

## **Inventing to Preserve: Novelty and Traditionalism in the Work of Stompin' Tom Connors**

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Since beginning his career as a country musician in 1964, Stompin' Tom Connors has become a major symbol of Canadian nationalism and a fascinating contributor to Canadian musical life. His insistence on performing only explicitly "Canadian" material has been exceptional in Canada's music industry. A major force in challenging the assumption that Canadian themes are less worthy than American or blandly "universal" ones, Connors has stood out in the degree to which he succeeded commercially with such themes.

Stompin' Tom became famous not only for writing and recording explicitly Canadian songs, but also by consistently advancing his belief that Canadians must hear and create songs about their own experiences, rather than measure themselves against American criteria (MacDonald, Connors, Potter). He argued that Canadians were losing their identity because they had no opportunity to express it and criticized Canadian broadcasters for playing only American music, or Canadian music lacking "regional associations."

In the 60s and 70s, broadcasters cited two reasons why Canadian country music was "unsuitable" for national broadcast: much of it focused on particular regions or topics not considered of national interest, and much was argued to be of "poor quality" (CRTC, 34). Connors countered that people wanted regional content, which would be educational and nation-building, and that there was no reason to judge "quality" against Nashville standards, for Canadian artists were as good as any other and should be allowed to express themselves according to their own terms and values.

In 1978, Connors declined his seventh Juno nomination, returned his six previous Juno awards to CARAS<sup>1</sup> and embarked upon a "one year" public performing boycott (which lasted closer to eleven): all this to protest the granting of Juno awards to Canadian artists who no longer lived or worked principally in Canada. There was little doubt that his conviction on these issues ran deep (Goddard; Lawson).

Connors is important not only because he is the only prominent Canadian entertainer to have gone to such lengths to advocate CanCon,<sup>2</sup> nor merely because he has produced so many memorable and inventive

songs on Canadian themes. His work is important especially because he has become for many Canadians a prominent symbol of advocacy. Stompin Tom's fans often regard him as a model of nationalism and of respect for tradition. It is commonly claimed that Connors can "speak for Canada" in an important and meaningful way (e.g., Flohil). Both the admiration of his many fans and his criticism by many others, who suggest his nationalism is too xenophobic or his view of Canada too cut-and-dried (e.g., Anon. 1974, Anon. 1978, Potter 1990), attest to Connors's importance. Even those who do not see Stompin' Tom's influence as entirely positive acknowledge that his work requires a response.

### **Theoretical Outlook: Creating Nations and Traditions**

The concept of "tradition," especially in connection with processes of nation-building, and the notion of "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm) help relate Connors's rhetorical and musical gestures to each other and make sense of an initially puzzling fact: Stompin' Tom can be considered both an important innovator and an important traditionalist. The present study reports on ways in which the mechanics of nation- and tradition-building both allow and require a balance between preservation and invention and shows how Stompin' Tom negotiates a creative tension between these opposites.

**Nations as Imagined Communities.** An important idea of Benedict Anderson is that nations are to a large extent "imagined" (1983, 15):

I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.

This idea and Anderson's view that artists can play a large part in national imagining by creating, spreading, and reinforcing images of the nation resonate strongly with Stompin' Tom. Anderson also emphasizes that such imagining does not necessarily entail falsification or deception, and that it can be an honourable and essential contribution to a community (129).

In the preceding passage (and elsewhere), Anderson implies that any relationship not based on face-to-face contact is "imaginary." This seems to obscure the reality of things that people can share without actually meeting: for instance, currency, geographic boundaries, government structures, and cultural artifacts (e.g., record albums and broadcasting). The work of artists is especially interesting, since many artists rely on the circulation of such artifacts to reach an audience. In one sense, the word "imagining" is apt, for it evokes the kind of creative process that can form a community out of many disparate parts. However, in its contrast with "reality," the term "imagining" is problematic. Anderson is entirely aware of this tension between the "real" and the "imaginary" and sets it up as one

of the central problems of his study. By describing imagined communities and loyalties as "shrunk" and "limited," Anderson makes it clear that, from his perspective, their imaginary status severely curtails their claims to legitimacy. However, he is unable to ignore the deep grip that they nonetheless have on many people (16):

...the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.

