

Traditions, Stereotypes, and Tactics: A History of Musical Buskers in Toronto

MURRAY SMITH

"Our tradition is a very modern tradition."

(Christopher Waterman 1990: 367)

The term "busker" conjures up images of the past: an organ grinder in the streets of Victorian England, or perhaps a medieval minstrel singing songs of praise while disseminating news from the battlefield. Contemporary musical busking — the art of "persuading strangers to fork out money for free music" (Kastner 1992) — would appear to have a long and colourful history.¹ The present study considers the history of busking in Toronto, a city which currently supports numerous buskers and busking locations.² More specifically, I try to determine whether one can identify a "busking tradition" in Toronto, and if so, what might be its characteristics.

For Europe, the history of itinerant music-makers has been well documented: from ancient *troubadours*, *Minnesinger*, *jongleurs*, *Spilleute* and others now commonly associated with the term "minstrel" (Aubry 1969; Chaytor 1923; Sayce 1967; Southworth 1989) to modern-day buskers themselves (Campbell 1981; Cohen and Greenwood 1981; Pepper 1990; Prato 1984). By contrast, there have relatively few, scattered references to their Canadian counterparts.

There are at least two reasons why Toronto buskers have left few documentary traces. First, in view of its low, often criminal, status throughout history, busking frequently has been either ignored by historians or treated in a perfunctory or romantically sentimental manner. Buskers have been portrayed as passive inheritors of predictable, i.e., stereotypically represented, musical traditions, and their role as active agents in the construction and reconstruction of their own historical identities has not been emphasized.³

Second, as Helmut Kallmann has stressed, Canadian music history is, on the whole, somewhat sketchy: "In [the] search for elements of continuity and cohesion, the student of music in early Canada...finds it difficult to satisfy traditional criteria" (1987:4). Much the same is true of ethnomusicological research on Canadian topics. James Robbins has emphasized that "one of the most striking things about the history of traditional-music research in Canada is that it is uneven: as a pattern, it is irregular" (1992:3). Robbins mentions several glaring gaps in who and what has been studied in the early years of Canadian musicology. Among these *lacunae*, Robbins draws attention to the music of recent immigrant groups — in particular, Canadians of Italian background — as well as

groups — in particular, Canadians of Italian background — as well as instrumental [and] commercial...music” (ibid.:4). It comes as no surprise, then, that references to Toronto musical busking are relatively rare in writings on Canada’s music, for Toronto busking has been a decidedly instrumental and commercial art with early roots in the Italian community.

This report sketches a history of Toronto street musicians and considers the relationship between this history and the musicians who have made it. I view both aspects of this study as complementary and interdependent. As Dell Hymes has stressed, historical inquiry can offer invaluable insights into social processes; conversely, the study of social agents and their performative acts can inform historical analysis (1975:71). This is especially true when, as Clifford Geertz advocates, we consider such acts not merely as “reflections of a pre-existing sensibility analogically represented” but also as “positive agents in the creation and maintenance of such a sensibility” (1973: 451). Indeed, Dutch sociologist Pieter Jan Bouman claims that “sociological understanding is impossible without historical insight” (1955:14).

For Michel de Certeau (1986:xix), a “tactic” is something that “insinuates itself into the other’s place fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances.... It is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’ Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities’.” Results of the present study suggest, to use de Certeau’s terms, that contemporary musical buskers often identify themselves with stereotypical imagery in a tactical effort to survive amidst frequently discouraging socio-political conditions on “the street” (which here includes not only outdoor venues but also such indoor thoroughfares as subway corridors, markets, and malls).

As well, I argue for the existence of traditional processes among contemporary Toronto musical buskers and acknowledge that these musicians, as well as those who document them, are active participants in (re-)constructing and maintaining their own collective identity. Fieldwork for the contemporary portion of the study includes interviews and performance observations of more than 30 musical (and a few non-musical) buskers in Toronto between 1991 and 1993, compiled in my Master’s thesis (1993).

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

"Music out of doors is nonsense."

