INTRODUCING MUSIC AT YORK

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A generation ago, in the late 1960s, I had occasion to visit a number of university music facilities in Canada, the US and Britain, and was often dismayed to find the faculty split into mutually mistrustful camps. In extreme cases, the gulf between performers and scholars could seem almost unbridgeable. Composers tended to land somewhere in the middle—sometimes only lukewarm about any music's history, style, or tradition but their own, and mainly interested in performances of pieces by themselves, their pupils, or their friends. The situation was serious, I thought then—but surely not hopeless?

Reflecting on those visits now, I'm no longer so puzzled by what I saw. After all, when two very different sets of expectations converge and intersect, as they do for most music faculty members, who would not feel a bit uneasy? In the milieu of classical concert music, for example—where I myself was raised and trained—everyone knows what high professional standards sound like, and the struggle to reach and maintain them is all-important For most academics on the other hand, it is only research grants, degrees, publications, that are the reigning professional criteria. Many university musicians must try to live in both worlds at once—though it is usually not until graduate school that we come to appreciate how deeply the library and the practice-room, scholarship and musicianship, can feed into and nourish one another.

A third kind of professional demand, no less important, further complicates our careers. We are expected to excel also in the art and craft of teaching—although success is never easy to measure—and to maintain as far as possible the one-on-one relationship of master to disciple that has always been preferred for any kind of effective musical instruction. A tall order indeed, this can be even harder to manage in a large institution, where more wholesale methods of schooling are likely to predominate.

It is true that music, in some form or other, has had a far longer history as a university discipline than any of the other fine or performing arts. Integrating practical training with the more bookish kinds of music study is, however, a relatively recent idea, still rarely attempted outside North America. Even on this side of the Atlantic, it has not always been easy to accommodate the elitist focus of European-style conservatory training within a general-purpose post-secondary institution servicing all comers.

Could the awkward three-way stretch alluded to above have been the source of some of the alienation and fractiousness I observed on my visits? Could such tensions and divisions be mitigated, or were they inevitable? These were among the many issues being debated in academic music journals and at annual meetings during those restless

years. Alongside various brave schemes for arresting the decline of Western art music—sometimes by requiring every student to memorize The 50 (or 100) Greatest Pieces of All Time—calmer voices could be heard urging adoption of a more 'comprehensive' curriculum, integrating scholarly and practical approaches, with a stronger commitment to the music being produced in our own time and place. Indeed, a number of institutions large and small—among them the University at Buffalo under Allen Sapp, and the University of York in Britain under Wilfrid Mellers—were already developing such academic programs, specifically aimed at overcoming the old antagonisms.

Meanwhile, at 'the other' York University in Toronto, a new Faculty of Fine Arts had come into being in 1968, with the resources of a major urban center close at hand. Programs in several Fine Arts disciplines—Visual Arts, Theatre, Dance, and Film—were already getting under way here when Music came on board. At the time, such a gathering of all the arts under one academic roof was rare, if not unprecedented in Canada.

Unlike its sister departments, Music was from the outset up against direct competition from most other Ontario universities. Actually, however, our proximity to an already well-established institution was a welcome advantage in those startup years. The University of Toronto was often a source of much-needed collegiality and library support—though early hopes for collaboration between the city's two music faculties were seldom to be realized in practice. Our downtown colleagues tended to regard York's situation as impossibly vague and remote, even if it was also more open to innovation, and more propitious for linkages with other disciplines, than their own.

'Tentanda Via'

The period immediately following Expo '67 was an exciting time of self-discovery for Canada, and of unprecedented expansion for Canadian universities. Funds for education were still flowing relatively freely at all levels. The Sixties' more relaxed atmosphere had begun to penetrate the nation's bastions of high culture; words like 'multicultural' and 'interdisciplinary' were in the air; more opportunities were opening up for local performers and composers; and new approaches (to paraphrase York's Latin motto) were begging to be tried. Where better to try them than in Toronto, a city that was already becoming a magnet for people from every corner of the globe, for lovers and practitioners of every flavor and level of world culture?

At the time we began building Music at York, the prestige of European-style conservatory training, and the elaborate British-inspired machinery of adjudications and competitions for amateur performers, were still very much to be reckoned with—by everyone except us! Outsiders and York colleagues alike were more than a little puzzled when our first moves in setting up the program showed so little regard for such established practices, and so little resemblance to what was then the expected model.

