

GOLDEN AGES

MUSIC IN ST. JOHN'S AT THE TURNS OF TWO CENTURIES

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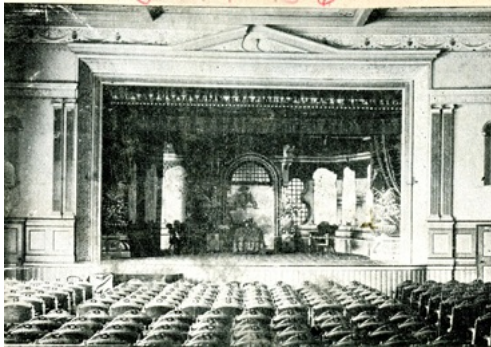
We often hear that Newfoundland and Labrador in general and St. John's in particular "punch above their weight" when it comes to the arts. As an admittedly invested player, I can't help but agree. But years before I became an "NBC" (Newfoundlander-by-choice), I was struck by how outsized Newfoundland and Labrador's

contributions were to the arts in our country. So much so that in the late nineties, I undertook a quasi-scientific bit of research to measure that impact. For close to a year, I logged the geographic locales of the stories on the then daily CBC arts news feature. With an appreciative nod to the late journalist, Suzanne Woolridge, Newfoundland's presence in these stories was well more than double its proportional representation in the country – significantly greater than any province other than Quebec, Ontario or BC.

So what is at the root of this vibrant cultural life we enjoy? Why do the creative activity and the arts seem to be so much more present here than in our Atlantic province neighbours or on the prairies. It's nothing in the water. It's certainly not the weather – unless adversity breeds creative flourish.

I feel like part of the explanation is likely attributable to the blessing of isolation. When I lived in Sherbrooke Quebec I was a 75 minute drive from the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. Today, I'm a 75 minute drive from the Goobie's Big Stop. There has never been somewhere down the road to drive to catch a bit of culture. It has always had to be homemade. And thus creativity and artistic generosity have lived for centuries in the kitchens of our province – music and story being an essential part of how Newfoundlanders and Labradorians shared their time with each other. Out of that grew a rich cultural legacy of story tellers, jigs and reels, pageants and church concerts. But even with that rich tradition, there have been highs and lows in our creative

landscape, periods where homegrown entertainments grew wings and spread from fishing stages to concert stages.



St. John's Total Abstinence Hall, 1894
1880-1914

Artistic Fraud's Between Breaths, 2018
1976-2020



This evening I'd like to share with you a few observations about what I've come to regard as two "golden ages" of music and the arts in St. John's. Coincidentally or not they were located at the turns of two centuries. The first "Golden Age" ran from the early 1880s to the onset of the First World War; the second was announced in 1976 and we are continuing to enjoy it today even as it evolves in new and exciting directions.

GOLDEN AGE I : NEWFOUNDLAND AS AN ARTISTIC CROSSROADS



If like me, you've gotten up far too many times at 3 am to make it for the 5 am flight for Toronto – or found yourself back at YYT at 3:30 am having flown back on the semi-red eye, you'll be forgiven for feeling we live at the end of the road. But not so before the age of flight. Indeed well into the age of commercial air travel, Gander was the transportation hub of the North Atlantic. And before that, from the 1870s to the second World War, most travel by ship between Europe and North America passed by our door step. St. John's was at the centre of international travel – a way station that saw layovers for top European and American artists on tour. These visitors, along with a burgeoning economy, laid the foundations for a vibrant and outsized creative community, one that played out on newly erected concert stages of impressive dimensions.

Concert music had earlier roots in Newfoundland. Military bands dating back to the earliest days of the colony and they were a common denominator between many civilian organizations like the Loyal Orange Lodges, Fisherman’s Union, Star of the Sea and Total Abstinence and Benefit Society. Through much of the 19th century they were led by “Newfoundland’s Sousa,” David Bennett (1823-1902), a composer and bandmaster and the father of a dynasty of Newfoundland bandsmen.



BAND OF NEWFOUNDLAND REGT., AVALON BATTALION, CHURCH LADS' BRIGADE. Earl Grey's Musical Competition, Ottawa, 1907

The legacy of the bands is carried on today by the Church Lads Brigade, founded in 1896, likely the oldest continuous music organization in the province.