(attr. to Hector Berlioz, in Prato 1984: 161)

In Europe, itinerant musical culture has long been subject to legal and ecclesiastical "supervision." As early as 451 B.C., the Roman Republic enacted, in legislation known as the Laws of the Twelve Tables, a prohibition, under pain of death, against singing or composing *libelli famosi*, that is, defamatory texts or songs (Cohen and Greenwood 1981: 14). Religious authorities customarily condemned itinerant performers as superstitious pagans (Krickeberg 1983: 99). Political leaders were no different. Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious, for example, "excluded *histriones* and *scurrae*, which included all entertainers without noble protection, from the privilege of justice" (ibid.: 24). In 1530, Henry VIII ordered the licensing of beggars who could not work, as well as pardoners, fortune-tellers, fencers, minstrels, and players; if they did not obey they could be whipped on two consecutive days (ibid.: 62).

Musical buskers in Toronto have suffered a similar, albeit less violent, climate of official hostility.⁴ It is not surprising, therefore, that students of busking history, the present writer included, have found some of their most valuable information in court records, police reports, and other juridic sources.⁵ Indeed, as Sally Harrison-Pepper correctly observes, "Much of the history of street performance . . . is found in laws which prohibit it" (1990: 22).

Musical Busking in Toronto before 1900

In their monograph, *The Buskers: A History of Street Entertainment*, Cohen and Greenwood assert that busking develops concurrently with urbanization as "one of those features that tend to crop up, like usury, prostitution, crime and poverty, wherever settlements develop into cities" (1981: 11). It is entirely possible that fast-developing Toronto, or York, as it was then called, had seen musical buskers as early as 1830, the year in which wooden sidewalks were first built on King Street to accommodate a wave of British immigrants to the city (Oki and Sirman 1970: 4; McCourt 1975: 2). Because traveling Italian musicians were seen from time to time in Canada by 1825 (Calderisi 1992: 639), this is very likely the case.

Although evidence is lacking, it is quite possible that public debates on the issue of "beggars and vagrants" occurred in Toronto during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Under British, and, therefore, Canadian, law, buskers belonged to this legal category.⁶ In the 1860s, Michael Bass, a prominent English mathematician, led a

campaign against street music that led to frequent disagreements concerning the category, so that the law was rewritten to the benefit of both buskers and those in opposition to them (Cohen and Greenwood 1981).

In Canada, strict legislation indicated a growing middle-class intolerance of vagrancy. For example, in 1868 a bylaw (No. 10) was enacted to repeal a previous bylaw (No. 4) for licensing, regulating, and governing hawkers and peddlers trading within the County of Huron (Smith 1993: 101, n. 7). In 1869, a more punitive Vagrancy Act was created in Toronto whereby "anyone 'without a home' could be charged with vagrancy and sentenced to a maximum of two months in jail as well as a fine" (Oki and Sirman 1970: 7). In 1886, the Vagrancy Act was replaced by an even stricter Public Morals and Convenience Act which "raised the maximum sentence for vagrancy to 6 months" (*loc. cit.*). However, the present writer has uncovered no records of musicians prosecuted under these acts.

The earliest clear reference to musical busking in Toronto known to me concerns an Italian street organist ca. 1860 (Zucchi 1988: 36). By the 1870s there is also record of a Genoese street musician who, upon arrival in Canada, had taken up mirror manufacturing (*loc. cit.*). Another early reference to musical busking in Canada concerns the city of Ottawa. For instance, we know that as early as 1872 at least three musical acts were performing in the streets of our nation's capital: an organ grinder and his monkey, a blind accordion-playing gentleman who sang "arias from various operas" led by a little girl who accompanied him on the "French fiddle," and a German band from New York (Keillor 1988: 116). The fact that, in 1877, an usually large number of itinerant musicians (e.g., such duos as a "harper and violinist") were observed in Ottawa (*loc. cit.*) indicates that, by the mid-to-late 19th century, busking had become a relatively common sight in Canada. Again, it is not known whether any of these musicians were ever prosecuted under the Vagrancy Act or similar legislation.

To judge from the dates (1860s, 1870s), instrumentation (harp and violin), the age of one of the performers (a child), repertoire (opera arias), and places of origin (Italy; New York), it is probable that some of Ottawa's itinerant musicians were members of a group of adult, as well as child, musicians who, beginning around 1860, migrated from the Basilicata region of southern Italy to destinations all over the world, including not only New York, but also Paris and London. According to John E. Zucchi's important study of Italian street musicians, because of miserable conditions in Italy most of these itinerant peasant performers emigrated to the New World seeking entrepreneurial opportunities (1992: 6; see also Zucchi 1988: 13).