Some local professionals and music teachers found our intentions hard to fathom: how could York University possibly be doing 'real' music unless the accustomed ways were followed? A few onlookers called what the York Music Program was attempting hopelessly eclectic. Others thought we were motivated only by the wish to appear as different, and as trendy as possible.

Whatever was driving us, it seems we did from the outset manage to create a distinctive profile of our own. But it is no easy task to look back now and explain how or why that happened as it did. Digging through old files not long ago to refresh my memory, I came across an old note to myself from the late 1960s. It was a list of five general objectives, which became part of my founding agenda for Music at York soon after they were jotted down. Notwithstanding the ins and outs of academic politics, those same early imperatives do seem, in retrospect, to have retained some influence over the years, and may even have set the course for much of what has since been achieved under other Chairs.

Blueprint for a Fresh Start

Here then are the original five points, for whatever interest they may still hold, along with a few later reflections on each.

1. Bring the Past to Life

The movement for revival of the music written before Bach is by no means new, but only became well established in this part of the world in the years following World War II. As historically informed performances keep gaining new converts wherever music lives, the way has opened for all concert performers to a freer, more adventurous exploration of pre-classical idioms and styles, an attitude that now extends even to the standard repertoire of European concert music from the 18th and 19th centuries. Early performance-practice is no longer just a subject for lively debate among experts, but an increasingly popular pastime for amateurs and professionals alike.

No wonder Early Music blossomed in those first years at York! For us, it was an ideal platform from which to demonstrate the interrelation between book-learning and practical musicmaking. The joy of playing and singing together is something even beginning students of Early Music could readily experience firsthand, in a repertoire that emphasizes ensemble participation rather than technical virtuosity. Their hands-on involvement with earlier styles and idioms also kindled their curiosity and stimulated the imagination, leading them quite naturally to discover a wealth of related historical knowledge, literature and art.

Among our first few full-time faculty appointments, as many as three were recruited mainly because of their expert knowledge of early instruments and repertoire; several more knowledgeable enthusiasts soon joined us as part-time instructors. As a result, in the '70s a majority of our students were actively and happily involved, either in

the Renaissance Wind Band, or playing viols, or singing in an Early Music choir. Again in the '90s, a combined full-year course in Early Music History & Performance ran successfully for several years, generating some memorable student concerts, and inspiring a raft of subsequent applications to graduate Music History programs. And although the buzz of the krummhorn is not so often heard these days o'er the plains of Upper Downsview, many of us hope and expect to witness yet another such revival soon.

2. Bring the World Home.

University is supposed to be a place where young minds go to be opened. Shouldn't the same be true for young ears? If an opening to the richness and diversity of world cultures other than one's own can come through music, maybe a few minds and hearts might follow. And where better to try than on a large urban campus, amply supplied with courses and experts in the world's history and literature, anthropology, social and area studies, not to mention the fine and performing arts?

In the early 1970s, the term 'World Music' was not yet common; most academics still preferred the more scientific-sounding label of 'Ethnomusicology'. But there was little doubt that the globalization of Canada's musical tastes and musical awareness had already begun, and that its university music departments would lead the way. When it came down to choosing which specific kinds of music to adopt for teaching purposes, there was something about the great Asian classical traditions—Indian, Indonesian, Chinese, Arabic—that inspired confidence. Not because the artistry so recognized was any 'higher' or 'finer' than in other, more popular idioms. But these traditions did possess a complexity, a history, a pedagogical underpinning, a literature and a cultural resonance that would facilitate and repay serious study.

Musicians of my generation tended to feel the same way about the kinds of home-grown musical expression known and enjoyed the world over as jazz. Though some academics still regarded it as the very antithesis of High Classical Art, jazz was finally being recognized as an essential component of *Music in the 20th Century*, after its inclusion by William Austin in his path-breaking history of the period, published in 1960. Indeed, jazz could easily have formed the basis for a whole 'world music program' of its own. A veritable musical melting-pot blending influences and idioms from every continent, it had its own panoply of genres and substyles, its own repository of old masters and treasured masterpieces. More than any other way of making music perhaps, jazz seemed to reflect and embody the ways young people in North America naturally felt and moved and related to one another—one more reason why instruction in small-group jazz performance, and in the harmonic theory underlying jazz improvisation, played a significant part in York's Music program from the very beginning.

