

From Point Grey to Little Mountain: Connections and Intersections between UBC Music and Little Mountain Sound

NATHAN HESSELINK

Introduction

For at least the past ten years there has been a climate of insecurity and identity crisis surrounding college and university undergraduate music programs in North America and the United Kingdom. The reasons and motivations behind such concerns are tangled and multifarious, with energies focused on more inclusionary structures that allow room for training, performance, composition, and theoretical worldviews beyond the traditional Western European conservatory model (Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major 2016; Moore 2017; Robin 2017; City of Vancouver 2019). In Canada, such imperatives are compounded by the increased desire to decolonize the performance arts, repertoire, and curriculum (Hess 2015; Bartleet et al. 2016; Pearse et al. 2019; Beverley Diamond's contribution to this volume). Particularly precarious has been the place or role of commercial music making within campus walls, with forays into the worlds of jazz and popular music being adopted at times with fervour (see the accompanying articles on Carleton University and The Université du Québec à Montréal), at others with trepidation or scorn.

In 2018, I embarked on a project that focused on entrainment and the technological mediation of time keeping as found in the objects of the click track and electronic drum machine. Aiming more specifically at rock music of the late 1970s through the early 1990s, I began by contacting local Vancouver engineers, producers, and session musicians who were active during that period. What I began to notice was that as soon as I introduced myself as a music professor from the University of British Columbia (hereafter UBC), it was almost universally followed by some close variation on “Interesting, [I, or such

and such a person] attended or worked at UBC.” This statement initially took me by surprise, as even after having worked at UBC in the School of Music for 14 years, I hadn’t heard anything about these connections or intersections between UBC Music and the Vancouver commercial music scene. (UBC has no major or full-time faculty member in commercial music making or production, nor any required courses in popular music.)

Subsequent research led to the conception of this article, which is about a largely unacknowledged and unrecorded history between UBC’s Department/School of Music (located on Point Grey, the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people) and the transformation of Vancouver from a regional musical hub to international stature, as shown in the development of Griffiths-Gibson-Ramsay Productions (a jingles/themes house) and its commercial recording venture, Little Mountain Sound Studios. My chosen time period is primarily the 1960s-1980s, which encompasses the exponential growth of the UBC music program and the commercial music scene of greater Vancouver. It is necessarily a selective history, as UBC, the School of Music, and Vancouver itself went through complex and dramatic changes during these three decades. In addition to the general knowledge gleaned from such an expanded institutional history, I will argue that this narrative provides a model for community engagement that embraces commercial music making currently in line with desired outcomes of curricular reform.

I begin by briefly outlining the general historical context and details about the individual who sparked commercial recording in Vancouver, which in combination created the venues and avenues of possibility and success for those who would follow. This is then followed by an early account of UBC’s Department of Music and the creation of the BMus degree. The remainder of the article traces the trajectory of a number of the school’s graduates who contributed to the meteoric rise and sustenance of Vancouver’s commercial music scene, with special emphasis placed on the centre of such activity, Little Mountain Sound Studios.

In the Beginning (Downtown)

The story of the recording industry in Vancouver begins properly with Al Reusch (1914-2000), radio broadcaster, performing musician (saxophone and clarinet), big band leader, and producer, who was the founder of Aragon Recording Studios, Vancouver’s first commercial recording studio. Born in Yorkton, SK, Reusch was a self-taught musician, first on ukulele and banjo, later on the saxophone and clarinet; by the age of 17 (1931) he had joined a popular local band called The

Rhythm Aces, which was regularly broadcast on CJGX in his hometown. Three years later, Reusch moved to Vancouver, joined the union, and began to play live gigs. In 1935, he knew enough musicians to start his own big band, which began to play the local ballrooms such as Ritz Hall, The Roxy, The Commodore, The Cave, and The Palomar; he would secure a regular engagement at the latter (previously at 715 Burrard Street, at the southwest corner of Burrard and West Georgia [it no longer exists]; Beddoes 1999: 2, 4-5).¹

In 1940, after the birth of his first child, Reusch decided to try and land a more stable job in broadcasting. In 1942, he was hired by CFJC in Kamloops, BC, though he continued to play with his band in Vancouver. Always ambitious to move to larger markets, in 1943 he was hired by CJCA in Edmonton, AB; this eventually led to his hiring at CKNW in New Westminster, BC in 1945. Later that year, Reusch returned to Vancouver as production manager at local station CKMO (later CFUN). In addition to his role as band leader and production manager, for the next few years Reusch hosted “The Al Reusch Show” in the mornings and “Name It, Play It,” an extremely popular teenager music request show, in the afternoons. His broadcasts preceded by seven years and cleared the path for later teen hit and rock ‘n’ roll DJ Red Robinson (in 1954; see B.C. Music Industry 2019a and 2019b).

Vancouver popular music history would change in 1946 when Reusch formed Aragon Recording Studios with business partners Pete Peverley, Rae Peverley, and Reo Thompson (the name was chosen because it started with the



Fig. 1. Davis Chambers Building (c. 1955), 615 West Hastings at Seymour, Vancouver. (Photo credit: City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 447-329, photographer Walter E. Frost.)



Fig. 2. View of 615 West Hastings at Seymour, Vancouver, 2019. (Photo by author.)

letter “A,” and it looked good to the partners on the label). “After the war a lot of people wanted to record and send messages home,” Reusch explained. “So we rented space in an office building at 615 West Hastings [the old Davis Chambers Building] and soundproofed it” (qtd. in MacKie 1998; see Figures 1 and 2). It was a three-room space with just one cutting turntable, a playback turntable, and a console; in its first year, election speeches and advertising jingles were added to requests for personal messages. A year later, the Aragon Records label was conceived in anticipation of recording commercial music (B.C. Music Industry 2019a).

