Exploring Community-Based Alternatives: Vernacular Music and Higher Education in Cape Breton

CHRIS McDONALD

It may be a fitting paradox that one of the youngest music programs in Canada — at one of the youngest of Canadian universities — should be situated on an island in the Canadian Maritimes renowned for its long-surviving traditional cultures. Cape Breton and Nova Scotia at large have long been branded as places to hear and experience traditional folkways,[1] and a number of famous musicians with roots in this locale (such as Stan Rogers, John Allan Cameron, Lee Cremo, the Rankins, Ashley MacIsaac, and Natalie MacMaster) drew upon the region's various folk repertoires and styles to build national and international profiles. In counterpoint to the popular vision of a pastoral province only lightly touched by the passage of time is a history of technological innovation and heavy industry which also marks Nova Scotia, followed by recent waves of economic decline and outmigration which continue to afflict the region. Desperate for renewed development and immigration, institutions like Cape Breton University are building new, and renovating old, programs and seeking students both domestic and international to revitalize their societies and economies. In a recent round of rebranding, Cape Breton University (CBU) chose as a catchphrase the oxymoron of "a tradition of new" to capture the institution's in-betweenness, at once serving a region where history runs deep, but where new institutions and aspirations are just starting to be defined.

This is the context in which CBU's fledgling music program was developed in the early 2010s. While other Nova Scotia universities offer Bachelor of Music programs based on the classical conservatory model (Dalhousie, Acadia), or the jazz conservatory (St. Francis Xavier), CBU's music offerings were developed by faculty in folklore and ethnomusicology, who sought ways to build on the region's strengths, and address its needs, in ways consonant with CBU's distinctive mission, resources, and curricular approaches. This article explores

McDonald, Chris. 2021. Exploring Community-Based Alternatives: Vernacular Music and Higher Education in Cape Breton. *MUSICultures* 48: 343-365.

the university's history of community-based programming, links this to the "Community Studies" music program that developed here, and considers the opportunities and challenges that arose in building the folklore- and ethnomusicology-based program in which I have taught for the past eight years.

We sometimes promote our program as Canada's only undergraduate university program in traditional music, and I want to explain the word "traditional" in this context. In the first place, ethnomusicology as a discipline has a history of studying music marked as traditional (as is evident in the names of scholarly societies like the Canadian Society for Traditional Music [CSTM] and the International Council for Traditional Music [ICTM]). Secondly, Cape Breton is home to a number of music traditions that are either Indigenous (Mi'kmaq), date from 18th-century settlers (Acadian French, Scottish, Irish), or date from the time of Cape Breton's steel and coal boom around 1900, which drew communities from countries like Poland, Ukraine, Italy, Barbados, and Lebanon. The Scottish-based traditions of fiddling, piping, and stepdance are particularly strong, and there are professional performers in this style who are well-known on the international folk festival circuit. Cape Breton's fiddle music and dance scene is practiced by the Gaelic, Acadian, and Mi'kmaw communities, and is more generally recognized now as a distinct Cape Breton style. Moreover, this fiddle style attracts people — especially fiddlers — from other parts of North America, Europe, and even Japan to experience and learn the style.

Though this style is clearly a cultural strength of Cape Breton's, it is only one of the scenes on the island. For that reason, we have maintained that the program specializes in unmarked "traditional" music in order to welcome students, researchers, and players interested in any style, and maintain the wide topical embrace of ethnomusicology. The word traditional (like folk) is a complex and contested term in ethnomusicology, and it is used in the program with a critical awareness that tradition may be defined in various ways and must be continuously queried for the ways it may include and exclude musical styles, cultures, and expressions. For example, while CBU's program specializes in vernacular and oral traditions, it is true that classical music is considered by many as a "tradition," while mass-mediated popular music is sometimes excluded from studies of traditional music because it is commodified and is presumably tied to the ephemerality of fashion. Yet popular music performers who learn by ear and by imitating older models may have much in common with fiddlers or folksingers and may, in many senses, be participating in an oral tradition. The program at CBU aims for an inclusive embrace of local oral traditions, and for pedagogies that build on oral-based creative practices.

Despite our program's uniqueness in Canada, traditional music degrees have been started in several countries over the past 30 years. Mark DeWitt

undertook a study of university programs offering training in, and support for, oral traditions in North America, and provides further context for the CBU program. DeWitt, who holds an endowed chair in traditional music at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, observes that traditional music programs arose in Scandinavia, the British Isles, and the United States starting in the 1980s (2017: 70). Some programs primarily offer liberal arts degrees, and some offer professional degrees with fewer academic credits and more applied credits (79). DeWitt highlights CBU's program as a liberal arts degree, but sees it as occupying something of a middle ground because of its mandatory credits in experiential learning and internships (86).

CBU as the Island's University

Most Nova Scotian universities, excepting Dalhousie/King's College and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, were founded through church affiliation, and all were founded in the 19th century or earlier. CBU's history starts in the 1950s when it was founded as a Sydney-based satellite campus of St. Francis Xavier University (whose home campus is in the mainland town of Antigonish) and was known as Xavier Junior College, or colloquially as "Little X." Xavier was a feeder college, with students starting studies in Sydney and completing degrees in Antigonish or elsewhere. In 1974, the institution merged with the Nova Scotia Eastern Institution of Technology, became independent of St. Francis Xavier, and moved to its current location on a highway between the industrial towns of Sydney, Glace Bay, and New Waterford. Renamed the College of Cape Breton, it offered college diplomas and university courses, remaining a feeder school to other universities. Once independent of St. Francis Xavier, the College ceased to be associated with the Roman Catholic church, though some professors had been trained as clergy. Nevertheless, the college was a secular institution following its independence. By 1982, it was conferring its own degrees, attained University College status, and expanded its programs and available credentials. Finally, in 2005, it became Cape Breton University.

