

MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

SEPTEMBER 2007



"The Theatre of Neptune" C.W. Jeffreys, Dalhousie University Archives

NORTH AMERICAN MUSIC BEGAN IN NOVA SCOTIA:

The Theater of Neptune by Emily-Jane Hills Orford

*NEPTUNE c'est mon nom,
Neptune l'un des Dieux
Qui a plus de pouvoir
souz le voute des cieux.
- Lescarbot, 1606*

The first musical event in the European tradition to be composed and performed in North America was presented in 1606 in the new colony of Port Royal, Nova Scotia.

The French established themselves at Port Royal on the Bay of Fundy coast in 1604. They believed that the St. John River, which was just across the Bay, was a major transportation route for the First Nations people and their much sought after furs and animal pelts. A fort was built and colonists arrived to cultivate the land. It was a rugged existence, very isolated from the homeland and from any other form of civilization. The winters were harsh and the land difficult to till. But the people persevered, in spite of France's constant threats to abandon the colony.

In the spring of 1606, a French lawyer, Marc Lescarbot, accompanied the colony's Governor, Baron de

Poutrincourt, to Port Royal. While the Baron continued on a cruise further south along the coast, Lescarbot was left to manage the colony. He was not the typical candidate to be an explorer or an adventurer. Born in the north of France in 1570, he was a lawyer and a jurist by trade, but he was also a farmer, a historian, and an amateur musician and poet.

Lescarbot left France with an idealistic view of the new land. During his employ as Poutrincourt's lawyer, Lescarbot had listened intently to the Baron's tales of adventure and great wealth to be found in the furs they acquired from the Micmacs.

Lescarbot was unprepared for the hardship and the disillusionment that met him at Port Royal. Left in charge, he faced mutinous colonists and soldiers and restive Micmacs. He devised a plan to keep everyone busy and content: he composed a masque. These were very popular in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A masque is a theatrical

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"Haloet" (pitches from Lescarbot's solfeggio notation; rhythms speculative)

production that uses drama, poetry, dance and music, indeed all the arts. Lescarbot wrote *The Theatre of Neptune* to include everyone: the colonists, the soldiers and the First Nations people who lived outside the fort. The masque was to be performed on barques out in the harbor as well as on the beaches in front of the fort.

Lescarbot had been spending his time acquainting himself with the Micmacs, particularly their chief, Membertou. He had been recording the words and music of the Micmacs, preparing the first written record of First Nations' music. Songs like:

Haloet
ho ho he he ha ha
haloet
ho ho he

were included in the masque. Lescarbot also included familiar folk songs of the time, such as "La Petite Galiotte de France," and he wrote his own poetry and songs based on easy rhythms and popular themes of his homeland. Lescarbot's idea was to keep everyone busy until the Governor's return and then to perform the masque as a celebration of his return. It worked. Everyone participated. *The Theatre of Neptune* may have saved Lescarbot's life. The mutinous soldiers were ready to dispatch anyone in authority. The distraction offered by the rehearsals, the feeling of good cheer that resulted from the music and the dancing and the performing, lightened the general mood of the fort and eased tensions.

The Governor returned in the late fall of 1606, and on November 14th, the first ever musical production to be written and performed in all of North America happened on the beaches of

Port Royal. The stage was set when the Baron's ship was sighted on the horizon. The actors took their places and Neptune, god of the seas, took his court in full regalia out to meet him with songs and poetry. Meanwhile on the beaches, the remaining characters, including the Micmacs, played their parts, singing and dancing. Though unprepared for the spectacle, the Governor slipped into his role well. He unsheathed his sword and saluted the approaching troupes as governor responsible to God and to the arts. As the Indian canoes approached to offer gifts, Neptune and his sea-court chanted, "Hold then thy course and fortune go with thee."