These deaths bring us abruptly face to face with the central problem posed by nationalism: what makes the shrunk imaginings of recent history (scarcely more than two centuries) generate such colossal sacrifices? I believe that the beginnings of an answer lie in the cultural roots of nationalism.

Anderson seems puzzled by what he has found. He acknowledges the profound power of imaginings, but appears uneasy about their basis, implying that their potency is disproportionate to their rational solidity. I think Anderson's attitude towards imagining arises because he does not want to allow subjective modes of reasoning to have the final word, nor does he want to grant reality to mediated (vs. face-to-face) relationships. Although Anderson leads us to see the importance of the individual subject in the logic of nations, he balks at allowing private logic to reign supreme and looks to "cultural roots" to explain the hold of "shrunk imaginings." Anderson seems to ask: "How can such a puny thing possibly be so strong?" when he could ask instead: "What is the intrinsic strength of this imagining?" Similarly, Anderson misses some of the reality in non-face-to-face contact between people. Cultural artifacts and their dissemination through material channels can create real connections, and although Anderson acknowledges their effectiveness, he continues to designate the resulting connection "imagined" and accords reality only to face-to-face contact.

In view of Anderson's materialist outlook and his focus on Realpolitik, it makes sense that he should see a puzzle in the material power of the imaginary. However, one can take this opposition as given, not as something needing reduction or solution. The interplay between the imagined community and "real" action seems, to me, a powerful source of creative energy.

Stompin' Tom helps in the imagining of Canada in important ways: 1) He creates for himself, and publicly presents, an enthusiasm and dogma about Canada; fully living out his own personal imaginings, Connors contributes them to the broader, collective imagining. 2) He continues to pay tribute to, and to some extent exemplify, certain "traditional" musical practices, acting out stylistically the claim to historical legitimacy on which all nationalisms and national imaginings rely. 3) Much of his work is produced for dissemination through films and albums; by providing arguably "genu-

ine" contact between himself and people he has never met, he both demonstrates the "imagined" nature of the community and undermines it.

None of these approaches is unique to Connors. Many musicians find themselves similarly involved in the dynamic relationship between "imagining" and "reality." However, Stompin' Tom's ability to use this dynamic creatively, and to make it a central feature of his style, is distinctive.

**Invented Traditions.** In the way he contributes to the imagining of Canada, Connors frequently occupies the dual position of innovator and conservator, preserving some ostensibly "traditional" aspects of Canadian music or culture and attracting attention and arousing interest through novelty and innovation. In this sense, he seems to be living out the dichotomy that Eric Hobsbawm argued to be at the heart of "invented traditions." For Hobsbawm, invented traditions are of two kinds: traditions which were invented and formally instituted at a particular, known time, and traditions whose exact origins are hard to trace, but which developed during a particular identifiable period (1). Invented traditions contrast with "old traditions," whose points of origin are much more difficult to identify.

Hobsbawm finds that advocates of invented traditions often seek historical legitimation and claim continuity with the past, but argues that such continuity "is largely factitious" because invented traditions are "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations" (2). Hobsbawm implies that traditions are invented in response to the decay of older traditions and situations, and that they would not be needed if the old traditions were still effective.

Since they are invented in an attempt to cope with new situations, invented traditions frequently involve new elements or novel combinations of old elements. To be effective, their connection with the past must be largely factitious. Invented traditions must introduce a measure of innovation, and not simply re-transmit older cultural forms. Otherwise, they would be no more effective than the older traditions they are trying to revive. Nonetheless, Hobsbawm continues, invented traditions are powerful agents in promoting certain values and beliefs, and they tend to be closely related to such important social processes as the construction and promotion of nations and nationalism.

