

THE NEWFOUNDLAND POPULAR MUSIC PROJECT

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On May 29, 1972, the Canadian Folk Music Society awarded us a summer grant to enable us to continue our research into the roots and sources of Newfoundland popular music. In our proposal to the Society we defined "Newfoundland popular music" as "all music commercially performed, recorded, or printed – be it a traditional Newfoundland ballad or an operatic performance – which is available to the listening public of Newfoundland." Our immediate goals in applying for the grant were (a) to compile a discography of Newfoundland recording artists, and (b) to travel to centres of Newfoundland music to interview professional and semi-professional musicians.

Research Done: Some Facts and Figures

In all, some forty hours of interviews were taped, though these by no means represent all of our conversations with people concerning Newfoundland music. We spoke not only to musicians, but to record salesmen, record company executives, recording studio engineers, and radio and T.V. station personnel. Our "man-in-the-street" informants included a railroad engineer, the proprietor of a BBQ chicken restaurant, the widow of an amateur folk song collector, numerous bartenders and their patrons, and dozens of hitchhikers. We logged several thousand miles by airplane, automobile, and train, to reach informants who live in the communities of St. John's, Mount Pearl, Portugal Cove, Conception Harbour, Arnold's Cove, Dunville, Windsor/Grand Falls, Corner Brook, Stephenville, Aguathuna, Black Duck Brook, Halifax, and Dartmouth. We also made use of our own summer and Christmas vacations in Toronto and New York to supplement our data, both in interviewing and record hunting.

A complete list of taped interviews relating to the project (which was begun before CFMS funding) is shown on a separate page. All tapes are on deposit in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (accession number 73-45).

Our interviews followed what eventually became a standard format. We elicited basic information from the informant – date and place of birth, ancestral origins, and education. We then explored all facets of the informant's musical background – the kinds of music he heard while growing up; his community's access to radio, T.V., and recordings; musical instruments in the community; and, if the informant was a musician, his early career. Finally, we investigated the informant's present musical tastes and preferences, and again, if he was a musician, his recent career and future plans in that field. Of course, a great deal more information of interest, both to our project and to the broader field of folklore research, came out during these interviews, and was recorded on tape or in our field notes.

Methodology for a Regional Discography of Newfoundland

The reason for compiling a regional discography of Newfoundland is not merely to list records, but to learn how concepts of popular music on the island are reflected in and shaped by the medium most directly associated

with popular music – the phonodisc. A compilation of both popular and private recordings done by Newfoundlanders will indicate how familiar Newfoundland people were and are with this type of media; what types of music were considered marketable, in the case of popular recordings, or *worth* preserving, in the case of private recordings; and how concepts and musical styles have changed from the early discs to the most recent and up-to-date recordings. Likewise, a compilation of recordings of Newfoundland music as performed by non-Newfoundlanders will indicate to what extent the island has influenced mainland popular culture.

Keeping in mind the problems raised above, we have divided the discography into two parts: Part I will include *every* Newfoundlander who recorded, regardless of where he was when he recorded, what kind of music was involved, or how long the performer had been away from the island. This means that if a singer left Newfoundland after high school never to return, and sang only light opera for a recording company in Vancouver, he will still be included in this section of the discography. Part I will attempt to be comprehensive. Part II will include all recordings of music which can be identified as either traditional Newfoundland music or music composed by a native Newfoundlander which is performed by any non-Newfoundlander. This means that if the Budapest String Quartet records "I'se the B'y", it will be cited in Part II. This part of the discography will attempt to be an in-depth survey, since comprehensiveness in this area would be nearly impossible.

There are two exceptions to the rules laid down above: in order to be cited in the discography, a Newfoundlander must be a *featured* artist, in some respect, on the record. So that if a violinist in a Toronto orchestra happens to be from Joe Batt's Arm, this does not mean that every record by that group will be cited. However, if that violinist is featured as a soloist on a piece played by that orchestra, *that* recording will be cited. The second exception is the output of Omar Blondahl. Even though he is not a native Newfoundlander, an attempt has been made to cite everything he has recorded, whether it is a Newfoundland song or not. This is because of the profound effect he has had on popular music on the island. His recording of a song like "The Black Flies of Ontario" would have a much greater impact on the listening audience of Newfoundland than the same song recorded by an unfamiliar "foreign" singer.

