, a concentration of former prison populations and the social and health issues in inner cities make them important locations and conceptual touchstones for Aboriginal wellness initiatives. A prominent role of music in cultural healing programs has not yet received detailed study, although initial research shows them to improve wellness levels related to socialization (Hunter et al. 2006, Marsden 2006, Schiff and Moore 2006).

This article asks: How may Aboriginal Canadian music facilitate well-being for individuals who take part in cultural healing programs? I describe practices of singing and drumming at several agencies affiliated with Vancou-

ver's Downtown Eastside:

1. Aboriginal Front Door.
2. Hey-way'noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Society.
3. The Positive Outlook branch of the Vancouver Native Health Society.[1]

Musical expressions have unfolded in cultural healing programs at each agency, and within the organizational missions and philosophies that I list in Figure 1.[2]

Musical practices of Aboriginal Canadian-centred programs for cultural healing are ethno-culturally diverse, yet grounded in non-institutionalized approaches to music and well-being in localized Aboriginal communities, in larger culture areas, and in "mass movements" of Aboriginal expressive culture and world view, including what some call "pan-Indianism" (Ellis, Lassiter and Dunham 2005, Scales 2007). In urban British Columbia, including Vancouver, pan-Aboriginal musical expressions that offer wellness opportunities include powwow drumming with its complex Plains origins (Ellis 2003); hand drum-

1. Aboriginal Front Door mission statement:
The Mission of the Aboriginal Front Door is to foster, encourage and support the Downtown Eastside (DTES) Aboriginal People to walk through life with love, honour, respect, and compassion for all things in creation, including themselves. To secure, develop and operate a safe place for Aboriginal People in the DTES, which place will be the entry point to begin the implementation of an Aboriginal specific drug and alcohol strategy in the DTES and will:
Be a place where Aboriginal People can experience, learn and participate in traditional Aboriginal Culture, Teachings and Ceremonies as part of their Healing journey through life;
Be a place DTES Aboriginal People can call their own and feel at home. An informal, non-institutional place to come in for time out, help and activities;
Be an accessible storefront, which will have a ceremonial meeting area, a multi-use area and a food preparation area, if possible;
Provide leadership through respected Elders and other role models;
Be developed and operated by and with the DTES Aboriginal People themselves. (Aboriginal Front Door Society n.d.)

2. Hey-way'noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Society mission statement:
To develop a holistic approach to assist urban Native and Métis individuals and families through their healing journey from chemical addictions and co-dependencies. To help restructure their lifestyles to maximum functioning, in a culturally relevant way that enhances individuality, continual independence and uniqueness. (Association of BC First Nations Treatment Programs n.d.)

3. Positive Outlook program philosophy:
*Each of us has our own dignity and deserves the respect and autonomy to direct our care;
*Links HIV+ persons into a network of health related social, cultural, emotional, and proactive support;
*Offers respect and understanding of First Nations Cultural history and tradition;
*Provides a harm reduction approach;
*Services are provided in a flexible, non-judgemental, nurturing, accepting manner;
*Offer[s] a safe, accessible, welcoming drop-in environment with an open door philosophy.

Figure 1. Healing Programs, Organizations, Philosophies (Vancouver Native Health Society 2003).

ming of Eastern Woodlands, Northwest Coast First Nations and Navajo varieties, for example; but also songs of Plains-style yuwipi ceremonies, sweat lodges and sun dances. These musical phenomena exist alongside vibrant, living traditions of Northwest Coast First Nations potlatches, feasts (Enrico and Stuart 1996, Halpern 1967) and spirit dances (Jilek 1974). As in other, urban Aboriginal contexts, contemporary music genres also can be important: for example, indigenous opera (Robinson forthcoming), Red hip hop (Marsh forthcoming) and a rich variety of pop, rock, R&B, country and "world music" genres that draw on Aboriginal heritages. Similar to these music genres, the cultural backgrounds and geographic homelands of Aboriginals living in urban BC, reach across the continent. Since 2003, I have worked most with Aboriginals who have moved to Vancouver from rural locations in Western Canada.

