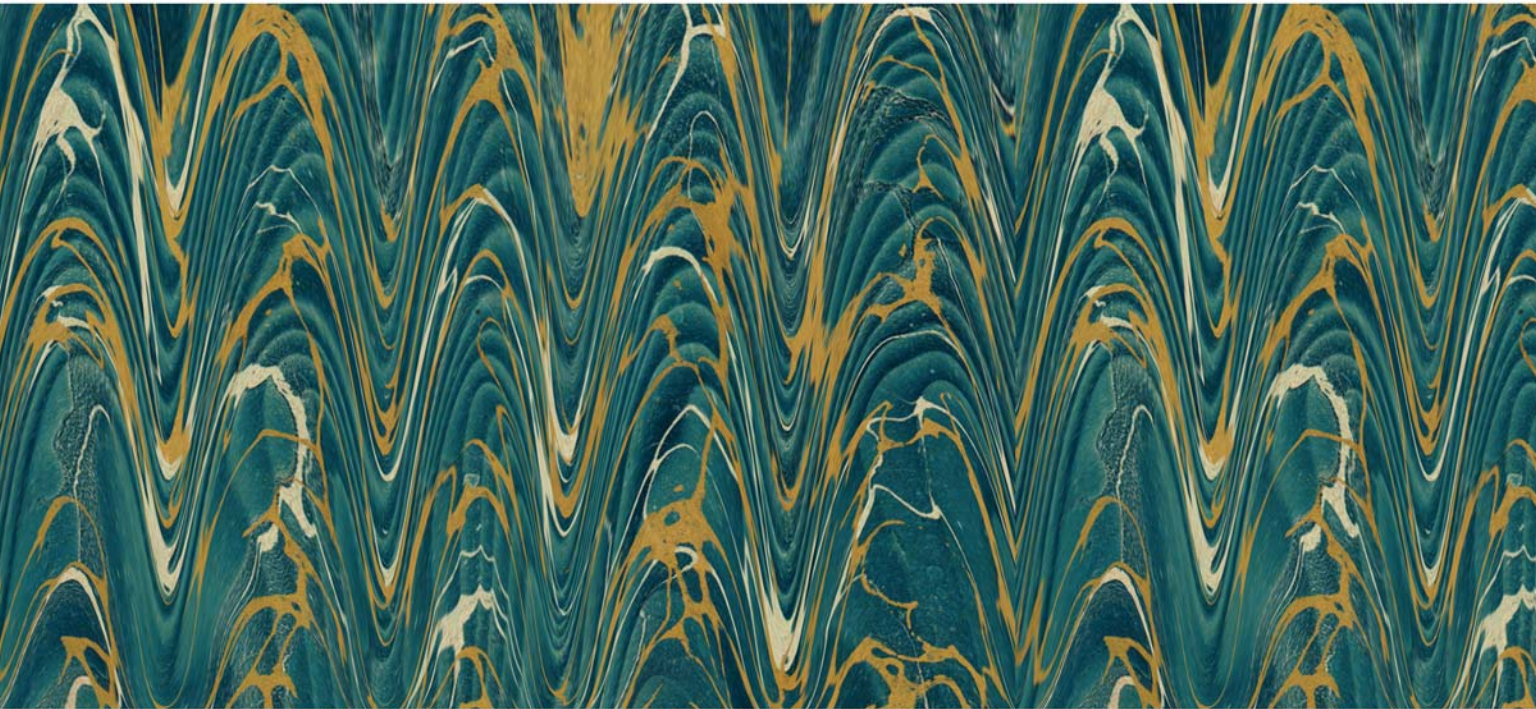


CANADA'S CHORAL MUSIC DEVELOPMENT

HILARY APFELSTADT

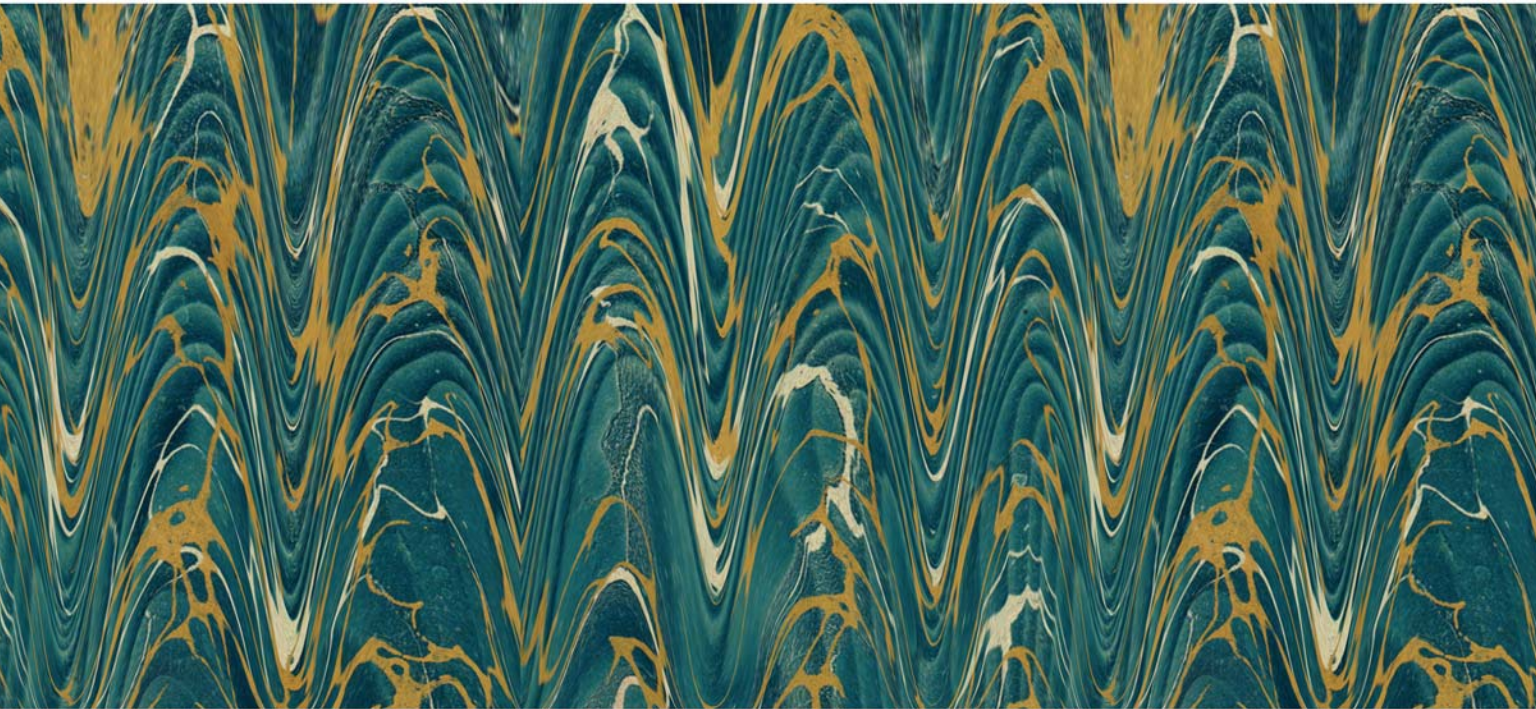


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Until the mid-nineteenth century, Canada's music reflected the stylistic elements of traditional musical periods because emigrants were trained outside the country and brought their traditions with them, as well as the influence of their own training. Singing schools developed, as in the United States, beginning around 1800 in the Maritime Provinces and eventually moving west over the next hundred years. The movement contributed to the development of church choirs. Together with singing societies such as the New Union Singing Society (1809) in Halifax, Nova Scotia, these singing schools enhanced the growth of choral music. Publishing followed and libraries grew. School music education began officially in 1850, and the Toronto Conservatory of Music, recognized widely for its national system of graded examinations, was founded in 1886. In 1903, Canada's national music festival movement began and continues to this day with annual competitive festivals throughout the country.