I think Hobsbawm draws too stark a picture of the divide between old and invented traditions. There may be a gradual shift from one set of practices to another. Hobsbawm's argument that an invented tradition's claim to historical legitimation is "largely factitious" may confuse surface forms with subtler, inner processes. As Anderson points out, even very stable and established practices require a fair bit of "imagining" to keep them going. Nonetheless, Hobsbawm's ideas about the relationship between innovation and preservation still seem crucial to understanding Stompin' Tom,

as does the observation that invented traditions can be very powerful and persuasive, even if their “invented” origins are publicly known.

Anderson and Hobsbawm provide a framework for approaching the relationship between innovation and tradition. Both writers show that the creation and maintenance of social groups and practices involve both imaginary constructions and appeals to material and historical legitimation, and that those who invent or preserve traditions and nations will have to manage a fine balance between fidelity to old forms and inventiveness in creating new ones.

### **Stompin’ Tom: Making It Actually Happen**

I feel that Stompin’ Tom lives out the process described by Anderson and Hobsbawm and that a careful and nuanced management of potentially opposed elements is a central to his style. Stompin Tom’s lyrics, music, rhetoric, and visual style maintain a continuous balance between various potentially opposing tendencies: “serious” and “silly,” “spontaneous” and “planned,” “old” and “innovative,” etc. Such tendencies are in constant danger of colliding, but Connors seems especially adept at playing to both sides at once. For any particular issue, the polarities are strong, providing Connors the possibility of a formidable image. However, he is able to be, in some sense, at both poles simultaneously. To demonstrate some of these points, I analyze two aspects of Stompin’ Tom’s work: his trademark clothing (including the stompin’ board) and stylistic allusions in his recordings.

### **The Look: The Boots, the Board, the Hat**

After 1970, Stompin’ Tom’s stage appearance stayed much the same: a black cowboy hat, cowboy boots, a long-sleeved shirt, and, usually, a black vest. The shirts varied considerably and sometimes the vest was absent. But Connors was rarely seen without the boots and hat. In concert, he carried a plywood board to stomp on, and at the beginning and end of each show he would hold it up for the audience to see. As a finale, he would dump a stream of sawdust off the shredded board while lofting it over his head.

Stompin’ Tom’s outfit created a “minimalist” cowboy image. He did not go in for more elaborate cowboy gear, like chaps or guns or spurs, and his boots and clothes never had the ornate glitter one might see on, for instance, a Lefty Frizzell outfit (e.g., Malone 1985, 223). Apart from the hat, Stompin’ Tom’s clothing said “plain working guy” as much as it said “cowboy” but was distinctive enough to make him stand out and be noticed.

Stompin’ Tom is well known for always dressing this way. A legend among his fans is that he never takes off his hat, except, so the story goes, when he met Queen Elizabeth in 1973 (MacDonald). The dogged consistency of this look is integral to Stompin’ Tom’s image. Fans hold it to be intrinsic to him, to represent consistency and reliability. However, even as they celebrate this consistency, some fans are aware that Connors devel-

oped this look only in the late 1960s, after beginning to record for Dominion records. Photographs published as late as 1970 show Connors without his hat, posing in an ordinary shirt and tie (e.g., Connors 1970a, 13-16). In part, the look is contrived, designed to attract attention. Indeed, Connors himself has pointed this out (1988). The look, despite its origin, now functions as an integral part of Stompin' Tom — just as “invented traditions” in general have been said to do, in spite of a general or vague knowledge of their origins. A possible reason for Connors' success in adopting this look is that it is memorable, without being too different from what people wear to work or to the tavern in some parts of Canada. It evokes a wide range of “Western” images, without being ornamental. This aura of utility is emphasized by the stompin' board. A familiar piece of unfinished wood, the board was adopted for practical reasons: to be heard above the crowd and to avoid damage to carpets.