Reusch couldn’t have anticipated his first recording artist, however. “[In 1948] a piper [William Barrie]² came in and told us that there was a market for this kind of music . . . They used it for instruction and so we recorded and released three 78s of highland music. They sold well all over the world” (qtd. in Harrison 1997b; see also McLaughlin 2000).³ It was the fourth release of the label, by BC native Keray Regan (born Oscar Melvin Frederickson), “My Home by the Fraser” (AR-104), however, that would become one of the biggest sellers — in excess of 100,000 copies — and which helped establish Aragon Records as a place to record for local country and western, rockabilly, and early rock ‘n’ roll artists (see Figure 3).⁴ In 1953, Reusch became sole owner of Aragon.

By the early 1960s, Aragon was beginning to outgrow its modest setup on Hastings Street. And so, in 1965, Reusch took the bold step of purchasing



Fig. 3. "My Home by the Fraser" (1949) by Keray Regan, Aragon Records. (Photo by author.)

a property at 1234 West 6th Avenue in the Fairview neighbourhood, choosing to build a state-of-the-art studio from the ground up with the help of Howard Tremaine, engineer and author of the now classic *The Audio Cyclopedia* (1969). "I had a lot of sleepless nights because I worried I might have bitten off more than I could chew," Reusch remembered. "But I was optimistic because by that time I realized there was a lot of talent on the West Coast" (qtd. in Harrison 1997b). Equipped with a 4-track recorder, natural echo chambers, and a room large enough for a small orchestra, a year later, in 1966, it was christened by Diana Ross and the Supremes in what would become a long line of classic artists and recordings to be produced by Aragon (later Can-Base Studios, and then later in the 1970s Mushroom Studios):

Aragon had a good reputation and did contract work for projects from all over the country. One day in 1966, Reusch received a call from a producer in L.A. who needed to book a rehearsal pianist, a concertina player and five hours in the studio in order to record The Supremes — the next day.

The Supremes were playing The Cave supper club at the time and the numbers were for the soundtrack of a TV show. They included a Nelson Riddle arrangement of "Michael Row the Boat Ashore." Everything went well except for the Riddle tune and the

session ran overtime as The Supremes tried in vain — 29 takes — to hit the last note correctly. In Motown lore, this recording was for The Supremes' famous appearance as nuns on the Tarzan TV series. (Harrison 1997b)⁵

In 1968, Aragon Studios would be the site of another important Vancouver musical landmark, though to properly understand its significance we must briefly turn the clock back and change our focus to the activities of the fledgling Department of Music at the University of British Columbia.

From Point Grey...

In 1946, the same year that Aragon Recording Studios was founded, a new Department of Music was launched at UBC, located across town in the Point Grey neighbourhood. A humble affair in the beginning, under the guidance of its first official instructor and chair of music, Harry Adaskin, UBC was initially only able to offer a BA degree with a major in music.⁶ (Al Reusch was an early visitor to the campus in 1949 when he gave a talk to the UBC Jazz Society.⁷) By 1959, a BMus program was established, followed by a Master of Music in 1966, reflecting increased government support, a growing interest in the academic study of music, and a robust faculty and student body. The expansion was overseen by G. Welton Marquis, Adaskin's successor and head of the department from 1958-72. What began in 1959 with 27 students and 8 faculty grew dramatically to 170 students and 41 faculty by 1964; by 1970, 311 students (280 undergraduate and 31 graduate) and 55 faculty members filled out the ranks (Church et al. 2013).

The new degree (BMus) and initial expansion of the department required a new and consolidated space, and so in 1959 UBC Music moved into the Old Forestry Building at 6358 University Blvd (currently the Theatre-Film Production Building, sandwiched between the School of Education and the Audain Art Centre; refer to Figure 4). At the time, the back of the building featured a large classroom with a vaulted ceiling that also doubled as a rehearsal space and small recital hall (larger productions were put on at Brock Hall). The classroom also had a loft space, where students could be found hanging out and/or sleeping between classes or even overnight (Doreen Oke, personal communication, September 16, 2019). UBC Music would occupy this building until the opening of its current home at 6361 Memorial Road in 1968.

Along with the move to the Old Forestry Building, 1959 also marked the hiring of two new professors from the United States, Cortland Hultberg



Fig. 4. Old UBC Department of Music Building, 6358 University Blvd, Vancouver. (Photo by author.)

and Dave Robbins. Both Midwesterners who had served in WWII (Hultberg from Illinois, Robbins from Indiana), these two remarkable individuals would set a number of trends and standards in motion with effects still felt today. Before settling in as a professor of music theory and composition (from 1970-93), Cortland Hultberg's two largest contributions to the music department were the founding of the UBC Chamber Singers in 1962, and the founding of the electronic music studio in 1965 (Townsend 2002; King and McGregor 2013; Gooch and Lower 2013; see Figure 5).⁸ The Chamber Singers, as an elite choir of 12 mixed voices, sang only music from before 1600 and after 1900; the singers had to be able to sight-sing impeccably and to sing without vibrato (Sharman King, personal communication, December 5, 2018). As will be seen below, UBC Chamber Singers became the site of a remarkable confluence of talent and personalities.

Dave Robbins had moved to Vancouver eight years earlier, in 1951, as a trombonist and band leader. After teaching jazz at a local secondary school and a brief stint at Vancouver Community College (VCC), he joined UBC from 1959 to 1966 as a professor of trombone (see Figure 6). Over the next two decades, he would become a staple of the Vancouver music scene, forming his own big band; performing with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, the CBC Vancouver Orchestra, and the Vancouver Opera; and establishing a jazz and commercial music department at VCC (The Canadian Encyclopedia 2013). According to one of his earliest students and later Vancouver hallmark

in his own right, Sharman King, “Dave Robbins is arguably the person most responsible for elevating musical standards in Vancouver to a competitive level” (personal communication, December 5, 2018).

