

Celebrating Canada 2022



Sounding off about Canadian music

By Jason Menard

Canada Day is a time when we celebrate being Canadian. But when it comes to music, how do we define what it means to be Canadian? And with a nation so vast and diverse in its composition, is there anything that can truly be foundationally Canadian?

For Robin Elliott, director of the Institute for Canadian Music and professor of Musicology at the University of Toronto, that diversity is at once both the greatest challenge when it comes to defining Canadian music — and its greatest strength.

"There have been so many attempts at defining Canadian music over the years; all of them have some merit for large parts of the repertoire, but none of them covers everything," Elliott explained. "There is just so much diversity in Canadian music!

Some writers have seen our music as reflecting the characteristics of the Canadian landscape, others have seen the multicultural juxtaposition and cross-influences of many different styles of music as a characteristic Canadian process. But again, both the landscape and the types of music practised here are so diverse, that no pervasive

kind of idiom has resulted.

"For me, this is a great strength of Canadian music; there is no dominating genre or type of music that is inherently and uniquely 'Canadian,' which allows all types of music to flourish and be appreciated here, without any particular kind of music receiving preferential treatment as the 'true' Canadian music.

Canadians who perform music from across many genres and international influences are pervasive throughout.

"In all genres of music, Canadians have been aware of and influenced by international trends," he said. "Traditional Inuit throat singing, for example, may be thought of as uniquely Canadian, but is a circumpolar tradition that is also practised in Alaska and Greenland. Classical music is strongly influenced by European models, country and mainstream pop by U.S. influences. Folk traditions heard in Canada are strongly tied to their country of origin. Again, I think of this as a strength rather than a weakness!"

Elliott points to the establishment of CanCon regulations as being a key turning point in the expansion and success of Canadian musicians.

"In terms of promoting the economic liveli-

hood of Canadian musicians, the introduction of CanCon regulations by the CRTC in 1971 was certainly a defining moment for all genres of Canadian music that are recorded and/or broadcasted," he explained. "This led to an entire generation of musicians receiving enhanced recognition and compensation for their creativity.

"The rise of internet file sharing and music streaming undid most of those benefits. While it is nice for music consumers to have access to so much music so easily, the impact on the economic livelihood of musicians has been nothing short of disastrous. But of course this has affected musicians everywhere, not just in Canada."

Beyond our borders, Canadians — in popular music — have arguably punched above our collective weight class. From Paul Anka to The Guess Who to Shania Twain and The Weeknd, with dozens of artists in between, Canadians have staked claims at the top of various music charts. However, Elliott explained that their Canadianness is secondary to the success.

"Each case is different. Shania Twain, for instance, came along at a crucial moment when audiences and the recording industry were open to her pop-influenced take on country music," he said. "Canadian musicians who become huge celebrities in the U.S. music industry tend to downplay or lose their Canadian identity; fans

may know that Justin Bieber or The Weeknd or Drake are Canadian, but their Canadianness is not really a large part of their success, which is derived instead from their individual creativity on the one hand, and how well they have been able to tap into U.S. media and celebrity culture on the other."

And Canadian music continues to evolve. Recently, we have seen a greater appreciation for Indigenous musicians in popular music — bands like The Halluci Nation, iskwē, Snotty Nose Rez Kids, and Tanya Tagaq have staked a claim in the mainstream consciousness.

"Canadian music is constantly changing, just as Canada itself is constantly changing. One of the defining elements of the current musical scene in Canada has been the extraordinary rise to prominence of Indigenous musicians in the past 15 years or so," Elliott explained. "There have been many great Canadian Indigenous musicians over the years, of course, such as Buffy Sainte-Marie and Robbie Robertson, but right now there is a critical mass of them who are doing extraordinary and transformative creative work in many different genres of music, from hip hop to classical music.

"Many of them are using their creativity to address settler/Indigenous relations and to bring attention to critical Indigenous issues in the aftermath of the TRC report."

Happy Canada Day

**Bill Van Ryn
Lawn Care**

KEEPING IT GREEN

Creating beautiful outdoor spaces in Halton Hills

Call us 905-877-2594

dg greenhouses



GARDEN CENTRE - NURSERY



**Happy
Canada Day!**

*Local growers of fine
quality perennials, annuals
and herbs for 50 years!*

**Your first choice when
it comes to Garden
Centres & Nurseries**

8890 Eighth Line, Georgetown
Phone: 905-877-9842
www.dggreenhouses.com