Focusing on ways that identifying musically and culturally can be personally meaningful and enable indigenous wellness (see Vosen 2001), I will share, with permission, the life-experience stories of four individuals and groups:

> 1. Fred John, a St'át'imic elder from Lillooet or T'ít'q'et, BC, who has instructed powwow drumming at Aboriginal Front Door and Hey-way'noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Society;
> 2. Gerry Oleman, a singer from the St'át'imic First Nation at Seaton Lake or Chalath, BC, who has taught hand drumming at Aboriginal Front Door and elsewhere in the Downtown Eastside;
> 3. Brenda Wells and Frank McAllister, two Alberta Cree who took part in hand drumming and popular music making at Positive Outlook; and

This oral history research is indebted to traditions of dialogic ethnography (see Mannheim and Tedlock 1995), and builds on music studies that convey individual experiences of Native North Americans, which are valued tremendously in such cultures (see e.g., Diamond 2002, Mitchell with McAllester and Frisbie 1978). I intend this article to be an example of indigenous "storywork," a term coined by Jo-ann Archibald to evoke how indigenous "stories and storytelling [a]re to be taken seriously" (Archibald 2008:3), including through the approach of seven principles that inspire me here: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness and synergy (Ibid.:33). Through exploring interrelations and synergies between life-experience stories told to me, I wish to draw out some holistic and theoretical premises for future research on Aboriginal music and wellness, while conveying, I hope, respect and reverence for some complex musical processes involved. May this gesture

of intellectual responsibility for the public interest (Titon 1992) contribute to developments in medical ethnomusicology (Koen et al. 2008) and applied ethnomusicology.

Fred John's Story: Powwow Drumming at Aboriginal Front Door and Hey-way'noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Society

At Aboriginal Front Door and Hey-way'noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Society, St'át'imic elder Fred John "doctors" individuals by singing powwow songs "from all directions" or geographic locations:

> What we don't do is say that "this is your song," you know, "this is my song," "that is your song." We put that [i.e., intellectual property issues] aside, but we will say, "I will give you… I've got this song in my dream and this song is for my child that went to the hospital, or something like that, or is in need of help. But I want you to go ahead and use this song." (Personal communication, May 16, 2005)

Aboriginals who access cultural healing programs often do not have comprehensive knowledge of local, regional or pan-Aboriginal music expressions because, for example, they attended residential school,[3] experienced other cultural assimilationist policies in Canada, or lived another course of colonization, intercultural interaction and cultural change. Fred John's attitude towards song ownership contrasts customs governing music, dance and associated visual artworks of First Nations in BC, for instance, where strict series of sui generis laws related to kinship govern who can present ceremonial art forms, how and when.[4] In Aboriginal Canadian music programs that address abuse, substance misuse and crime, Fred said, practitioners are identifying songs that "can be used all over the country" for purposes of "healing."

Fred John described how "doctoring" unfolded when he has led powwow drumming at Aboriginal Front Door and Hey-way'noqu':

> The coordinator at Aboriginal Front Door asked me to come down there to help with their drumming. They got a drum from the people from the penitentiary, you know, the Natives. They put together a drum made out of buffalo hide. To us, buffalo is really important spiritually. It's like our relative or something that we use. So that buffalo drum is like a healing drum, that helps people.

And when they put that together, they needed someone to come in and help teach the drumming right down at Main & Hastings [Streets, in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside]. The fellow who asked me to come down there said that was the largest reservation in Canada because all [Aboriginal] Nations are down there.

Even though when we're drumming, they can hear the drum sound almost like the drum sound to us is, it makes us feel, let's see, we feel like it's healing us. It makes us proud to hear the drum and the drum songs. Even though people down there would be using, they'd be drinking or doping up, when they hear the drum song, it bypasses all of that. It gets to their heart, and they will respect the drum even in that condition. They will hear it and respect it. The respect would be to walk away. They know the alcohol and drugs, they do not blend with that.

They already know that the drum has the pure energy to be able to help the people. So the songs also represent, maybe … Now, each [member of each] nation throughout North America, they recognize a song that maybe happened when they're a baby or when they were little. It revives that spirit again. It brings it back. So any song they hear will automatically trigger that memory. [They will] say, "Oh, I like that sound. Where's that drum coming from? Where's that drum coming from?" They'll go. They'll look for that sound. And it makes them feel good. They'll feel like it's bringing them back to the purification time when they were little or when they've been raised before the hardship started. And they understand the condition that their parents were in, grandparents maybe, [who] did those kinds of ceremonies or had big gatherings, and always included the songs of their area.