The need for this institution in Industrial Cape Breton grew in proportion to the gradual decline of the coal and steel industries in the area, and the increasing precarity of the fishing and logging industries. Workers needed to retrain, and their children needed an education that could prepare them for jobs and careers that would likely differ from their parents'. Moreover, the university was seen as a key resource for the community in reimagining its economy and the directions in which the island would develop. In some cases, this meant innovation, and in others it meant preserving and revitalizing

the community's cultural resources. The first degree the university offered was the Bachelor of Arts Community Studies (BACS), which merged standard liberal arts areas with a core curriculum emphasizing group-directed research, experiential learning, and problem-solving skills. The degree culminated in a community action project, in which graduating student groups used the skills they cultivated in their studies to address, answer, or bring alternatives to a problem identified in the community. This kind of curriculum emphasized intimate and reciprocal "town-gown" (community-university) relationships, with university research skills supporting and interweaving with community-identified priorities. A similar approach underlies CBU's Integrative Science (MSIT) program, which blends Western scientific study with parallel concepts from Indigenous Mi'kmaw traditional knowledge in an effort to serve students from local Indigenous communities in culturally relevant ways.[2]

The community's sense of ownership of the university is a marked feature of its history, with its domestic enrolment coming overwhelmingly from Cape Breton's urban centres. Until the recent influx of international students, its catchment from other locales, even Maritime or Canadian, was relatively low. This seems to suggest an insular or parochial focus to the university historically, but the downward pressures on the island's economy and cultures since the late 1960s provoked a concerned and assertive response from the community, which looked to the university to preserve its heritage, culture, and identity, while also training its citizens to take charge of its future. Private industry in Cape Breton, run by businesses with head offices outside the region, had a long, exploitive history. The local population came to mistrust large companies, as well as provincial and federal government policy, which they saw as paternalistic and colonial influences that consistently left Cape Breton's economy at the whims of powers outside most islanders' control. To the extent that the university belonged to Cape Breton, it was hoped that the institution could provide the island some agency and some means towards better regional self-determination.[3]

Theatre, Archives, and Folklore: The Roots of Music at CBU

In terms of giving Cape Bretoners a sense of agency and control over their own story, the College of Cape Breton's theatre offerings in the mid-1970s stand out as an important site where creativity was encouraged and careers were launched. English professors Liz and Harry Boardmore directed the college's theatre program, and they encouraged students to write their own plays, create their own roles based on a rich well of local characters and lore, and write their own

music and songs. The 1977 production of *The Rise and Follies of Cape Breton*, a variety show featuring a number of comedic skits, songs, and narratives about industrial decline and outmigration, was a rousing success when run, and led to an original cast LP released by the college's press. Performers included a then-unknown Rita MacNeil, Raylene Rankin, and Max MacDonald, and featured songs that became regional classics, such as Leon Dubinsky's "We Rise Again" (later made famous by the Rankin Family on their 1993 album *North Country*) and Kenzie MacNeil's "The Island," which became Cape Breton's unofficial anthem, and is still often played at large public gatherings and sports events. The original *Rise and Follies* company and creative personnel continued producing Cape Breton-themed variety shows, redubbed *The Cape Breton Summertime Revue*, featuring other future members of the Rankin Family, as well as singer, comedienne, and future television star Bette MacDonald. But the *Revue* carried on as a community theatre franchise outside the purview of the college.

An essential precursor to the development of folklore and ethnomusicology at CBU is the Beaton Institute, an archive and repository of print, audio, video, and material culture. The institute was founded in 1957 by Sister Margaret Beaton, Xavier Junior College's librarian, who was concerned that many historically significant documents in Cape Breton were being lost because there was no repository for them. The archive was originally called "Cape Bretoniana," with an Archive and Document Library, and a Division of Ethnic Studies, Folklore and the Social and Cultural History of Cape Breton Island. Cultural holdings ran the gamut of Cape Breton cultures, including Mi'kmaq, Acadian, Central and Eastern European, and West Indian, with a rich trove of Scottish Gaelic documents and recordings. Following Sister Margaret's death in 1975, the archive was renamed the Beaton Institute. In the late 1970s, educator Sheldon MacInnes and cultural geographer Elizabeth Beaton were hired to do research projects in the Archive. Beaton taught one of the first folklore classes offered at the college, and MacInnes, who also worked for the continuing education department, arranged for fiddle and stepdance classes to be taught, though at this time, they were community classes and not offered for credit. Violinist Winnie Chafe was one of the early instructors. MacInnes was instrumental in making the case to the college that music, folklore, and Cape Breton traditions were important, and that research and teaching resources should be directed towards them.

By the early 1980s, the University College of Cape Breton began to expand its offerings beyond the Bachelor of Arts Community Studies and began developing a BA. The chair of the Department of Humanities, Charles MacDonald, wanted the fine arts to be part of the BA's core, and this led to a need for courses in areas like art history or music appreciation. At the same time,

two young scholars near the ends of their PhDs, folklorist Richard MacKinnon and ethnomusicologist Gordon Smith, began teaching part time at the college. There was deliberation over whether the BA's "fine arts" requirement was best fulfilled through a more conservative approach, emphasizing classical music or European art history, or whether education in popular or vernacular arts and local traditions would better connect with UCCB's student base. There was already a course on the history of European art music in UCCB's calendar, but Smith recalled that teaching it seemed awkward, given that the students were the sons and daughters of coal miners and steel workers, or Indigenous students from nearby reserves. Smith chose instead to propose a course called Music and Culture, a general introduction to cultural themes in ethnomusicology, which might better engage these students. MacKinnon, likewise, proposed courses in folklore, oral literature, folksong, and vernacular architecture as options for the fine arts credit requirement.

In 1987, Smith moved on to a tenure-track appointment at Queen's University, while MacKinnon stayed on at UCCB in a tenure-track position, cross-appointed between Humanities, which housed the BA, and Community Studies, which directed UCCB's distinctive BACS degree. The 1990s saw a gradual expansion of music and folklore offerings, with MacKinnon, MacInnes, and Celtic music scholar and fiddler Kate Dunlay offering a variety of social and stylistic histories of folk music and dance from Canada's East Coast. Classical pianist Kathleen Kasper taught classical music history, as well as two courses on protest songs, focussing on the folk revival. The turning point for folklore and music at CBU came in 2004, when Richard MacKinnon successfully applied for a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). The proposal for the chair was timely, as UNESCO had just adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in October 2003. Though Canada was not a signatory, MacKinnon sat on the UNESCO board for Canada, and saw the potential for influencing public policy through the work of the chair.