First pipe organ in Roman Catholic Cathedral, 1852

Church and School were equally important in laying the ground work for music in the Dominion. The earliest record found of a church musician is an advertisement from 1807 seeking to hire “a person well-qualified to teach the theory of Sacred Music.” In the next decade Gower Street Church became known for the quality of its vocal and instrumental music. By the 1830s music had been introduced to the curriculum in many Newfoundland schools, with the arrival of the Presentation Sisters and soon after, the Sisters of Mercy. The development of church choirs and instrumental supports was linked, to a certain extent, to the Protestant / Catholic divide: the Catholics holding no reservations about complex music being performed in their liturgies, while many Protestants churches favoured the congregational participation in devotional hymnody. But on both sides of that divide there emerged a cohort of professional organists and choirmasters during the second half of the nineteenth century, among them Charles Hutton at the Roman Catholic Cathedral and Peter LeSeur at the Methodist College.

Concert halls and the musicians who populated them were requirements for the blossoming of the first Golden Age. And both these began to take root in the last two decades of the 19th century. Choral and orchestra societies were formed; Operetta productions fast became the

highlight of the season – an appetite first created by touring companies passing through, but then nourished by the homegrown and emigré talent that made St. John’s home.

- St. John’s Choral Society founded in 1880
- St. John’s Orchestral Society founded in 1890
- Productions of operettas were a staple of the season by the 1880s
- Professional singers and musicians in the community
 - Operatic soprano, Miss Clara Fisher (in St. John’s 1881-89)
 - Touring Irish tenor, Joseph O’Shaughnessy (frequent visits in the 1880s and 90s)
 - Organist and composer, Peter LeSueur (in St. John’s 1895-1905)



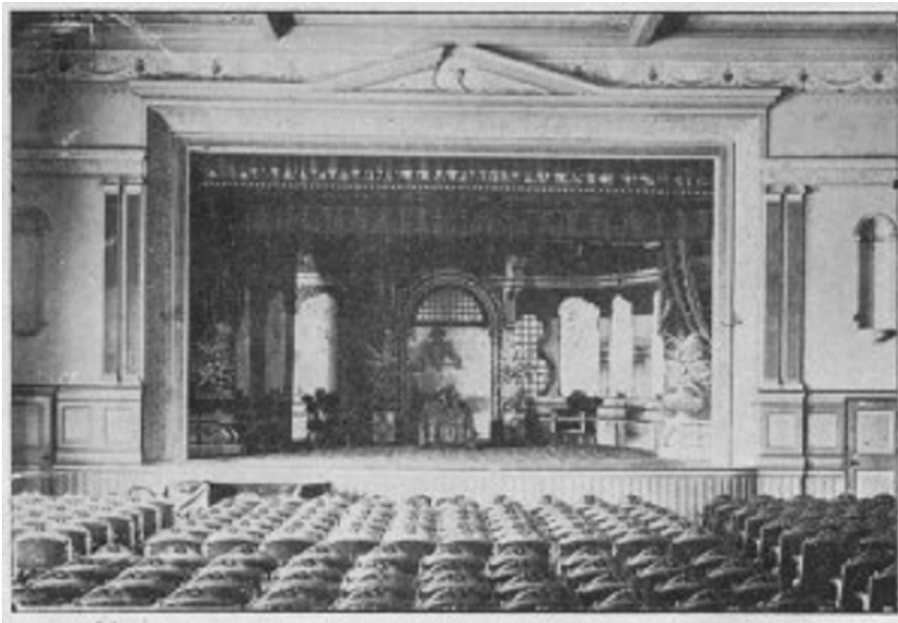
Peter LeSueur

To support the growing cultural life there was a need for institutions to house it. Churches and schools continued to offer important venues, but so too did a number of institutions and clubs created for the purpose of bringing people together for enrichment and socializing. One of the most important of these at the end of the 19th century was St. John’s Athenaeum. The Athenaeum had its roots in the St. John’s Library Society, founded in 1823, the Mechanic’s Institute of 1849 and the Young Mens’ Literary and Scientific Institute of 1858. In 1861 these amalgamated and by 1879 a new building was completed on Duckworth Street. The Athenaeum featured an auditorium with seating capacity for 1,000 and the society’s grand piano was placed there for use in public concerts and recitals. Typically, each season the Athenaeum offered weekly evening lectures to the public, but after 1880 these alternated with evenings of Reading and Music.