One of the first students to enter the new program in the 1959 class was Brian Gibson, a New Westminster, BC native who played the trombone (see Figure 7). In addition to taking lessons from Dave Robbins, he clearly remembered his first impression of Cortland Hultberg:



Fig. 5. Cortland Hultberg and UBC Chamber Singers, 1971-72. (Photo credit: UBC Music.)



Fig. 6. Dave Robbins (c. 1965), UBC campus. (Photo credit: Sharman King.)

Why UBC played such a critical role with us was the connection in particular with a first-year prof from the US named Cortland Hultberg. He was our mentor and inspiration, and he was close to maybe two years older than we were. A really young guy who had gone to Illinois, a very accomplished composer, and young. “This guy is so hip!” (personal communication, September 29, 2019)⁹

From the beginning, Gibson was interested in the popular music scene, in spite of the fact that most UBC grads earned their degree to teach in the public school system. And so, he asked Hultberg, “What do we do who don’t want to pursue teaching?”

Hultberg then explained that he had been a vocal cheerleader and had formed several groups before coming to UBC. Even though Gibson admitted he had never sung, he was encouraged to go out and form his own vocal group.¹⁰ He gathered some fellow students together, went out to the Quonset hut, and wrote out and recorded some charts. Gibson then took his recording to the CBC and played it for one of the staff members, who then passed it on to the producers Neil Sutherland and Bob Wagstaff. The CBC was impressed enough



Fig. 7. Brian Gibson (c. 1961), UBC campus.
(Photo credit: UBC Music.)

to begin to use his group for radio and television variety shows (some of which were run by Dave Robbins). Over the next two years, Gibson would attend UBC during the day and record at night with his newly christened Gibson 6. That ensemble would eventually morph into The Accents, a four-voice vocal group.

The next fortuitous meeting occurred in 1961, when Gibson met fellow student Brian Griffiths, an accomplished singer and arranger, on the front steps of the music building. The two of them immediately felt a special connection. Gibson and Griffiths would join the then new UBC Chamber Singers under Cortland Hultberg in 1962, which would lead

to their recruiting of new members from the Chamber Singers to form their new commercial music group, the Numerality Singers, in 1963. According to both Brian Gibson and Doreen Oke (who was both a receptionist and a singer with the group), jobs with the Numerality Singers helped pay off their UBC degrees, in addition to purchasing their first cars (personal communication, September 29, 2019). In addition to other radio and television work, The Numerality Singers, in various lineups under producer Ken Gibson, were regulars on three CBC variety or music television shows: 1) *Let's Go*: July 17 through September 4, 1964; 2) *Up, Up, and Away*: July 29 through August 19, 1967 (see Figure 8); and 3) *Hits a Poppin'*: August 4 through September 1, 1968 (Corcelli 2005).

After graduation in 1964, Gibson and Griffiths (Griffiths would graduate in 1965) began to notice that their commercial work was not covering the expenses of being married, having mortgages, etc., and so the notion of composing and recording jingles was born. No one in town was doing it, and Vancouver had the musicians and the talent to support such a venture; what it didn't really have was the professional grade studios, outside of Aragon. Griffiths and Gibson approached a Seattle producer who was looking for clients, which led to their first official job breathing new life into the old classic "Rice a Roni" out of San Francisco. While that first contract ended in disaster,¹¹ it did lead to introductions to other producers and advertisers in Seattle, followed by ones in Portland, San Francisco, and Toronto, resulting in growing, steady employment.



Fig. 8. Numerality Singers (1967) on set of "Up, Up, and Away." (Photo credit: Brian Gibson.)

During this post-UBC period, Griffiths was offered an opportunity to do some studio work in Los Angeles. With the blessing of his partner Gibson, Griffiths decided to take 1966 and part of 1967 off to pursue work down south in the United States. Fortunately for both of them, before Griffiths' departure they received a phone call from Gary Taylor, a local nightclub owner and good friend of the duo. According to Gibson, he said: "Listen, I've got a cousin coming into town. He's from LA, and he wants to know if there's any work." And so, the final fortuitous meeting occurred when Griffiths and Gibson met Miles Ramsay, a Maryland native who attended Cal State University and UCLA who had extensive choral experience, in addition to singing and drumming in a lounge band. The three of them hit it off, and while they didn't feel there was enough work for all three of them just yet, the decision was made to hang together for better or for worse.

Joani Taylor, Dave Robbins, and the Numerality Singers

By 1967, Griffiths, Gibson, and Ramsay had reunited in Vancouver and were growing their business steadily. The last frontier for the trio was ironically their own city; with new contracts with Ron Woodall and the J. Walter Thompson

Company, as well as a large firm out of Toronto, the decision was made to officially incorporate in 1968 under the name Griffiths-Gibson Productions (the name Griffiths-Gibson-Ramsay Productions would come a couple of years later).¹² The year also marked a kind of final hurrah for ties between UBC music, Griffiths and Gibson, and Aragon Studios, as captured in a now iconic recording that helped launch the careers of numerous Vancouver-based performers, arrangers, and producers, as well as the singing career of a local and beloved jazz songstress.