York's Program in Film and Video was then headed by James Beveridge, a distinguished Canadian filmmaker deeply acquainted with the music and art of the

Indian subcontinent, while its Program in Dance was already looking to Toronto's teachers of classical Indian dance for input and collaboration. When I heard that India's most famous musician, Pandit Ravi Shankar, intended to locate his proposed school of the classical Indian arts in Toronto (later California), I sought his advice before starting my work here, having already decided that York must become somehow involved.

The way basic rhythmic training is traditionally done in India can be far more rigorous and effective than almost anything Western schooling has to offer. Why not make that training, in some form, part of every York music student's firsthand experience? So we tried a number of different routes to reach India, before settling on a strategy that worked. The ancient classical pedagogy of Carnatic (South Indian) small-ensemble performance, with its endless possibilities for melodic elaboration and rhythmic accompaniment, its potent blend of improvisatory freedom with precise discipline and control—all taught and exercised through the human voice—was already becoming ensconced by then at a handful of American universities, and seemed to have the requisite depth and integrity to inspire our students too.

The ideal exponent of that tradition, in our context, would have to be both a recognized master performer and a gifted academic communicator, able to operate easily in both Indian and Canadian cultural settings. We found such an extraordinary combination in the person of Jon Higgins, a phenomenally gifted young 'bi-musical' singer, trained initially in Carnatic singing by Indian master teachers in the US, yet equally at home with Bach, Ives, or Fauré. Higgins was energetically recruited, sight unseen and not a moment too soon, while he was still performing in India to the amazement of local connoisseurs.

When Jon agreed to join us in the Fall of 1971, he hoped to bring with him a full South Indian performing ensemble, but eventually had to settle for only a single additional musician, to handle the essential rhythmic component. Fortunately he was able to persuade Trichy Sankaran, a brilliant young percussion virtuoso with a university degree in economics, to leave Madras and accompany him to and at York, where both taught and performed for seven memorable, musically enriching years. (Higgins eventually took up a deanship at Wesleyan before his tragically early death, while Sankaran continues his dynamic performing career and his leadership of Indian music studies at York to this day.)

Though the Indian Connection has been a pillar of strength throughout the entire history of the Music Department, it is by no means York's only claim to global awareness. In the '60s, imported Indonesian gamelans (traditional hand-crafted gong-chime orchestras) had already begun to appear at a few university music departments; the enchantingly exotic yet remarkably accessible ensemble music-making experience they provide eventually became a permanent fixture on many North American campuses. Soon York too had its own outpost of Southeast Asian musical tradition, when Philippine kolintang became a regular feature of our ensemble offerings. And

today, after years of waiting and months of painstaking negotiation, a handsome set of Javanese bronze-and-bamboo instruments at last resides in one of the Music Department's provisional practice spaces, where an authentic gamelan's fascinating soundscape can be explored and enjoyed by the current generation of York students—only one of the various non-European performance genres now being actively cultivated at York.

As for Western Classical Music itself, where most of us in the profession started out and still feel lovingly at home, reports of its imminent death continue to be greatly exaggerated. Yet these days it can be almost a closed book to some otherwise musically alert young people. Far from ignoring the great classical concert repertoire, at York we worked hard to keep it a living presence in our midst, knowing even our youthful skeptics might eventually be won over. And we were sure York students would approach Scarlatti, Schumann, Schoenberg, or Somers with fresher, more receptive ears because of their exposure to a wide range of other musical styles.

The recipe one can derive from all this is simple. First, select carefully which unusual musics to cultivate. Next, an uncommonly skilled and committed instructor must be available for each such musical tradition, able to make it come alive as an authentic presence, and to instill some of the unique habits and meanings it embodies. Students may then tap into the power of at least one 'different world' of music before they leave. While enlarging their cultural horizons, they will also sharpen their practical skills in ways that will serve them well in any musical endeavor.

3. Plug into the Future

When York's Music program began, the impact of recorded and broadcast music was already pervasive. But 'electronic music' made from synthetically generated sounds was still widely regarded in academic circles as a laboratory curiosity or an expensive toy—the exclusive domain of avant-gardists from overseas, oddball faculty composers, and perhaps a few advanced graduate students.

York soon took the lead in bringing hands-on work in composition with electronic media into the mainstream of undergraduate music studies. We were especially noted for orienting our electronic studios toward interaction with live performers. And we set our sights on joining the worldwide network of advanced research centers, most of them located at universities, where inventors, composers, and producers were perfecting the next generation of music-making technology.