St. John’s Athenaeum
Duckworth Street
1879-1892

Mixed programs, leaning heavily on solo songs with piano accompaniment, choral offerings, and small instrumental ensembles made up the repertoire on annual concerts that were a feature of St. John's cultural life from 1862, held in the Temperance or Masonic Halls. In 1879 the Athenaeum opened its own concert hall and it was joined by several others, many of which seated up to 1000 in the audience. From 1862 the Athenaeum featured recitals of vocal, chamber, and orchestral music. It provided the venue for performances by the St. John's Choral Society (from 1880), the Queen's Own Rifle Band, and the Avalon Glee Club. The Athenaeum was a cultural focal point for Newfoundland scholars and musicians, offering both a venue and an environment for intellectual and cultural exchanges, uniquely immune from the sectarian divisions that pervaded the city. Similar venues to the Athenaeum were the Academia Club, St. Bonaventure's College also presented lectures and the auditorium of the Total Abstinence & Benefit Society.



Interior of the Total Abstinence and Benefit Society Theatre, 1894
The T.A. & B. premises were rebuilt in the 1930s and eventually became the Capital Theatre, then the CBC Radio building (now abandoned)

But much like today, with the proliferation of musicals that fill week-ends at the Arts and Culture Centre and Holy Heart Theatre, it was music theatre that particularly captured the imaginations of St. John's audiences from the 1880s to the 1930s.

- Visiting troupes inspired local companies to form for the production of operettas and operas which were rampant from the 1880s to the 1930s.
- *H.M.S. Pinafore* received its first full production in 1879 at the Athenaeum by the touring Josie Loane Opera Company.
- One of that company's lead singers, Miss Clara Fisher, remained in St. John's and became a mainstay of music theatre performance and teaching in the city (1881-1891). Fisher was a fine singer, professionally trained and with a career of some stature before her arrival.



Miss Clara Fisher

Lavish local productions soon became the season's most anticipated events, with Gilbert & Sullivan operettas – and others of that ilk – being the most popular. Local impresarios included Charles Hutton – patriarch of a dynasty that continues to figure prominently in the music community today. Hutton was organist and choirmaster at the Roman Catholic Cathedral; teacher at St. Bonaventure's College; a member of the House of Assembly; and a music merchant. Another influential impresario was Peter LeSueur – Oxford-trained organist and composer who arrived 1894 to assume duties at Gower Street and the Methodist College.

Early G & S productions included

- *Patience* in 1883 – a vehicle for Clara Fisher
- *The Mikado* in 1886 – Legend has it that the score was transcribed by Charles Hutton who heard it in London and transcribed it by memory for the St. John's production; and
- *Trial by Jury* and *Cox and Box* in 1894



Trial by Jury, 1894. Charles Hutton is the Magistrate.

The majority were under Hutton's direction. Numerous other operettas followed, several directed by the Englishman Peter LeSueur just after the turn of the century, or by Gordon Christian in the 1930s, Nish Rumboldt and Don Cook from the 40s to the 70s

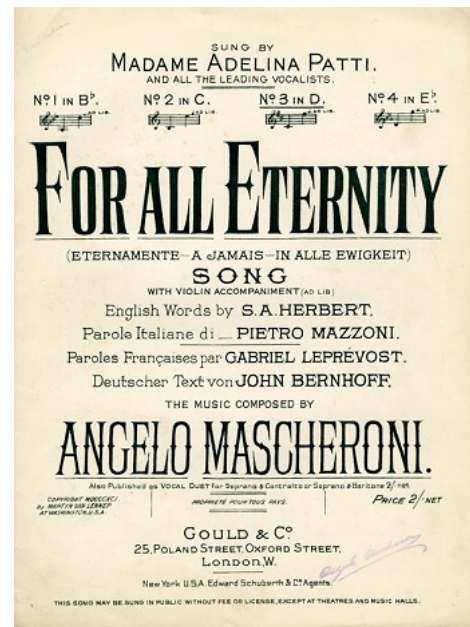


But when it comes to music for the stage during the first Golden Age, the main event is Newfoundland's own home-grown, international operatic superstar, Georgina Stirling (1867-1935). Her story brought the glamour of the international stage home and took Newfoundland to the international stage. It is, at the same time, a story filled with pathos and disappointment – strangely metaphoric for the island nation itself.