So what I was teaching down there was for them, the ones who came in and really [were] interested in singing and learning to "revive their spirit of identity." It makes them feel good and they enjoy and [it] lifts a lot of hard things that [were] bothering them that they [were] that weak, that made them feel really bad. But after that, singing and hearing the songs, it lifts that. And so it brings back. And this is what I was doing down there.

I do that at [Hey-way'noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Socie-

> ty] too. And the people that come here, some of them went home and did singing with their family, you know, where they come from, and before too long their grandmother and their mother [were] singing. They were singing their songs they haven't sang I guess because they weren't allowed to sing. They were not allowed to use any of their songs or ceremonies. And it was given back to them to go ahead. It wouldn't disturb them anymore if they went ahead and used the songs, but for many of them, they were too far forgotten that a lot of them would not go there anymore. (Personal communication, May 16, 2005)

Another reason for singing powwow songs "from all directions," Fred explained, is to allow the songs to be relevant to urban Aboriginals from diverse places and ethno-cultural groups. A range of cultural and geographic histories are typically enveloped in powwow singing and drumming. While popular songs of the powwow circuit form the bulk of the powwow repertoire in BC, such music incorporates the region's Interior Salish and Northwest Coast First Nations vocal timbres, songs, rhythms and music protocols, for example, in addition to musical influences from other tribal and pan-indigenous sources. Vocal timbre frequently is produced in the chest, which is customary of Northwest Coast traditional songs, but atypical of the northern powwow style, which uses a falsetto, head voice (Browner 2004:73). Singers also sometimes adapt, for example, Interior Salish and Northwest Coast songs for powwow performance. When such songs derive from nations on the Pacific, like the Haida, Nuuchahnulth and Kwakwaka'wakw, rhythms of the percussive accompaniment tend to be irregular, which Ida Halpern annotated with poetic scansion of the iamb (short-long rhythm), anapaest (short-short-long), trochee (long-short), dactyl (long-short-short) and spondee (long beats repeated) (Halpern 1981:6). Tara Browner observes that scholarship on powwows has "posited a loss of individual tribal identity in favor of a kind of culturally homogenized 'super-Indian'," yet "*all* pow-wows have a larger, underlying tribal or regional framework, and by either merging with or deviating from it, participants reinforce personal tribal affiliations" (Browner 2004:4). In Aboriginal Canadian cultural healing programs, too, participants can identify with musical sounds and meanings of diverse local, regional or pan-Aboriginal origin.

During cultural healing, Fred John suggested, "doctoring" occurs as Aboriginals connect with and articulate their indigenous identities. Doing this through music may foster pride in "Nativeness" and Aboriginal cultural expressions, salving abjection (Kristeva 1982) that some Natives feel after the histories of cultural assimilation in Canada, which included an Aboriginal music and

dance ban from 1884-1951 (Sewid-Smith 1979). Expressing indigenous identity through music also is a means of musical and cultural revival within the self, which may possibly lead to musical renewal in community. At powwow sessions facilitated by Fred, I witnessed participants "bringing back" positive senses of Aboriginal self and selfhood through finding personal meaningfulness in musical memories and experiences. On one occasion, Rusty, a St'át'imic singer and drummer at Hey-way'noqu', shared some of his life story:

> When Rusty was a child in the 1950s, he would sing "Indian songs" and there would be Indian dances [on the Mt. Currie or Lil'wat, BC reserve]. He said that although he did not know the significance of a "potluck" or feast, there would be a potluck and dancing and singing all night. He used to sing Indian songs, and people would ask him what he was singing, but then, at that time, the "alcohol was talking." Rusty said that he has been an alcoholic for many years. He felt ashamed of who he was. He went to residential school. But the Hey-way'-noqu' drumming has really helped with that shame. Rusty has been working for a year now. His coworkers joke that he should own his workplace because he basically runs it. (Fieldnote, September 12, 2006)

Fred John commented that his approach to musical "doctoring" is intellectually and spiritually fluid:

> Like, I don't have a library book. I don't write all [the songs] down. I don't write nothing down. It's all in memory, in my heart, so. Sometimes when I arrive down [at Aboriginal Front Door], I'd be singing entirely different songs in my heart and other songs would show up. And when I'd come up [to Hey-way'noqu'], I couldn't sing those songs up here because I'd have another set. There's no plan. I don't plan. It's almost like there's a spirit that gives me their… Whatever those people down there are needing, I will present it to them. (Personal communication, May 16, 2005)

By cultivating a powwow song repertoire that is not limited by indigenous "copyright," by channelling local, regional and pan-Aboriginal sounds that can be personally meaningful to participants, by facilitating remembrances of senses of self and selfhood through such sound, and by mentoring expressions of Aboriginal identity through powwow music, Fred John works towards Aboriginal wellness.