The Basilicata region, and especially the towns of Viggiano and later Laurenzana, were noted for sending their harpers and violinists abroad. Preceding them were the barrel organ players, an overwhelming majority of whom hailed from the mountainous districts of northern Italy. Later, as the number of barrel-organists began to decline, fifers and pipers (*pifferari e zampognari*) as well as violinists emigrated from Terra de Lavoro (ibid.: 32). Many of these musicians were adolescents and children, some as young as five or six. They were “leased” by their parents, typically under three-year written contracts, to labour bosses or *padroni* who were responsible for their musical training, clothing, food and accommodation, and their general well-being for the duration of the contract. Some *padroni* neglected their legal obligations, and instances of child abuse and exploitation were quite common.

Victorian Toronto may have received members of all three musical occupations. Nonetheless, from the mid-1870s onward, one regional group, and in fact, one family in particular — the Glionna’s from the town of Laurenzana — became prominent not only in Toronto’s street-music trade, but within the city’s Italian community as a whole. The first member of the Glionna family to arrive in Toronto was Giovanni, in November 1874.

A *padrone* labour boss with a controversial background, Giovanni Glionna came to Toronto via New York, Boston, and New Haven, where he had been arrested for holding four child “apprentice” musicians as slaves. By this time, severe legislation had almost completely wiped out the unfortunate practice of child labour in the United States, Italy, and the “significant migration chain of *laurenzanesi*, from New York and directly from Italy” to Toronto (ibid.: 122). Among Italian musical families who followed Giovanni were the Brancieres, Lobraicos, Laurias, and Laraias (Zucchi 1988: 80).

Once in Toronto, few of these musical families actually remained street entertainers. Instead, they found more lucrative and prestigious positions playing harp, violin, and clarinet indoors for vaudeville shows, wedding parties, balls, orchestras and theatres (Zucchi 1992: 167). The Glionnas, in fact, formed their own dance/wedding orchestra, the Glionna-Marsicano Orchestra. Musicians were in such demand in Toronto toward the end of the 19th century that it made no sense to play for pennies on the street when more lucrative gigs were plentiful. Many of their American counterparts switched to other trades (e.g., bootblacking and carpentry) when street performing became less lucrative. In contrast, many Toronto street musicians continued practising their art, albeit in a slightly altered form. Indeed, Zucchi argues that musicians constituted the wealthiest occupation in Toronto’s Italian community around 1900 (1992: 148).⁸

By 1900, musical busking had begun to wane in Europe and North America because of legal restrictions, social disapproval, and economic

decline.⁹ In particular, Italian child musicians had almost disappeared from the world's streets by the late 1880s (Zucchi 1992: 164). In Toronto, musical buskers never left the streets entirely. For example, around 1890, a man named Martucci is said to have brought one of the first street organs to Toronto via England. Martucci's earnings are reported as having been extremely good for the time (\$10 to \$15 per day) possibly due to the novelty of his instrument and lack of competition. His earnings are said to have diminished somewhat around 1900 as more barrel organists arrived on the scene (Harney and Troper 1975: 82).

1900 to 1950

A 1913 article by Margaret Bell on "Toronto's Melting Pot," reported a "blind beggar who [sat] on the sidewalk soliciting coppers" while playing a concertina (234). Bell also described a street performance by a hurdy-gurdy (i.e., barrel organ) player and a dancing bear. The former wore "wonderful spangles on his coat and a peculiar shaped hat."

In Bell's words (ibid.: 236):

With one hand, he turns the handle of the hurdy gurdy, with the other, waves a vari-coloured baton, which seems to have a rattle in one end.

Bell's account continues with still more detail:

Six or seven...hurdy-gurdies [crawl] lazily along.... One halts before the saloon. It plays the Miséréré. Dirty-faced youngsters run shrieking along, and circle around the wailing thing. Then they dance. The music goes faster and faster She [the performer] carries a tambourine. Into the saloon she goes, shaking the bizarre contribution box. (ibid.: 242)

1950s: Joe Ferrari

Early photographs show that barrel-organ playing in Toronto streets persisted well into the twentieth century (Fig. 1, below). One of these (Fig. 1.b) is from a 1952 article in Maclean's by Douglas Dacre, featuring the Italian immigrant organ grinder, Joe Ferrari. According to Ferrari, eighteen organ grinders were active in Toronto before World War II. Of these he names only Michelangelo De Cicco, the man from whom Ferrari rented his instrument. Ferrari himself began organ-grinding in the city around 1912. He had worked with a monkey until about 1932, when the animal was destroyed by the police for biting a listener (cf. Fig. 1.c). His repertoire included ten tunes, one of which was titled "Oh, By Gee, By Gosh, Oh, By Jingo." He had regular customers, and a weekly routine:

On Monday he stays home, and mends his socks and washes his clothes. On Tuesday he plays the organ on Jarvis Street, Toronto's red-light and CBC quarter. On Wednesday he drags his seven-hundred-and-fifty-pound instrument along University Avenue, a broad sweep which sideswipes Little Italy on its way up to the



Figure 1. a (top left) unidentified Toronto organ grinder on Bay St., [1922]. Photo by Van & Ryan, Courtesy Metro Toronto Reference Library (Repro T 13387).

b (top right) Joe Ferrari (see above), business district, [1952]. Courtesy Peter Croyden (original caption in Maclean's: "Coins from high office windows reward Joe for his programs of muddled music.")



c (lower left) Pete and Billie, Toronto, [1932]. Photo courtesy Toronto Sun (original headline, Toronto Telegram, Jan. 15, 1932: "Pete and Billie Play for Pennies"; accompanying story quotes "the master as he ground out his merry tunes on his 150-year old organ. . . . 'Times are hard. People don't seem to have money anymore. But so long as we have blue skies overhead, what does it matter!'")

Provincial Parliament Buildings. On Thursday he goes downtown among the stockbrokers along King Street. On Friday he plays to the Jewish garment workers on Spadina Avenue. On Saturdays shoppers parading on Toronto's swanky Bloor Street hear him. On Sunday he leaves the organ in a little shed behind Michelangelo DeCicco's house and goes to Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church on St. Patrick Street (Dacre 1952: 24).

In 1952, at 64, Ferrari was considering retirement because of difficulty in finding spare parts and new music for his old instrument. As Ferrari is quoted, "All finish. Nobody make nothing no more. Everybody forget 'ow she work. *Tutto finito*." (ibid.: 22)

1960s: Michael McTaggart (a.k.a. Subway Elvis)

The 1950s folk music revival and the hippie era of the Sixties increased public acceptance of musical amateurism and helped foster interest in street culture and spontaneous artistic performance throughout North America and Western Europe. As a few of Toronto's more venerable street performers have told me, musical busking only started to become popular in Toronto in the late 1960s.

The first musician to busk regularly "underground" was the well-known Michael McTaggart who, in 1967 and 1968, started singing rock'n'roll ballads, including those of Elvis Presley, to Toronto's subway riders. In 1970, McTaggart was "discovered" by a Toronto Star reporter who nicknamed him "Subway Elvis" (McDonald 1970: 1), a sobriquet he has retained ever since.¹⁰

1970s: Yonge Street, the Subway and John Musgrave

Toronto's most recent large-scale attempt to create an urban street culture was the Yonge St. Mall. Begun in 1971, the pedestrian mall is said to have attracted many musicians and other itinerant performers until it was re-opened to vehicular traffic in 1974 (Stein 1992).

Throughout the Sixties and Seventies, another popular busking location was a subterranean alcove on the east side of Yonge Street, just south of Dundas Street. Called "the pit," it was a place where musicians performed for crowds that frequently formed at street level and threw money down to the buskers.

Toronto street musician, Billy James, relates that after 1972 or '73 an increasing number of Toronto musicians began performing (illegally) in the subway (1992). Many were told to leave or fined. However, a handful of buskers remained to challenge what they felt was an unjust by-law prohibiting them from making music in the subway system.

In 1979, after being fined several times and charged twice by police, guitarist-singer John Musgrave fought the Toronto Transit Commission bylaw. With the help of local media, his campaign

eventually forced the TTC to permit musicians to perform in underground stations, beginning with a six-month trial period. Based on close monitoring by the TTC and a survey of passengers' opinions, the trial was deemed a success. By the summer of 1979, auditions were held and eight licenses granted to the most promising acts.

1980s and 1990s: *Music for Subways* and "Troubadour Day"

In 1981 a vinyl LP recording was made of the eight chosen subway acts. Called *Music for Subways* the album was recorded in the studio "as a test" to dispel what the producers considered to be a popular opinion that street musicians were not legitimate artists.