On the whole, Stompin' Tom's look is somewhat ambiguous: it evokes tradition, but the precise tradition is not clear. Despite the look's ties to the American West and American country music, we can assume that these are not what Connors wants to emphasize. The look may also evoke Alberta and the Canadian West, but Stompin' Tom's roots are not there. Like the very idea of “tradition,” Stompin' Tom's look seems somehow appropriate and “authentic,” but hard to locate exactly in time or place.

The look accomplishes much. It summons up and continues a tradition of cowboy images in country music, without being a “show business” costume that would separate Connors from his audience. It makes Connors distinctive, while also incorporating him into the lineage of such earlier Canadian country stars as Wilf Carter and Hank Snow. In short, it strikes a careful balance between “traditional” and “eye-catching,” projecting a solid and familiar exterior, with enough inner subtlety to remain fresh and effective in a variety of circumstances.

### **The Sound: Stylistic Allusions in the Band**

Very little seems to have been written or said about the instruments in Stompin' Tom's band. This gap may result from Stompin' Tom's forceful personality, his foregrounding of lyrics, and the “sideman” role accorded the instrumentalists. However, instrumentation and playing style are crucial to the formation of image and stylistic affiliation. My discussion of the music is based mostly on the seven studio albums released between 1969 and 1973: *On Tragedy Trail* (1968), *Bud The Spud* (1969), *Stompin' Tom Connors Meets Big Joe Mufferaw* (1970), *Love and Laughter* (1971), *My Stompin' Grounds* (1971a), *The Hockey Song* (1972), and *To It And At It* (1973).

Connors clearly is a country musician. He dresses the part; he identifies himself with Wilf Carter and Hank Snow, his heroes as a youth; he plays big Gibson and Martin dreadnought guitars; etc.<sup>3</sup> Many aspects of his

band's accompaniment reinforce this image, but with interesting ambiguities. Indeed, fans disagree as to whether Connors properly can be called a "country" artist. Some feel his work is "country;" others find it "more folk than country" or believe he sings too many "novelty" songs to be considered a country artist. Aspects of Stompin' Tom's sound that contribute to this ambiguity include his instrumentation and the stomp itself.

**The Stomp.** The foot stomp seems to have a different role in live performance than in recording. In live performance, his stomp is an important theatrical element and can have a galvanizing effect on an audience. On recordings, the stomp becomes less and less common after *Bud The Spud* (1969) and is completely absent from *Love And Laughter* (1971) and *To It And At It* (1973). In a recording, percussion can take over the stomp's sonic role, and its theatrical function might not be as great a concern as it is in concert. Probably the stomp is still desirable on record as a selling feature, as a sign of "Stompin' Tom-ness," but its use evidently is closely regulated. Anything that could be perceived as a gimmick must be carefully controlled in a recording if it is not to take over and become the centerpiece for the listener. On a recording, the performer cannot respond directly to the audience; similarly, a listener at home might find a novel part of the music to be grounded differently than in a live performance, where context could lessen its effect.

**Bass and Acoustic Guitar.** The bass and acoustic guitar are always present on Stompin' Tom recordings and stylistically are their most uniform element. Two acoustic guitar styles are most common. A simple, open-strum style, used by Connors himself, is always heard and consists of rhythmically repetitive strumming on open-position chords; usually most or all of the strings are struck, without melodic fills. Less common is a simple finger-style pattern with occasional fills, very rarely including quite elaborate fills on the upper strings. This style is never virtuosic (as in Doc Watson's playing, for example). Always used with the open-strum style, it is most frequent on the *Big Joe Mufferaw* album (1970).

The bass almost always plays simple walking patterns or uses an alternating style (alternating between two chord tones on the first and third beats, and using a few passing notes). The bass and acoustic guitar seem to be the two most "functional" instruments, the least inclined towards variety. They lay a solid, consistent rhythmic foundation, which can be considered the "core" Connors sound. This foundation is sometimes reinforced by banjo, mandolin, or percussion (including the stomp).