In the 1980s came a deluge of portable PCs, inexpensive synthesizers, MIDI-linked composing and performance systems. With only the barest minimum of new money, the Music Department nevertheless found ways to keep its students, and many local teachers too, abreast of these expanding capabilities. Indeed, Music was years ahead of all other Fine Arts departments in making hands-on computer work an integral part of its curriculum, and the range of York's undergraduate course offerings in the

area of digital music is still exceptionally wide.

The latest advances in real-time computer control, digital processing, and graphic representation have revealed even more exciting possibilities for manipulating sound. Computers and other electronic devices are now standard items of equipment, not only for straight-ahead composers and instrumentalists, but especially in the collaborative arenas of film, video, theatre, dance, interactive multimedia and performance art. Nowadays, the technical capabilities of any serious student's own home studio might well outstrip what the pioneers of electronic music were obliged to work with only a few decades ago, at a handful of hugely expensive installations that only governments or universities could then afford to run.

All of this confirms the wisdom of our original decision to give students a grounding in the musical applications of electronic media. For several, such studies served as a natural bridge between their courses in Pure and Applied Science, on one hand, and their involvement in artistic creation and production, on the other. To others, they opened new career possibilities. Quite a few of the future composers, producers, administrators, and teachers we sent out with this unconventional background went on to become important contributors in their field.

4. Play Smaller, Learn Faster

Live musicmaking is what draws most young people into a university music program in the first place; and performance has always been the center of what we do in Music at York. But since a full-time university student's actual practice time is likely to be severely limited, each hour spent in supervised playing or singing must really count.

Worthwhile performing experience, we thought, could be provided most effectively in chamber-sized ensembles, rather than in the big bands and mass choirs so dear to generations of high-school and university music educators. Small ensembles tend to demand more of their participants, who must listen harder, play or sing more intelligently, and improve faster to hold their own.

Building basic technique on the instrument is one job no aspiring musician can ignore. Nor did we. Because of its metropolitan location, York could draw selectively on a reservoir of outside teachers to supplement our own staff performers. But from the outset we favored a broader definition of performance training, including the usual private lessons but not stopping there.

In Toronto as elsewhere, all sorts of jazz-based, jazz-inspired, or totally free new-music groups were then proliferating. Taking this as our cue, we offered students a range of opportunities to play each other's compositions and to take part in collective improvisation—a kind of creative stimulant that fed back into those long hours spent learning how to make other people's music come alive.

Though all these measures still make good sense, they soon ran up against system-wide pressures for bigger classes, fewer teachers, more bang for the buck. Unfortunately, economies of scale that are sometimes acceptable in other Fine Arts areas simply don't work for teaching musicians. Every Chair of Music has fought hard to maintain at a respectable level the resources available for individual and small-group performance instruction. Skillful management has lately given this area new impetus, and there are hopes for further improvement as funds become available.

5. No Pigeons, No Holes

The larger an academic program gets, the stronger is the temptation to hire new people mainly because they are able to teach what nobody else wants to. Soon they may be off in their own corner, doing their own thing and luxuriating in the uniqueness of their special expertise, but may feel precious little sympathy for the rest of the enterprise.

Hiring new faculty in the usual way couldn't have worked for the kind of music program we envisioned at York. It simply wasn't good enough just to 'fill slots' or 'cover areas'. To teach effectively in such a comprehensive, cross-cultural, stylistically eclectic, technically demanding program, we needed people who themselves embodied and exemplified the breadth and connectedness of the life in music we were inviting our students to share.

From its inception this Department, alone among its sisters in Fine Arts, resisted on principle the temptation to divide itself (and its curriculum) into two separate streams, one for hands-on doers, the other for scholars and critics. Most people appointed to the Music faculty, whatever their specialty, were clearly capable of making memorable music themselves, whether as a composer, a performer, or both.

The next thing we looked for in potential faculty recruits was some indication that things outside their area of specialization also mattered, some interest in what other kinds of artists and scholars—not to mention other Music Department colleagues—might be doing. When such signs of uncommon intellectual curiosity did appear, along with them usually came a somewhat checkered personal history, and a reluctance to be pinned down to any narrow self-defining label. (Not exactly the kind of candidate officialdom finds most comforting—but fortunately, our Deans were not too inclined to worry!)

Predictably, almost every serious effort to exploit the exciting potential for inter-arts collaboration on this campus has been spearheaded by a Music faculty member. Music for film, composing for dance, musical theatre, experimental multimedia, digital arts, native and South Asian cultural studies—every one of those initatives seeking to enlarge the scope and mission of Fine Arts at York came from this one founding group.