Hand Drumming at Aboriginal Front Door

In 2006, St'át'imic singer Gerry Oleman began to lead a hand drumming group at Aboriginal Front Door. Gerry Oleman has led over one thousand cultural healing workshops and currently works for the Indian Residential School Survivors Society in Vancouver.

> I am welcomed into a healing circle of about twenty First Nations and Métis. Usually thirty to forty people sit in the circle, but Gerry has been away for two weeks and not everyone knew about this gathering. I sit too and close my eyes. The room's energy is kind of crazy, but calming in swirls above. I listen. Gerry is singing a prayer song to a rattle. "The rattle," he says, "attracts the spirits. They come right to it."
>
> Sage burns in an abalone shell, which is passed around the circle, counter-clockwise. I chat with a woman on my left and a man on my right. Both are Native street people, maybe in their late thirties or early forties, with skin charred by scar tissue. They are good-hearted people. The woman passes me the shell, and I smudge my feet, asking for blessings on the path that I walk. Gerry still sings and shakes the rattle.
>
> Out of a medicine bag, he picks a talking stick carved from elk horn. This bag (bright red) lies on a buffalo skin, on which rests fifteen drums. Gerry introduces a special event, a short film on residential schools, which we watch. Then each person speaks, in counter-clockwise order. The first speaker says that Rusty died violently in the Downtown Eastside. I am sad and a little shocked. The woman next to me says that when Gerry sang and shook his rattle, prayer came through her like the wind; it was like god was speaking through her; she "doesn't know how to say it"; it was so "beautiful, so spiritual." She then talks about being beaten up by five people last night, and about how angry she feels that her sister was "cheating" while in addictions recovery. The woman asserts that she is ready to go into recovery at the same time she is clearly high, "tweaking" then tipping towards the ground in a drug-induced slumber.
>
> Eventually, Gerry leads us in singing another song. As the music

> swells in volume, he calls out, "For all the little boys who went to residential school, man" and "for all the little girls who went to residential school." People sing with more gusto and volume after these words that point to the intent of the singing – to heal hard experiences of cultural assimilation and of abuse. We should "love people not power," Gerry teaches. As this ritual happens, Aboriginals flow in and out of the circle as they connect to spirit and song. A few cannot connect and must leave. There are no rules about who can access the musical expressions, based on gender, or the use of drugs or alcohol. (Fieldnote, August 24, 2007)

The process by which individuals find meanings about lifestyle in Aboriginal music making happens through verbal discourse, in addition to the signifiers of musical sound. In powwow and hand drumming gatherings, for example, music may be preceded by a talking circle or healing circle in which each participant has opportunities to reflect verbally in the group. This has been the case with hand drumming led by Gerry Oleman, and with powwow drumming taught by Fred John at Aboriginal Front Door and Hey'way'noqu' Healing Circle for Addictions Society. This was not the case with events of hand drumming and popular music making at Positive Outlook, which I describe later in this article.

Typically, talking circles happen after a music group prays, sometimes through singing or listening to song, and after participants smudge their bodies, a practice associated with medicine wheel teachings and pan-Aboriginal spirituality. Observations of spirituality are important to such talking circles generally. The spiritual beliefs evoked when participants speak, though, can be highly individual – drawing on pan-Aboriginal spirituality; on beliefs of local indigenous groups as in Gerry Oleman's statement about the rattle, a St'át'imic understanding; or on organized religions such as Christianity. Prayer is another type of acknowledgement of the self and an expression of selfhood; a way of retrieving and articulating an internal connection that may also embrace "Nativeness."