1990 saw the expansion of the TTC's program from 8 to 16 acts. In 1991 violinist Ezra Azmon resumed the struggle which John Musgrave had begun more than ten years previously. Azmon organized a protest against what many artists had continued to consider an elitist program of auditions and licensing by the TTC. He called the protest "Troubadour Day." Although Azmon did not achieve his original goal, namely, to make the subway available to musicians on a first-come-first-served basis, he managed to convince TTC officials to increase the number of licensed acts to 42, and also to increase the number of available stations. Meanwhile, the number of acts and available stations has been steadily increasing. In 1993 there were 75 acts and 35 stations; the number of licensed musicians has not changed since. Clearly, the history of musical busking in Toronto is far from over, and probably much of its past remains to be re-discovered. In particular, much more research is required to determine what street musicianship was like in Toronto before the 1960s.

TRADITIONS, STEREOTYPES, AND TACTICS

If one defines a tradition as "a custom, opinion, or belief handed down to posterity, especially orally or by practice" (Allen 1990), and "heritage" as "the persistence over time of of particular complex of cultural goods" (Dorst 1989:129), one is hard-pressed to find a busking "tradition" or "heritage" among contemporary Toronto street musicians. For instance, none of these musicians claims family traditions within the art form like those of the Glionna family or the English busking tradition.¹¹ Moreover, few have undertaken busking apprenticeships.

Nor, in my view, do these musicians constitute a "community," understood as a group of people who "tend to 'stick together,' to help and support each other [and] have expectations of loyalty one to the other and methods of social control" (Fitzpatrick 1966: 6). If a sense of community among musical buskers exists at all in Toronto, it appears to be strongest in such external forms of organization as those provided through licensing programs and busking festivals. Interpersonal

friendships among buskers seem to be created or consolidated during festivals held outside Toronto more than during everyday busking in the city (Smith 1993:58). All the same, contemporary busker identity in Toronto seems united by historical imagery, often associated with “busking tradition.”

The historical imagery with which modern day buskers in Toronto most commonly identify is the stereotypical imagery of medieval “troubadours” or “wandering minstrels.” “Curly,” a Toronto street piper, considers himself an inheritor of such a minstrel tradition. Says Curly:

If you look at the traditional paintings, the Flemish stuff from the Reformation period and further on into the Renaissance, there’s pipers everywhere, man. Pipers on the corners all over the place. Look at Brueghel. So, I’m just keepin’ up the tradition. (1991)

For Toronto fiddler, Ezra Azmon, the *troubadour* image has been not only a source of personal empowerment, but also a political strategy. His previously mentioned “Troubadour Day” protest against the TTC helped increase the number of musicians allowed in the subway system. Azmon also has used the “busking tradition” as a form of legal defence. When Azmon was accused by the TTC of soliciting in the subway, a Provincial Court judge ultimately dismissed all charges against him, offering the following statement:

Mr. Azmon has made a very eloquent defence of the [busking] tradition across the world from one country to the other—and this tradition remains. It seems to me, on looking at the spirit of the law, that in Toronto, unfortunately, we are not known for our sense of humour or generosity towards artists. We live in hard times and the TTC should adopt a more compassionate approach. There are very few venues for musicians to play in. There are no more bands that they can play in, parks have very few concerts. The quality of the musicianship should be their only concern. (cf. Smith 1993: 55-57)

(Azmon ultimately was acquitted because his actions did not fit the Supreme Court’s definition of solicitation, which required that one must be “pressing and persistent” and “contribute to the public inconvenience.”)

Although the “minstrel” image is important to musical busking from the standpoint of socio-political *praxis*, from an historical outlook it is problematic. Claiming too close a parallel between medieval *troubadours* and contemporary musical buskers in Toronto can be misleading. In his monograph on *troubadour* music of the Middle Ages, Peter Whigham offers the following corrective:

The word *troubadour* evokes in the popular imagination an image of a romantic young singer, pale and wan, with a languorous expression on his face, the traditional lute or lyre in his delicate hands. The

statuette of the Florentine Singer with its simpering affectation represents this legendary stereotype. Yet these preconceptions do an injustice to the accurate image of the *troubadours* and *trouvères* of the Middle Ages. (1979: 11)

The French words "*trouvère*" and "*troubadour*" derive from the Provençal "*trobador*," which shares its root with the verb "*trobar*," i.e., to invent, in the sense of discovery or creation. Unlike contemporary musical buskers in Toronto, medieval *troubadours* and *trouvères* were mainly composers or improvisers, rather than performers of others' works. As Pierre Aubry emphasized, "It was very unusual for the *trouvère* to sing his own compositions, this being the province of the *jongleur* or *joglar*. The latter would move from castle to castle, *vièle* on back, and manuscript in wallet to refresh his memory" (1969: 6).