The Tier 1 Canada Research Chair was a major coup for CBU, since such chairs generally went to larger research universities. It opened doors for funding and infrastructure building at CBU that could support expanded research projects and offerings in folklore and music. MacKinnon made the case for two new faculty hires in these areas, one in folklore and the other in ethnomusicology. Musical traditions are an important component of ICH, and the hope was that a folklorist and an ethnomusicologist with an interest in local traditions could be found. Ian Brodie, who had worked on a project using the MacEdward Leach folksong collection at Memorial University of Newfoundland, was hired as a folklorist, and York University PhD candidate

Heather Sparling, whose research was on Gaelic song traditions in Cape Breton, was hired as an ethnomusicologist. Sparling's interest in both music and the Gaelic language — a threatened and declining heritage language in Cape Breton (as well as in Scotland) — made her work attractive for the ICH emphasis MacKinnon pursued. The Canada Research Chair was able to attract funds to construct the Centre for Cape Breton Studies (completed in 2007), with a Digitization Lab and a performance space in which performed ICH could be recorded in sound or video. The Digitization Lab was built with the Beaton Institute in mind, safeguarding its audio and video holdings (many of which were old reel-to-reel tapes, cassettes, VHS, 78 rpm records, and so on) by capturing and storing them digitally. Meanwhile, newly recorded ICH in the Centre would add to the Beaton Institute's holdings.

Towards a Music Program

By the mid-2000s, the pieces fell in place for an ethnomusicology-based music program. Courses were proposed that would form the degree's core requirements and some of the area studies and electives that would support students interested in traditional and popular musics. Sheldon MacInnes arranged for applied fiddle classes to be taught by Stan Chapman (who taught professional fiddlers Natalie MacMaster and Ashley MacIsaac) and Kyle MacNeil of the Celtic fusion group the Barra MacNeils, giving CBU's applied courses some "star power." The courses attracted some CBU students as well as community members who sometimes audited the classes. These classes were augmented by yearly cohorts of exchange students from the University of Limerick's traditional music and dance program, and periodically by students from the Royal Scottish Conservatoire and *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig*, the Gaelic-medium campus of Scotland's University of Highlands and Islands. The classes took on more of a Celtic ensemble feel with the exchange students, who were not always fiddlers, but brought instruments like whistle, bagpipes, banjo, concertina, and harp to the classes.

The Centre for Cape Breton Studies grew quickly into an active research cluster for traditional and community music. Richard MacKinnon collected labour and protest songs from industrial Cape Breton from the early and mid-20th century. Heather Sparling researched Gaelic song competitions in Cape Breton and Scotland, and began a long-term project on Atlantic Canadian disaster songs. Folklorist Jodi McDavid worked as the archivist for the Beaton Institute and then as a research officer in CBU's Office of Research and Graduate Studies, while teaching folklore classes. As an ethnomusicologist, I

helped to build up course offerings in popular music and music theory, and did grant-funded research on Cape Breton's unique piano accompaniment style. Marcia Ostashewski, trained in ethnomusicology and dance ethnography, began researching the music of Sydney's Ukrainian community in 2008, funded primarily by MacKinnon's research chair, and curated an exhibit of Ukrainian theatrical dance from its parish. Ethnomusicologist Janice Esther Tulk held a post-doctoral fellowship at CBU from 2008-2010, studying Mi'kmaw music and teaching courses on Indigenous music and global pop. Tulk was hired by CBU in other non-faculty capacities following the post-doc, becoming a senior researcher for the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies, and later the Senior Researcher, Prospect and Development, in CBU's Development Office. Ostashewski also held a post-doctoral fellowship at CBU from 2010-2012, continuing her research on the creative practices of Ukrainian Cape Bretoners and later expanding her work and exhibits to other local communities of Eastern European ancestry.

In 2010, CBU was approached by the Sydney campus of the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) about assisting in bringing the NSCC's music program — which was relatively new and only offered at its Dartmouth Waterfront Campus (near Halifax) — to Sydney. The hope was that some of CBU's facilities, and some of the music theory, music history, and culture courses could be offered through the university, while college staff provided more of the applied and music business offerings. Sparling responded to this as an exciting opportunity to begin building a music program at CBU, and began to sketch out the necessary offerings, as well as write up a proposal to bring to the university. Unfortunately, by early 2011, it became clear that the College-University program partnership was not going to proceed. However, CBU's Dean of the School of Arts and Social Sciences at the time, Rod Nicholls, believed that the work Sparling had undertaken in designing a Cape Breton-focussed music program had promise, and proposed the idea of CBU developing and running an independent program itself.

Sparling aimed for CBU's strengths in ethnomusicology and folklore to be the basis of the program. But the question was, what kind of degree would it be? A BA in music? Would CBU invest in something as ambitious as Bachelor of Music, especially given that there were already three established BMus programs in the province? It was decided that CBU's original degree, the Bachelor of Arts Community Studies, made a promising fit. The BACS was already built on close relationships with the community, and the intention was to align the study of music closely with local communities. The BACS also had an experiential learning component, with work placements woven into the curriculum, so students interested in areas like the music business, music

and tourism, music and festivals, or archives and the non-profit sector, could get work experience in these areas. The BACS structure had a good degree of flexibility, allowing to students to emphasize areas like music performance, ethnomusicology, or music business, as it suited their needs and interests. A special minor in business (available to BACS music majors, but not BA students) was included in the proposal in order to support students interested in the music industry, and as a complement to certain workplaces or internships that would be part of the BACS degree. Essentially, the degree was designed for students who want to work in the music and culture industries (both private and non-profit), and would cultivate skills useful for practitioners of popular and oral traditions as well as people working in cultural enterprises, archives, or the cultural tourism sectors.[4]

A proposed BACS Music Major made its way through CBU's program approval process and arrived for final approval at the Maritime Province's Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) in 2012. There, the program proposal stalled over some controversial points, one of which was a debate over the program's name. MPHEC wanted CBU to call it the Program in *Traditional* Music, while CBU simply wanted an unmarked name, like BACS Music Major. Letters and emails to and from the MPHEC were exchanged over some months, with no resolution on the disagreement over the name. The issue became urgent, as CBU wanted the program ready to be offered inaugurally by fall 2013. Students were already inquiring about the program, and one student from Ontario had already enrolled in a general BACS degree in 2012 with the expectation that the Music Major would be approved for the following year. CBU decided to send Sparling, Dean Nicholls, and the Vice President Academic, Bob Bailey, to the next MPHEC meeting to deal with the problem directly. Sparling pointed out to the MPHEC that programs specializing in Western classical music or jazz are not required to mark their areas of study in their names and argued that marking traditional music was to emphasize some kind of marginality. Moreover, she argued, it would symbolically limit the scope of study and flexibility of CBU's program, which was expected to evolve and hopefully expand. The argument was successful, and approval of the program followed quickly.

