

INTRODUCTION

Music in Canadian Higher Education – Institutional Histories and Entanglements

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In March of 2020 Nathan Hesselink approached *MUSICultures* with a potential article about the intersections between a fledgling music program at the University of British Columbia and the rise of the commercial music industry in greater Vancouver. After an exploratory phone call with the journal's editor, Heather Sparling, a plan emerged for a special but unusual section of the publication, the results of which you see here. While the article about UBC did not initially seem like a good fit with the academic aims and focus of the journal, it did point in the direction of what was seen as an important and timely gap in the existing literature, namely, an account of the relationships between ethnomusicology and popular music studies and Canadian institutional histories and entanglements. At a time of increasing calls for curricular reform in music programs and critiques of epistemological hegemony in several music disciplines, particularly music theory, music education, and ethnomusicology,¹ it is appropriate to (re)consider how we got where we are. The history of our disciplines and fields of study are closely tied to our university programs, where we were ourselves trained and where we train the next generation of scholars.

Early in our conversations, we noted that a number of pivotal figures in popular music and ethnomusicology were near or had recently achieved retirement. These individuals were approached first with the idea that they had long careers and experiences on which to draw in their analyses and ruminations. They might also, we thought, enjoy some freedom to speak their minds, having some distance from their institutions and peers, and might have the time to share their knowledge and insights. Not all the faculty consulted were willing or able to contribute to this project, and in one case, a junior faculty member, Julia

Byl at the University of Alberta, was asked to write in their stead. We also quickly realized that such an endeavour could never be a comprehensive or encyclopedic account of ethnomusicology and popular music studies in Canadian universities; rather, we sought the stories of a small number of diverse programs from across the country, which also resulted in some younger schools joining the mix. We offer here a sampling of program histories, recognizing that we could have included many others here if we'd had the means and the time. We also recognize that these histories might look very different if they'd been written by others. But we also felt strongly that it was important to take these small steps towards documenting the story of ethnomusicology and popular music programs in Canada now with the hopes that others will find ways to expand it.

The organizing framework for the various contributions is based on individual experience. While a number of authors did consult their colleagues and/or archives, the end result is accounts that are deeply personal. Unlike typical encyclopedia entries on institutional histories that frequently remove the human dimension, here we celebrate the role of individual agency and motivations in the development and maintenance of the various programs (as many authors observed, serendipity is also a guiding force). Institutions or programs per se do not exist; what does move and guide students and curricula are living, breathing, energetic, and flawed people who often worked tirelessly to promote the aims and goals of ethnomusicology and popular music against great odds and considerable obstacles (institutional, financial, emotional, etc.). As a result, the pieces recorded here are varied in approach, structure, and tone, and are (of course) subjective (like all historical accounts).

An individual approach does raise some philosophical concerns. As Kyle Devine reflects in his interview with John Shepherd, there are inherent dangers in consulting a few people to speak on behalf of larger institutional and disciplinary histories. To quote from their interview, a central concern is that we “might problematically canonize and authorize certain versions of a historiography, its figures, and its lineages — at the expense of others.” This was not, we believe, the overt intention of any of our authors, but the challenge is real and must be made plain in any collection of such articles.

Another issue related to history, subject position, and representation is the cultural context under which most ethnomusicology and popular music studies programs emerged. While these programs helped to de-centre Western art music and conservatory-style approaches to music education and performance, they are not innocent of accusations of exclusivity and colonization, as noted above. The architects of these programs were almost exclusively white — though there was some diversity in terms of gender and social class — and thus the authors of the histories contained here are also white. Unintentional as it may have been —

and a number of notable exceptions in these pages point to other possibilities — universities in general, and music programs in particular, have historically privileged white, middle-class students. White composers and musics have also been the norm, at least until very recently.

Acknowledging such contexts, the papers in this collection frequently draw on the self-reflexive voice while presenting history as a series of challenges, accomplishments, and missed opportunities. This includes a constructive grappling with our pasts, both the positive and negative aspects, fulfilling some documentary function while at the same time providing thought-provoking and compelling ways of understanding where we are at present, what has been overcome, and ways to move forward as a positive force for our schools and our communities. Curricular reform, (anti)racism, Indigenous rights, and decolonization are themes encountered across the various contributions, but as editors we also felt we could do more.