Marius Barbeau, W. Roy Mackenzie, Helen Creighton, and Maud Karpeles, among others, contributed to a vast resource of folk materials. In time, their work led to arrangements and new compositions by a variety of Canadian composers, such as W. H. Anderson, Claude Champagne, Sir Earnest MacMillan, and Healey Willan. Many English-speaking composers were influenced by church music styles and wrote in the British tradition (e.g., MacMillan and Willan), but French-speaking composers like Claude Champagne tended to reflect more the influence of their contemporaries further afield, such as Debussy and Scriabin.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) was an ardent supporter of choral music, sponsoring an annual CBC Radio competition for amateur choirs and generating Canadian choral compositions. That event is now cosponsored by the Association of Canadian Choral Communities (ACCC), the Canada Council for the Arts, CBC Music, and Festival 500.



Author's note: The first part of this paper is based on a chapter written for *Conducting Women's Choirs: Strategies for Success* (ed. Debra Spurgeon), which was published by GIA Publications, Inc. in 2012. See "Canadian Repertoire for Women's Choruses," pp. 69 - 102.

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Since the mid-twentieth century, Canada's musical growth has skyrocketed. Examples include (1) university music degree programs; (2) the founding of professional organizations and their subsequent journals; (3) the development of professional organizations for Canadian composers, including the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada (SOCAN), the Canadian League of Composers (CLC), and the Association of Canadian Women Composers (ACWC); (4) the founding of the Association of Canadian Choral Communities (formerly known as the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors, 1980). Eight of ten provinces have a choral federation that supports choral events, including workshops, choral festivals, and annual youth choirs and camps.

Professional choirs such as the Vancouver Chamber Choir (Jon Washburn, conductor) and the Elmer Iseler Singers (Lydia Adams, conductor) are also an essential part of the Canadian choral scene. Ensembles such as these contribute in multiple ways, serving as champions of Canadian composers and the choral art in general. Music Intima, based in British Columbia, is a professional ensemble that has garnered high praise both locally and internationally for its innovative programming and repertoire.

The influence of Canadian choral conductor the late Elmer Iseler deserves particular mention. For many years he conducted the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir and the Festival Singers which, in the 1970s, set the standard for professional choral singing in the country. Because of his influence, other conductors formed professional choirs, the best known of which is the Vancouver Chamber Choir, still led by Jon Washburn, as mentioned above. Wayne Riddell's ensemble, the Montreal Tudor Singers, now defunct, was another

important contributor to the development of Canadian choral repertoire of the last century. Elmer Iseler was a champion of Canadian composers and a standard bearer of fine performance in general. He shared a Grammy Award with the composer for his recording of Stravinsky's music. Walter Pitman's book *Elmer Iseler: Choral Visionary*¹ provides a detailed history of the Festival Singers and of Iseler's influence, which has been now passed on to Lydia Adams, who conducts the Elmer Iseler Singers and actively commissions and promotes Canadian works.

The proliferation of children's and youth choirs throughout Canada is a major influence on the development of Canadian choral music. One prominent example is the Toronto Children's Chorus, founded in 1978 by Jean Ashworth Bartle, and accompanied by Ruth Watson Henderson. For many years, Gordon V. Thompson, a Canadian music publisher, produced a series edited by Bartle, to which Henderson and other prominent Canadian composers contributed. Much of that music is suitable for performance by older treble voice choirs and is still available through other publishers.