The final condition for the offering of music at CBU concerned staffing. With the approval of the BACS music major came a commitment to hiring to support the degree. At the same time, MacKinnon's first term as CRC in Intangible Cultural Heritage was coming to an end; the question was whether to renew or use the CRC credits in a different way. It was decided that the Tier 1 CRC would be split into two Tier 2 CRCs, keeping them in the areas of music and/or folklore. Heather Sparling successfully applied for one CRC, in Musical Traditions. The other CRC was successfully applied for by Marcia Ostashewski,

as chair in Communities and Cultures. I was hired as a backfill for Sparling's teaching faculty position, and the three of us assumed these new positions at CBU in summer 2013.

Curricular Approach

The BACS music major has two sets of core requirements. All BACS degrees have six credits required yearly in Community Studies, with the 1000-level course introducing the principles of community studies and key approaches for managing and working in groups. The 2000-level course teaches research skills appropriate to community studies. The 3000-level course builds on the required research skills by researching, implementing, and assessing a community intervention to address a community issue. The final 4000-level seminar directs individual community-based research projects, which, for music majors, are expected to be on a musical topic.

On the music side, the degree places ethnomusicological approaches at its core with three required courses. The 1000-level foundation course introduces music fundamentals through a global perspective. For example, concepts in rhythm are introduced through examples from West Africa, Indonesia, India, Japan, Europe, and North America. The required 2000-level course, Music and Culture, introduces contemporary themes in ethnomusicology, such as music and identity, music and migration, music and spirituality, music and politics, and so on. Complementing this, an ethnographic methods course serves students in music, folklore, and anthropology. The skills from these two levels of study are further integrated in a 3000-level required course, Musics of the World, where students approach a small number of music cultures in depth, exploring the musical, social, and cultural concepts introduced in earlier courses in greater detail. The aforementioned 4000-level Community Studies seminar, on a music topic, acts as a capstone, and is expected to integrate the skills acquired through community studies and the music core into a coherent project.[5]

CBU's music theory course cycle introduce scales, modes, harmony, and form through folk and traditional music (with an emphasis on local repertoire) using the sound-to-symbol pedagogy. This approach, developed and supported by Micheal Houlahan and Philip Tacka, culminating in their textbook, *From Sound to Symbol* (2008), is designed for students whose musical styles emphasize playing by ear more than by reading. Since CBU specializes in traditional and folk musics, it made sense to design its theory courses assuming students had strong aural skills, through which theory concepts could be taught and applied,

and build toward music literacy, instead of putting music literacy at the centre of music theory studies from the outset. As the theory classes progress to the upper years, popular song, jazz, and classical music are integrated more as concepts in harmony and voice-leading are introduced and developed.

Elective courses fall broadly into a number of categories. Studies of local traditional cultures are served by a suite of Celtic music and dance courses, a course in North American Indigenous musics, a course in Acadian song traditions, and a course in Atlantic Canadian folksong. There are a number of courses focussing on popular music, including Roots Music and Acoustic Pop, which bridges the traditional and popular music areas and puts them into a broader North American perspective. A number of courses study music in its economic context, including a general introduction to the music industry, the study of music festivals, music and tourism, and an arts management course focussing on the non-profit sector. These courses are intended to interact with the work placement component required of all BACS degrees, as music students typically work with organizations like the Celtic Colours International Festival, the Cape Breton Music Industry Cooperative, the Beaton Institute, and Cape Breton's Gaelic College, which seasonally offers musical, cultural, and language programming for children, youth, and adults.

Many of these courses are designed to facilitate community collaboration and outreach, in keeping with the BACS approach. Ostashewski's Indigenous Musics of North America course, for example, invites Culture Bearers from local Mi'kmaw communities, as well as other Nations, to speak with students and teach music and dance practices. The course has done well on campus and "in-community" (referring to CBU's practice of offering courses on First Nations reserves), allowing Mi'kmaw students to explore their own traditions, while also learning about other traditions, and simultaneously introducing non-Indigenous students to Indigenous musical expressions. Cultural Tourism, a course which critically explores how certain cultures are represented and privileged for the tourist economy, has included an applied research activity in which students work with the Celtic Colours International Festival (run yearly in October in Cape Breton) to produce reports that the Festival uses in its funding applications and marketing strategies. Sparling's Celtic Instrumental Music includes field trips into the community, exploring where Celtic music is found sonically and in terms of material culture, doing ethnographic participant-observation at musical events, and bringing practitioners into the class. From these experiences, students produce radio programs for air on CBU's campus station.