The method for collecting information was at first haphazard, since the scope and size of a Newfoundland discography were completely unknown factors. All record shops in St. John's as well as other stores which carried records (drug stores, book shops, department stores, etc.) were searched for relevant material. A complete search of the record library of the St. John's CBC radio station was carried out. Several private record collections were gone through, and those knowledgeable about Newfoundland recordings (such as one long-time owner of a St. John's record shop) were consulted and shown lists of records already cited, so that they could fill in gaps and add information to records already on the list. Every musician interviewed was asked to give a complete account of his or her recording career, and was asked about other artists who might have recorded publicly or privately. On every trip to another city likely stores and record shops were inspected. Record

companies which seemed to specialize in Newfoundland music were consulted for information. Of course, newspapers and the radio were helpful in calling attention to new record releases, and an ever-increasing circle of friends and informants supplied valuable and not so valuable information.

To date, we have a fairly complete list for Part I of the discography, although much information on each individual item is still lacking. Likewise, Part II represents a decent survey of Newfoundland music recorded by non-Newfoundlanders, but, if anything, is sketchier in exact discographical detail. All in all, we have cited approximately 120 records in Part I, from Marie Toulinguet (1904) to the Du-Cats (1972), and seventy records in Part II, from the McNulty Family to Bob Dylan. But though the discography seems to have reached its upper limits in terms of actual citations, there is still much work to be done.

However, even in rough form, the discography reveals some interesting and important information. It is possible to see exactly what types of music Newfoundlanders have recorded, and what particular songs or kinds of songs are most popular. The kinds of material recorded by Newfoundlanders break down into six general categories which may best be listed in terms of what percentage of the total recorded output they represent: 56 percent Newfoundland and Irish music; 18 percent country and western music; 12 percent popular music, 6 percent religious music; 4 percent rock music; 4 percent monologues, speeches, and patriotic songs.

Newfoundland and Irish music are by far the most popular forms of music on record, and of the two types, there are ten indigenous Newfoundland songs on record for every Irish song. Yet these two types of music may be grouped together since, whenever a record of "all Newfoundland" music is put out, it is bound to contain some purely Irish songs, and the artists who record Newfoundland material are the ones who sing Irish songs. Harry Hibbs' first recording (Arc AS 794) contains such Newfoundland tunes as "I'se the B'y" and "Squid Jiggin' Ground" but also includes Irish tunes like "The Irish Rover" and "Off to Dublin". Likewise, John White recorded an all-Newfoundland album - "Voice of Newfoundland" (International Artists IA 3014) - as well as an Irish album - "Irish Folk Songs" (Rodeo RLP 85). Of all Newfoundland songs perhaps the most widely recorded is "I'se the B'y," which has found its way on to disc at least twelve times.

As expected from our research, country and western music has been extensively recorded by Newfoundland artists. And again, many of the same artists who record Newfoundland music also record country and western songs, but the two types of music are found, more often than not, on separate albums by the same artist. Dick Nolan's "Truck Driving Man" (Arc AS 633) is all country and western, whereas his "Be True Newfoundlanders" (Arc ACS 5024) is all Newfoundland and Irish. As far as individual songs are concerned, "Folsom Prison Blues," "Oh Lonesome Me," and "Okie from Muskokie" stand out as the most popularly recorded country and western songs.

The rather nebulous category of "popular music" contains a wide assortment of songs, most of which would be well-known to the entire North American culture. This category includes sophisticated "night-club" type songs such as "The Shadow of Your Smile" (Mary Lou Collins, RCA Victor CTL/CTLS 1086), musical comedy tunes such as "Oklahoma" (CJON Glee

Club, T 42300/42301), vaudeville or music hall songs such as “Toot Toot Tootsie” (George Mercer, private recording), or songs of seasonal interest such as “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer” (Dick Nolan, Arc AC 20).

Of the three small categories, religious music is perhaps the most significant. Though the Lidstone Sisters, a Newfoundland gospel duet, recorded only one record in the mid '50's, the fact that this record is *still* stocked by record sellers attests to the continued popularity of this kind of music. To date, Newfoundland rock musicians have not been greatly recorded, but there is every reason to believe that this will change in the coming years and that one can expect to see more rock groups on record in the future. The last type of material on records – monologues, speeches, and patriotic songs – is, as one would expect, not greatly popular, but recent records of Newfoundland jokes and anecdotes by raconteurs such as Ron Pumphrey (Caribou CCLP 7005) and Kevin Jardine (Marathon MS 2115) may start a trend in this direction.