**Electric Guitars.** The electric guitars use three main accompaniment styles: open-strum, dead-string,<sup>4</sup> and what I call the "Lewis style," after Connors' principal electric guitarist from 1970 to 1978, Bill Lewis. Widespread in American country music, the dead-string and open-strum styles

evoke Hank Williams and Johnny Cash. The Lewis style is an odd blend of three stylistic traits: 1) an open, ringing sound, used in arpeggiating chords and doubling vocal melody fragments; 2) jangly riffs and strident fills, more reminiscent of surf or rock music than country; 3) palm-muted rhythm on one or two strings (sometimes lower, sometimes upper), modulated with a wah-wah pedal.

Perhaps the best example of the Lewis style is "Bud The Spud." Quite common throughout the *Bud The Spud* album (1969), the Lewis style thereupon becomes quite rare, the electric guitar reverting to dead-string or open-strum playing for the most part. The wah-wah pedal effectively disappears by 1970, as do the open, half-arpeggiated, half-melody-doubling features of Lewis style.<sup>5</sup>

**Other Instruments.** Generally employed ornamentally, rather than as part of the rhythm section, the pedal steel guitar strongly evokes American country music. Also evocative, the background vocals are often closer to pop stylings than to country vocal idioms (e.g., "Oh, Laura" on *Love and Laughter*). The fiddle is especially important, because of its central place in old-time Maritime music. Much of the fiddle's stylistic range, except very fast, virtuosic playing, appears at one time or another on Stompin' Tom's records.<sup>6</sup>

The records' instrumental effects extend beyond straight-ahead country in other ways. On "Sudbury Saturday Night," for example, the military snare drum evokes a drum corps rather than country music.<sup>7</sup> "TTC Skidaddler," with its flamenco-like acoustic guitar rhythm and lively bells, is highly idiosyncratic. Generally these devices serve merely to embellish the basic country sound. However, a small part of the repertoire is clearly intended to be heard as thoroughly novel in instrumentation. The most strident instances are "Muk Luk Shoo," "Pizza Pie Love," and "Moonlight Lady." In such songs, rhythms and instrumental patterns differ enormously from the usual Connors sound. In "Muk Luk Shoo," the combination of trombones, an odd rhythmic and formal structure, and arguably "surreal" background vocals produces a distinctive soundscape.<sup>8</sup> In "Pizza Pie Love," *mariachi* rhythms and brass scoring result in a generic "Latin" feel. The "otherness" of these sounds seems to emphasize thematic otherness in the lyrics: for example, Inuit culture in "Muk Luk Shoo" is symbolized by "exotic" lyrics and musical gestures clearly outside the normal Stompin' Tom sound.

**The Maritime Country Style.** Although Stompin' Tom's sound is quite idiosyncratic, and it would be an oversimplification to say that his music is representative of Maritime country music in general, Maritime country music had the first and possibly greatest influence on Connors. Neil Rosenberg has argued that the emergence of a Maritime country music style depended on recording technology. He reminds us that recordings can



convey nuances of style and texture (as live performance can) and also can be scrutinized repeatedly and memorized (as sheet music can). After the arrival of recording technology, personal styles of performance became more influential and spread more widely and uniformly.

For Maritime country music, the most important early recordings were those Jimmie Rodgers made between 1927 and 1933. Rodgers's yodeling style influenced both Wilf Carter and Hank Snow. Carter and Snow first recorded in 1933 and 1936, respectively, and developed variants of their own, which became very influential in the Maritimes. Rosenberg states that Maritime singing and the yodeling cowboys who developed this style were "stylistically innovative in several ways" (4):

In this region folk instrumental and folk singing traditions had been separate; not only was the use of the guitar a novelty, but the singing style associated with it differed from the unaccompanied *parlando rubato* style of folk music. In the resulting synthesis of folk and country music in the region, there emerged a singing style which is typically relaxed and low-pitched, neither as free nor as slow as the unaccompanied style but, on the other hand, quite different from the tense and high-pitched mountain style which is an important component in [some American country and folk styles].