The Canadian Music Centre (CMC) now has over eight hundred associate members—composers who are invited to membership on the basis of submission review. Many of these composers write for the choral idiom. The CMC provides numerous resources for choral conductors and singers who wish to borrow or purchase scores, or simply to investigate the wealth of Canadian repertoire housed there.²

Canadian music represents a wide variety of genres and styles, some based on folk idioms, some paying homage to historical elements or the landscape of nature, some simply representing current techniques that are evident in other countries. Canadians who have studied

outside the country certainly show evidence of those external influences, as would be expected. There is no point in denying those influences; everyone is a product of background.

At the same time, composers whose education and influences are largely Canadian may be the ones in the future to set the parameters for what becomes known as "Canadian music." In the meantime, there are a number of characteristics that seem to relate to Canadian choral composers, and those will constitute the focus for the remainder of this discussion.

ESSENTIAL INFLUENCES ON CANADIAN CHORAL MUSIC

Three influences seem predominant in Canadian choral music composition: folk music, nature references, and compositional trends that are incorporated into so-called "art" music.

1) FOLK MUSIC ELEMENTS

Folk music is the music of ordinary people: songs and tunes that are passed on from one to another by ear rather than by print and thus over time take on different forms. Canada has a rich variety of folk music, and *The Canadian Encyclopedia*³ is a helpful resource both for a general description of folk music in Canada and also for information on both Anglo-Canadian and French-Canadian folk music.

Anglo-Canadian Folk Music

The largest number of Anglo-Canadian folk songs came to this country with the early settlers from Britain and Ireland, who initially settled on the East Coast. Many of these songs were passed from generation to generation. Newfoundland is especially rich in its folk songs, and there is a strong choral

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culture in that province. In addition to ditties and ballads, the music comprises lullabies, love songs, sea shanties, and music-hall songs.

Nearly all the native Canadian songs use melodies from Old World sources. Texts were about the occupations of the early settlers—the two largest groups being men who earned their living on the sea or in the woods. Thus, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland have sea shanties, or songs about whaling, sealing, and fishing, as well as ballads about maritime disasters such as shipwrecks.

In New Brunswick and Ontario, most of the folk songs came from the lumber camps. Other songs came from sailors on the Great Lakes, coal miners in Cape Breton and British Columbia, and homesteaders and cowboys on the Prairies.

In the Maritimes and Newfoundland (all four comprise the Atlantic Provinces), there is a good deal of music that honors these folk roots. Famous among the Newfoundland examples are Harry Somers's arrangements of "Five Songs of the Newfoundland Outports," in particular, "Feller from Fortune," with its rollicking theme and characteristic mixed meters that bring it into contemporary terms. This particular song also references Newfoundland parties. Also part of Somers's set is a haunting arrangement of "She's Like the Swallow," one of Newfoundland's best-known folk songs.

Western Canada produced few Anglo-Canadian songs but adopted a number of American songs, such as "The Little Old Sod Shanty" and "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie." The most widespread Prairie song was a form of American verses based on "Beulah Land."⁴


dia, "the most notable characteristic of the native Anglo-Canadian songs is their predominantly Irish quality... Both sea ballads and lumbering songs fall into the typical 'come-all-ye' pattern and nearly all are set to Irish tunes."⁵

Author Edith Fowke, a well-known Canadian folk song collector, continues:

Traditional folksingers always sang unaccompanied until very recently, and "mouth music" or liting was sometimes used to accompany

dancing. The fiddle was by far the most popular folk instrument, followed by the accordion and tin whistle. The most common fiddle tunes were Scottish and Irish, and some were composed by local fiddlers.⁶

"Mouth music," or "chin music," as it was sometimes called, is referenced in the use of nonsense syllables in Somers's "Feller from Fortune" and "The Old Mayflower," for example, where the



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Characteristics

According to the *Canadian Encyclope-*

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"daddle-diddle" syllable combinations in mixed meter challenge singers and delight audiences.

In *Canadian Folk Songs: A Collection*⁷ one finds a variety of songs and references that further elucidate characteristics of this music. There are rich resources available to musicians seeking information on Anglo-Canadian folk songs, thanks to the work of W. Roy Mackenzie in Nova Scotia and Elisabeth Greenleaf in Newfoundland, among others.