As the degree is not a Bachelor of Music, the options for applied study in the BACS music major have tended to be more limited than is typical of BMus

programs. The fiddle or Celtic ensemble courses, which have a long history at CBU, were recently joined by a vocal ensemble and popular music ensemble as options for students. In keeping with the ethnomusicology emphasis, both new ensembles emphasize both local and culturally diverse repertoires. The vocal ensemble rehearsed traditional Gaelic, Acadian French, and Mi'kmaw songs with mentorship from community members immersed in the traditions, as well as Ukrainian liturgical chant taught by Fr. Roman Dusanowskyj (Sydney has the only Ukrainian Catholic parish in Canada east of Montreal). The popular music ensemble embraced contemporary and classic rock, blues, Latin American music, jazz fusion, Chinese rock (introduced by one of the students), as well as fusion arrangements of local Maritime folksongs. The degree has also made available one-credit (one hour per week) courses for the applied study of various local music practices. Some courses, like Introducing Dance, mix applied study with academic work. Ostashewski's CRC led to the 2016 construction of the Centre for Sound Communities, an arts-focused social innovation lab, with a dance studio and a media analysis and production lab supplied with a variety of equipment for digital research, livestreaming, and audio-visual recording.[6]

Many of the curricular features of CBU's music program address the recommended directions outlined in the College Music Society's report entitled *Transforming Music Study from its Foundations: A Manifesto for Progressive Change in the Undergraduate Preparation of Music Majors* (Campbell et al. 2014) assembled by the Society's Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major. In constructing new music program curricula, the authors recommend a three-pillar approach emphasizing diversity, integration, and creativity, and a move away from the "interpretive-performer" paradigm that is typically used in conservatories. Regarding diversity, the authors note that "music majors commonly spend many years on campus without even a nod to surrounding multicultural communities, and practitioners from these communities are rarely invited to engage with university students of music" (19). Thus, the authors urge curricula to be developed that encourage "active engagement … within as culturally broad an expanse as possible" (20). The aim, they argue, should be for more than "just contact" with a wider and more diverse musical world, but for "authentic transcultural understanding," where musical training becomes relevant to the diverse communities students inhabit (21).

As a starting point, the three core required courses at CBU aim for these kinds of engagement by making the learning of music fundamentals, social issues in the study of music, and deeper case studies of musical cultures focused on both local and global cultures. CBU now has a considerable history of hosting local and non-local musicians and other artists on campus, starting with Richard MacKinnon's CRC, where a monthly "Culture Circle" event brought a wide

variety of musicians, groups, and even music industry representatives to campus to talk to students and interested spectators from the community. Through CBU's partnership with Celtic Colours, visiting musicians from abroad (such as multi-instrumentalist Phil Cunningham and guitarist/accordionist Tim Edey) speak and perform for students at CBU every October. Through the Centre for Sound Communities, artists like the Ukrainian bandurist Julian Kytasty and Malian balafon master Lassana Diabaté have been in residence, performing and speaking to students in classes. Most recently, CBU has launched an artist-in-residence program which will feature artists in different disciplines, including music.

Regarding integration, the authors explicitly recommend "a project-oriented course that connects students to community musicians or community venues in which music can be facilitated" (Campbell et al. 2014: 47), and this recommendation in particular sounds like CBU's community studies approach. The recommendations of the College Music Society on new music curricula are echoed by Jacqueline Warwick, who recently noted that successful, creative musicians who attend university often enrol in disciplines other than music — her examples include creative writing and visual arts — where creativity and theories about creativity are explicitly taught (2020). This suggests that potential students do not see relevant skills, perspectives, and creative techniques as attributes of typical music programs in the older model. Moreover, students whose strengths and interests are in music with a strong oral — rather than literate — training or emphasis benefit from having program options that are designed for their aptitudes, as well as their aesthetic and cultural values. As Mark DeWitt observes, programs focussing on oral traditions tend to embody particular values, such as a commitment to community, to the practical needs of professional musicians, to social justice, and to access: "a curriculum centred on oral tradition(s) also removes an entry barrier for a considerable number of students who play music but who never learned how to read Western staff notation, a skill which itself is correlated with social class" (2017: 70-71).

All of this speaks to the choices CBU made in developing its curriculum: making the program community-focussed but, through ethnomusicology, also diverse in its coverage; making its theory and applied training open to musicians from oral traditions; making access to training accessible; and through work placements and courses in cultural enterprises and the music industry, addressing the practical needs for working in the culture and entertainment sectors. The College Music Society's taskforce's third pillar — creativity — is an area CBU still needs to more fully address. Improvisation is a part of some of the ensemble courses, research-creation projects are being explored in other courses, and a songwriting and composition course has been developed, but

overall, the creative training dimension of the program is still in early stages of development.

There have been significant and justified calls on the academy to address matters of decolonization and indigenization in curricular design. As Appleton (2019) and Figueroa (2020) remark, the complexity and scope of decolonization and indigenization presents institutions with an enormous and transformative task, and almost no course, program, or university, at this point, can reasonably claim to be fully decolonized or indigenized. But Appleton and Figueroa point out that faculty and staff at universities must at least begin the work and move towards the scale of collective action needed to make needed progress on this task (Figueroa 2020: 41). I agree, and while CBU has identified decolonization and indigenization as key academic and strategic priorities, the work and development needed from us remains considerable. For example, our ethnomusicology orientation emphasizes diverse musical cultures, but the most researched traditions on the island, in areas like Celtic, Acadian, and Eastern European cultures — even if Cape Breton's demographics favour these groups — are still basically "white" areas. We offer an Indigenous music course, and the best-known practices for Indigenous pedagogy are pursued, but institution-wide, we still need more dedicated Indigenous faculty. Fortunately, because of the newness of the program and the ethnomusicology orientation, it is unlikely that further development and reform would lead to the kind of "clash of values" that Walker can see happening in established BMus programs if decolonization efforts are pursued (see Walker 2020: 4), but much work remains to be done.