And so what is presented here is just one step in a broader process in which our academic societies are engaged. Heather is working with the incoming journal editor, Gordon E. Smith, to develop a future special issue by diverse young authors who will speak about their own experiences of navigating these programs as students, academics, and professionals. This future issue is inspired by, and draws on, the Society for Ethnomusicology's roundtable, "Many Voices at the Table: A Conversation about the Need for Equity in Canadian Ethnomusicology" in 2020, sponsored by the Canadian Society for Traditional Music, and by IASPM-Canada's roundtable, "Strategies for Justice: A Roundtable Discussion of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in Music" in 2021. CSTM President Marcia Ostashewski has also initiated a number of anti-racist initiatives, which will include the development of a future special issue of *MUSICultures*, in collaboration with Meghan Forsyth, on anti-racist pedagogies.

The goal of this issue's focus on program histories is to provide some kind of yardstick by which to measure what we have achieved, but also to highlight the ways in which some are pushing for change, and how their visions may contribute to a more equitable and inclusive university music education in Canada. We invite such individuals to approach the journal so that this dialogue can continue.

Setting the Scene

The relationship between individuals and institutions is, nevertheless, a complex and contested one. As Gail Bossenga noted in an overview of the so-called "new institutionalism" school of thought,

institutions are rooted in cognitive and normative frameworks by which individuals make sense of the world, and, at the same time, they are sources of resources that both constrain and empower people to act in order to realize socially-defined purposes. Institutions thus bridge the cultural and social realms in complex ways. (2016: 9)

And so while we may celebrate the role of the individual in the collection of articles that follow, we also are cognizant of the push and pull that institutions exert on our personal and collective efforts for change, in both uplifting and frustrating ways. For these reasons, we feel we must briefly discuss the Canadian context of musical institutions in particular.

In 2010, Harald Jørgensen published “Higher Music Education Institutions: A Neglected Arena for Research?” in which he calls for more research on higher education music programs. In his work, he surveyed 847 published research reports on higher music education, of which 68% were authored by scholars in the US while only 2% were authored by scholars in Canada. This historical and continuing imbalance shows there is clearly room for more studies from and about higher education music programs in Canada.

Jørgensen organizes the contents of the 847 studies into four categories: 1) institutional characteristics (e.g., program history, mission, goals, culture, etc.); 2) institutional resources (e.g., programs and courses offered; human, musical, and material resources); 3) institutional processes (e.g., student recruitment, entrance requirements, teaching); and 4) institutional relations to external sectors (e.g., political, economic). More than half (58%) of the studies surveyed address institutional processes, a quarter (25%) address institutional resources, and only 9% and 8% address institutional characteristics and relations to external sectors, respectively.

Within these four categories, Jørgensen identifies additional lacunae. For example, the majority of articles addressing institutional characteristics provide histories, leaving other significant gaps:

There are few studies of the other core characteristics. Some “Type” issues are totally or nearly totally neglected by research, such as the size of the institution (e.g. does size influence institutional quality?); the study of institutions with one artistic basis (music) and institutions with a multi-artistic basis (e.g., will integration of several art programs within the same institution develop new artistic practices?); and funding. (2010: 72)

Those articles addressing institutional resources are primarily about human resources (faculty, students, and staff), neglecting matters of repertoire practiced and performed in particular higher education music programs, as well as material resources and infrastructure, not to mention curricula and courses. Articles addressing institutional processes are primarily about student learning and development, leaving a lack of studies about the performance, research, and creative activities of both teachers and students, as well as about leadership, management, institutional change, social interactions, behaviour, and decision-making processes. Finally, studies about the relationship between institutions and external sectors tend to focus on the job sector for graduates, leaving gaps in knowledge about the relationship between higher education music programs and earlier music education institutions (e.g., elementary and high schools, conservatories, and other music organizations), politics, and economics. Moreover, there is a lack of research on “town-gown” relationships and the kinds of community-university projects and initiatives being undertaken.

Jørgensen’s categories offer one way to understand the value of the articles in this collection. Although these are not peer-reviewed research studies (with the exception of Julia Byl’s), they do offer valuable documentation of a range of issues and features of ethnomusicology and popular music studies in Canada. And although none of these articles addresses all of Jørgensen’s characteristics, most address at least several and, taken as a whole, nearly all of his concerns. In short, this group of articles offers valuable evidence and insights that contribute to the understanding of higher education music programs in Canada.