Rosenberg goes on to note that in Maritime country music, unlike the music of Rodgers and other Americans, the guitar part is "rarely integrated with the vocal performance in a call-response manner" (loc.cit.) and that the Don Messer style of fiddling (not a "cowboy" style, but definitely a Maritime one) is lighter, more rhythmically precise, and less concerned with variation than many common southern U.S. styles.

The music of Connors is very similar to the early Maritime style. This is not surprising, in view of Stompin' Tom's origins and his admiration of Wilf Carter and Hank Snow. Stompin' Tom's voice is moderately low, his manner direct, and his ornamentation simple. He uses almost no varied repetition, and his guitar style is decidedly a rhythmic background, rarely venturing into the foreground to join the vocals. Although Connors does not yodel, he has acquired many elements of the Maritime cowboy sound, as well as a version of the image.

**House Parties and Household Music-Making.** Whereas certain aspects of Stompin' Tom's style are clearly connected to Maritime country music in general, some of the very same traits appear elsewhere, and still other features have quite different origins. Connors has often mentioned his fond memories of boyhood house parties and informal household music-making. He has also said that he still enjoys throwing such parties today, "reminiscent of the ones we used to have at home" (1988). As well, his public performances bear marks of community-based music, connecting Connors to an old-time Maritime tradition that predates the singing cowboys, and

which is similar to traditions in farming communities elsewhere in Canada and the USA.

Simon Bronner has provided a book-length treatment of old-time music in upstate New York which displays interesting similarities to the Maritime tradition that influenced Connors. These are not the mere result of American styles spreading into Canada, rather a parallel development of similar traditions in the two countries. In his preface, Bronner tries to distinguish old-time music from other styles. It was "not exactly folk music," because it sometimes used commercial recordings or sheet music as learning materials, and "not exactly country music," because many old-time repertoire items predated commercialized country (xiii).

Bronner notes that old-time music comprised, and combined aspects of, Anglo-American fiddle, square-dance, and play-party tunes, native American and British ballads, and songs of the minstrel show, the churches, and the Victorian parlour. To post-WWI generations, Bronner continues, the style came to symbolize rural values, and in upstate New York, old-time music was equated with country dance music (a main source of farm entertainment). Importantly, old-time music was community music, central to social gatherings.

Connors has frequently remarked that one of his most important jobs as a performer is to facilitate communication between audience members (1988):

When I was out there, I know for a fact that people in every room that I ever played, they became friends instantly, because when I seen two tables sitting together and they weren't talking to one another, I'd introduce them right off the stage the one to the other and say, "Hey, grab that guy by the hand, because he's a fisherman from Newfoundland and you're a lumberjack from Northern Ontario. Why don't you get to know each other?" And I'd sing a song for each of them. And the next thing you know, Stompin' Tom was the go-between, and I'd say, "Well, I'll be down to have a brew with you after, there," or something. So we'd go down and all talk, and the next thing, they put the two tables together, and from that time on they're friends.

The connections Connors draws between music and community service are old and widespread. His influences are earlier than the 1920s, and his appeal is to a broader geographical area than the Maritimes.

Interestingly, there is also an upstate New York parallel to Stompin' Tom's adaptation of the cowboy image. Bronner describes the diffusion of Southern iconographies into upstate New York dance bands beginning in the 1930s—first the hillbilly string band look, and later the western cowboy image—just as Rosenberg has discussed the diffusion of the singing-cowboy style into the Maritimes.

New York State musicians were adamant that the image be called hillbilly, not country, and that it was local hillbilly, not southern. The commercial viability of the look was almost certainly related to the success

of southern hillbilly string bands, but the northerners insisted that they were celebrating their own, similar traditions, and not imitating the southerners. This seems parallel to Stompin' Tom adopting a cowboy look without appearing American. Both Connors and the upstate New York musicians reclaimed images that were relevant to their own histories, but had come to be exclusively associated with the southern USA—in part, by connecting their work to the earlier, old-time tradition.

