

Music in Canada as a National Art

What it is, and what it may mean to this Country when we cease to be apologetic in regard to our native Art, and begin to study seriously an individual expression along national lines—Our Folk Songs and Indian Tribal Melodies.

By KATHERINE HALE

IS Canada an apologetic country? Amid the roll of drums, the waving of flags and the eager chorus of the "next of kin," as glorious a host as they have gone forth to battle, I hear the voice of the nation answer "No."

I agree with the voice that in arms, in energy, in merchandizing and a certain sort of enterprise, we are capable of holding our own with any other country in the world. But there are two most important factors in the life and growth of any nation about which we, as Canadians, are chronically apologetic:—politics and art. Alas for the country that possesses neither great statesmen nor great artists. There is something weak in the very fibre of its being.

I do not admit any limitation in our possibilities in either direction, but I distinctly affirm that while we dwell on the negative side of our resources, and state that which is not, instead of that which is, we shall continue to be tolerant of men who have gone into politics as a side issue and a game, and of colleges and conservatories of music who have no instructor in the study of national music and what it may mean to the individual composer.

In all Canada is there, at the present time, one man or woman devoting his or her time to writing or lecturing along a definite line of this sort, having to do with the fabric of Canadian music?

So far as I can find out the answer is "no," with the postscript: "What is there to teach or to lecture about?"

The other day I noticed an article in a leading Canadian newspaper the heading of which was heavily leaded. The cheerful message ran: "Canada Cannot Have Folk-Songs. But a Canadian School of Composition is not Impossible."

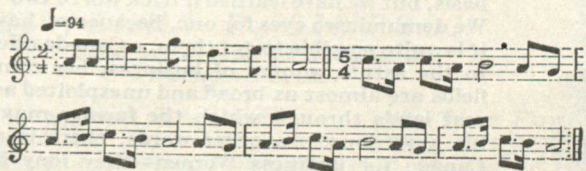
That, it seems to me, is absolutely typical of our attitude. First, a dash of ice-cold water, and then a little luke-warm water applied as a faint encouragement.

In this case, the truth is, of course, that we have what is technically known as "folk-song" in one of the most interesting phases imaginable in the Province of Quebec, in Northern Ontario, in the northern end of New Brunswick, wherever indeed that delightful type of French-Canadian—the habitant—remains.

TO realize these French-Canadian songs and their meaning one must go back over two hundred and fifty years ago when, as we know, some aristocrats of France were lodged behind the wooden palisades of the little citadel of Quebec. Seigneurs, priests, great ladies, nuns, they seemed to have brought with them as adjuncts to their bravery a store of guns, beads, bibles, knitting needles and songs.

Come to think of it, every one of these articles is more than ever to the fore to-day, so after all they have proved to be essential.

The songs were largely those of the people; gay little ditties of love and adventure in towns and villages, and of grape-growing and hay-making in the sunny fields and uplands of France. These were hummed by the ladies and their maids and by the brave Henris and Jeans who made up the little companies that followed the seigneurs and fought those desperate battles against Indians, bush fires and famines. Mingled with these were the holy songs of the priests and nuns, echoes of the Gregorian



Tribal Melody of Iroquois near Caledonia, Ontario.

chants—than which there is no more austere and beautiful music—and they began to float through the still air and to mingle with the plaintive or merry chansons of the Province and Picardy.

And that generation, all-French, died away, and another arose and the precious home songs became permeated with the keen, Canadian atmosphere, the vivid early-Canadian life of struggle and adventure, and gradually improvisation stole in until we have now a



"Day Star" Indians at Kutana, Saskatchewan, during a song festival of the Tribe.

typical and most distinctive sort of thing, that is not in the least a succession of songs that are French of France, but wholly French of Canada, a blossoming peculiar yet quite indigenous to the soil.

It has been most difficult to arrange accompaniments for modern use, as these songs are so very old that they were written before the major and minor scales appeared or harmony was much considered in musical literature. Another characteristic is their extreme simplicity, a fine art, however, lying in the skilful repetitions and the quaint monotonous sing-song verses which hold such a world of pathos and sometimes of comedy within their oft-recurring phrases. Musical students will be interested in the fact, which gives one some clue as to dates, that almost invariably the last word of the verse has a seeming rhyme so far as vowels are concerned with the preceding word. This puts the songs at once into a class with the other French "imperfect rhymes" of which the history of literature tells us. An artist like Yvette Guilbert has found much pleasure in the study of these French-Canadian songs, and there is surely suggestion

for all musical students in the fact that such folk-songs exist in abundance near our door—rich material for the taking.