There are some general tendencies in urban British Columbia regarding who can participate in music making and associated talking circles at cultural healing programs. Hand drumming and powwow drumming both tend to be highly inclusive of different ethnicities, ability levels, ages, sexualities, and genders. Powwow drumming in BC encourages participation from females and males, unlike in eastern Canada where powwow drumming tends to be male only (see Hoefnagels 2007). Sometimes a protocol that discourages intoxication with drugs or alcohol while drumming affects whether people

deep into addictions feel welcome to drum and sing. Common throughout North America, this protocol reinforces beliefs among Coast Salish peoples whose traditional territories include Vancouver and Victoria, the largest urban centres in BC. After colonial encounters, alcohol was added to a list of factors that can "pollute" one's spirit and life force. Some Coast Salish say that the projection of a person's "spirit power," one's *síəwən*, "does not mix" with alcohol (Robinson 1963:109-10, 138). Gerry Oleman relaxed this protocol in an effort to offer entry into Aboriginal music and world views for addicted people not yet in treatment. Whether and when to enforce such protocols, or to develop new philosophies, is a purview of musicians who lead cultural healing programs.

Brenda Wells' and Frank McAllister's Stories: Hand Drumming and Aboriginal Popular Song at Positive Outlook

> Brenda is stick thin, blind, with worn distinguished features and earrings that dangle, jeans, track marks on her arms. She is banging loudly on a hand drum, sitting on a faux leather sofa in the music room at Positive Outlook – a large apple green and sorbet yellow walled room that usually smells like wieners and beans from the center's free food canteen. Brenda loudly asks for drummers and continues banging on the drum. It's an impetuous signal with no particular rhythm. Several people of Aboriginal descent, myself and the centre's non-Native music therapist, Jeffrey Smith, gather around Brenda. She leads us in the "Women's Warrior Song," which is of St'át'imic origin, and a "Sunrise Song," whose melodic pattern ascends, descends, ascends. Jeff asks for the "Rainbow Bridges Song," associated with the Navajo myth; a non-Native friend that sweats with my cousin joins to sing a "Grandmother Song" used in Vancouver sweat lodges adapted from Plains traditions; a woman visiting from New Zealand contributes a Maori melody, with which women historically conveyed blessing on people entering a ceremonial house. Like all of the songs above, the Maori song is embraced in musical inclusiveness that is typical of hand drumming in urban British Columbia. Pan-indigenous music in the Downtown Eastside engages indigenous song genres and individuals from diverse Aboriginal groups who increasingly have flowed to and from Canadian cities. Another Aboriginal woman, an AIDS patient at Positive Outlook

> like Brenda, picks up a frame drum that belongs to the centre, and starts to drum and sing. Her voice is really scratchy, soft and shaky. Brenda sits quietly, closely and lovingly with her. (Fieldnote, February 4, 2005)

Brenda Wells started learning about her Aboriginal music heritage in jail in the 1980s. She received her Indian name, Little Eagle Drummer, in 1995, in Mission, BC, at the Ferndale Institution, a minimum security prison. Brenda learned hand drumming in jail, and in Aboriginal-operated contexts: for example, a grassroots protest against gendered violence in the Downtown Eastside called the Women's Memorial March (Culhane 2003), and a BC Indian Traditional Parenting Skills Program, which facilitated singing, drum making, regalia making, and sweat lodge ceremonies. Brenda told me that her involvement in hand drumming coincided with some major changes in the way that she had lived her life since she was thirteen. Brenda became more intensely involved in First Nations music when she gave birth to her son, thirteen years ago:

> I was in and around [non-Native] foster homes around my home town for quite some time when I was growing up. And when I was about thirteen, I guess, I was taken back to my parents and I left home when I was thirteen. And I am forty-two. I've been on my own ever since. I mean, I didn't feel safe at home, but I felt safe on the streets and that's where I stayed, was on the streets, right. I've been off the streets now for… You see, my [youngest] son is thirteen. About thirteen years, I've been off the street. Since my son had been born [when I also started drumming more often], I straightened out quite a bit. I don't know how much, but quite a bit, I have. I don't get in trouble. I don't do a lot of the lifestyle that I used to do before, like sell drugs and sell guns and all that other stuff. I don't do that anymore. I used to prostitute for a long time on the streets, over twenty years of my life. I don't do that anymore either. (Personal communication, February 22, 2005)

Brenda felt that her engagement in Aboriginal drumming and singing helped to diminish her criminal involvement.