**Honky-Tonks and Roadhouses.** Bill Malone's *Country Music U.S.A.* describes the effects of honky-tonks on country music in Texas (and eventually everywhere). In several respects, honky-tonks resemble hotels, taverns, and roadhouses in many parts of Canada. According to Malone (154f.):

When country music entered the honky-tonk, it had to change, both in lyrics and in style. The older pastoral or down-home emphasis of the music could not survive in such an atmosphere. Songs about "poor old Mother at home" and "The Old Country Church" seemed somewhat out of place in the honky-tonk environment. Instead, songs reflecting the problems and changing social status of the ex-rural dweller became paramount.... Country instrumentation changed significantly within the honky-tonk atmosphere. In the honky-tonk, with its laughter and merriment, clinking of glasses, and shuffling of dancing feet, instrumentation changed to accommodate the environment. Amidst the din and revelry there had to be, for both the dancer and the passive listener, a steady and insistent beat which could be felt even if the lyrics could not be understood. The music became louder: "sock rhythm"—the playing of closed chords, or the striking of all six strings in unison in order to achieve a percussive effect—became characteristic of honky-tonk rhythm playing; the string bass became a fixture in bands; pianos became more common; and in rare cases drums were used. By the end of the thirties, hillbilly bands were steadily adopting that bane of traditionalists, the electric guitar.

Connors first reached public attention by playing in hotels, mostly in northern Ontario; later, by recording and performing in large cities (mostly Toronto). In northern venues (e.g., The Maple Leaf) and urban (e.g., The Horseshoe), Connors, like earlier, honky-tonk musicians, faced the challenge of being noticed in a boisterous crowd. Connors did not originally accomplish this by adopting electric instruments. Through most of the 1960s he performed solo with acoustic guitar, often without a p.a. system. But his foot stomp, forceful strumming and vocal projection match the more aggressive profile Malone describes. Later, when Connors began to play in larger urban centres, he incorporated electric guitar and electric or stand-up bass into his live act.

These developments need not be seen as direct borrowings from the American South. The main aim, to be heard over a crowd, is not specifically Southern, but is shared by all musicians who play in noisy public places.

When Connors adopted the electric guitar (which he never plays himself), the instrument had become the universal pop music instrument, as much because of rock as of country. Even though electrification is not a direct borrowing, it removes Stompin' Tom's sound further from old-time and yodeling cowboy music and increases its sonic affinity with contemporary styles deriving from honky-tonk. In addition to this second-hand similarity, certain aspects of Stompin' Tom's sound are directly borrowed from honky-tonk and other electrified, American country styles: most notably, his frequent use of pedal steel guitar and dead-string electric guitar.

Like his visual image, the Stompin' Tom's instrumental style on records features a careful balancing of diverse influences and tendencies and results in a hybrid that is difficult to characterize. Like the "invented traditions" discussed above, Stompin' Tom's style refers to, and re-enacts, traditional models, but introduces much invention and imaginative recombination. In short, one can characterize Stompin' Tom's instrumental style as follows: 1) Early influential figures were Wilf Carter and Hank Snow, who introduced Connors to the yodeling cowboy style and aligned him with trends in Maritime country music from the 20s and 30s. 2) Another early, but more general, influence was the old-time tradition of community-based musical entertainment, as described by Bronner. 3) Connors adapted his style to noisy venues by performing in a more driving, strident manner, using the boot stomp and electric instruments. 4) In recordings, Connors employed extra instruments that evoked yet other styles: pedal steel guitar, mandolin, banjo, fiddle, background vocals, and sound effects.