Vancouver native Joani Taylor began singing in grade 9 on the aforementioned CBC TV musical show *Let's Go*. By the age of 16, she was singing full-time at Isy's Supper Club on West Georgia, opening for the likes of Stevie Wonder, Jimmy Smith, and Little Richard. In early 1968, Taylor was approached by the CBC and producer Dave Bird to record some songs of her choice with the Dave Robbins Orchestra (Weeds 2008). Years later she would reflect on this meeting and valuable career opportunity:

I was very young [21] when I recorded this album with the Dave Robbins Orchestra. Dave Robbins was the sweetest person and taught me so much. I did quite a bit of work with Dave. He wrote great arrangements, and it was a real privilege to work with him. (qtd. in Taylor 2009)¹³

The recording session was booked at Aragon Studios on 1234 West 6th Avenue — the premier studio of the day — over two days, March 28 and 29, and represented Vancouver's first 4-track recording (Sharman King, personal communication, December 5, 2018). What came to be titled *Joani Taylor with The Dave Robbins Orchestra and the Numerality Singers* (CBC Radio Canada, LM 45 1970) was produced by Dave Bird, with arrangements by Dave Robbins and Brian Griffiths. A virtual “Who's Who” of the Vancouver commercial music scene, the back cover featured photos of UBC music graduates Doreen Oke (BMus 1968), Corlynn Hanney (BMus 1967), Brian Griffiths, and Brian Gibson, alongside Joani Taylor, Miles Ramsay, and Dave Robbins (refer to Figure 9).¹⁴ A photo by Franz Lindner taken on the first day of recording (March 28, 1968) captured many of the supporting personnel, including fellow UBC music students (and later jazz greats) Don Clark on trumpet (BMus 1969) and Ian McDougall on trombone (BMus 1965, MMus 1970), UBC professor of theory and trumpet John Swan, UBC sessional lecturer of bass trombone Jimmy Coombes, producer George Laverock (BMus 1966), and owner Al Reusch. According to an article in *The Vancouver Sun* published a day after the session was completed:

The arrangements were written by Brian Griffiths and [Dave] Robbins. The recorded products, intended for international release, were supervised by Dave Bird. If properly promoted they should be valuable in raising our town's status through one of its strongest attributes, resident talent. (Smith 1968)¹⁵

While Gibson and Griffiths never specifically identified this album as the final impetus behind formally incorporating as a jingles company, the coming together of local talent, as well as their introduction to Joani Taylor — they would work together in the ensuing years — must have certainly added to their

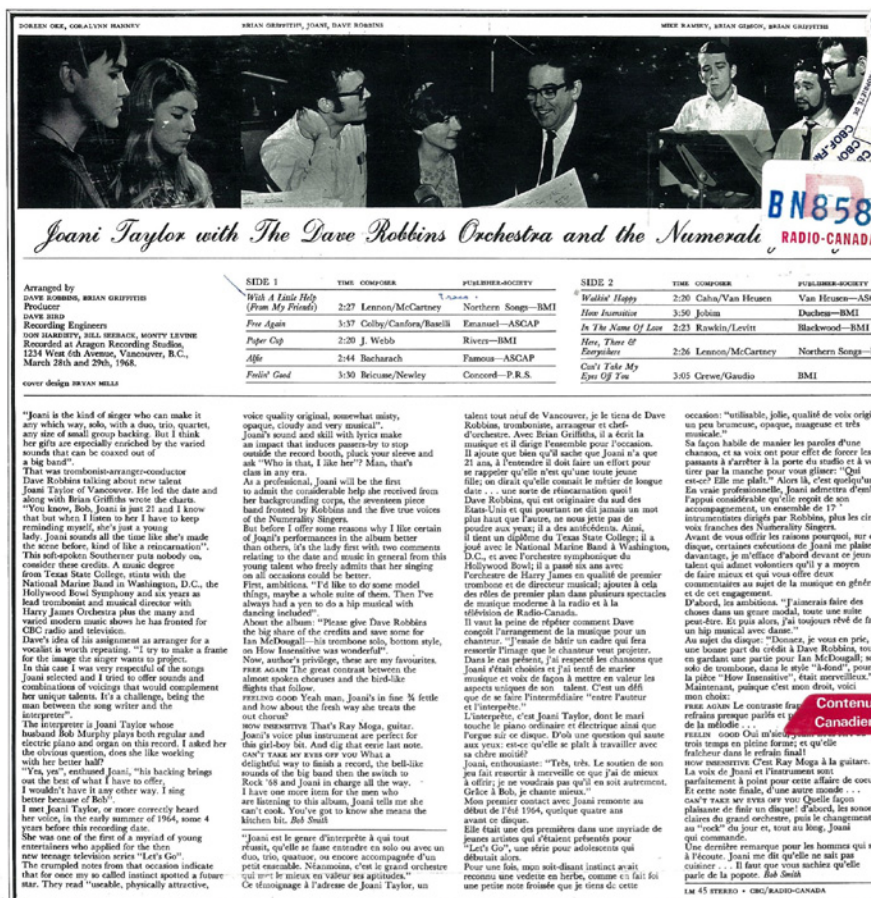


Fig. 9. Back cover of *Joani Taylor with The Dave Robbins Orchestra and the Numerality Singers*, 1970. (Image credit: CBC Records 1968.)

growing confidence in Vancouver as a site of potential and steady work. As we now know, their trust was well placed; all that was needed was a space of their own.

...to Little Mountain

By the late 1960s, Griffiths-Gibson Productions was in full swing and had become affiliated with Western Broadcasting Company (previously radio station CKNW, where Al Reusch used to work in 1945). As Brian Gibson noted, access to the small studio scene in Vancouver was becoming problematic, and while they had privileges at Studio 3 on West 3rd Avenue, the space was inadequate for the kind of world-class recordings they aspired to (Brian Gibson, personal communication, September 29, 2019; Sharman King, personal communication, December 5, 2018). And so, in 1972 Griffiths-Gibson and Western Broadcasting went in 50/50 on purchasing a warehouse building with a loading dock located at 201 West 7th Avenue, converting it into a series of studios (see Figure 10). The occasion received some press in *Billboard* magazine:

Studio activity in general is being given a tremendous boost by the construction of two major studio facilities, one by Griffiths-Gibson Productions, one of Canada's major producers of commercial broadcast material. Since the company's inception in 1968, all their recording has been done in studios in Vancouver, Los Angeles, or Toronto, but the steadily increasing volume of work for major accounts in both Canada and the US forced a decision last January to move the operation into their own building, and construct their own sound studio.