Faculty research initiatives, which inform many of the courses taught, show some of the directions the program has been going in its effort to respond to the local community and do decolonizing work. The two research centres have played crucial roles here. At the Centre for Cape Breton Studies, projects on Atlantic Canadian disaster songs (which respond to mining disasters, shipwrecks, and other occupational tragedies) and protest songs of the local labour movement address music's role in political resistance and occupational folklife, and the ways working-class populations use musical traditions to cope with the risks, injustices, and losses brought by industrial capitalism. A project on music and Gaelic language revitalization addresses a threatened heritage language in the area and examines how music can play a role in bringing such languages back from the brink and sustaining them.[7]

The Centre for Sound Communities produced an archival web portal documenting cultural expressions of Cape Bretoners of Eastern European descent. It ran an interdisciplinary science- and arts-based project exploring the effects on local youth of the "slow violence" of industrial environmental contamination (Sydney was once the most contaminated industrial site in

Canada), and industry's subsequent abandonment of the community in the late 20th century, with ongoing consequences. The Centre also ran projects on local and international bardic traditions. More recently the Centre has put a lot of focus on collaborative research in local Indigenous and settler groups, culminating in a project called "Songs of Migration and Encounter."[8]

In addition to research, both facilities have proven valuable for community arts initiatives, with the Cape Breton University Pipe Band, community theatre groups, and CBU's student-led Indian dance group rehearsing in them. They have produced and hosted installations, public pedagogy programs, as well as music recordings and documentary films.[9] All told, these projects document histories and intervene in communities where colonization and the problems wrought by industrialization and deindustrialization have left their marks. In researching and teaching musical traditions, the program is assertively not aiming to reproduce the kinds of Celtic pastoralism or "tartanism" McKay (1992) and Ivakhiv (2005) critique in Nova Scotia, but take seriously the realities of the communities of Cape Breton, historical and contemporary.

Challenges and Tensions

CBU's music program was built on existing strengths in the broader island community and represents a continuation of the efforts to preserve, document, and revive musical traditions on the island in ways that reflect its roots in folklore and ethnomusicology. But there remain a number of issues and tensions which present challenges to the program's growth and development. For example, attempts to innovate in curriculum — making ethnomusicology the focus, and making theory, applied, and academic courses accessible to musicians from oral traditions — may place CBU on the progressive side of curricular reform. But music programs in the local schools are fairly conventional wind and band programs, so they do not feed into CBU's program naturally, and this makes recruitment from the local high schools difficult.

The program has benefited from CBU's status as a small and young institution, and this allowed us to develop the program in distinct ways pedagogically and thematically because there was no real "baggage" carried forward from older ways of structuring a music program or department. This has permitted a great amount of freedom in both program and instructional design and allowed for experimentation on a small scale with course and program development. But small and young institutions come with their limitations: resources and capital are not usually plentiful, and while successive CRCs in folklore and music have helped to build up our infrastructure for

research, teaching, and performance, the capital for building desirable facilities for practice rooms, keyboard and electronic labs, and dedicated performance spaces has always been limited. Meanwhile, the newness of both the university and program also make visibility and reputation a challenge. To grow, the program needs a critical degree of public recognition as a viable and attractive alternative to classical or jazz conservatories, and a wide-reaching public profile has so far been elusive. Moreover, the idea of a BA or BACS in music, with the particular sets of skills and outcomes it cultivates, is often not what students or parents expect, since the Bachelor of Music model is so much more established and well-understood.

The program's foundational emphasis on "traditional music" was, admittedly, based on Cape Breton's robust and celebrated fiddle culture, which could give the program a standout identity and area of expertise. In the 2000s, during the last years of a global popularity boom for Celtic music, there had been significant interest from local students in traditional music offerings and a steady stream of exchange students from traditional music programs in Ireland, Scotland, and further abroad who wanted to study here. All of this suggested that this emphasis would work well at CBU. Cape Breton's fiddle scene has a number of established experts who could teach in the program, its documentation was well-supported through CBU's archives, and there is still a lively scene of traditional sessions in pubs, live performances across the island, and square dances that can provide learning and performance opportunities for fiddlers and other traditional musicians. The original idea was that CBU might provide an eastern Canadian response to similar programs at the University of Limerick in Ireland, Scotland's Royal Conservatoire and *Sabhal Mor Ostaig*, England's program at Newcastle, and assorted American traditional music programs, like those at East Tennessee State University and the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Over the course of the 2010s, however, a number of headwinds have made the progress of the program, in its current form, ambivalent.

For example, there is an east-west and urban-rural divide in Cape Breton, with the western/rural part of the island (especially Inverness County) being particularly vibrant in musical traditions like fiddling, stepdancing, and piping. But the university is located on the urban side, and Cape Breton's urban residents often feel at some remove from the culture of the rural counties. Moreover, many families in the rural counties have a generations-long history of attending St. Francis Xavier University, which makes CBU recruitment difficult in general, and many in the rural counties feel that CBU is mainly for the urban/post-industrial districts. CBU's current strategic plan advocates more active island-wide recruiting, so the program's reach into the

rural counties may yet improve. But the question of how to serve potential urban students through the program still needs better answers. While CBU's curriculum aims to be as welcoming of students interested in popular music and less well-studied or visible traditional styles as of those interested in the island's more common traditional styles, striking the right balance in curriculum, outreach, and program marketing remains an ongoing challenge. There have been students who have successfully navigated the program while pursuing interests in popular music by taking the various ethnomusicology, theory, and popular music courses and very little of the traditional music offerings, suggesting that another stream through the degree might serve and market better to urban students.

One of the successes of the program has been its ability to draw students "from away." Students interested in traditional music from Central, Western, and Northern Canada, as well as from the United States have found great value in the program and fallen in love with the community and cultures here. And CBU continues to draw exchange students from Ireland and Scotland seeking to expand their repertoires and styles. A number of students from all of these locales — including from Ireland and Scotland — have moved to Nova Scotia permanently; in a place that has struggled with losing its young people, these relocations carry a lot of significance for the community. This echoes a longstanding pattern in the study of music and culture in this region. Outsiders have come to Cape Breton for a long time, convinced of the value and preciousness of the cultures here, and some became proficient practitioners, advocates, or scholar-collectors in the region.[10] In counterpoint to this attraction of outsiders, Cape Bretoners are sometimes engaged in a pride-shame dialectic with respect to the island's culture. While many love it avidly, and express pride and support for the musicians and performers that emerge from their ranks, there is also an obverse sense that Cape Breton's traditional cultures can be embarrassing, a sign of backwardness, a failure to keep up with the world. Outsiders bring an affirmative perspective on Cape Breton's cultures, and this is one way in which the program is having a positive influence on the community. But this leaves a question about the right balance in the program: how many locals, and how many from away, create the right mix?