Georgina was born to an aristocratic family in Twillingate – her father was the town's doctor; her mother was Anne Peyton. Georgina was educated at the Toronto Ladies College and in 1888 travelled to Paris to study with Madame Mathilde Marchesi, one of Europe's opera star-makers, teacher of Nellie Melba, among others. Stirling made a career in Europe and the U.S. under the name of Marie Toulinget – a nod to her hometown. Her summer visits home to Newfoundland in the 1890s

were among the most sensational moments of a golden age. But after 1904 her career abruptly ended and from 1928 to her death she led a reclusive life in her Twilingate home.

Twilingate Stirling – the name by which she was remembered in Newfoundland – sang a repertoire that catered to the tastes of the day. Little of it was actually operatic, but much of it was operatic in scope. There was a heavy admixture of religious songs, displaying a kind of sentimental religiosity in works like Adams’ *The Holy City*, Gounod’s *Ave Maria* or Sullivan’s *Lost Chord*. Also well represented were parlour songs. This was the core of Georgina’s repertoire – a gentile concoction of the domestic sheet music industry from elegant little masterpieces to clichéd melodramas with a surplus of sentiment and a deficit of originality. Among the most enduring was Marie Toulinget’s inevitable encore: *The Last Rose of Summer*. Also a mainstay of her recitals were salon arias. These were works that displayed vocal pyrotechnics: operatic in dimensions and drama, sentimental and virtuosic. One of Georgina’s signature pieces in this genre was Angelo Mascheroni’s *For All Eternity*. If the Victorian era had kept a hit-parade, *Eternamente* would have topped it for decades. Now long forgotten, *For All Eternity* was the ubiquitous encore for such operatic superstars like Patti and Caruso.



Reports of the European triumphs of Georgina Stirling were echoed regularly in papers in her native Newfoundland. A return visit to her homeland in 1893 and a performance in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. John’s (the only major church left standing after the fire) alerted her countrymen to the sensational talent of their native diva. Of her 1893 performance the *St. John’s Telegram* had written:

“Miss Stirling possesses a magnificent mezzo-soprano voice, full and clear and of extraordinary richness and power. Her register is unusually comprehensive and possesses a range of notes rarely found, each of which is rendered with equal clearness and strength.”

Under the management of St. John’s primo impresario Charles Hutton, accompanied by the Newfoundland’s finest musicians, in 1895 Georgina performed an astonishing fourteen concerts in St. John’s in the span of fifteen days between September 18th and her Grand Farewell Concert on October 3rd. Midway through Stirling’s musical marathon,



Georgina Stirling, 1891

The Telegram proclaimed

“The town for the past week has been in a musical ferment, the exciting cause being the advent among us of Miss Twillingate Stirling, now so well known in the musical world.” By the end of her two-week reign, Georgina Stirling had brought sizable benefit to the coffers of each of the major downtown congregations – funds desperately needed to complete the restorations of church buildings destroyed by the fire. Still it was that astonishing voice and the utterly irresistible dramatic delivery of Newfoundland’s native songstress that elevated her to idol status. The *Telegram*’s critic wrote:

“Who can forget Miss Twilingate Stirling’s encore song to her solo *For All Eternity: Rule Britannia*, old, yet ever new . . . The audience was simply electrified by what they heard. The ovation which the talented artist received was deafening. She was cheered and applauded to the echo. As a matter of fact, her every appearance was a signal for tumultuous applause.”

After her home turf triumphs, Marie Toulinget toured the United States in 1896-97 with the Scalchi Opera Company, performing roles from *Faust* and *Trovatore*. In 1898 she was the toast of the Italian operatic stage. And in the summer of 1897, she returned to Newfoundland for the Jubilee celebrations, singing with a massed choir on top Signal Hill. But by 1901 she had stopped singing in Europe and America. Her final concert was in St. John’s on 14 November 1904. Few in Newfoundland realized that her career was already over, nor that she had succumbed to alcoholism. Georgina Stirling’s unanswered question remains did the career falter because of alcoholism or was alcoholism the response to a career failure? As would the Dominion’s first Golden Age less than a decade later, Georgina Stirling’s career dissolved, shrouded in disappointments and inexplicable failure. Three days after that last concert, she set sail for London and took up residence at the Duxhurst Farm Reformation Colony for Inebriate Women where she remained until 1928.



