In my fall 2002 column, I reported responses from elementary and secondary school music teachers from across Canada to this question: “Why do you include Canadian music in your curriculum?” I recently posed a related question to Robin Elliott, newly appointed as Jean A. Chalmers Chair in Canadian Music at the University of Toronto: “Why do you consider it important for teachers to teach Canadian music, and for students to study Canadian music?” Here is his thoughtful response. “It is important to teach and study Canadian music because it not only provides deeply satisfying artistic, intellectual, and emotional rewards, but also encourages inclusiveness and a sense of belonging in students. Now, this is not going to happen unless the students are introduced to a very broad spectrum of Canadian music, including First Nations music, traditional and classical idioms, popular music and jazz, and the music of the many ethnic groups who have made Canada their home. This way, students (and indeed teachers) can learn a lot about how music helps to shape our identity, or rather identities, as Canadians. It seems clear that a major reason why many students leave school early is that they do not see their experience of Canada and the world reflected in the official school curriculum. Music class should be a place where a concept of ‘Canadian’ that values inclusiveness can be embraced, thus enabling teacher and student to explore the potential for fulfillment in music that we all bear within us.”

As a follow-up, I asked Robin Elliott if he thought there has been progress in making Canadians aware of their national musical heritage. I also asked him what more might realistically be done in this regard. He replied: “In speaking of heritage, we enter the realm of history and the musical constructions of past generations. Certain types of music have been better served in this regard than others, but in general the musical past of Canada is an area that, although it is central to my own interests, seems to be of marginal interest to most people. One might have hoped for an improvement in this regard when the federal government ministry responsible for the arts, broadcasting, and culture switched from Communication Canada to Canadian Heritage. This move seemed to signify a recognition that music and other Canadian cultural practices no longer exist solely in the present, but rather that there is a past to explore and celebrate. As things turned out, however, the organization which is explicitly dedicated to preserving and increasing our awareness of Canada’s musical heritage, the Canadian Musical Heritage Society (CMHS), has been poorly served to date by the Canadian Heritage ministry. So yes, there has been progress: the CMHS, for instance, has published 25 volumes of music composed before 1950. But improved recognition of and support for the ongoing projects of the CMHS are needed, and the leadership in this should come from the federal government. Incidentally, I encourage anyone interested in the activities of the CMHS to visit its web site at http://www.cmhs.carleton.ca.”

I asked Robin Elliott about his involvement with Canadian music projects which can provide teachers and students with valuable reference materials. Here is his reply: “The two main projects in which I have been involved are the Encyclopedia of Music in Canada (EMC), for the second edition of which I served as English style editor, and the CMHS, for which I edited three volumes of chamber music by Canadian composers. I am still very involved with both of these organizations, but they are somewhat less active at the moment. EMC is searching for an effective way to update the existing second edition and to maintain and expand its presence on the Internet. At the moment its electronic version is only available through a portal at the National Library of Canada’s web site, at http://www.nic-
CMHS, which was founded 20 years ago this year, completed its publication project in 1999. It is now seeking support to make more CD recordings of works from the 25 published volumes. Both organizations are currently drawing up plans for renewal which may bear fruit in the near future.

Robin Elliott’s future plans as Director of the University of Toronto Institute for Canadian Music include development of a newsletter and a web site. He is also planning what he describes as “various publication initiatives, which will involve providing subsidies for existing projects and also initiating new plans; and a Canadian musical biography project. I am very excited about these ventures, and look forward to making the Institute a dynamic force in the field of Canadian music studies. The web site will have information about all of these activities: its URL is http://www.utoronto.ca/icm.”