Newfoundland Popular Music: Some Findings

By means of our interviews we have been able to piece together a general, though by no means complete, picture of popular music on the island from about the 1930's to the present. In particular, we have found some preliminary answers to many questions concerning outside influences on popular music in Newfoundland, primarily in the area of the mass media.

Various informants on the west coast of the island told us of the numerous radio stations they could receive from the mainland in the thirties, especially from Charlottetown, P.E.I., which were broadcasting many forms of popular music of the day. Even as far north as the tip of the Great Northern Peninsula, mainland stations as distant as Boston were received clearly, as well as stations in St. John's. There is little doubt that, in the western parts of the island at least, mainland radio was largely responsible for introducing the music of popular culture to Newfoundlanders. The American military base radio station at Harmon, established in the forties, does not seem to have been a great influence, since, according to our informants in that area, the local station was much more popular. Indeed, Newfoundland radio stations were well established before the American invasion, and were already broadcasting popular mainland music, especially Irish and Country-Western music.

On the east coast, St. John's, far from being a musical backwater, offered a large variety of popular music to its citizens, and through the resources of its media, affected the eastern part of the island. Information from one long-time resident of the city, who has been an integral part of the St. John's popular music scene for years, leads us to believe that from 1900 into the thirties, when St. John's still had regular passenger service to New York, the city was probably as sophisticated, musically speaking, as any mainland city of the same size. Mainland groups came up continually to perform in St. John's, and regular outdoor concerts were given in the warmer months. One would be as likely to find the latest tunes and dance steps in St. John's in 1925 as one would in a prairie city or Maritime urban centre.

Nor did St. John's export popular music only through the media: direct contact was made in the small outports through various travelling shows and musicians from the capital city. For example, Jimmie Linegar travelled extensively throughout the island singing country music, and is remembered by one informant as perhaps the first touring artist in his isolated northern community, which until that time had only heard Linegar on radio. (It should be pointed out that, even in communities where there was no electricity, many families had large battery radios.

Aside from influences from the big cities, people in small communities and outports were quite capable of obtaining the latest popular music. Although there were virtually no record stores or music shops, records and musical instruments could be easily ordered from catalogues such as that of Simpson-Sears. And although record players were not as available as radios, nearly every informant we spoke to either had one or had access to one — usually the Victor crank-type gramophone. Recordings of the Irish McNulty Family, as well as Wilf Carter and Hank Snow 78s, were plentiful. (One of our earliest reports of record collecting on the island comes from an informant in his early fifties who recalls that his father collected Jimmie Rodgers records). And if records weren't available from shops, sheet music was, or could be sent away for. Men returning from work on the mainland were also known to have brought sheet music back with them.

There seems to be a long tradition of learning popular and classical tunes from sheet music, whatever its origin. This music was played on parlour pianos and at concerts. (One informant remembers how his sister, who played piano "from the book," bought sheet music to "Red Sails in the Sunset" in the 1930s.) Perhaps two or three times a year — Christmas being the most popular time — many communities had formal concerts given by the local religious order or some secular or semi-secular society. In one case reported, the concert regularly featured a full-blown "operetta," as the informant referred to it, written by a classical master or popular mainland composer. Thus it should not come as a surprise that Marie Toulinget, a woman from a small outport on the north coast, should become an internationally-known opera singer, and that upon her retirement, she should have given successful and still remembered concerts on the island. These productions were usually followed by a dance in which traditional jigs and reels were played, showing that traditional and popular (or classical) music existed quite comfortably side by side. Furthermore, one musician who played at dances in the early forties reports that although traditional square dances were requested, what he called "round dances" shared equal billing. When asked to describe "round dances", he named the waltz, foxtrot and jitterbug as examples.

Getting back to parlour pianos: although "times" ("house parties") with their traditional music and singing appear to have been in the backgrounds of most informants (even in the urban centres), get-togethers around a piano to listen or sing along to sheet music were not uncommon, and in some cases, seem to have taken precedence over the more traditional "times." One informant, who grew up in the Change Islands in the twenties and thirties, recalls these gatherings around a parlour piano, and although there was a strong tradition of local singing and song-making, the *traditional* songs, he says, were generally saved for work situations on the stages or at the fishing grounds.