Again, from the Canadian Encyclopedia:

Other native songs reflect outstanding events in our history. The Battle of the Plains of Abraham inspired the earliest known Anglo-Canadian ballad, "Brave Wolfe" or "Bold Wolfe." The War of 1812 produced such lively songs as "Come All You Bold Canadians" and "The Chesapeake and the Shannon." Other ballads recall the Rebellions of 1837–38 and the Fenian raids of 1866, and Confederation inspired some anti-Confederation songs in Newfoundland.⁸

Franco-Canadian Folk Music

Beginning with the Conquest of 1759–60 until well into the twentieth century, rural French communities maintained a sense of isolation from the surrounding culture, which helped to "maintain the vitality and strength of their traditional culture."⁹

Just as with the Anglo-Canadian folk songs, Franco-Canadian texts reflect both the life of the people singing and those listening. Numerous researchers studied French folk songs, most notable among them Earnest Gagnon and Marius Barbeau. An anthropologist with the National Museum of Canada, Barbeau collected over ten thousand

songs, which are archived in the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

One of Quebec's best-known composers was Lionel Daunais, a Canadian singer and composer who devoted his professional life to both domains. He spent time in Paris studying counterpoint with a student of Darius Milhaud. During this time in France (1926–1930), he performed with Opera of Algiers, and upon his return to Canada, pursued opera singing and composition in Montreal. Although he wrote only eighteen choral pieces (compared to one hundred songs for solo voice), he is still known today for his composition "Le pont Mirabeau," and choirs auditioning for the national choral competition frequently use it as their French language selection.

Sir Earnest MacMillan, former conductor of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, arranged a French-Canadian folk song titled "Blanche Comme La Neige" for TTBB in 1928 and for SATB in 1958. This, too, has developed a reputation as a standard in Canadian choral repertoire.

Donald Patriquin, a composer from the province of Quebec, is known for his setting of "Ah, Si Mon Moine Voulait Danser," arranged for mixed and treble choir. Like Somers's "Feller from Fortune," Patriquin's work also celebrates the community party or dance and tells of life in a Canadian community.

Indigenous People: First Nations and Inuit

First Nations people are aboriginals who are not of Métis (mixed First Nations and European background) or Inuit (indigenous peoples who live in the Arctic areas of Canada, the United States, Greenland, and Russia). There are more than six hundred groups of First Nations people throughout the country, with more than half of those living in Ontario and British Columbia.¹⁰

Music of the indigenous peoples is usually social (public) or ceremonial (private). Public, social music may be dance music accompanied by rattles and drums, whereas private, ceremonial music includes vocal songs with percussion. Many First Nations people consider song and dance to be sacred.¹¹

Inuit Music

Approximately twenty-five thousand Inuit live in Northern Canada, primarily spread across *Nunavut*, the Northwest Territories, and *Nunavik* (northern Quebec). Originally, Inuit music used drums but has evolved to include fiddles and accordions. One popular element of Inuit music is *Katajjaq*, or "Inuit throat singing."

In this traditional singing style, female singers produce melodies from deep in their throats. To the outsider, it looks as though the women are facing each other and singing into each other's throats; the sounds merge and the "contest" ends when one singer runs out of breath, begins to laugh, or the voices lose distinction and sound like one.¹²

In Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as in Nunavut, there is some research being conducted with music of the Inuit peoples. Dr. Lori Ann Dolloff, Coordinator of Music Education at the University of Toronto, works with the schools in *Iqaluit* (the capital of Nunavut, previously known as Frobisher Bay) on a regular basis. Kellie Walsh, who conducts Newfoundland's Lady Cove Women's Choir and Shallaway Youth Choir, is working to document music traditions in Labrador; at Festival 500 in 2011 in St. John's, Lady Cove presented a concert featuring two throat-singers from Labrador. Later that summer, they presented the same program at the International Federation for Choral Music (IFCM) World Symposium in Brazil.