The facility will be the most sophisticated available in Vancouver to date, boasting the city's first 32-track capacity. The opening date is set for October 1, at which time the company has plans to branch into the record business, establishing relations with a national company for distribution and promotion, and including publishing as well as recording functions. (Read 1973: C-34)

(While mostly correct in its details, on the technical side Little Mountain began with 24-track Neve and 16-track Scully analog consoles [Ron "Obvious" Vermeulen, personal communication, November 18, 2019]).

Luckily for Griffiths-Gibson, as well as the Vancouver music scene in general, the pair had previously made contact with a young British audio



Fig. 10. Griffiths-Gibson-Ramsay Productions and (previous) Little Mountain Sound Studios, 201 W. 7th Avenue, Vancouver. (Photo by author.)

engineer named Geoff Turner, who had worked at Abbey Road but was at that time living in and producing out of New York City. Turner was looking to move to Vancouver, and under his guidance Little Mountain Sound Studios was born, complete with three recording spaces: Studio A (the largest, capable of holding an orchestra as well as rock/pop bands), Studio B (medium size, eventually used by many rock/pop bands), and Studio C (the smallest space; refer to Figure 11). Turner managed and acted as an engineer at the studio until 1976 when Bob Brooks was brought in as studio manager, at which point Roger Monk, John Vrtacic, Ron “Obvious” Vermeulen, and Bob Rock were brought in as engineers. Early in-house composers and arrangers included Bob Buckley and Peter Berring (BMus composition, 1977), who had met and worked together at Cortland Hultberg’s electronic music studio on the UBC campus.

In those first few years, most of the work that came through the doors was for jingles and broadcasting, for which the Vancouver Symphony and UBC Music provided many of the live instrumentalists (Brian Gibson called it their own “mini LA scene” [Brian Gibson, personal communication, September 29, 2019]). By the mid-1970s, the commercial music scene was also beginning to be felt, though the jingles still took up the prime hours of recording. According to Ron “Obvious” Vermeulen, one of that engineering class of ’76 who initially worked with punk bands:

In 1976, it was basically jingles in both Studios A and B during the days; that’s how busy it was. In the evenings is when the rock and roll bands would come in, or local bands doing other kinds of music. (personal communication, August 30, 2018)¹⁶

Griffiths-Gibson (soon thereafter Griffiths-Gibson-Ramsay) Productions would go on to produce more than 4,000 jingles, television themes, movie soundtracks, and special event scores internationally over the next four decades, becoming the largest such company in all of Canada. But for the final connection made to UBC music, and also to focus on how most of the popular music world came

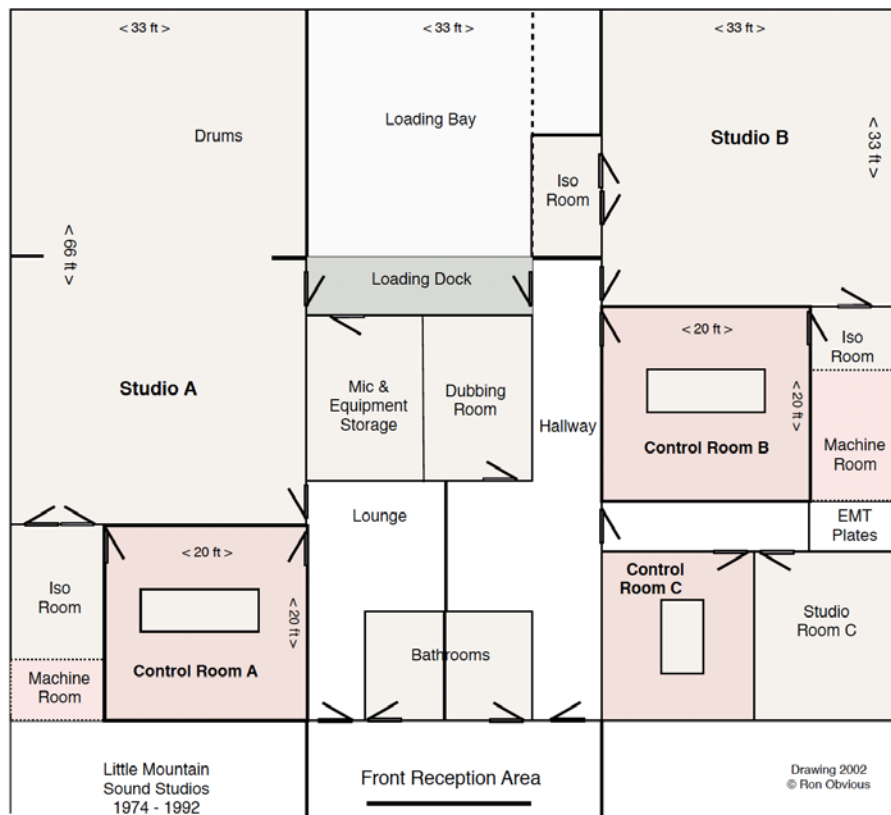


Fig. 11. Little Mountain Sound Studios floor plan, 1974-1992. (Image credit: Ron “Obvious” Vermeulen.)

to know Little Mountain, I now turn to the musician-producer who would help propel the already successful company into international stardom.