Georgina Stirling, 1906
Duxhurst Colony

The first golden age of the arts in Newfoundland came to a sudden halt during the First World War. It had been born of the prosperity of the 1880s & 1890s, recovering rapidly after the fire of 1892. St. John’s benefited from being at the centre of North Atlantic Travel Routes: touring companies visited St. John’s en route between Europe and North America. Some of those visiting artists stayed and joined the vibrant, local musical community. A proliferation of venues for concerts and causes to be supported by them fueled an astonishingly active concert life that

was further nourished by widespread music literacy and an appetite for entertainment. Local impresarios of remarkable energy, like Charles Hutton and Peter Le Sueur responded by organizing concerts and entertainments and creating an artistic forward momentum that kept growing until the onset of the First World War and the tragic losses of July 1st 1916. It would be 60 years before anything like that momentum would be regained.

GOLDEN AGE II : A VERNACULAR RENAISSANCE

Newfoundland's second golden age was heralded in 1976 by an expat Newfoundlander occupying an influencer's position in central Canada. In that year, Sandra Gwyn, then an editor at *Saturday Night Magazine* – Canada's long-time literary and cultural oracle – declared a cultural renaissance in Newfoundland. Citing Codco, The Mummers Troupe, Gerry Squires and Figgy Duff, Gwyn declared a cultural re-awakening and revolution comparable to Quebec in the 1960s or Ireland at the turn of the century

“a socio-political upheaval has sprung loose a surge of creative energy. In Newfoundland, the catalyst, instead of gunfire has been demographic engineering. Through the Resettlement Programme of the late 1960s, a policy devised by federal and provincial officials to make the province economically more viable, thousands of Newfoundlanders were shifted from tiny outports to government-approved growth centres.”

The result, according to Gerry Squires was
“Newfoundlanders were made to feel the most inferior people in North America. As if there were some great monster out there telling us we were 200 years behind the times. But now we're starting to get our identify back. And our dignity.”

As compared with the first golden age, this artistic apogee did not emerge from converging international influences, colonial cultures, or the accouterments of newfound economic prosperity. It was home grown, celebrating the vernacular in ways that had been long disparaged by cultural movers and shakers in the province.



Lighthouse at Ferryland by Gerry Squires

Art in the Newfoundland renaissance was characterized as

- Vernacular, dealing with everyday subjects in everyday and witty ways
- Made by people (artists) who were part of their communities – even if slightly eccentric
- Extension from traditional craft, storytelling, kitchen entertainment

It came about as result of a revolution encouraged by

- MUN through Extension Services (community-based artists, Fogo process), the song and story collecting of the Folklore Department, a focus on Newfoundland artists in the art gallery
- A provincial government policy on the arts that was overtly colonial, provoking push back from arts community



Minnie White

New and nationalistically oriented artists balked at the provincial arts policies and leadership

The key assumption of the revival is that there exists a distinctive Newfoundland culture, way of life, ethos, character, soul, or ethnic identity . . . This unique culture centred on the outports has been undermined by industrialization, the welfare state, urbanization, and the introduction of North American values in the period since the Second World War.

Newfoundland culture is now threatened with extinction. – Roger Bill

First the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Arts Council, then the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council pushed back against provincial policies that favoured elitist art and direct governmental control. The LSPU Hall was taken over by a collective of these renaissance artists. CBC responded with *All Around the Circle* and *The Wonderful Grand Band* – programming with frankly nationalist orientation.

The music of this renaissance or revolution – take your pick – was typified in groups like Figgy Duff – a concert personification of a kitchen party, but with the highest performance standard and an implicit license to build from, modify and transform those traditions. In music Gwyn and

others heard the Newfoundland renaissance in the reviving and dignifying of the traditional music of the kitchen party – the true identifying music of Newfoundland:

“The old, rambling, unaccompanied songs, tin-whistle melodies, and elaborate recitations that, not to be rude about stuff like Aunt Martha’s Sheep or the well-intended, but insane attempts to mount a full-scale symphony orchestra in St. John’s, are the real musical tradition of the island.” – Sandra Gwyn, 1976