Over time, Brenda became a motivational speaker at conferences across Canada for Aboriginals with addictions, poverty issues or HIV/AIDS. Still invested and involved in drug communities, Brenda continued a relationship with addiction:

> I used to be involved with the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users down here. Yeah. I sat on the steering committee with the Vancouver-Richmond health board to open up the Health Contact Centre, which is now functioning. I've done a lot of "activisting" for Downtown Eastside drug users because I was a drug user. I still am a drug user. The squatters, the homeless people, I used to fight for them, too. Now I'm doing healing. I'm from fighting to healing. What a warrior woman. (Personal communication, February 22, 2005)

Brenda reflected on the role of Aboriginal music in her addictions recovery:

> I'm starting to see a connection [between drumming and healing]. It's coming more stronger to me every time I come here [to Positive Outlook], right. It's actually really starting to help me to try [to] think about things before I act on them. Sometimes it doesn't always work, but I do. Right, you know. I've been working on my drug habit, which is really coming down, like I don't use every day like I was for the last couple years. I was using every day. Like I had an over $300 habit a day, right. (Personal communication, February 22, 2005)

As with Brenda, Frank's decision to undertake a healing journey through Aboriginal musical activities was a decision to continue a process that had benefited him in the past. It also was in jail that Frank became intensely involved in First Nations artistic and musical expressions, and where he learned to play guitar. He lived "in penitentiaries mostly" starting at age seventeen before coming to the Downtown Eastside. As a child in Alberta, he was juggled between fifteen foster homes. Frank contrasted some childhood experiences singing in non-Native Christian contexts with music making in a medium security prison:

> The first time I ever heard the drum was in a penitentiary, a Native drum. In Drumheller [Institution], I was twenty years old. That was the first time I ever smelled sweetgrass or anything, you know. The first time I ever heard people speak in Cree, which is what I am, was in the penitentiary. So that gives an idea of where I'm coming from. I was left to my own devices, basically. I've been on my own since I was three years old. I'm thirty-seven years old now and I am still searching for who I am, you know, for

> my roots. (Personal communication, February 21, 2005)

Hand drumming at Positive Outlook gave Frank opportunities to "come to grips with [and] let go" of painful experiences that he felt triggered his problems with drug and alcohol addictions.

For Frank and Brenda, Aboriginal musical sound and instruments informed a process of introspection and contemplation. Brenda told me:

> I've really come a long way in the last couple of months just by drumming, you know. I actually sit back and take a really good look at where I came from and where I'm going, right. And what I want to do. I never really gave myself an opportunity to do that. And that's basically where it is for me. I don't want to have to lead a dysfunctional lifestyle all my life, right. I'm 42 years old and I'd like to show my kids that there is a different life than the life I've led all my life. (Personal communication, February 22, 2005)

The types of decisions that Brenda said she made in her introspection – not to sell drugs, for example – stemmed from a sense of a responsibility to try to heal and survive. She also reflected on her life path in Aboriginal contexts of a weekly talking circle and women's support group.

Leading hand drumming at Positive Outlook, Brenda said, was a "positive experience" in that it enabled her to help those who had similar social and health struggles and also to engage in self-reflection:

> It's a good feeling to know that somebody else is going to pick up that drum, right, because this means that they are taking a look at themselves, right, which is cool, right. Which is what people need to do. They are connecting themselves back to their culture, right. And drumming is part of it, so, that is great. (Personal communication, February 22, 2005)

Connecting to Aboriginal music was not a process where an outsider pathologized individual behaviour, but a process of investing oneself in Aboriginal world views that provided an alternate framework for living and being. Brenda equated "healing" with "Native drumming"; making life changes, with reclaiming Native musical heritages that were not taught to her as a child. When I asked Brenda whether there was a difference between connecting to Aboriginal music communities and connecting to the "culture" or social context of the Downtown Eastside, she responded:

> Yeah. Yes! Yeah, there is a huge difference! The difference is that, well, connecting with my culture in the Downtown Eastside. Well, the Downtown Eastside, the only culture that is down here is rock and crack cocaine. That's the culture. Everybody is so connected to it. (Personal communication, February 22, 2005)

