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Reviews

Carmelle Bégin, with the assistance of Constance Nebel. *Opus: The Making of Musical Instruments in Canada*. Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992. 148 pp. \$29.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-660-14006-3

Although the art of instrument making in Canada developed slowly over a century, it has experienced a revival in the last two decades. Carmelle Bégin, curator of the Ethnomusicology Programme at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, has chosen instruments which reflect this upsurge of interest, and presents the artists who created them.

Bégin's book features over 100 musical instruments made in Canada by some sixty artisans: traditional, folk, and symphonic, including reproductions of early European instruments. It is the first work of such scope on Canadian instrument making.

In her descriptions of the instruments, Bégin highlights features of their history, decoration, and social significance. Each description is complemented by a short biography of the instrument maker. The instruments are presented in four sections: the making of instruments, historical overview, aesthetics, and symbolism.

In "Making Musical Instruments," Bégin considers medieval, renaissance, and baroque instruments, substitute materials, and the jazz ensemble. This section includes reproductions of such early instruments as Dominik Zuchowicz's *pardessus de viole* in the manner of Nicolas Bertrand (d. 1725). Anecdotes about the artisans add much to the book's

appeal: for example, Linda Manser's penchant for creative inlays, as illustrated by her steel-string guitar with motifs representing eight animal species that are endangered or already extinct in Canada.

The section on "History" traces the development of the guitar, the string quartet, the marimba, and the flute. Included are citations of recently developed instrument designs, e.g., the Butterfly flute headjoint created by Jack Goosman.

The "Aesthetics" section deals with the lute and the trio sonata. A colour photograph of the soundboard on a 17th-century Flemish-style harpsichord by Yves Beaupré shows the beautiful artwork of Danièle Forget, with a foliage motif, tulips, a parakeet, a dragonfly and bees -- all characteristic of Flemish ornamentation.

The section on "Symbolism" discusses materials and sounds as well as symbolic instruments, including folk instruments of North American origin and instruments originating outside North America.

Canada's mosaic nature is revealed in the heritage of such artisans as Constantin Tingas, whose Greek parents took him back to their homeland for much of his childhood. In his Toronto workshop, Tingas builds violins, violas, 'cellos and guitars, alongside such traditional Greek instruments as the *bouzouki*, the *baglama*, the *tzouras* and the *laouto*.

The numerous photographs (both colour and black-and-white) result in a charming, small "coffee-table" book that doubles as an academic resource for those who wish to learn about the current state of instrument making in Canada. Bégin includes photographs of the artisans at work along with their creations.

Especially useful is each caption's acknowledgment of the historical instrument's original creator as well as the maker of the instrument illustrated, where the artisan resides, the year of construction, the materials used, the dimensions and the Canadian Museum of Civilization catalogue number. Two indices help one look up instrument makers and instruments. But for researchers, an initial division into instrument-families would have been preferable and would still have allowed for Bégin's four sections.

A useful research tool is tucked away at the back of the book after the general bibliography. Kevin James has compiled a selected bibliography of newspaper and periodical articles written between

1971 and 1991 that contain important information on instrument makers active in Canada as well as relevant pre-1971 articles that had been located in the course of his main search.

Because the instruments featured in this book are part of the Museum's permanent collection, you can not only read about instrument making in Canada, but actually view the instruments in one place. Since the entire country is represented, you can also see who [has made instruments] in your own backyard. Bégin has indeed filled a gap in Canadian musical history.

Paula Conlon

Craig Mishler. *The Crooked Stovepipe: Athapaskan Fiddle Music and Square Dancing in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. 234 pp. \$29.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-252-01996-2

Named for a popular local fiddle tune, *The Crooked Stovepipe* studies the indigenous fiddle music and social dancing of the Athapaskan people. Craig Mishler taped and interviewed Gwich'in fiddlers and dancers, whose territory spans the border between Alaska and Canada along the Yukon River. His work is based on a series of twelve visits, each about a week, from 1972 to 1992.

Mishler stresses that little of the music is pure and stable; rather it is a meeting of indigenous and "exotic" forms. Using the concept of convergence, he accounts for invention and innovation as well as contact and borrowing involving diffusion (form is transferred intact), juxtaposition (forms brought together side by side, without being integrated), and finally fusion (true syncretism or invention: forms are mutually distorted in the way they are joined):

Outsiders may simply look at Athapaskan fiddlers as Indians playing the white man's music, but they couldn't be further from the mark. Although initially learned from whites, Athapaskan fiddle music has been cultivated in relative isolation from mainstream American country music. Playing strictly by ear and within a strong conservative tradition that is over 140 years old, Athapaskan men have developed a power-

ful, beautiful sound and a repertoire that is different from any other style of fiddle music (p. 5).

After a rather heavy introduction, Mishler changes gears and offers a series of snapshots [brief excerpts from? of] early accounts of the fiddle in this area, based on records and letters of the Hudson[s? Bay Company, missionaries, trappers, traders, and settlers. By 1902, Lt. J. C. Cantwell, who journeyed up the Yukon on the government steamboat, noted that "dances of native origin have been almost entirely discontinued and superseded by those learned by the younger generation at the white settlements" (p. 25).

Profiles of Athapaskan fiddlers provide a glimpse of the extent to which fiddling has been adopted into the Indian identity. The leading Gwich'in fiddler of Canada today, Charlie Peter Charlie Sr. (b. 1919) is admired not only by his Indian peers but by many of Alaska's white old-time fiddlers. Elected chief of the Old Crow band from 1956 to 1968, Charlie went on to receive the Order of Canada in 1988 for his community service to the Yukon Native community and his assistance to the academic community. A consultant to biologists, ethnologists, archaeologists, and linguists, Charlie has helped document and preserve the Gwich'in language. He also [performed?] in the 1988 Athapaskan Old-Time Fiddling Festival held in Fairbanks.

Mishler discusses a number of fiddling tunes, noting the tendency to press the bow hairs very hard on the string:

This squeaking and scraping is ... a conscious attempt to replicate the traditional sound of elder fiddlers, a sound aesthetically marked as being Indian.... It's fair to say that among Gwich'in fiddlers, there is a decidedly greater reverence for tradition than for innovation (p. 58).

Certain tunes and dances are favoured in each village, although "Red River Jig" is the all-out favourite across the North. Mishler notates some of the more popular dances using diagrams and verbal descriptions. Jigs, reels, contradances, square dances and closed couple dances gradually replaced the indigenous dances, with the recent addition of open, rock and roll couple dances. "The net result has been a very diverse dance repertoire developed by accretion and attrition constantly reshaping itself through time" (p. 115).