Let the Sunshyne In

Vancouver-born Bruce Fairbairn discovered the trumpet through a next-door neighbour at the age of five. After having seen his neighbour play a few times, and after expressing some interest, Fairbairn was told he could rent the instrument for five cents a month as long as he took private lessons. He never looked back; over the succeeding years he would play in numerous school and community ensembles. In the tenth grade (1965), while attending Prince of Wales



Fig. 12. Bruce Fairbairn on cover of *Georgia Straight*, November 12-19, 1998. (Image credit: Georgia Straight.)

Secondary School, he formed his first group, The Spectres, an R&B band. The young but talented group caught the attention of local impresario Bruce Allen, who would manage Fairbairn throughout the rest of his career (Newton 1998: 16; see Figure 12).

After graduation from secondary school, Fairbairn continued to play the trumpet with his band, though a practical streak in him led to his enrollment at UBC in Biology, leading to a Bachelor of Science honours degree in 1970. Fresh with diploma in hand, Fairbairn decided to form a new and more ambitious band, one that would include friends and fellow UBC students from the Department of Music.¹⁷ Choosing to call themselves Sunshyne, Fair-

bairn was joined by the aforementioned Peter Berring on keyboards and guitar, Ross Barrett on saxophone (BMus 1968), David Sinclair on guitar and vocals (attended 1966-69), Tom Keenlyside on saxophone and flute (BMus 1976; he had first met Fairbairn in 1965), and Jim Vallance on drums (attended 1970-



Fig. 13. Sunshyne in 1973; L-R and top to bottom: Peter Berring (UBC), Bruce Fairbairn (UBC), Richard Christie, Bill Buckingham; Ralph Eppel, Steve Sullivan, Tom Keenlyside (UBC); Jim Vallance (UBC). (Image credit: Tom Keenlyside.)

71; see Figure 13).¹⁸ Even after only three weeks of existence, music critic Peter Wilson highlighted what he saw as potential in the then “unknown group”:

Together for only three weeks and appearing third on a list of five local bands leading up to Mother T., Sunshyne broke through the clouds of sameness settled in the arena, which up until then had only been slightly scattered by the showing of a partially visible Roadrunner cartoon.... Particularly interesting was one of their own compositions, “Changing Directions,” which displayed good work by flautist Tom Keenlyside and trumpeter Bruce Fairbairn. It was obvious from this number that the group is going to be one of those hard to classify but, perhaps, jazz-rock would be as good a place to start. (1970: 30)¹⁹

While the band would form a devoted local following and would continue as an entity until 1976, they found it difficult to make a full-time living. In 1972, Fairbairn re-enrolled at UBC in the Master’s in Environmental Planning program, graduating with a Master of Science degree in 1974. He then went to work for BC Hydro, where he began a multi-year, multi-volume environmental-impact analysis of the Revelstoke Dam, all the while trying to secure a recording contract for Sunshyne (Newton 1998: 17).²⁰ Unsuccessful for more than a year, in 1975 Fairbairn reached out to previous and founding member Jim Vallance to rework some of their previous demos, at the same time discussing lineup changes with Sunshyne and Seeds of Time guitarist Lindsay Mitchell (BA in Political Science from UBC, 1998). The metamorphosis that occurred over the next year is complex with many moving parts (well documented on the band’s web site as well as the Wikipedia entry). But in the end, 1977 saw a new band emerge from the ashes of Sunshyne and Seeds of Time under the name Prism, with Jim Vallance (under the pseudonym “Rodney Higgs”) acting as drummer and main songwriter, Bruce Fairbairn as producer, and Bruce Allen as manager.

Under contract with GRT records (at that time based out of Toronto), Prism recorded their debut album at Can-Base Studios, the new name for Aragon Studios after Al Reusch sold the establishment in 1971. With Fairbairn at the helm, aided by Rolf Hennemann as engineer and mixer (Hennemann was instrumental in bringing Heart into Can-Base for their debut album two years previous), the self-titled *Prism* had three hits with “Open Soul Surgery,” “Take Me to the Kaptin,” and the now Canadian classic “Spaceship Superstar.”

Their follow-up album *See Forever Eyes* (1978), recorded primarily at the same studio — now re-named Mushroom Studios — and with the same technical crew, was commercially disappointing, though it did introduce Fairbairn and the

band to Little Mountain Sound Studios, where additional recording took place. The experience was positive enough that when the band sat down to record their third studio album in 1978, *Armageddon* (released 1979), Fairbairn decided to switch to Little Mountain Sound, and to employ then fledgling engineer and mixer Bob Rock. Further UBC connections included arrangements by previously mentioned music graduate and Griffith-Gibson in-house composer Peter Berring, and the new writing partnership of Jim Vallance and Bryan Adams (this was their first professional project together, more to be said at the end of this article).

The year 1980 was pivotal for Prism, Bruce Fairbairn, Little Mountain Sound, and a newly signed fellow Canadian band called Loverboy. At the same time that Fairbairn began producing Prism's fourth studio album, *Young and Restless* (1980), he was asked by Bruce Allen to simultaneously produce his new clients Loverboy at Little Mountain Sound (Allen managed both bands). While Bob Rock would engineer and mix both projects, with *Loverboy* (1980) Fairbairn and Rock were joined by junior engineer and recent employee Mike Fraser (nephew of studio manager Bob Brooks). As is now well known, *Loverboy* would go on to sell more than 1 million copies in Canada alone, propelling the band, Fairbairn (along with Rock and Fraser), and Little Mountain Sound into super stardom, as Fairbairn recalled:

I think the success of the first Loverboy album was the key to the success of my producing career... To make that record was a very easy job because the guys played so well and they were just a real hot band at that time — all I had to do was get them in the studio, get the mikes in front of the gear, and turn on the tape recorder. But for me, it was the first record that was a big hit, especially in the States, so it was a milestone for me. (Newton 1998: 17)

In the process, however, Fairbairn would end his longtime relationship with Prism.