THEN the tribal songs of Canadian Indians make a great study in themselves. Nearly every important Government, save that of Canada, employs a specialist to collect and preserve national folk-songs and tribal melodies.

One effort in this direction has been made in Ontario when the Department of Education some years ago authorized Mr. A. T. Cringan, of Toronto, to secure transcriptions of the songs of the Iroquois, of the Indian Reserve near Caledonia on the Grand River in Ontario.

As there is no written note of music in the record of any tribe, the hunter for these melodies has a more or less exciting time. The songs come down truly "by word of mouth" from one generation to another. Mr. Cringan sought the aid of the useful, necessary gramophone, and so the student may to-day hear many songs of a tribe that is fast fading away.

A study of this music reveals the most striking and unconventional tonality and rhythm. At first it is all a jumble of unconnected sounds, harsh and unmusical. The predominating quality is loudness. Yet, as one follows and studies the queer tribal melodies with their monotonous absence of accent, we find the most fascinating features. The origin of the songs is lost in the dim past. The Indian whose life is very simple takes everything seriously. A single monotonous air of a few variations makes up his sum of beauty, and the song is ended at any convenient point as long as it ceases with the ceremony or dance which it accompanies; and so the conclusion is often unconventional and emphatic. It would seem that the Indians employ a five-tone scale to avoid the interval of the semi-tone. This little trick they have acquired in common with the Chinese and the Hindoos.

WHEN it is realized that there are, in all, no less than fifty-eight tribes of Indians in North America, and that each tribe speaks a language so separate that even the root meanings of words are different, the magnitude of the task of a study of tribal songs may be imagined.

But each tribe has qualities in common, and the fact is that to express in song is as natural as the breath of life to an Indian. He makes a song for everything. Not only are his themes the usual ones of love and war, of death and dancing, but, like the Japanese, he will epitomize in a tiny frame of music the most ordinary happening of his day and generation: the new path cut through the forest, the red blanket just acquired, the smoke blowing from the chimney, the bacon sputtering in the pan, the whiskey bottle on the shelf—these become epic in his five-note or pentatonic scale set in the queer syncopated rhythm with its slur up to an unexpected climax, and the mournful whoop down.

Modern composers such as the American-Cadman, are finding much to interest them in the adaptation to modern music of these tribal Indian themes.

What about Canadian composers?

As this is an article of suggestion, I shall leave you to work your way towards a better knowledge of the rich basic material that lies like an unworked mine at the foundation of Canadian music.

Leading Art Achievement in 1917

UNDoubtedly the greatest event in the art world during the year 1917, just closed, was the unveiling, in Brantford, on October 24th, of the great Bell Memorial, a tremendous piece of sculpture by Walter S. Allward.

Mr. Allward is a typical Canadian in the very best sense of the word. He was born, educated, lives and works in his native city of Toronto.

Because he has won great technique through severe and undeviating labor in the most difficult and laborious of all the arts, because he possesses the vision of a seer, and the brain of a poet, and the hand of an artist, therefore it has been given to him to interpret some of the great men and the great moments of his country, in an imperishable medium. In Ottawa there are splendid examples of his art in the



Baldwin-Lafontaine and Nicholas Flood-Davin Memorials. The glorious monument to the Victory in South Africa, on University Avenue in Toronto, brought

the days to come many a pilgrimage will be made to Brantford, the telephone city, where this magnificent group is placed.

him into the full blaze; but the Bell memorial will send his name, with that of the inventor, around the world.

The illustration shows the beautiful design, but no photograph can do justice to the magnificent proportions, the sweep and the grandeur of the conception.

The bronze figures on the pylons flanking the panel, also in bronze, show Humanity speaking and listening across the waves of wire-cut air, and the panel presents Man guided by Inspiration, sending his thoughts out, by magic of his own making. And Mr. Allward has epitomized these thoughts in the floating figures of Knowledge, Joy and Sorrow. In