The Theatre of Neptune was but one of Lescarbot's many contributions to the New World. He made his fame amongst the people of Port Royal and averted a mutiny. Upon his return to France in 1609, Lescarbot continued to bask in the limelight with the publications of his histories of the New World. The masque was but one of Lescarbot's many firsts. He was the first to write a history of North America, *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*, which was published upon his return to France. And, he was the first of North America's ethnomusicologists, a term not used for another couple of centuries, but evidently applicable to a man who actively sought to record the words and music of the First Nations people.

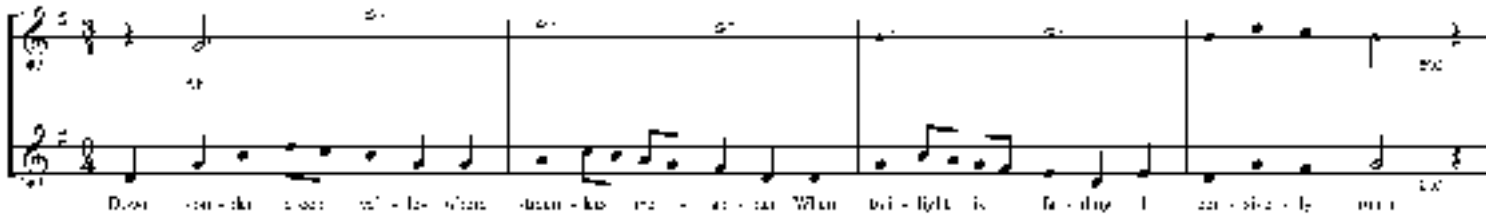
Lescarbot was also a dreamer. He had hoped to start something with his cultural contribution to the new colony. His muse may not have affected the cultural development of this early colony, but it did find its root in 1962 with the foundation of the Neptune Theatre Foundation in

Halifax, named after Lescarbot's 1606 masque.

The culture that started with Lescarbot at Port Royal continued throughout North America as the land was settled. Port Royal itself did not boast any further grand events, but the history of music had made its beginnings. Not many people realize that Canada's, and indeed North America's, music history began as early as 1606, in the tiny colony of Port Royal, Nova Scotia. Lescarbot's legacy can be studied in a few archives that hold copies of his published work, including the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. Looking out across the beaches of the National Historic Site of Port Royal, one can imagine the great spectacle that happened almost four hundred years ago.

Emily-Jane Hills Orford is a writer and a private music teacher in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Her books, Spring (Publish America, 2005) and Ukulele Yukon (Baico Publishing, 2006), reflect her passion for music and the history of music. Her most recent book, It Happened in Canada (Baico Publishing, 2007), is a collection of short stories, including one on "The Theatre of Neptune."

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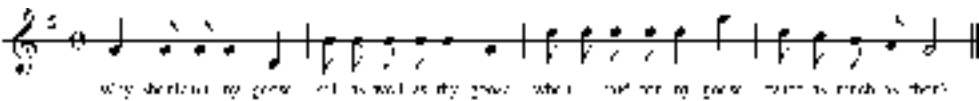


Family Music on the Road by Aunt Stanbury

In the 1940s and 1950s, a car radio was an extra for which one paid money. Spending money on extras wasn't my father's style. To while away the time on long and short automobile treks, our schoolteacher mother suggested games that my younger sister and I could play, one based on counting cows, another on looking for letters of the alphabet on signs. At one time we took turns giving one-minute speeches on topics assigned by Dad.

But mostly, we sang. We are a family of singers. My father's parents sang duets in church. My grandfather performed in the local Gilbert and Sullivan operas and sang comical ditties while milking the cows. Dad's mother formed his four older sisters into a vocal quartet that performed at local venues. Paula, and I, and later a third sister, Mary, added when I was fifteen, sang together in the car and elsewhere as soon as we could sing at all.

Our family's version of "Sweetly Sings the Donkey" figured prominently. We also sang "Three Blind Mice," "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," and another round with the text: "Why shouldn't my goose/Sell as well as thy goose/When I paid for my goose/Twice as much as thou?" Paula often couldn't resist an exaggerated fermata on the highest note, on the last occurrence of "goose," which of course train-wrecked the performance.