Over the next 13 years Fairbairn, Rock, and Fraser, in various roles, would become a rock “power trio,” producing iconic albums that sold in the tens of millions internationally and that came to define much of the 1980s and early 1990s rock sound (refer to Figure 14). Almost uniformly, however, musicians, technicians, and other industry professionals credit Fairbairn's presence as providing the roots of such success. Randy Raine-Reusch, whose father was first cousins with Aragon founder Al Reusch, and who was the go-to world music session player in Vancouver during that era, recalled his time working with Fairbairn on Aerosmith's *Pump* (1989):

Aerosmith: *Permanent Vacation* (1987; Fairbairn P, Fraser E/M, Rock E), *Pump* (1989; Fairbairn P, Fraser E/M), *Get a Grip* (1993; Fairbairn P)
 Bon Jovi: *Slippery When Wet* (1986; Fairbairn P, Rock E/M), *New Jersey* (1988; Fairbairn P, Rock E/M), *Keep the Faith* (1992; Rock P/M)
 Bryan Adams: *Cuts Like a Knife* (1983; Fraser E), *Reckless* (1984; Fraser E/M)
 Mötley Crüe: *Dr. Feelgood* (1989; Rock P/E/M), *Decade of Decadence* (1991; Rock P/E/M, Fraser E/M), *Mötley Crüe* (1994; Rock P/M)
 Loverboy: *Loverboy* (1980; Fairbairn P, Rock E, Fraser AE), *Get Lucky* (1981; Fairbairn P, Rock M), *Lovin' Every Minute Of It* (1985)
 The Cult: *Sonic Temple* (1989; Rock P, Fraser E/M)
 Poison: *Flesh and Blood* (1990; Fairbairn P, Fraser P)
 Van Halen: *Balance* (1995; Fairbairn P, Fraser M) [vocals only]
 AC/DC: *The Razor's Edge* (1990; Fairbairn P, Fraser E), *Live* (1992; Fairbairn P)
 David Lee Roth: *A Little Ain't Enough* (1991; Rock P)
 Metallica: *Metallica/The Black Album* (1991; Rock P)
 Scorpions: *Face the Heat* (1993; Fairbairn P)
 Whitesnake: *Whitesnake* (1987)
 David Coverdale and Jimmy Page: *Coverdale • Page* (1993; Fraser Co-P/M/E)

Fig. 14. Albums released by Little Mountain Sound Studios from 1980-1995 (P = producer, E = engineering, AE = assistant engineer, M = mixing).

If you look at Bruce Fairbairn's stuff, Bruce Fairbairn is probably the most identifiable of those [people at Little Mountain], that's why he became a really big name. And everybody, all these New York labels, were sending stuff to Vancouver for Bruce, to get his touch, because he was a hit maker. When you listen to Bruce, you're listening for the cues, you're listening to how he treated his material, and the extra little things that would make it sparkle. A lot of the time it was the horn sections he'd bring in, all the top horn players, and he'd arrange the brass sections. It was his musicality, his arranging skills, his ear, and his personality that made him great. (personal communication, July 30, 2018)

Conclusion

The above accounts and personalities are only part of a much larger web of successes and accomplishments that extend into the present day. UBC faculty, graduates, and attendees continued to produce significant and influential work both during this period and in the decades that followed the founding of GGRP and Little Mountain Sound Studios. Further examples include guitarist-singer Bill Henderson (attended 1962-66) and sax/flute player Claire Lawrence (BMus

sax/flute player Claire Lawrence (BMus 1967) who would form the rock band Chilliwack in 1970, becoming a Canadian rock music staple with numerous hits and sales in the hundreds of thousands. Hultberg's electronic music studio provided the space and technology for the development of the Roland MC-8 Micro-Composer digital sequencer by Ralph Dyck in 1970-71 (a device used by Steve Porcaro of Toto, Giorgio Moroder, The Human League, Tangerine Dream, Yellow Magic Orchestra, Kraftwerk, etc.), as well as launched the careers of numerous generations of CBC recording engineers and producers.

Dave Robbins's continuing influence is demonstrated by the activities of his former students and mentees, including trombonist Sharman King (Buddy Rich Orchestra, Edmonton Symphony, CBC Vancouver Orchestra, Diana Krall, Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan), trumpeter Don Clark (Dave Robbins, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Chicago Six), trombonist Ian McDougall (John Dankworth Band, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Pacific Salt, Boss Brass), current UBC instructor of jazz Fred Stride (BMus 1976; Dave Robbins, Tommy Banks, Fred Stride Jazz Orchestra, numerous arrangements for the CBC), and flautist and sax player Tom Keenlyside (Aerosmith, Loverboy, Van Halen, Heart, Yes). And then there is Jim Vallance, who from early Sunshyne days with Bruce Fairbairn would go on to conquer the world with his string of international hits for numerous artists, including Bryan Adams (his main co-writer), Heart, Rod Stewart, Tina Turner, Alice Cooper, Aerosmith, Carly Simon, and KISS.

If there is a lesson to learn from this extended narrative, it's not just that we as departments and schools of music need to pay more attention to the opportunities of the commercial realm. As faculty and mentors, we must remain open-minded and curious in our musical pursuits — reflecting and encouraging our students — and be willing to support endeavours that don't always fit neatly within the pages of our syllabi or ensemble programming. This often means being better attuned to our local music-making scenes with their specific needs and audiences, ever cognizant and poised for a continually changing global musical soundscape. In the context of the Vancouver musical landscape that encompasses both the academic and commercial realms, we must recognize that nearly every artist, recording, and professional accomplishment presented in this article traces their artistic DNA back to the visions and efforts of those pioneering UBC music professors, Cortland Hultberg and Dave Robbins. This research is dedicated to their memories.