Several Canadian choral composi-

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tions use elements of aboriginal music. Lydia Adams's "Mi'kmaq Honour Song" for example, includes a chant that refers to a creator figure and incorporates a drum accompaniment and animal sounds that are evocative of nature. Harry Freedman's "Keewaydin" uses Ontario place names in Ojibway. It also features a recording of a loon call. In many respects, this kind of music overlaps with the second essential element of Canadian choral music: the influence of the landscape, or the sense of the "great white north."

2) NATURE ELEMENTS

As is the case in the United States, Canada is a country of great contrasts, ranging from beaches and rocky shores on the East Coast, forested areas throughout the country, and great mountains in the west. The music of several composers in particular honors the geographical features of the north, the sense of openness and space, as well as drawing on some of the folk music roots cited earlier. Not only in musical terms but also through poetry choices, the composers acknowledge these

landscape elements. New Brunswick poet Bliss Carman wrote "Vestigia," set for treble voices both by Imant Raminsh and also by Eleanor Daley. Both Ruth Watson Henderson and Jeff Smallman have set texts by First Nations poet E. Pauline Johnson.

As an example of reflecting nature, we will consider R. Murray Schafer's "Epitaph for Moonlight."

Schafer wrote the music using words that grade seven students invented in response to an assignment he gave them to create synonyms for the word



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moonlight: e.g. noorwahn, malooma, shalowa, and shiverglowa. In the composer's words, included in the score itself, "Moonlight is a study-piece for youth choir. It is an ear-training exercise, for the singers must learn to pitch their notes by interval from any note given." Rather than using conventional notation, Schafer used graphic notation, another standard feature of his work, showing dynamic changes by thickening or thinning the lines, and indicating pitch range by using numbers to show intervals (e.g. + 2 = major 2nd; - 3 = minor 3rd).

Schafer has a unique place among Canadian composers. His music is distinctive and frequently uses multimedia. Some of it is written to take place outdoors and to be performed by multiple

groups. In the 1960s and 70s, Schafer's music was considered very innovative and remains thus to this day. It was Schafer who invented the term "soundscape." According to Robert Harris, a critic for the *Toronto Globe and Mail*:

[The invention of "soundscape"] vaulted Schafer to prominence in the late 1970s, when his book, *The Tuning of the World*, became an international sensation, attracting the attention of everyone from budding environmentalists to famed concert violinist Yehudi Menuhin, eventually creating a new intellectual and musical discipline—acoustic ecology: which noted the relationship between people and the sounds of the urban environment, and which led to a movement of architects

and urban planners who worked to consciously construct the sound universe in which we live.¹³

In speaking of Schafer's style and penchant for combining music reflective of nature with more traditional forms, Harris says,

Schafer remains one of the few Canadians to have spread his imaginative view of the world beyond the borders of his own country. Open and alive to the traditions of other cultures, but supremely rooted in the spiritual space of his own land, he is someone who has allowed whatever Canada means to be heard throughout the world.¹⁴

3) ART MUSIC

The third essential influence is that of standard compositional trends that exist in a culture or region. Compositions reflect their writers' past training and current experiences. Although Healey Willan emigrated from Great Britain to Canada, we claimed him as our own. His musical style reflected that of English church music of the time and, due to its popularity, influenced that of contemporary composers such as Eleanor Daley and Stephanie Martin who, until 2012, was music director at Willan's former church, St. Mary Magdalene's in Toronto. Willan's motets, such as "Rise up, my love," are still revered in Canada.