We sang "The Ash Grove," with the familiar descant, and "Beautiful Ohio," with harmony suggested by Dad. He probably hummed along on a bass part while we produced soprano and alto.

Dad had a "real good ear" (his phrase) and hankered for the bass line, the foundation of the harmony. He played string bass in dance orchestras during the big band era and sang bass until he began taking lessons. Then, as he learned to produce high notes correctly, he found that he was really a tenor.

One of our favorite tunes was the "Colonel Bogie March," whistled, of course. Everyone in the family whistles as well as sings. I remember my grandmother, a dignified New England lady, whistling unashamedly (in her day, "whistling girls" weren't approved of). Like her youngest daughter, she whistled with a quick vibrato. My father perfected the rapid whistled trill that can suggest two notes at once, and warbled a unique stream of musical consciousness.

Paula took the melody of "Colonel Bogie" and I whistled an obligato while Dad supplied a bass line of furious oom-pahs. We executed the



minor section *marcato* in unison or octaves, with repeat; emphasized the flatted note that signals the transition back to major; and reverted to three parts for the repeated section (not that

any of us thought of it in those terms). We would go round and round in that fashion until someone, usually Paula, started to laugh.

Mother isn't a musician. She held her own on simple rounds, but for the most part she listened, grateful that the back seat wasn't exploding into hostilities. When Mary appeared, she and Mother sang together. "We'll just sing our part," Mother said, "and not pay *any attention* to what they're singing"—not a great approach to ensemble sound, but good enough for a non-musician and a two- or three-year-old. They set off, Mary sounding tentative and looking dubious; but in no time at all she got the idea and led while Mother followed.

All of this was excellent training in carrying a part alone, resisting the urge to veer off onto someone else's line. I never know what to make of it when a much better player than I doesn't sing at all or can't seem to resist the pull of someone nearby singing something

else. I suppose every car in America has a radio now. I hope some families turn it off occasionally and try making their own music.

Aunt Stanbury's other writing can be seen at <www.auntstanbury.blogspot.com> where she identifies herself as "female, not young, [and] based in the Northeast."

Advantage: Indian Music

by T. V. Sairam

Human activities follow a pattern of rhythms.

As we talk, there is a rhythm. The thinking process, movements of limbs and body—all involve rhythm.

The basic pattern followed in all forms of music—folk, modern or classical—cater both to our intellectual curiosity and our emotional needs.

Even by unconsciously following any musical pattern, our thinking and emotional processes become regulated, paving way for our all-around health, growth and happiness.

Synchronization of Body and Mind with Rhythms in Music

Listen to the way the military bands play. First they have definite beats, emanating from huge drums: *DA – DHANG, DA-DHANG, DA-DHANG*. These sounds synchronize with the body rhythms of a soldier, facilitating a perfect march.

As the drum calculatedly determines the pace of the soldiers, the melody helps in killing the monotony of travail (left-right-left, being endlessly repeated) until an order is given to halt.

Not only body movement but also thinking and behavior are influenced by music. In other words, our culture is shaped greatly by the type of music we listen to.

Indian Freedom and European Discipline Mirrored in their Music

Take for example, European orchestration. Here, one comes across the system of polyphony which presupposes a strict teamwork, total cooperation and perfect coordination. In other words, a strong sense of

discipline among the artists and a blind team spirit are necessary to achieve the musical goal.

Western notes, unlike Indian *swaras*, are rigidly fixed, as they simply cannot oscillate beyond the predetermined frequencies. The current standard of the 'concert pitch', as agreed on at the international conferences held of 1939 and 1960, makes the frequency of the middle 'C' 261.6 Hz. This system insists on a high degree of accuracy; no perceptible deviation is tolerated by discerning musicians and critics. I believe the ideals of orderliness and sense of team discipline classical western system of music promotes have helped considerably in regimentalizing western people's life-style, and robotizing their human interactions.

