

Application Essay, 2021 Self-directed Learning Award

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As a local musician in Newfoundland and Labrador, I was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, as I lost a lot of performances which accounted for most of my income. I quickly picked up on an idea that many other local musicians had also begun to put forward, which was to live-stream performances on Facebook from my home in Pouch Cove. When I first started doing these live-streams, they were short performances for friends and family where they could request songs they wanted to hear. This was not the first time that I had created digital content as a musician. However, when I started doing live stream concerts during the pandemic I realized that this could be the new norm for quite some time and that I could benefit from the exposure created. In the early summer, I received word that I would need some basic recording equipment for school come the fall and this led me to think about the home studio I had always wanted. By working three jobs during the summer months, I saved enough to purchase a basic recording bundle and camera in order to start a small studio in my home.

One of the summer jobs I had in 2019 was as a Cultural Ambassador with the Soundbone Traditional Arts Foundation, traveling the Kittiwake coast performing for many different people. The role of a Cultural Ambassador is to ensure that the traditional music of Newfoundland and Labrador is kept alive in the younger people of the province. I had the same job this past summer, but it was anything but normal. Since travel was prohibited, I had to stay in my hometown of Pouch Cove and was encouraged to find ways to perform there virtually and in-person. I had worked with the Pouch Cove Heritage Society on multiple occasions before this and thought this organization and I would be able to work together on something that would benefit us both. After chatting with the Heritage Society Chair Ken Pittman, we came up with the idea of doing some songs from one of the Newfoundland songbooks, initially written in the twentieth century, during my employment as a Cultural Ambassador in partnership with the Pouch Cove Heritage Society. I quickly figured out a quick and efficient way to record audio and video for these songs. For this, I uploaded a couple of videos to the Pouch Cove Heritage Society's Facebook page where I was either singing a cappella (without any instruments) or playing guitar and singing. The reason for this was because I could only have two simultaneous input possibilities due to the equipment that I had at my disposal.

When the summer was coming to a close, I realized that I was having a lot of fun recording songs from the third edition of Gerald S. Doyle's Old-Time Songs of Newfoundland, and wanted to find a way to keep going. With that in mind, I created a proposal that I shared with the School of Music, asking that I get credit for doing the project through the School of Music's Music in the Community program. In my proposal, I outlined two primary learning objectives, which are as follows. The first one was to learn more songs during my time with this project. When I started the Gerald S. Doyle Songbook Project, I had six of the 47 songs from the book in my repertoire. Thus, expanding my repertoire was a big objective for me and it allowed me to learn more about the history of the music of Newfoundland and Labrador. I also felt that this project would give the overlooked songs in the book a chance to shine. The second objective was to become more technologically fluent. Before starting this project, I had no experience in recording or video editing. However, I knew that learning how to record would be a very

valuable skill for me to have. With social media at the forefront of how musicians can reach a bigger audience, the need to be able to share your music digitally is more prominent now than ever.

One learning resource that I knew would be crucial for the success of this project was the Doyle songbook itself. Some songs that I knew before starting this project had different lyrics or a different melody in the book than what I had learned before. For the purposes of this project, I wanted to stay true to the content of the songbook and opted to learn the melody and lyrics of each song as they are written in the book. In terms of issues with recording, I knew I would be able to find the answers to all my questions online.

When I was working on this project for credit in the Fall 2020 semester, I submitted a journal entry for every song I did, reflecting on what went right, what went wrong, and how I worked with any challenges that arose.

As mentioned, when I started this project with the Pouch Cove Heritage Society in the summer of 2020, I performed each song either a cappella or with vocals and guitar. I then uploaded the videos of these songs to the Heritage Society's Facebook page. I recorded the audio and video directly to my computer and when I stopped recording I had the final product. The downside to this was that I had no way to edit the video or sound. I essentially had to do both the audio and video in one take and that was it.

When the Fall 2020 semester started, I quickly looked into how I could change my recording process to give me more creative control over the final product. I knew if I could find a way to edit the recording, I could share higher quality content. I also decided to upload the videos to my Facebook page from now on in an effort to maximize the number of people the project could reach.

The first song I recorded during the Fall 2020 semester was "Jack Was Every Inch a Sailor" with just guitar and vocals. This marked my first time working with recording software for the audio. Because of this, I was able to add reverb to my vocals and equalization (EQ) to my guitar. For the video, I uploaded it into the Windows Film & TV App to line it up with the audio. The second song I did was "Feller from Fortune", which gave me the chance to learn how to record bouzouki and vocals. I was also able to work on recording bodhrán and vocals for "A Great Big Sea Hove in Long Beach." The next song I did was "Lukey's Boat," but when I record the vocals and guitar for this song, I realized that it had the same arrangements as the previously recorded songs. Feeling that this was repetitive, I tried to find a solution to this problem. As a result, when I was looking through the songbook to see what songs I would record in the coming weeks, I heard arrangements of some of them in my head with multiple instruments. I felt that some of the songs called for bigger arrangements and thicker instrumentation, which was a new area for me. I knew how to record each of the instruments; now I wanted to put them all together.

The one thing I was unsure about was how to show multiple videos at once. I wanted to learn how to use audio and video to present what could essentially be seen as a one-man-band. However with some quick research, I found that I would need to use video editing software to take on what I was aspiring to do. Luckily, I was learning how to use this software in another

course I was taking. After a lot of trial and error and learning from my mistakes, I finished “The Squid Jiggin’ Ground” with all of the audio recorded through a recording software and lined it up with their respective videos in a video editing software. I also recorded bass for the first time with this song and was very pleased with the result. I put each of the four videos into their own corner on the screen; one with guitar and vocals, one with bass, one with bodhrán, and one with bouzouki. Following “The Squid Jiggin’ Ground”, I finished the semester off with a few differently arranged songs. I recorded “I’se the B’y” with only vocals, bouzouki, and bodhrán. I only used two separate videos for this song, which posed another challenge for me to place them in a visually appealing manner for my viewers. I also did the “Ode to Newfoundland” a cappella, and “Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary’s” with vocals and guitar. I am also incredibly pleased with how the last song, “The Kelligrew’s Soiree” came out. I experimented more with arranging videos on-screen with three videos; vocals with guitar, bass, and bodhrán. I also learned how to transition to just one video on-screen when I arranged the song to have an accordion feature in the middle. I transitioned from the three videos to just accordion and back again. In total, I recorded ten songs using a variety of instrumentation and audio/video recording techniques throughout the Fall 2020 semester.

I believe this Gerald S. Doyle Songbook Project has helped me develop my skills as a musician in many ways. I began this project never having recorded before, and I finished with extensive knowledge of not only recording processes but filming content and making it work together in a final project. I feel my musicianship has also broadened through arranging these songs with various instruments and making them my own. I began by simply playing the songs with vocals and guitar, but by the end of the Fall 2020 semester, I was adding introductions and instrumental sections to the songs. I can envision using these skills I learned from this project in the future in other musical endeavors. In fact, I am utilizing what I learned from the Gerald S. Doyle songbook project to record bass tracks for two songs I am working on to release to radio and digital streaming platforms.