NEWFOUNDLAND POPULAR MUSIC PROJECT: INTERVIEWS ON TAPE

<i>Date</i>	<i>Informant(s)</i>	<i>Location</i>
8/1/72	Harry Hibbs (musician)	Toronto
5/2/72	Ray Maclean, Winston Saunders, Bill Chipman, Dave Noseworthy, Bill Whelan ("The Newfoundland Showband")	St. John's
13/6/72	Dick Nolan, Jerry Pye (musicians)	St. John's
29/6/72	Jimmie Linegar (musician)	Portugal Cove
5/9/72	Grant Kennedy (engineer & co-owner: Audio Atlantic Studios)	Halifax
6/9/72	John Drake, Tom Rose (of "The Doreymen")	Halifax
6/9/72	Ray Johnson (musician)	Halifax
13/9/72	Harry Hibbs (musician)	St. John's
27/9/72	Lloyd Bartlett, Wilf Pardy, Terry Anstey ("Street Symphony")	Corner Brook
28/9/72	Derek Brake (of "Next In Line")	Corner Brook
28/9/72	Mike Kelly, Ray Wilton, Dave Walsh ("The NuTones")	Corner Brook
28/9/72	Max Anderson (railroad engineer & Jimmie Rodgers enthusiast)	Corner Brook
29/9/72	Gerry Murphy (station manager: CFSX)	Stephenville
29/9/72	Gerry Formanger [Reeves] (musician)	Aguathuna
30/9/72	Emile Benoit (traditional fiddler) & family	Black Duck Brook
1/10/72	Neil Shepherd (musician)	Stephenville
5/10/72	Hank Harnum (announcer: CBC radio)	Corner Brook*
11/10/72	Willie Millar, Joe Millar, George Millar, Jim Ferguson, Wilcil McDowell ("The Irish Rovers")	St. John's
15/10/72	Wilf Doyle (musician)	Conception Harbour
17/10/72	Bob MacLeod (organist, source re. St. John's music)	St. John's
23/10/72	A. R. Scammell (singer-songwriter)	St. John's
26/10/72	Bob MacLeod (see above)	St. John's
3/11/72	Joan Morrissey (singer)	Mt. Pearl
10/1/73	Winston Elms (source re. outport music)	St. John's
17/1/73	Mary (Mrs. Gerald S.) Doyle	St. John's

*telephone interview, courtesy of CBC Radio, St. John's

One assumption we had made when we began our research was that the American military bases established on the island during World War II had been a major influence in introducing popular music, especially Country-Western music, to Newfoundland. According to our overall findings, however, this was not the case. This is not to say that the Americans had *no* influence whatsoever. They did bring in many entertainers to the bases whom Newfoundlanders had previously heard only on record or radio. And their radio stations, though not as popular as previously thought, *were* one more outlet for popular music. If anything, Newfoundlanders influenced American taste in music rather than vice-versa. A. R. Scammell found some of the most avid customers for his records to be American servicemen, and Americans eagerly grabbed up copies of Gerald S. Doyle's song books.

But it was a Canadian mainlander who was largely responsible for turning traditional Newfoundland music into popular music in, what might be called, a folk-revival manner. Omar Blondahl, from Saskatchewan, was one of the first singers to put out an LP of traditional Newfoundland music, and was very popular on radio all over Newfoundland as a singer of Newfoundland songs. (Ed McCurdy and Alan Mills had preceded him, and were known on the island, but their records never sold well.) It was through Blondahl that Wilf Doyle, a traditional Newfoundland musician and composer, got his start in the recording business, since in 1955 it was Doyle's button accordion that accompanied one of Blondahl's early recordings for the Rodeo Record Company. The next year Doyle started his long career of recording on LPs for the popular market. With Doyle in the lead, other traditional musicians followed, such as Harry Hibbs, John White, and more recently, Ray Johnson; and singers, who for a long time had made their living on the mainland singing other types of music, could now find a market for records of traditional Newfoundland music – Dick Nolan and Gerry Formanger (Reeves) being but two examples.

In this part of our article, we have touched upon only the primary question of popular music influences coming from off the island, and said nothing about other problems which we tried to deal with in our research, such as regional tastes and styles, and musical change brought about by cultural adaptation. We hope to discuss these problems at some future date. In the meantime, because of the complexity of the interaction of traditional and popular music in Newfoundland, and the vast amount of data yet to be collected, we must consider whatever findings we have so far as signposts for further research.

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Résumé: *Messieurs Posen et Taft, gradués en folklore au Memorial University, décrivent leur projet relatif à la musique populaire de Terre-Neuve. Ils ont compilé une liste de chansons enregistrées par des chanteurs Terre-neuviens et des chants de Terre-Neuve enregistrés par des personnes étrangères; ils ont aussi interviewé un certain nombre d'artistes préalablement enregistrés, cela faisant partie de l'étude en cours.*