For Frank, embracing a First Nations world view, not a context of substance misuse, was the only way that he felt that he could fight addiction. He told me about the first time he committed to a First Nations ontology:

> I was involved in Drumheller [Institution] with the Drumheller Native Brotherhood for First Nations and Métis [an Aboriginal volunteer service organization], but in Grande Cache [Institution], I remember getting involved. And I remember different things happening during our ceremonies where I really started, you know, I knew who I was. I was a Native and this was the way, this was our only [way], this was my way. But yet, that was over ten years ago, and here I am, still fighting addiction and fighting myself, basically. (Personal communication, February 21, 2005)

In the Grande Cache prison, Frank wrote a popular song that he called "Creator." The song evokes how his life priorities changed to the "way" he mentions above. In 2005, Frank recorded the song (retitled "Frank's Tune") for a CD project called the *Circle of Song* that, organized by Jeffrey Smith, featured compositions by clients of Positive Outlook and the Dr. Peter Centre in Vancouver's West End for HIV+ people. I played violin on another track and wrote liner notes for the album (see Smith 2007). Solo vocals by Frank soar over an accompaniment of acoustic, bass and baritone guitars, drums, and background vocals by Métis singer Sandy Scofield. The song features a chord progression of I – IV/IV – IV – I, which is repeated three times for each of six sections that unfold in the structure of verse, chorus, verse, chorus, then an extended tag performed twice. The musical texture gathers densities of eighth-notes to end in an almost (powwow?) danceable rhythm, and the song oscillates between five-bar phrases and four-bar phrases until the four-bar phrases win out in the tag. Verse one states Frank's intent to find "a better way to go," while the chorus and verse two explain that this "way" is the Creator's "path":

> "There's a fire burning down, deep in my soul
> I'm just a child that needs to grow
> Thirty-seven years now, nothing to show

Oh, there's got to be a better way to go
Sick and I'm tired of looking out at your world
From inside of these prison walls

(CHORUS)
I know in my heart and my spirit are true
Follow your path, straight and true
I can be a warrior in your band
Spreading your love, lending a helping hand
Across your land, to any man

Spent too much time in my short life
Puttin' my troubles on my brothers, mothers and others
It's time I started looking in the mirror
There's only myself, can't blame no others here
Please show me the way, show me your path
I've been long gone, but I want to come back." (*Circle of Song* 2005)

The chorus and second verse also hint at a process of self-reflection that following the Creator's path mobilized for Frank. Frank talked to me about an unusual self-confidence that he felt when he put his heart, spirit and past experience in dialogue with a pan-Aboriginal spirituality with which he first identified in ceremonies at Grande Cache prison. He noticed this self-esteem in small ways. For example, he was able to "put himself out in front of people" to perform guitar, which earlier he did not feel he could. "I feel better about myself." When asked to elaborate, Frank said:

> That's a hard thing to explain. Today I know that the Creator is with me. I know that he has been watching and guiding my path and he is the reason that I am still here because I have been through a lot of things that, you know. I shouldn't really be here. . . . I believe that there is a reason that I'm here and hopefully, singing is one of them. And I think that if you just try to be kind and spread love and be a good man, that is a good thing. And I have always, despite what I've done in the past, I've always been a good person. Today, I am being that person. I am not afraid to be that person. In the past, it was put in the back type of thing. (Personal communication, February 21, 2005)

In the extended tag, Frank McAllister sang the following lyrics and vocables, and Sandy Scofield, a powwow-style overdub of same:

> "Way hey hey hey, hey hey hey
> Hey hey hey hey, hey hey hey."

Frank also inserted two lines of English lyrics in the repetition of the tag:

> "You're a calm, loving Creator
> Yes, I'm coming home to you."

This was a First Nations spiritual path. Towards the end of "Creator," Frank articulated living an Aboriginal world view in and through music as being a route to the twinned gifts of identity and well-being.

Lessons Learned, Directions Forward

The stories and histories that I have shared above offer several lessons, which are relevant to future academic research projects and understandings on Aboriginal music in cultural healing programs in Canada. One that stands out for me is that musical participants in cultural healing programs may move through two "fields of tension":

1. A tension between cultural revivalist attitudes of such Aboriginal communities or groups versus cultural assimilationist attitudes implied by historical policies of colonialism and imperialism in Canada, which included: residential schools; the Aboriginal music and dance ban; and the now heavily-critiqued practice (Strega and Esquao 2009) of placing Indian children from troubled homes in non-Native foster care, often with limited credence to Aboriginal family values.