In contrast to this, the oscillations (*gamakas*) of Carnatic *swaras* have thrown open the doors of resilience, freedom and flexibility to the Indian society. It is here that 'sa' can be made to sound 'ri' and 'ri', 'ga', which tremendously enhances the *bhava* in the raga.

A Carnatic raga-explorer, is thus not only allowed to "jay-walk" into the adjacent territories of sound frequencies allotted for a *swara*, but he or she can also expect kudos for such 'smart' deviation! The reason is that the artist is able to bring in the desired *bhava*, through his labor of love (call it 'flexibility', or 'indiscipline'!) in a creative manner.

As a consequence, this 'love-ty-neighbor-ing-*swara*-policy', in the rendering of a *swara*, gives a Carnatic musician a sense of fulfillment as he can be creative in exploring and expanding his (musical) consciousness,

A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF INDIAN MUSICAL TERMS

(Abbreviations used: C= Carnatic; H=Hindustani)

Alap (H) Also **Alapana** (C) (Lit. 'to spread') Extempore, creative unfolding of a raga, often sans beats.

Bhava (C & H) The deep emotional content of a raga, believed to be its 'soul'.

Carnatic Music. Also, **Karnatak Music**. The elaborate classical system of music, originated and developed in southern parts of India.

Gamaka (C & H) (Lit. 'to warm up') Oscillations of a note, referred to as 'embellishment' (There are 8 types of gamakas) (From the word gam, 'to acquire pace'.)

Gitam (C) The simplest of the musical forms, which is not usually divided into many sections.

Hindustani (H) The highly developed system of music prevalent in the northern parts of India.

Kriti (C) A devotional composition in Carnatic music as rigid as Dhrupad.

Manodharma sangita (C) Improvised or extemporized music.

Raga (C & H) A musical scale, unique to Indian music, which utilizes varying ascending (*aroha*) and descending (*avaroha*) patterns.

Sarod A large fretless plucked string instrument shaped like a lute, with 18, 19 or 25 metal strings.

Sabha (C) A concert hall for Indian music.

Swara (C & H) Also, **Sur** (H). (Lit. swa= self; ra= shining forth). An Indian note, distinguishable from the 'note' of the Western system, as it is based on the human vocal utterance. Indian instruments, when playing *swaras*, are supposed to imitate the human voice and its range.

Varnam (C) A composition in Carnatic music with limited verse, but pregnant with *swara* possibilities in a raga that bring out *bhava*.

within the traditional parameters for rendering the raga. Such individual freedom, however, may be lacking in some Indian compositions. *Gitam, varnam, kriti* etc., have formal rules as complex as their Western counterparts such as the concerto, sonata, fugue and toccata. (Likewise, some Western musical styles, though not orchestral music, favor improvised melodic embellishment and expressive bending of pitches—ed.)

Team 'Indiscipline'

Even in a concert—be it Carnatic or Hindustani—one can easily sense how the deviating “accompanist” (usually in *sarod*, harmonium or violin) at times out-smarts the main musician to garner some claps.

Exploring the “edge” of a musical phrase stated by the main singer, and developing it into a novel interpretation, can never be called ‘indiscipline’ as long as it does not totally overshadow the main singer!

Devotees of the Western classical music system would, however, shudder to think of such disorderly meandering by the second violins, let alone tolerate it!

Tolerance to One's Manodharma: 'Indianness' in Music

Indian society and its musical culture seem to be more tolerant towards personal expression than their classical western counterparts.

The same musical freedom available in *sabhas* is also available on the streets! Watch the seemingly erratic flow of the vehicular traffic on the road, each one trying to reach its destination outsmarting the other! Even a cycle overtaking a Chevrolet caught in a traffic is something quite common!

The apparent circumventing to reach the goals reminds us of the behavior of *swaras*! At the same time, there is a mystic bond that exists on the roads which prevents fatal accidents!