Postlude

On Monday, May 24, 1999, a memorial service was held for Bruce Fairbairn to commemorate his early passing on May 17, earlier that month (at age 49). Held on the UBC campus at the iconic Chan Centre for the Arts, the event featured various artists who had worked with him over his lifetime, including members of Yes, for whom Fairbairn produced *The Ladder* (1999), and fellow UBC students Tom Keenlyside and David Sinclair from early Sunshyne band days:

A memorial service was held for Fairbairn at the Chan Center and was attended by more than 300 people. “A Celebration of the Life



Fig. 15. Bruce Fairbairn's star on BC Entertainment Hall of Fame Star Walk, Robson at Granville Streets, Vancouver. (Photo by author.)

of Bruce Earl Fairbairn” was highlighted by reminiscences from close friends, as well as musical performances from Jon Anderson and Steve Howe of Yes, Tom Keenleyside [Keenlyside], David Sinclair and a moving version of “Taps” played on Bruce’s trumpet by his son Brent. After the service, guests were encouraged to stay and mingle on the outdoor patio and trade fond memories of Bruce, while an impromptu group of friends known as the Bozo Band played old standards. It was a classy yet casual affair, just as Bruce would probably have wanted it. (Moshansky 1999) 🍀

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Notes

1. For more information on the early ballroom/supper club scene in Vancouver, see Potter and Robinson (2004: 41-108).

2. William Barrie, a native of Scotland, would become a championship piper of piobaireachd and a prolific composer. In 1939, at the age of 29, he moved to Vancouver, where he settled and trained many of the leading local pipers and pipe bands during WWII. In 1953, he spent a number of years in New Zealand before returning to British Columbia. He is survived by his son James Barrie, a BC resident and accomplished piper in his own right (see Walker 1987: 17-20). I am indebted to Edward MacIlwaine for identifying this source.

3. These recordings in chronological order: “Sword Dance” (AR-101), “Seann Truibhas” (AR-102), and “Irish Jig” (AR-103). I thank James Barrie for providing these titles and mp3 files of the original recordings.

4. The best-selling version of “My Home by the Fraser” was a re-recording with professional musicians released in 1951; a wide sampling of Aragon Records from the 1960s through the 1980s is found on Lasko (2003).

5. “Al Reusch has remained active in recording, these days specializing in preparing music for competitors in skating and synchronized swimming events.

In 1971, he sold Aragon but got it back again when the operation went belly-up. He re-activated Aragon as a label when he produced two big-band albums for Dal Richards in 1983 and '84. He was presented with an award by the BC chapter of CARAS for his pioneering work in the music business and he has a star on Granville Street's walk of fame" (Harrison 1997a).

6. Ida Halpern had been teaching music appreciation courses since 1940 through the Department of Extension.

7. "Al Reusch, formerly of CKMO 'Name It Play It' program, will be the guest speaker at the regular weekly meeting of the UBC Jazz Society on Tuesday at 12:30 in the club room behind the Brock. The program promises to be very interesting, and all members and others interested are invited to attend" (The Daily Ubysey 1949).

8. Hultberg also founded and directed the Phoenix Chamber Choir from 1983 to 1995.

9. All subsequent Brian Gibson quotes are from this same 2019 interview.

10. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the director G. Welton Marquis was opposed to faculty playing downtown in the commercial music world, in spite of being remembered as a kind and supportive administrator (Ian Hampton, personal communication, October 25, 2019).

11. According to Brian Gibson: "Unfortunately the connection that we were led to believe was firmly established between this Seattle contact and Rice a Roni was a little bit misrepresented. He had left town by the time we went down to Seattle to deliver our package! So that put us even further into debt" (personal communication, September 29, 2019).

12. This is the standard account provided in numerous online sources, including the official GGRP web site. However, copyright records exist from 1974 that show Griffiths-Gibson Productions as an entity ("The Car Pool Song" from August 19, 1974), and a poster from as late as 1976 still shows only Griffiths and Gibson on the masthead (UBC School of Music archives).

13. Taylor was inducted into the BC Entertainment Hall of Fame in 2019 during her performance on Saturday, September 7 at the legendary Patricia Hotel in East Vancouver.

14. In many ways this paper began when UBC music graduate and trombone great Sharman King (BMus 1970) brought this album to my attention; I thank him again for revealing this musical and cultural gem.

15. While beyond the scope of this paper, Aragon would eventually become Mushroom Studios, one of the leading Canadian studios and pop/rock music powerhouses (Howell 2006; Marchand 2013).

16. A cross-section of the local popular music scene from the late 1960s is captured in the remastered CD collection *The Cool-Aid Benefit Album* (Various 2010 [1969]).

17. That same year, fellow UBC music students Don Clark (trumpet) and Ian McDougall (trombone) would form the fusion jazz band Pacific Salt (with Ron

Johnston on piano, Oliver Gannon on guitar, and Tony Clitheroe on bass). I thank Sharman King for this reference.

18. I thank fellow worker Juliet O’Keefe, graduate secretary at the UBC School of Music, who helped me track down many of the student files of these notable UBC graduates and attendees.

19. Less than two years later, Fairbairn, with Sunshyne, would compose a rock mass for a performance at Christ Church Cathedral in downtown Vancouver, complete with Latin and four-part fugues (Ohm 1972).

20. Fairbairn was also active in community planning and renewable housing through committee work with AMS (the student union) as an undergrad, teaching at UBC after receiving his master’s degree, and authoring proposals for NGOs and the city (see Cocking 1975 and UBC Alumni Chronicle 1977).

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