The first two points correspond to the core of Stompin' Tom's sound, in particular its old-time feel; the other two, to an interesting middle ground between the acoustic music of the 20s and 30s, and electrified music from the 40s onwards. As a whole, Stompin' Tom's music alludes to many influential popular music styles in Canada in our century.

## **Conclusion**

The multi-layered influences in Stompin' Tom's sound and look are crucial to a programme of importance to Connors, namely, the promotion of Canadianism. To be both credible and effective as an advocate for this cause, Connors must be part of an historically grounded tradition and offer the public a fresh and interesting personality. According to my reading of Hobsbawm and Anderson, these are general requirements of nationalist and traditionalist endeavours and not unique to Connors.

Connors has turned these requirements to his advantage. He has taken a variety of influences, making his style interesting and broad and giving it a degree of historical legitimation. He has joined these influences into an organic whole, naturalizing his image, making it work as a single unit rather than a mere grab-bag of antecedents, and mobilizing this flexibility to make his messages concrete and particular.

Stompin' Tom can accomplish this, in part, because he has always seemed completely sincere and committed in his goals and methods. In this sense, all the diverse influences and tendencies to be found in his work are united by virtue of their inclusion in this singular vision. This is another instance of the dynamic between diverse, sometimes disordered, particulars and unified, undoubting belief and action that Anderson finds at the heart of all nationalism. This dynamic can continually refresh an interpretation and appreciation of Stompin' Tom. More importantly, it can allow us to analyze many details of style, without leading us away from the larger issues of nation and identity that Connors has worked so hard to raise.

#### NOTES

1. CARAS, the Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, is the governing body for the Junos, Canada's main music industry awards, inaugurated in 1970. By 1977, Stompin' Tom had won six and had been nominated for a seventh.
2. CanCon, the common abbreviation for Canadian Content, comprises regulations first drafted in the early 70s by the CRTC (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission) to ensure fair access to broadcasting for Canadian artists.
3. Named for its very large body, the Dreadnought steel-string acoustic guitar produces a booming tone, very resonant in the bass register. Well-suited to accompanying vocals, Dreadnought guitars have become standard in country music since their introduction by the C.F. Martin Co. in 1931.
4. While recording with Hank Williams in the late 40s, Zeke Turner developed the "dead-string" style of electric rhythm guitar playing (Wolfe and Pinson 1981, 23). Chords are palm-muted on the back beat, often with alternating, low-string bass notes on beats one and three.
5. Released in 1973, the concert film, *Across This Land*, shows that the Lewis style was used in live performances long after it had become rare on records.
6. During his retirement and protest of 1977-87, Connors spent much time learning to play the fiddle (Connors 1988). His first album after this period was *Fiddle and Song*.
7. Although such colouristic drumming appeared in other pre-1970 country pieces (e.g., "The Battle of New Orleans": cf. Malone 1981), drums were not generally prominent in country music until the 70s.
8. In formal structure, "Muk Luk Shoo" differs entirely from other Stompin' Tom songs. Its two verses comprise 33 and 34 bars but sound like 16-bar forms, greatly amplified and transformed with surprising extensions and repetitions. Trombones and jaw harp are used, and female background vocalists periodically warble "Tuktoyaktuk" in a very high bleat.

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- \* N.B. Many of Stompin' Tom's recordings have been released on several labels. The catalogue numbers given here are all for the Capitol re-releases, but the years indicate the original release dates. Detailed discographic information appears in Echard (1994).

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**Résumé:** *William Echard étudie les styles instrumentaux du célèbre chanteur canadien de musique western Stompin' Tom Connors, ainsi que l'image transmise sur scène par le chanteur. Echard, qui souligne les aspects à la fois innovateurs et conservateurs de la musique et du "look" de Stompin' Tom, se sert de l'idée de Benedict Anderson selon laquelle les nations sont des "groupements imaginés d'individus" et du concept de "traditions inventées" de Eric Hobsbawm pour expliquer l'importance de Connors dans le développement d'un nationalisme musical canadien.*