Gaining a Foothold

If there was indeed any general trend which in retrospect could be said to have inspired our founding generation, it is one that is certainly not over yet. Twentieth-century pioneers like Varèse, Cage, or Partch in the US, Schafer or Minden in Canada, have led the way, vastly expanding the range of objects and assemblages that could serve as 'instruments' to explore a nearly limitless field of sonic possibilities. Equipment for manipulating synthetic and recorded sound made parallel advances in the 1950s and '60—though only a few composers managed to imbue their electroacoustic creations with the inherent theatrical appeal of live performance. At about the same time, high-fidelity recording and high-speed travel were helping to open ears and minds to intriguingly unfamiliar traditions of music-making from remote corners of the world.

When taken to heart, this avalanche of newly accessible musical resources had the potential to blow the whole established Eurocentric system of Canadian music education wide open. Murray Schafer and others were already at work in the schools, showing the way towards what he called 'ear cleaning', and thereby transforming hundreds of lucky schoolchildren, here in Ontario and elsewhere, into imaginative listeners and creative musicmakers. What we were able to do in the early years at York was at least a first step in this same direction.

Without ever discussing it much, we all took for granted our allegiance to 'the tradition of the new'. Although diverse in background and outlook, our brave young faculty wholeheartedly embraced the job of teaching people to know and enjoy the musical panorama of their own time, discover its sources, and contribute to its further development. And once all that pedagogical energy and idealism got going in the classroom, some remarkable results ensued.

From a class where their job may have been to invent free-flowing improvisation games using unconventional instruments they themselves had built from found objects, our students might move to a session of Indian drum-language exercises, where they discovered how to extract the maximum in controlled structural excitement from the barest minimum of sonic material. The next day might find them in the electronic studio, working to master the latest tone-generating and sequencing equipment—only hours, perhaps, before taking up a krummhorn to join the Renaissance Band in performing a piece of 450-year old polyphonic dance music.

Indeed, despite its physical location far from the city's core, Music at York began with a remarkably cosmopolitan outlook. Jazz, Asian musics, Medieval and Remaissance ensembles— at the time, none of these were offered for undergraduates elsewhere in Canada. Our courses also fostered unprecedented student involvement in mixed media, computer-assisted composition, biofeedback experiments, and live interaction with synthesizers and other new technical means.

On the scholarly front too, innovation and diversity became our hallmark. Before York entered the field, Mieczyslaw Kolinski was the only well-known ethnomusicologist

in town—a theoretician on the European model, rather than a hands-on practitioner of exotic music such as some American schools (UCLA, Wesleyan) were already producing. But York's Graduate Program in Musicology & Ethnomusicology, once launched, harbored a lively mix of approaches and personalities. Such diversity is hardly surprising, when one remembers how many of the top-ranking graduate schools helped train the founding faculty of this one small department—CalArts, Cambridge, Chicago, Cincinnati, Columbia, Cornell, Eastman, Harvard, Illinois, Indiana, Juilliard, MIT, Princeton, Toronto, Urbana, Washington, Wesleyan, and Yale among them.

For example, though Beverley Diamond had been a Kolinski pupil, Steve Otto came from the opposite camp, having studied at Wesleyan and Seattle, while Steve Blum and Bob Witmer, who trained with Bruno Nettl and Alexander Ringer at Urbana, were perhaps somewhere in the middle. York's own product, Rob Bowman, has taken the lead in opening up an important new field of studies in North American popular music. (The recent ascent of studies in popular culture to nearly equal importance with 'the classics', and the role of university programs like ours in legitimizing that rise, would no doubt make a worthy topic in itself, one that York-trained researchers should be well situated to handle!) Another York Music graduate, Rob van der Bliek, has long served with distinction as York's music librarian, and has built here a collection that is second to none in its areas of strength—an indispensable resource for the daily work of the Music Department, and for the entire university community.

Like successful York graduate programs in other fields, Music's made its name by drawing ideas and inspiration simultaneously from European, homegrown Canadian, and the best American sources. But what made it possible to move so soon into offering graduate degrees was, no doubt, York's early rise to a position among the province's largest undergraduate Music programs. We were perhaps lucky to begin when we did—a few years later and we might never have made it—yet the climb was never easy. As a brand-new outfit without a local constituency or an established reputation, we could only hope good applicants would come to us because they sensed things were livelier here, and wanted to be where the action was. Come they did, too—from all over Canada, and from as far away as Kentucky, California, Poland, and Hong Kong.