Gwyn pointed to Figgy Duff as the way of the future for their use of authentic folklore resources and impeccable musicians – revising older traditional ballads (not the rubber-bootery stuff) and performing them on traditional instruments. Their model inspired a wide range of musicians whose interpretations of these traditions touched across many styles. Examples include

Great Big Sea

- Founded in 1993 with Alan Doyle, Sean McCann, Darrell Power & Bob Hallett
- An energetic “rock” take on traditional music

Daniel Obediah Payne

- Native of Cow Head, multi-instrumentalist and actor (you know him from *Random Passage*)
- Promotes Western Newfoundland traditions of Rufus Guinchart & Emile Benoit; ballads and kitchen party songs
- Deep engagement with carrying on the traditions of oral transmission



And more recent entrants into the field like

The Once

- Started singing together in 2006; became The Once in 2009
- Geraldine Hollett, Phil Churchill, and Andrew Dale
- The highest craftsmanship and purist tradition; recent work is imbued with that tradition, but applies it to different kinds of music



The Dardanelles

- Tom Power, Matthew Byrne, Aaron Collis, Emilia Bartellas, Richard Klaus
- Formed in 2009 – high energy approach to traditional Newfoundland music, as well as ballads

Rube & Rake

- Since 2015, Josh Sandu & Andrew Laite, folk story-tellers

Gwyn disparaged the efforts to (re-)establish a symphony in St. John's as infeasible and a vestige of colonial attitudes. She believed that elitist culture was antithetical to the “authenticity” of the Newfoundland renaissance which expressed

- suffering tempered by irrepressible humour;
- loss balanced by a mystical oneness with the land;
- icy waves crashing on harsh shores;
- a salty yet melodious language;
- and the lingering mystique of a unique, unspoiled people.

At the time of the 1976 revolution, the “authentic” and the “colonial” (or “elitist”) were set in opposition – perhaps necessarily so to achieve a revolution. Hindsight is 20/20 and in 2020 we can see that the last half century has witnessed a leveling of any perceived antithesis in a generous cultural community like St. John's. The common denominator has been artistic integrity, curiosity and an engagement with the larger community that is dynamic and exciting.



Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra

That “well-intentioned, but insane” orchestra is now 58 years old, fully professional and with a comprehensive season of concerts that spread across the widest range of genres. They’re at home on the Arts & Culture Stage, in Mile One, in grade-five classrooms around the city and everywhere in between. Founded in 1962 as the St. John’s Symphony through MUN Extension, its first full-time musician, Peter Gardner, was appointed in 1972 by Smallwood himself. The orchestra morphed into the Newfoundland Symphony Orcehstra in 1977 and a handful of resident professionals were hired. The Atlantic String Quartet, the NSO’s string core, was founded in 1987. Five years later, in 1992, Marc David was appointed resident conductor 1992 (succeeding Mario Duschenes). In 2011, on the retirement of Peter Gardner, David was appointed music director. The Newfoundland Symphony Orchestra became fully professionalized in 2019.

While orchestral precedents were spotty, the rich history of choral and theatre music dated back to the mid-19th century, sustaining a link between the two golden ages. Choral music would remain a continuous presence in the churches, the schools and in the communities

- Christian Brothers & Convent Schools – notably under Nish Rumboldt and Sr. Katherine Bellamy
- MUN and St. John’s Glee Clubs under Eleanor Mews
- University Choirs under D. F. Cook, Doug Dunsmore & Jakub Martinec



The love for choral singing, a tradition of excellence, and the education of choral conductors has left a lasting imprint on Newfoundland and Labrador’s music. Newfoundland Choirs are now among the top-ranked choirs worldwide – with several winning major international competitions in recent years

- NSO Philharmonic Choir
- Lady Cove Women’s Choir
- Newman Sound Men’s Choir
- Shallaway – Newfoundland and Labrador Youth in Chorus
- The Quintessential Vocal Ensemble
- Atlantic Boy Choir
- Projēkt Chamber Voices



Another common thread between the two golden ages of music in St. John's is the taste for and level of activity around music theatre. Hardly a week-end passes when there isn't some big music theatre production on the go on the stage of the Arts & Culture Centre or Holy Heart Theatre.