Alap or *alapana*, the extempore elaboration of a raga, is 100% creative experience. The process here facilitates the free expansion of one's (musical) consciousness within a set of ground rules and constraints that define each raga.

The depth, sweep and flexibility allowed in Indian musical experience could be a reason for the therapeutic role of ragas, glorified in ancient literature.

Ragas, with their inherent flexibility, can prove a most useful basis of music therapy for tackling modern-day illnesses such as stress, as stress is itself the product of inflexibility in our life-styles!

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Dr. Trimurthy V. Sairam, an author, teacher and administrator, trained in Indian carnatic system of music and nada yoga from an early age, alerting him to the therapeutic nature of sounds, silence and music in human life. His research on the therapeutic role of music appears in over 200 articles and several books (see www.nada.in). He was keynote speaker for conferences on music therapy in Chennai (2005, 2006), Goa (2007) and Delhi (2007). He lives in New Delhi, India, His e-mail contact is tosairam@gmail.com.

The In Box

FINDING NEW MUSIC ON THE INTERNET

Your editor was idly surfing YouTube .com late one night and chanced upon a superb performance at the Osaka Festival of “Frivolity” from *Three Moods for Wind Quintet* by Andrey Rubtsov. A Google search for the title and composer quickly located Rubtsov's home page at SibeliusMusic.com, which reveals him to be a prolific young composer and an oboist with the Russian National Orchestra. It provides links to freely downloadable sound files and sheet music for dozens of his works. I downloaded a beautifully prepared score and set of parts for Three Moods. I can highly recommend both YouTube and SibeliusMusic for broadening one's musical horizons.

NEW SHORT COURSES AT BENSLOW

Among the new short courses at the Benslow Music Trust for the first half of 2008 are *Composing for Amateurs* (February 29-March 2), *Fantastic Flutes* (February 15-17) and *Folk Music: Streams of Tradition* (May 23-25). Programs in solo and ensemble voices, woodwinds, brass, strings and keyboard, jazz and early music are also offered. The Trust is located in Hitchin, Herfordshire, SG4 9RB, UK, and can be reached at 01462 459446, info@benslow.org, www.benslow.org.

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Gregorian Chant and Sacred Polyphony

by Cristina A. Montes

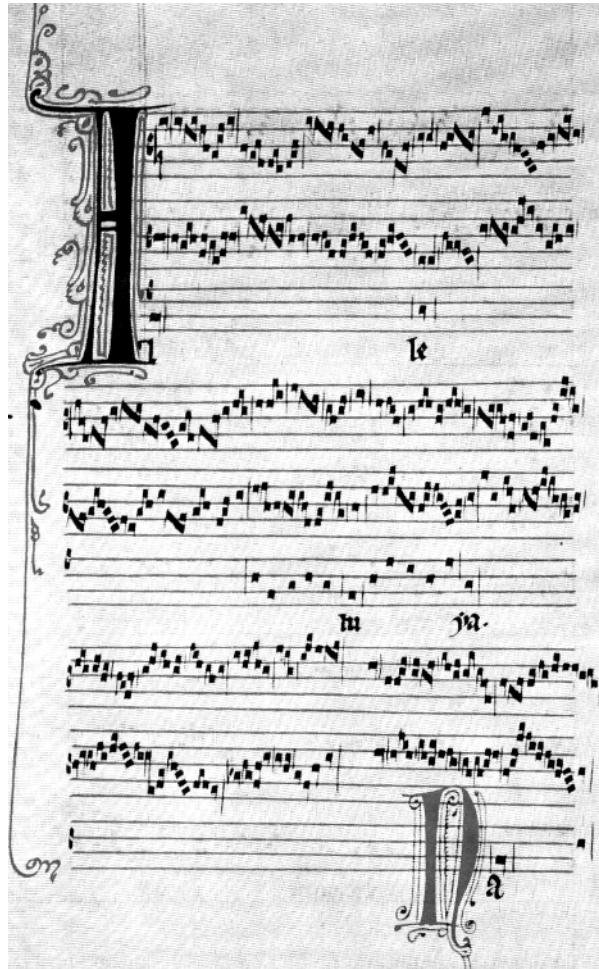
"Do you want to sing Gregorian chant and sacred music of the Renaissance?"