Most of them came, presumably, with two goals in mind: to Get an Education, and to Become a Better Musician. But it has never been easy to do justice to both. In learning to play or sing at an advanced level, certain unique kinds of mental and bodily skill must be addressed. They are not the same abilities required by most other university subjects, and a good deal more difficult to measure or identify. However, when students become able to hear more accurately, analyze and memorize complex patterns, or improve coordination of hand, ear, and eye, this can make for better performance in other areas of scholastic or personal endeavor too. At the same time, what they learn of other lives and other modes of thought in studying the Humanities, as well as the Sciences of Man and of Nature, can illuminate the whole process of

becoming a musician in today's world, and open new options for lifelong involvement with their chosen art.

Applicants who could take full advantage of the kind of double-barreled training York was positioning itself to offer were never easy to find, though a good number of them managed to find us. It is still difficult, and in some places impossible, for Ontario youngsters to get a solid grounding in music fundamentals while in high school. Grades previously obtained on standard Royal Conservatory theory or piano exams did not, we soon realized, give a very reliable indication of musicality or potential for academic success. So faculty members were obliged to put in extra hours each year screening applicants by individual audition, hoping to land those who seemed most likely to benefit from the range of options we offered.

Perhaps our growth could have been even faster, had we ourselves taken a less arduous path at the outset. But when faced with the choice between 'chops' and 'smarts', we committed our fledgling enterprise to cultivating both—and never one without the other! Thus, everything that made its way into our Music curriculum needed to serve a double purpose. In every class, through every course, we had to open young ears and minds to awareness and appreciation of the best that musicians had achieved or could become. With luck, we could also help our students discover what it takes to function effectively as a serious musician, and hopefully stimulate their appetite for acquiring the necessary skills, by setting demanding musical tasks and demonstrating efficient methods for self-improvement. The rest would be up to them.

Making the Scene

Beyond the everyday routine of classes, rehearsals, and meetings, we also felt an obligation to keep York 'on the map' as a place where the brightest creative personalities from all the contemporary arts worlds, here in Canada and abroad, could regularly be seen and heard. Guest lecturers, visits and residencies by leading artists, scholars or critics, festivals, symposia, and projects involving students from other departments, public performances on campus by outstanding professional ensembles—all these should play a major role in any academic community dedicated to excellence in the creative arts. And not just for what they would add, by way of enrichment and intensity, to our own courses; but also as an essential nutrient for the whole University body, including our colleagues and students in other disciplines. An abundant menu of campus arts events would naturally attract the general public too, thus helping to build stronger links with York's surrounding community.

For a while, especially when the Mirvish Gallery downtown briefly became a vibrant showcase for York Fine Arts student and faculty initiatives, that vision was widely shared. And all through our first generation, many wonderful public musical events did take place on campus too, wherever some kind of possible space could be made to serve the purpose.

Nowadays, budgetary support for these essential 'extras' is much harder to come by; and it is no surprise that private donations have yet to fill the gap. Campus concert facilities, though still embarrassingly makeshift, have actually improved slightly over the years, as York awaits its first purpose-built spaces designed to serve Music's needs. And thanks to the exceptional effort, initiative and resourcefulness of individual faculty members and student groups, special concerts and stimulating visits do continue to happen from time to time, albeit on a much more limited scale.

No doubt more could have been done at the outset to publicize and attract outside support for what the Music Department was trying to accomplish. York was still young then, could still count on generous public funding, and was slow to understand the need for skilled support staff to spread the news of its faculty's accomplishments. So a lot of our best public relations fieldwork had to come from Music faculty members themselves, whenever they could manage it. (These days, of course, unless people who really know the field are doing its fundraising, no department or faculty of music can hope to attract enough private and corporate support to generate the endowed chairs, the up-to-date production studios, or the distinguished visiting artists a first-class academic program requires.)

Yet if at first our efforts at York lacked visibility, before long we would suffer from the sincerest form of flattery. Today, when a Canadian university hires expensive publicists to help sell its latest new offering in Music to prospective students, what they are advertising often turns out to be something York pioneered.

Are We There Yet?