The *jongleur* is perhaps a more accurate historical representation of modern musical busking in Toronto. Marius Barbeau describes the *jongleur* as follows:

[The *jongleur* was] a strolling performer of the Middle Ages whose repertoire included juggling, acrobatics, singing, and playing of instruments for casual entertainment. While the *troubadour* composed and performed in courtly style, the *jongleur* was the purveyor of popular song, dance, and tale, and may be credited with much of the transmission of such lore throughout Europe, as well as with the composition of some songs, and the reduction of *troubadour* works to popular form. (Barbeau 1962: 1)

Despite obvious discontinuities between buskers of the past and present, traditional processes of transmission survive among contemporary musical buskers in Toronto. At least two senior contemporary Toronto buskers, Billy James and Keith Girard, hand down their knowledge as teachers in an apprenticeship relationship with less experienced street musicians. Girard, for instance, undertook this type of relationship with subway melodica player Peter Neville. Neville explains:

I have a very experienced partner, Keith Girard. He and his daughter [Nicole] sort of got me going. The funny thing is I started to follow them a couple of years ago, and I suppose, in a way, they're my mentors in the sense of giving me the initiative to go and try it. Keith's a veteran, and I consider [him] the most consummate busker in the town. (1991)

Similarly, Billy James claims that Toronto saxophonist Jim Heineman, during the latter's formative years as a busker, frequently observed Billy's performances and discussed techniques of the trade with him. Billy calls himself an "ambassador to the trade." As he says, "I love people. People talk to me. I give them good advice" (1992).

CONCLUSION

As with the history of music in Canada, the history of musical busking in Toronto, especially before the late 1960s, is far from complete. But one cannot deny musical busking has survived, and even flourished, in the face of socio-political opposition—as much today as 500 years ago. Traditional processes persist among contemporary Toronto buskers, even when these musicians do not perform the same material and do not share a family heritage.

Theirs is, to borrow a phrase re-worked by Christopher Waterman (1990: 367; cf. 378), a “very modern tradition.” Indeed, I am inclined to agree with Paulo Prato when he suggests that “today’s street music, besides being heir to the street music of the past, is also, and maybe primarily, heir to its antagonists (the home media). [It] has more to do with TV and radio advertising than with an outdoor performance in Victorian London” (1984: 162). It is not that contemporary musical buskers in Toronto have an “invented” tradition in which “continuity with [the past] is largely fictitious” (Hobsbawm 1988: 2). Instead, their history may not be separable from those attempts to “rework the past so as to make it appear that past practice has governed present practice,” for which John David Yeadon Peel has coined the phrase “stereotypic reproductions” (1984: 113). The folk parable of the inherited axe may illustrate this notion:

There was once a man whose prize possession was an ax. It was a good ax, above all because it had come down to him through generations of his family. It was already so old when his grandfather inherited it that the shaft had to be replaced; when his father got it he found that it needed a new head; but the man was inspired every time he used it to think that it was the very ax that had been held by all his forebears (Dorst 1978: 131).

Toronto street musicians still gain inspiration from imagining themselves as part of an ancient tradition, even though much has changed, including their repertoires, musical instruments, and such social functions as telling tales, conveying news, praising patrons, and disseminating mass (or “popular”) music. Nonetheless, street musicians’ general condition persists: performing music outside conventional power structures. It may even be that the tradition of musical busking is actually embodied in the very act of busking itself, in the sense that “performance is a mode of existence and realization that is partly constitutive of what the tradition is” (Hymes 1975: 19). And perhaps all these aspects of contemporary busking explain why Walter Salmen’s treatment of itinerant musicians’ social conditions in the Middle Ages sounds strangely familiar today:

Pay without useful labor, an existence without walls or power, but with independence and freedom to travel aroused such resentment

that in many places musicians were denied a decent burial or the last rites. This irrational and unreasonable nuisance of a musician, whom the power structure opposed, was nevertheless a constant magnet to which one was emotionally drawn. (1983: 27)

Indeed, it may be the very marginality of contemporary Toronto musical buskers *vis-à-vis* such power structures, as well as their lack of community, that has necessitated their use of stereotypical imagery for the creation, maintenance, and legitimization of "busker" identity. One thing is certain: Whatever the nature of their "tradition," these musicians are very much involved in an historical struggle for survival.