Finally, the demographics of students at CBU has been in constant flux over the past 10 years, and the evolving situation is challenging to navigate. Once hosting a primarily local student body, CBU has used international recruitment agents to draw students in large numbers from China and India, with smaller numbers from other east Asian countries, Africa, Eastern Europe, and South America. CBU hosted a large cohort of students from Saudi Arabia,

but this group was abruptly withdrawn by the Saudi government in the mid-2010s. Overwhelmingly, international students are recruited into business, tourism management, engineering, and public health. The university is aware of the imbalance and wants to see international recruitment spread more evenly across areas of study. This issue is of growing importance for music and other areas of study: in 2019, the number of international students grew to an unprecedented number in excess of 50% of the student body. The humanities, sciences, and social sciences remain primarily domestic in student base, but the local student population has been declining slowly for some time. For music at CBU, this poses a number of challenges. We are working to recruit from a shrinking base of domestic students interested in a music credential. The non-local students who are genuinely drawn to our program (primarily Central and Western Canadian, American, Irish, British) are not from demographics that can be easily recruited in large groups, as they can be for other areas of study. There are particular courses in which enrolments benefit from CBU's internationalization by increasing the number of elective-seeking students, but this has not — except in rare cases — helped to raise the numbers of majors in the program as such.

The distribution of students across the university also creates a curious situation where most liberal arts music courses (not necessarily applied courses) are open to both majors and elective-seeking students to ensure viable enrolment levels. This sometimes raises the question of who the courses are for, and how to address the sometimes very different interests, competencies, and experience bases that students in the classes can have. But at the same time, this issue is a driver of pedagogical creativity, and faculty have used community studies pedagogies, Indigenous pedagogies, discovery models, as well as inquiry-based and intercultural learning approaches that allow for dialogue among students in diverse classes and allow for student-directed research projects.

Conclusion

Reflecting on his survey of traditional music programs in North America, Mark DeWitt offered these questions:

> Why introduce folk and traditional music into the music performance curriculum? Is it to add a new set of skills for music majors to learn and become more employable? Or is it an opposite motivation, to preserve art forms that are no longer in demand in the marketplace? Are we trying to add diversity to our student

> body by bringing in first generation students, talented musicians with high school educations who don't read music and might not otherwise attend university at all? Or are we starting with an intellectual agenda, based in the discipline of ethnomusicology or folklore, and using performance training as a way to engage students more fully in the intellectual and social issues that we care about? (2017: 94)

These questions speak to me as a professor teaching in such a program for the past eight years. Our faculties' strengths in ethnomusicology, dance ethnology, and folklore bring strong intellectual, critical, and liberal arts emphases to some of our offerings. At the same time, Cape Breton is an institution with many first generation university students, and many who are interested in music learned first through oral means. So a program with a strong commitment to openness of access, and to relevant musical practices, is needed to properly serve the community. How CBU will balance these trajectories will remain a key question as the program evolves.

After writing this institutional history, I worry that this article sounds celebratory, that I have emphasized progressive curricular reforms and made an appealing narrative of a university serving — even trying to rescue — a beleaguered community. This was not my intention. The program is still so young that I cannot say whether the efforts described qualify as a "success," or whether the program will, in the longer term, be successful. Moreover, I continue to ponder what "success" in this context will mean. Will it mean growth and higher enrolment numbers? Will success be measured through an enhanced institutional reputation? Will success best be measured through our graduates, who carry forward whatever skills, perspectives, and attributes the program helps them cultivate? Is success providing a service that the community at large values, regardless of the program's size? Is it actualizing particular scholarly values and best pedagogical practices, and addressing the curricular and decolonization challenges before us, again regardless of cohort size? These questions remain to be answered.

Acknowledgements

I thank Drs. Richard MacKinnon and Gordon Smith for speaking with me about the early history of folklore and music offerings at CBU. I thank Drs. Heather Sparling, Janice Esther Tulk, and others who wished anonymity, for their feedback and input on the article's early drafts.

Notes

1. McKay (1992) has offered influential critiques of the "tartanization" of Nova Scotia, and the selling of the province's tourist industry through a curation of its pre-industrial past and Scottish settlement history. Nova Scotia's modernity and diversity was obscured by this. Meanwhile, some descendants of the Scots-Gaelic settlers in eastern Nova Scotia found their culture distorted and exploited by the sorts of commodities and representations made to attract and satisfy the tourist gaze (see Michael Kennedy's 2001 report). Acadian and small coastal fishing communities have felt similarly appropriated. Meanwhile, other Nova Scotian cultures have been largely overlooked by the tourist industry until recently.

2. The development of this program was the context in which the concept of "two-eyed seeing" originated. See Bartlett, Marshall and Marshall (2012: 335), where two-eyed seeing is defined as "the gift of multiple perspectives treasured by many aboriginal peoples and explains that it refers to learning to see from one eye with the *strengths* of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the *strengths* of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all."

3. Self-determination was a key theme in the Antigonish Movement, pursued by liberal Catholic faculty at St. Francis Xavier University in the late 1920s. Its social and economic development programs were further developed at the Coady Institute, established at St. Francis Xavier University in 1959. Members of the movement advocated for education, public support for small enterprises, cooperative enterprises, and community economic development as approaches to regional revitalization in eastern Nova Scotia. The ideals of the Antigonish Movement influenced CBU's development and coloured how the community felt about the institution. For further discussion of CBU's history in this regard, see Morgan (2004).

4. Later in the 2010s, a BACS in Applied Theatre was approved, using the BACS Music Major as a preliminary model, continuing the relationship between theatre and music established at the institution decades earlier.

5. The first three courses predate the formal program and were based on courses Sparling and Ostashewski worked on at CBU and Nipissing University in the 2000s, with textbook and pedagogical recommendations from their mentor, Dr. Beverley Diamond.

6. For further information on the Centre, see http://soundcommunities.org/about/.

7. See Sparling 2017; MacKinnon and MacKinnon 2012; https://languageinlyrics.com; MacIntyre, Ross and Sparling 2019.

8. See Ostashewski 2015; Ostashewski 2020a and 2020b. Continuing the long-standing overlap between music and theatre at CBU, the Centre also supports applied theatre projects on topics like transgender youth experience, a recent local flood disaster, and queer birthing experiences.