The notion of a 'department' might well, at least to outsiders, entail a fairly like-minded, insular, and self-sufficient team of functionaries. But these are hardly the right adjectives to describe the Music Department's early history at York, as readers of this book will soon discover. It was more like a permanent floating argument—an untidy bunch of rugged individualists who liked to disagree about almost everything, including music itself. That was also how we helped each other avoid the deadening grip of 'departmental' thinking, while doing our best to prevent those same demons of separatism and conformity from constricting the young minds in our charge.

After all, Music as a university discipline is not really about absorbing a fixed body of knowledge, or learning established rules and codes, or coming up with demonstrably correct answers. Each of the various 'subjects' we profess—somewhat misleadingly labeled as Theory, Composition, Musicianship, History, Interpretation, Cultural Criticism, Ethnography, Technology, or Performance Practice—represents a different attitude or way of thinking, invented to help people confront this most mysterious communicative habit of humans everywhere, manage its storehouse of engaging artifacts, and discover the identities they express. Surely, the more such viewpoints we can eventually bring to bear on the music that intrigues us, the better!

The five founding principles cited above, along with others, have been repeatedly reinterpreted, deconstructed, debated, and tested in action over the past three decades. York Music as a collective enterprise has long since assumed a momentum of its own, with its own alumni, its own traditions, history, and reputation. It has arguably left an imprint not just on those who studied and taught here, but also on the Toronto music scene and further afield. Could it be that the times are catching up with us?

As musical life in Canada evolves, it seems to be pulling its most talented practitioners in many directions at once—away from an exclusive investment in mainline pop or mainstream classical repertoires, and toward all sorts of new amalgams and crossovers. These days in the homeland of Glenn Gould, many more performers also do serious research and analysis; technology is engendering its own kind of artistry; and the cultivation of traditional heritages often nourishes creative invention.

The academic field of Music too, by now an integral part of the typical North American university environment, has become a multi-discipline in its own right, with vital connections to almost all the other great areas of organized knowledge. Anyone seriously interested in music history, music theory, ethnomusicology, performance or composition is likely to draw upon, and be drawn into, other academic disciplines too—everything from psychoacoustics and computer engineering to art history, anthropology, gender studies, kinesiology, or business administration.

Meanwhile, in Canada's cities, a number of distinct musical communities have established themselves, each with its roster of performing groups and concert seasons, its loyal patrons and supporters. For example, Toronto's various active Early Music presenters, their increase stimulated by the remarkable success of the Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra in our midst, are gathered under the umbrella of the Toronto Early Music Centre, whose current president is a York Music alumnus. Improvised and experimental music activities of many kinds have long been centered around and nourished by the Music Gallery—founded by York Music faculty and alumni a generation ago. This city's premier showcase for the international avant-garde, New Music Concerts, now flourishes under the presidency of a former Music Department chairman. And York graduates figure prominently among Canada's preeminent jazz artists.

What were once considered rare or exotic musical traditions are now thriving here too, as never before. In Toronto, several different globally attuned concert series are spreading their influence far beyond any merely parochial or ethnic audience. Besides music from our own native peoples, one can hear Indian musicians from South and North, traditional Indonesian and contemporary gamelan groups, Appalachian folk fiddling, Celtic songs and dances, Caribbean steel drums, old-time klezmer bands, singers of Georgian and Macedonian choral polyphony or Outer Mongolian hypervocal harmonics—as well as seductive sounds from every nation and corner of the African continent—more and more often in all sorts of unlikely Canadian places.

Predictably, York Music people—students, former students, and faculty—can usually be found in some kind of significant role, helping to stimulate and energize these and other vital new elements in Canada's musical life.

Coda

As things turned out, the free-swinging euphoria of the late 1960s did not last. Neither did the level of fiscal support York had enjoyed as an 'emerging university'. Optimistic hopes for the future were soon curtailed by chronic budget cuts, hiring freezes, mild outbreaks of xenophobia, and the much more cautious climate that reigned from the mid-1970s on.

Yet after thirty lean years, York Music is still lively and growing, thanks largely to the perseverance and devotion of its full-time and part-time faculty. Kept on track by the inexhaustible energy and enthusiasm of the students, its momentum has been sustained also by the efforts of a superbly resilient and loyal support staff.

At this writing, only a few members of the original team are still on the job. The next generation of Music Department faculty will face challenges of their own, as new areas of repertoire and new avenues for research and instruction continue to open up. Hopefully they will find there's more building, more connecting, yet to do here. And how better to celebrate the founding spirit of Music at York!