NOTES

1. The term "musical busking" encompasses both "street music" and "busking." The phrase "street music" emphasizes a specific location or "situation," where music is performed, namely, "the street." The word "busking" stresses action rather than location and comprises a variety of entertainment types in addition to music (e.g., juggling, mime, and comedy). Musical busking can also be defined as the art of performing music in the presence of pedestrians whose participation in the communication act may include immediate, voluntary remuneration of the performer(s) (Smith 1993: 4).
2. At the writer's last count (1993), Toronto boasted no fewer than twelve outdoor locations (i.e., on the street or sidewalk) and more than thirty indoor locations (including subway platforms, markets, malls) frequented by musical buskers.
3. Nostalgic interpretation of tradition is neither unique to musical busking, nor is it a recent development. Beginning with the Romantic philosophers and poets of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe, conceptions of tradition became disembodied, removed from the realities of historical processes, and located in the inevitability of Nature (Dorst 1989: 128).
4. Although the present analysis deals primarily with socio-political opposition to musical busking, physical conditions of playing music on the street are similarly discouraging (See Smith 1993, esp. chaps. 4-5).
5. My research included such documentary and archival materials as police reports from the Toronto City Council Minutes (1834 onward), criminal law reports, bylaw enactments, news and periodical indices, photograph collections, and interviews.
6. British law regarded street ballad singers as "beggars and vagrants" along with "cripples, blind men, old men, women, children, sweepers, match-girls..., and in winter, sham watermen, fishermen, and gardeners" (Francis Gross, as quoted in Ribton-Turner 1887: 634). It seems reasonable to assume the same of City of Toronto authorities, for

the city operated under British law until Canadian Confederation in 1867.

7. Giovanni Glionna actually returned to the music business after having retrained as a glazier while living in New York City (Zucchi 1988).

8. E.g., the Glionna family used their wealth and prestige to gain political prominence in the community. They became prominent members of the Umberto Primo Society, formed in 1888, as well as the Municipal, Provincial and National Liberal Parties (Zucchi 1988: 65). Two other wealthy musicians from Laurenzano, Donato D'Alessandro and Nunzio Lobraico, also helped form the Italian National Club in 1909 (ibid.: 156).

9. The advent of musical copyright and the abolition of pirate music hawkers contributed to the decline of busking in the late 19th century. Italian authorities, for example, had begun to prohibit the mechanical reproduction of the later works of Verdi, namely *Otello* and *Falstaff*. Hitherto, the owner of a barrel organ could freely play any tune desired, or, at most, pay a fee to the Association of Musical Composers (Ord-Hume 1978: 247).

10. Incidentally, "Subway," as McTaggart likes to be called, had his career temporarily put on hold eight years ago when he was wrongfully accused and imprisoned for a string of bank robberies which he did not commit. Witnesses said the thief looked like Elvis Presley. Subway is suing for compensation, and his case is still before the courts.

11. For an autobiographical account of Henry Hollis, third generation English busker, see Hollis and Wooding (1983). Says Hollis, "Wot's good for my [d]ad is good for me. Besides, my [d]ad's dad was a busker and so was his dad, so wot else is there for me?... It's wot was handed to me the day I was born" (157, 175). Especially noteworthy are Hollis's references to the superstitious nature of buskers, as well as a unique busking argot known as "palaree" (282, 53).

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Résumé: *Murray Smith ajoute considérablement aux travaux de recherches qu'il avait entrepris initialement pour son mémoire de maîtrise à l'Université York. S'appuyant sur un grand nombre de sources, notamment des actes notariés, de très anciennes photographies d'archives et des rapports journalistiques, de même que sur ses longs entretiens avec des musiciens des rues de Toronto et les observations qui en ont découlé, M. Smith retrace l'histoire des musiciens des rues: depuis leurs précurseurs aux premiers temps de la république romaine et au cours du Moyen-Âge européen, en passant par les immigrants italiens du 19^e siècle, pour finir avec les musiciens contemporains, et les controverses municipales dont ils ont fait l'objet durant ces dix dernières années. Liant son interprétation aux cadres théoriques proposés par Geertz, Hymes et Hobsbawm, M. Smith évalue le rôle joué par la vision qu'ont les musiciens des rues contemporains de leur propre histoire sur la perception qu'ils ont d'eux-mêmes et sur leur survie.*