9. For installations, see *iCreate Cape Breton* (https://icreatecapebreton.ca) and

Canary in the Mine (Sparling 2015); for recordings see *Cape Breton Protest Songs* (MacKinnon 2011) and *Songs of Truth* (Kytasty 2014); for documentaries, see *The Sunjata Story* (Diabaté 2016) and *Doug MacPhee and Cape Breton's Celtic Piano Style* (McDonald and MacKinnon 2016).

10. Examples include Ontario fiddler Paul Cranford and American fiddlers Jerry Holland and David Greenberg, all of whom became strong Cape Breton-style fiddlers. Cranford and Greenberg collected and published volumes of fiddle tunes popular on the island. American folklorist John Shaw collected Gaelic-language songs on the island and published authoritative volumes of them, while Mary Jane Lamond, an Ontarian with family roots in Cape Breton, has emerged as the foremost commercial recording artist of Cape Breton Gaelic song. Similarly, CBU faculty are often from away, but find much of value to research here. Dr. Ronald Labelle, a Quebec-born folklorist of Acadian music, moved from the University of Moncton to CBU to finish his teaching and research career here, studying Acadian music in and around Chéticamp. Heather Sparling was drawn here from Ontario by her research interests in Gaelic language and song, and now works with the community on projects to revitalize the language. Marcia Ostashewski began her research in Cape Breton to extend her Ukrainian-Canadian studies, which started on the Prairies, and is now studying the revival of Ukrainian liturgical chant practices in Sydney.

References

Appleton, Nayantara Sheoran. 2019. Do Not 'Decolonize' . . . If You Are Not Decolonizing: Progressive Language and Planning Beyond a Hollow Academic Rebranding. *Critical Ethnic Studies Blog*. University of Minnesota Press. http://www.criticalethnicstudiesjournal.org/blog/2019/1/21/do-not-decolonize-if-you-are-not-decolonizing-alternate-language-to-navigate-desires-for-progressive-academia-6y5sg (accessed August 13, 2020).

Bartlett, Cheryl, Murdena Marshall, and Albert Marshall. 2012. Two-Eyed Seeing and Other Lessons Learned within a Co-learning Journey of Bringing Together Indigenous and Mainstream Knowledges and Ways of Knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* 2 (4): 331-340.

Campbell, Patricia S. et al. 2014. *Transforming Music Study from its Foundations: A Manifesto for Progressive Change in the Undergraduate Preparation of Music Majors*. Report from the Task Force on the Undergraduate Music Major. The College Music Society. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267631399_Transforming_Music_Study_from_its_Foundations_A_Manifesto_for_Progressive_Change_in_the_Undergraduate_Preparation_of_Music_Majors (accessed August 10, 2020).

Dewitt, Mark F. 2017. Training in Local Oral Traditions. In *College Music Curricula for a New Century*, 69-100. Ed. Robin D. Moore. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Figueroa, Michael A. 2020. Decolonizing "Intro to World Music?" *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 10 (1): 39-57.

Houlahan, Michael and Philip Tacka. 2008. *From Sound to Symbol: Fundamentals of Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ivakhiv, Adrian. 2005. Colouring Cape Breton Celtic: Topographies of Culture and Identity in Cape Breton. *Ethnologies* 27 (2): 107-136.

Kennedy, Michael. 2001. *Gaelic Nova Scotia: An Economic, Cultural and Social Impact Study.* Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture.

MacIntyre, Peter, Jessica Ross, and Heather Sparling. 2019. Flow Experiences and Willingness to Communicate: Connecting Scottish Gaelic Language and Traditional Music. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 38 (4): 536-545.

MacKinnon, Richard and Lachlan MacKinnon. 2012. Residual Radicalism: Labour Song-Poems of Industrial Decline. *Ethnologies* 34 (1/2): 273-298.

McDavid, Jodi. 2020. This is the Right Place For It: The Development of the Folklore Program at Cape Breton University. In *Folklore in the United States and Canada: An Institutional History*, 262-269. Ed. Patricia Swain and Rosemary Levy Zumwalt. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

McKay, Ian. 1992. Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933-54. *Acadiensis* 21 (2): 5-47.

Morgan, Robert J. 2004. *Perseverance: The Story of Cape Breton's University College, 1952-2002*. Sydney: Cape Breton University Press.

Ostashewski, Marcia. 2015. Community-Engaged Research and Its Outcomes: A Web Portal Project in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada. *Arti Musices: hrvatski muzikološki zbornik* 46 (2): 223-243.

———. 2020a. Sound Communities. *Music and Arts in Action* 7 (3): 63-84.

———. 2020b. Studying Singing Storytellers in Cape Breton: Community-Engaged Research-Creation as a Methodology. In *The Routledge Companion to Interdisciplinary Studies in Singing, Volume III: Wellbeing*, 291-303. Ed. R. Heydon, D. Fancourt, and A. J. Cohen. New York: Routledge.

Sparling, Heather. 2015. Canary in the Mine and the Concerns of Research Councils, Applied Ethnomusicologists, and Museum Professionals. *Material Culture Review* 82/83: 190-206.

———. 2017. "Sad and Solemn Requiems": Disaster Songs and Complicated Grief in the Aftermath of Nova Scotia Mining Disasters. In *Singing Death: Reflection on Music and Mortality*, 90-106. Ed. H. Dell and H.M. Hickey. New York: Routledge.

Walker, Margaret. 2020. Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum. *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 10 (1): 1-19.

Warwick, Jacqueline. 2020. Music Education has a Race Problem, and Universities Must Address It. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/music-education-has-a-race-problem-and-universities-must-address-it-143719 (accessed August 14, 2020).

Discography

Kytasty, Julian. 2014. *Songs of Truth: Music & Song from the Kobzar Tradition*. Centre for Cape Breton Studies. Compact disc.
MacKinnon, Richard (producer). 2011. *Cape Breton Island Protest Songs*. Centre for Cape Breton Studies. Compact disc.

Videography

Diabaté, Lassana, dir. 2016. *The Sunjata Story*. Centre for Sound Communities.
McDonald, Chris and Richard MacKinnon, dirs. 2016. *Doug MacPhee and Cape Breton's Celtic Piano Style*. NovaStream.