Much as in the days of Charles Hutton, music theatre is on stage in St. John's on a regular basis

- School musicals
- Professional productions – TaDa! Productions; Spirit of Newfoundland; Atlantic Light Theatre; Peter MacDonald Productions, etc.
- Benefits and annual shows

Opera also has a surprising recent history in Newfoundland

- Michael Parker's *The Visitor* (NSO – 2000)
- Stephen Hatfield, *Ann & Seamus* (Shallaway – 2005)
- Dean Burry, *The Vinland Traveller* (MUN's Opera Roadshow – 2006)
- John Estacio, *Ours* (Opera on the Avalon – 2016)



Dean Burry, *The Vinland Traveler* (2006)

The first Come Home Year was celebrated in 1966, as part of the celebrations around the completion of the TCH across the island of Newfoundland. It launched the prototype for the kinds of festivals that have since become a mainstay across the province and throughout the year. Aside from the local gatherings, music festivals played no role in Newfoundland music until recent years. But a convergence of circumstances created an ideal

climate to share the riches of our culture with visitors



Festival 500 (1997)

- A booming economy
- A burgeoning tourism industry, centred on culture and landscape
- Improved transportation to our province
- A mature professional music industry
- A culture of sharing

All contributed to the development of a vibrant festival season all over the province and across every artistic practice. Festivals are now much more than tourism events. They have spread to cover the entire calendar year, bringing the widest range of performances to audiences of visitors, but audiences of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians too. They enrich our experience and our community and

often leave legacies – like the touring troupes of the 1890s – of new members to our professional community.



The granddaddy of summer festivals is the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival, founded in 1976, the year the Newfoundland renaissance was born. It's a spectacular celebration of vernacular music at both a professional and community level. Over the years, it's been a proving ground for generations of Newfoundland musicians. And there's always something for everyone: headliners, workshops, up-and-comers, rain. The Festival now has a year round presence through its weekly Folk night at the Ship and the mentoring events of Young Folks at the Hall.

One of my favourites (and full disclaimer here: my wife and I are the honorary co-chairs) is the Tuckamore Chamber Music Festival. Founded in 2001 by violinist Nancy Dahn & pianist Timothy Steeves, Tuckamore has rapidly become Atlantic Canada's premier chamber music festival. A roster of international guest artists join with faculty artists to present a spectacular array of concerts for two weeks each August. They are joined by a couple dozen young artists and young composers who experience an exciting apprenticeship before our eyes and ears. Many Tuckamore alumni have stayed on and made St. John's their home, now serving as principals in the NSO and training the next generation in schools, studios, the youth orchestra and through such innovative programs as Strong Harbour Strings.



Timothy Steeves & Nancy Dahn

REFLECTIONS OF AN NBC ON A GOLDEN AGE

I first visited Newfoundland in 1968. I was entranced from the first time I rolled off the ferry in Port-aux-Basques. Across more than three decades I became a Newfoundland-ophile, developing my own mythology of a kind of artistic utopia – a culture deeply rooted in place and assuredly self-confident. When twenty years ago, a dream was realized and I found myself in the centre of a musical life I had admired from a distance, I was a bit worried that I had romanticized things beyond any possible reality. I was wrong. The Golden Age continues to shine – if anything far more brilliantly than it did when Sandra Gwyn brought Newfoundland's renaissance to Canada's attention.



Two decades ago, I was an observer “from away”. What I observed a vital, living tradition, a culture firmly rooted in place. It was a culture characterized by self-confidence, wit and pathos – a music at the centre of a social consciousness. For the last two decades I’ve been lucky to view the musical culture of Newfoundland and Labrador from a place of privilege near its centre. What I’ve come

to recognize is a community teaming with a crowd of musical champions and an overwhelming generosity across a diverse musical community. I’ve recognized the widespread belief in music as a form of social justice – something that is vitally important to the life of the province and its people. Within the professional music community there’s a complete lack of cynicism or professional ennui and an absence of artificial barriers between musicians and musical styles/genres. And a growing sense of a place in the musical world. This is indeed a Golden Age.

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For additional Reading

- Paul Woodford’s monograph *‘We Love This Place, O Lord,’ A History of the Written Music Tradition in Newfoundland and Labrador to 1949*, St. John’s: Creative Publishers, 1988. It’s in the QEII (ML 205.7 / .N4 W66 / 1988).
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- Sandra Gwyn, “The Newfoundland Renaissance,” *Saturday Night* XCI:2 (April 1976), 38-45.
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