Jeffrey and Arlene recruit parish choir members with this invitation. Their choir now has twelve members—none of whom has a professional musical background—and a waiting list to get in. Although the choir sings at a Catholic parish, members include two Unitarians, two Episcopalians, two Baptists and one Presbyterian in addition to the Catholics—all united by a passion for sacred choral music.

Many consider Gregorian chant and Renaissance sacred polyphony difficult. But the proliferation of *scholas* composed of amateur singers debunks this notion. Almost every day, Jeffrey and Arlene receive notices about new *scholas* being formed. Lala, a choir conductor in the Philippines, has successfully trained one choir composed of women volunteers with full-time non-musical day jobs, and another composed of 12-to-16-year-old girls, to sing Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony.

Amateurs, in fact, fit sacred choral music better than professionals. "There is an advantage to not having professionals," says Arlene. "No one comes with an inflated ego or drags into the scene non-liturgical singing styles they gleaned from teachers or talent shows."

The special character of sacred choral music and a sense of mission in singing it attract *schola* members. "There is something terribly engaging about the music we sing—it is not like anything anyone has heard in the secular world," says Jeffrey. "In most churches today, Catholic or Protestant, what you hear mimics what you hear on the radio, and at best, the concert hall. Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony have a draw all their own—they are timeless and not quite



Pérotin, Alleluia, c.1183 (Paris, Notre Dame)

of this earth, not to mention filled with endless opportunities for personal challenge and musical discovery."

"Recruitment is not a problem since members themselves recruit new ones," shares Lala. "I am amazed at how many people we have. Many are interested, and since it is a service, many volunteer."

"Our own project began in the hope of bringing some sense of decorum and tradition to liturgical music in our own parish," says Arlene. "More than anything we felt a responsibility to make sure that the Church's traditional music was sung and heard in the modern age." Jeffrey adds, "We are not there to perform but rather to pray and assist others to do so."

Still, the question remains: how difficult, exactly, are Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony? The difficulty lies not in the language but in

perfecting the sound. Lala says, "One of the challenges in training choirs to sing sacred music is correcting the pop style of singing or getting them to sing with the right style which is plain singing, or pure, round sound without any lilt of voice whatsoever. The purity and simplicity of the tunes make Gregorian chant special. What's most challenging is making the choir sing in a united way, sounding as one, without any voice sticking out." She requires choir members to pronounce all the syllables of the songs, especially the vowels, in a round way. Arlene and Jeffrey stress the importance of singing *legato* and learning rhythm and solfège, and memorizing as much as possible.

Despite the hard work involved, Jeffrey says all his choir members are "fanatically devoted" to their cause and their group. "We have shirts, parties, trips, and we care for each other in sickness," he says. "We've had *schola* members move, and this always makes us sad. One of our founders died, and we sang a requiem Mass for her. This was an unforgettable experience. Each of us knows that the *schola* will sing at our funerals. . . . We also know that if we are blessed with old age, we will look back to our *schola* times as the most special of our lives."

Such dedication is understandable. Indeed, the music they sing not only sounds pleasant, but exists for a special purpose. "People fear chant because they think it is hard," Arlene says. "But we often recall what a Benediction nun said of the singing in her convent: the angels fix the notes before they present our gifts before the throne of God. That is a beautiful image because we will always produce an imperfect product and also we must always remember that our musical purpose isn't to please the human ear but to make a gift to the Creator. Remembering this helps us sing more beautifully."

Cristina A. Montes is a lawyer and freelance writer in the Philippines, and comes from a very musical family. Her web page is at dappledthings.org.



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