2. A tension between communities or groups affiliated with Aboriginal musical expressions including ceremony and dance, and world views associated with the expressions, versus communities or groups whose interactions orient around drug, alcohol or other substance misuse; physical, sexual, emotional or spiritual abuse (Assembly of First Nations 1994); or criminal activity.

Within these fields of tension, I propose that there is a continuum of musical participation of individuals moving away from communities of hurt, and towards communities of Aboriginal music. At one end of the continuum would be those who do not or usually cannot participate of their own initiative in cultural healing programs. In the Downtown Eastside, for example, some people were simply too sick, deep into addiction or overwhelmed by situations of poverty to attend cultural healing programs. People who are lightly affiliated with a small number of Aboriginal healing programs would come next. Frank, for example, had participated at Positive Outlook for one year when we first played music together. Next would be individuals like Brenda who configure Aboriginal music experiences to suit their interests, needs and their tribal affiliations, from healing programs and other Aboriginal music gatherings. At the other end of the continuum would be people who take part in diverse Aboriginal music contexts, one or more of which may touch a socioeconomically depressed urban area. Since the late 1990s, in the Vancouver area, I have attended powwows (e.g., the Trout Lake powwow), participated in sweat lodge ceremonies, attended other ceremonial events (including yuwipi ceremonies, Northwest Coast First Nations potlatch presentations), and participated in hand drumming and powwow drumming. Some Aboriginals that I have met make use of resources affiliated with the Downtown Eastside although they don't necessarily live there. Others have a history in Vancouver's inner city, but are integrated into Aboriginal groups outside and use musical expressions to maintain healthy life directions.

As Aboriginals who shared their stories here made music, they worked or helped others to travel along this continuum towards wellness, and in so doing, revived "spirits of identity" in ways that cry out for further research. For some, connecting to indigenous musical heritages including regional and pan-Aboriginal elements, allowed them to feel pride and self-esteem after experiencing social and cultural disassociation or dislocation, which correlate positively with addictions (Alexander 2008:58-59, 131-136) and are tragedies of cultural assimilation. For others, expressing personal meaningfulness about Aboriginal identity through music had the potential to repair damaged connections to self and senses of selfhood. Self-reflection facilitated by personal meaningfulness found in Aboriginal music could model, affect and affirm life decisions directly involving health in relationship to broader Aboriginal world views. In these ways, among others, Aboriginal music may "culturally heal" individuals struggling with issues of well-being like the substance misuse, crime and violence that are highly visible in Canadian inner cities.

Notes

1. While Aboriginal Front Door and Positive Outlook are located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Hey'way'noqu Healing Circle for Addictions Society is about four kilometres away by car, in East Vancouver. Hey'way'noqu, however, serves many clients with inner city backgrounds.

2. The financial support of cultural healing programs, however, warrants a separate ethnography of administration. It emerges through a complex and frequently changing array of diversely budgeted public policies involving Canadian federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal band governments and government branches, arms-length governmental organizations, and regional health authorities.

3. From 1879 to 1986, Canadian First Nations and Inuit children were forced from their families to often distant residential schools, where they were forbidden to practice their Native cultures, including languages and spiritualities (Milloy 1999). The schools were sites of emotional, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse (Assembly of First Nations 1994:2); a heavy handed attempt by Canada's federal government and various Christian churches to "civilize," and "assimilate" the Aboriginal into Euro-Canadian society. Christian denominations involved were Catholic, Anglican, United and Presbyterian (Milloy 1999:xii). Important studies of residential schools in Canada include Celia Haig-Brown's *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Haig-Brown 1988), the Assembly of First Nations' *Breaking the Silence* (Assembly of First Nations 1994) and John S. Milloy's *A National Crime* (Milloy 1999).

4. For instance, I have documented how Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations govern hereditary songs, dances and visual artworks through four types of collective ownership: (1) groups of Kwakwaka'wakw tribes or nations; (2) Kwakwaka'wakw nations; (3) groups within these nations, such as extended family units or numayms; and (4) groups within Kwakwaka'wakw numayms (Harrison 2002).

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