Writing ten years earlier, Beverley Diamond noted in a reflective piece on the study of music in Canada specifically that many of the aforementioned gaps in the research — institutional and methodological change, curricular reform, and the intersections between academy and community — are crucial to our understanding of the ways we study, understand, and write about different genres and populations in a so-called “multicultural” nation (2000). Couched within a series of “fields of tension” borrowed from the writing of Krister Malm — homogeneity-diversity, global-local, mediated-live, etc. — Diamond identified three failings of ethnomusicological research of the 1990s that continue to speak to inherited biases against marginalized and minority musical activity in and around colleges and universities. These include: 1) denying the modernity of communities in our midst, 2) ignoring their commercial aspects, and 3) failing to enable more access to major venues and media by the musicians with whom we work (2000: 69). She goes on to recommend two courses of action that are equally relevant to the ongoing

workings of the fields of ethnomusicology and popular music studies: 1) explore post-colonial ideas about research methodology, and 2) identify the particular strengths and weaknesses of our positions as scholars working within Canadian academia (70).

Lastly, we briefly call attention to the ongoing importance and urgency of the project of decolonization, both at the level of curriculum and pedagogy. While there is a growing and rich literature both within and outside of North America, we find special direction and inspiration in the Canadian perspective of Margaret Walker, who reminds us all that, “We cannot decolonize without knowing about colonialism, and we cannot know about colonialism without engaging vigorously with its history and, for us, its musical history” (2020: 19). Nearly all articles in this collection historicize and problematize our colonial and settler legacies, the outcomes of which we continue to live with as we struggle for Indigenous spaces — spaces in the curriculum, spaces on campus, and spaces in the methodological, epistemological, and spiritual makeup of our students and faculty. To fully decolonize we must not only address the gaps in the research and curricula, but “must recognize the value of multiple knowledge systems, beliefs, values, and practices in music” (Attas and Walker 2019: 12).

Looking Ahead

There are certainly many ways the following articles can be read and understood. Our hope is that readers will treat this collection and subsequent initiatives as a resource that can be revisited and from which to draw wisdom. Nearly every issue raised in the critical literature on curricular reform, decolonization, and diversity and equity is found in one form or another in the program histories and perspectives presented here. Such concerns include elitism and racism in university curricula, the support and/or marginalization of ethnomusicology and popular music studies, relationships between academia and local communities, Indigenous histories and worldviews, experiential learning, enduring legacies of colonialism, the importance of archives and public sector work, language usage, the role and place of evolving technologies, centre vs. periphery and the meanings of “local,” and different modalities of learning.

There is still obviously much work to be done. Many readers will be able to see themselves and their institutions in these pages, and at the same time we hope that they will be inspired and encouraged to move in new or different directions. Our sampling of university programs is wide and diverse, and one benefit of such a broad perspective is not necessarily having to reinvent the wheel every time a panel or committee convenes to discuss changes in curriculum or

teaching strategies. A number of progressive ideas, approaches, and programs have been experimented with and/or realized, and if special synergies are realized across time and space we will feel doubly rewarded.

Any such benefits or enthusiasm are tempered by current voices that remind us that the projects of decolonization, indigenization, curricular and institutional change, and social justice are processes, not end products (Attas and Walker 2019: 3). Critical self-reflection and historical reckoning cannot be complete with one-off publications and dedicated conference roundtables; it requires the hard work of being ever open to criticism, dedication to constructive and ethical transformation, a commitment to the dismantling of oppressive power structures, and a willingness to listen to and act upon diverse voices and worldviews. 🍁

Notes

1. See, for example, Dr. Danielle Brown's "Open Letter on Racism in Music Studies, Especially Music Education and Ethnomusicology" (posted June 12, 2020, <https://www.mypeopletellstories.com/blog/open-letter>) and Philip Ewell's writing on racism in music theory, such as his blog, "Music Theory's White Racial Frame: Confronting Racism and Sexism in American Music Theory" (<https://musictheoryswhiteracialframe.wordpress.com/>).

References

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