Eleanor Daley, a church musician for most of her career, has written numerous pieces for her adult church choir at Fairlawn Avenue United Church in Toronto. This fine ensemble comprises numerous singers, anchored by a core of nine section leads, with the ability to sing divisi repertoire with excellent tuning and pure tone.¹⁵

Although it was written in 1974, Ruth Watson Henderson's *Missa Brevis* is still regarded as a landmark piece of

CONDUCTORS' SURVEY "TOP TEN" RESULTS

Schafer, R. Murray	<i>Epitaph for Moonlight</i> *
Henderson, Ruth Watson	<i>Missa Brevis</i> **
Raminsh, Imant	<i>Ave verum corpus</i> **
Somers, Harry	<i>Songs from the Newfoundland Outports</i> (especially "Feller from Feller from Fortune")**
Willan, Healey	<i>An Apostrophe to the Heavenly Host;</i> <i>Rise Up, My Love</i> **
Glick, Srul Irving	<i>The Hour has Come</i>
Estacio, John	<i>Eulogies</i> —in manuscript—CMC
Healey, Derek	Various folk song arrangements
Daley, Eleanor	"In remembrance" from the <i>Requiem</i>
Chatman, Stephen	"Remember"; folk song arrangements; and various cycles
**frequently cited	*most cited

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Canadian choral composition. Henderson was accompanist for the Festival Singers, conducted by Elmer Iseler. Inspired by the fine singing she heard on a regular basis, she decided to try her hand at writing for them. The resulting multimovement work is a challenging unaccompanied piece that sounds fresh nearly forty years after its composition. With a variety of textures, tonal elements, and rhythmic figures that suit the text stress and mood, the work exhibits excellent craftsmanship and expressivity.

The existence of the Toronto Children's Choir and, more recently, dozens of fine children's and youth choirs that commission works, has led to the development of a large body of works for treble voices (e.g. The TCC series, ed by Jean Ashworth Bartle and published initially by Gordon V. Thompson, now by Walton).

CONCLUSION

Canada's choral repertory is a significant one, reflecting the influence of the country's folk roots, geography and thus correlative nature elements, and art music. There are numerous examples of

fine composers and compositions to be explored and a wealth of performance opportunities to be had from singing this music. Starting with the Canadian Music Centre (<http://musiccentre.ca>) is an excellent beginning, followed by pursuit of Canadian repertoire published by companies that specialize in our repertoire (e.g. Cypress Press; Kellman Hall).

For examples of iconic Canadian repertoire as suggested by conductors across the country, see the results of an informal survey I conducted in 2013 (page 40). Although many composers and their individual works were cited, those listed were the most often mentioned among compositions regarded as iconic Canadian choral music. 

NOTES

¹ Walter Pitman, *Elmer Iseler: Choral Visionary* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008).

² <http://www.musiccentre.ca>

³ <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com>

⁴ Edith Fowke, "Angle-Canadian Folk Music," (February 7, 2006) <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/article/>

[anglo-canadian-folk-music/](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/article/anglo-canadian-folk-music/)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <http://members.shaw.ca/slower/cfs/>

⁸ Edith Fowke, "Angle-Canadian Folk Music," (February 7, 2006) <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/article/anglo-canadian-folk-music/>

⁹ Donald Deschênes, "Franco-Canadian Folk Music," (February 25, 2008), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/franco-canadian-folk-music/>

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Nations

¹¹ Library and Archives Canada <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/aboriginal-music-song/028012-2100-e.html> (retrieved May 26, 2013)

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inuit_throat_singing

¹³ Robert Harris, "R. Murray Schafer: Out of the wild, into the concert hall," *The Globe and Mail* (October 12, 2012) <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/music/r-murray-schafer-out-of-the-wild-into-the-concert-hall/article4609392/>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See the church's website for more information <http://www.fairlawnavenueunited.ca>.

SELECTED BOOKS ON CANADIAN MUSIC AND CONDUCTORS

de Quadros, André, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Choral Music*. Cambridge University Press, 2012. (See chapter 7.)

Jonas, Holly Higgins, ed. *In their own words: Canadian Choral Conductors*. Dundurn Press, 2001.

Keillor, Elaine. *Music in Canada: Capturing Landscape and Diversity*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006.

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