In recent years, Canadians have been increasingly attempting to explore their national identity. English and French Canadians have retained many ties with Britain and France, and Canadians from other backgrounds have continued to be aware of their ethnic heritage. We are proud of our cultural mosaic, our rich and varied backgrounds; and yet we often feel the lack of a strong sense of our Canadian identity. The problem is made more difficult by the fact that we are very much influenced by our American neighbours. Our lives are greatly affected by American economic and foreign policy, and by American culture. Wherein then does our Canadian identity lie? Opponents of free trade negotiations with the Americans have questioned whether Canada can maintain its cultural sovereignty if closer ties with the U.S. are forged. Certainly Canadians have much to be proud of, not only in terms of the beauty and wealth of our vast country, and the strength of our democratic and educational institutions, but also in the richness of our cultural achievements. Yet many Canadians have little understanding and appreciation of the music, literature, visual art, drama, and dance of their own country.

Education is seen to be central to the development of a sense of national identity, and a number of recent reports have called for greater emphasis on Canadian Studies. For example, the Applebaum-Hébert Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee stressed the need for greater emphasis on the work of Canada’s creative artists and on the development of discriminating audiences for Canadian culture. “The primary, secondary and post-secondary systems of education...have specific cultural functions— including the identification and encouragement of artistic talent, as well as the development of a sense of appreciation for our heritage and the arts.”

Within the music education field, the call for greater emphasis on Canadian culture can also be heard.

A country’s culture depends upon its creative instincts and abilities as expressed by its composers, artists, writers and choreographers. In their works they reflect upon where we are now and anticipate directions in which we may
move in the future. And it is vital that our children know, sing and play the music of their own country so that they may have a place to stand from which they can view and meet the outside world.

Although many Canadian music teachers believe that their students should be made aware of their national cultural heritage, it is not simply a matter of encouraging or legislating Canadian content in school music programs. If the basic aim of music education is to develop students’ aesthetic sensitivity, then there is no educational justification for studying a piece of music just because it is Canadian. Students need to have as wide an experience as possible singing, playing, listening to, analysing, and generally perceiving and reacting to fine examples of music of all styles. Within a broad and well-balanced music program, there should be a good representation of Canadian music which is skilfully written, formally interesting, musically expressive, and pedagogically suitable for that particular age and grade level of student.

Quality must be a fundamental consideration when selecting music for use in schools. But how is the teacher to know what Canadian music is available and which of the available pieces are of high quality musically and educationally? What criteria should the teacher use when selecting music? How can publishers be encouraged to bring out more Canadian repertoire which is well crafted and musically effective yet within the technical grasp of young performers? How can composers be encouraged to add to the repertoire suitable for school use? How can experienced teachers provide composers with guidance as to the capabilities of student performers?

The John Adaskin Project

The John Adaskin Project (Canadian Music for Schools) has been developed in order to help provide some answers to these questions. The Project is a joint venture of the Canadian Music Centre and the Canadian Music Educators’ Association. The current aims of the Project are:

1) to provide teachers with information on available published Canadian music suitable for student performers.
2) to promote the publication of additional suitable repertoire.
3) to encourage composers to add to the repertoire.

The Project is named after John Adaskin, Executive Secretary of the Canadian Music Centre from 1961 to his death in 1964, who in 1961 initiated a Graded Educational Music Plan, designed to promote the use of more Canadian music in schools — eventually 25% Canadian content, he hoped. In 1962, a committee of music educators began grading and evaluating Canadian repertoire in terms of its suitability for student performers. The committee found very little suitable music. To promote the composition of additional Canadian school music, a Seminar for Graded Educational Music was held in 1963. As part of this seminar, fifteen Canadian composers visited schools in the Toronto area, observing student performers with the idea of writing music for their use. The 1965 ‘Seminar II,’ at which the project was renamed in Adaskin’s memory, featured concert demonstrations of music by ten of the fifteen ‘Seminar I’ composers and planning for the future of the Project. Some of the music was subsequently published, but further development of the Project was curtailed because of CMC’s heavy commitments to preparations for Canada’s 1967 centennial. In November 1967, CMC organized a policy conference at which composers, educators and publishers gathered to discuss the further development of Canadian music for schools and the need for creativity in education. Although enthusiasm at the
policy conference ran high, CMC could no longer maintain the Project, and felt that further initiative should come from educators who had more pedagogical expertise than the CMC staff could provide. However, the Project was a major undertaking, and it was not until 1973 that CMEA joined with CMC to reactivate the John Adaskin Project (Canadian Music for Schools). I agreed at that time to act as Director of the joint CMEA-CMC project, and undertook a three-phase plan of development:

1. research into published Canadian music suitable for student performers,
2. research into unpublished Canadian music, and
3. efforts to expand the Canadian educational repertoire.

Adaskin Project researchers work out of the CMC Toronto office where we have access to the extensive CMC holdings of published and unpublished Canadian music, recordings and tapes. Through CMEA, we have contacts with music teachers in all provinces, and through CMC and the provincial MEAs, we have contacts with composers across Canada.

Research Into Published Canadian Music

Phase One of the joint CMEA-CMC John Adaskin Project has involved locating and evaluating published Canadian music in terms of its suitability for student performers. In 1978, the Canadian Music Centre published *Canadian Music: A Selective Guidelist for Teachers*, providing evaluations of selected published compositions suitable for student choirs, bands, orchestras, string orchestras, and chamber ensembles. These pieces were selected in consultation with experienced music teachers from across Canada. Every work chosen was judged to be musically and pedagogically worthy. In 1982, a French version of the guidelist was published. It includes translations of the
evaluations of the instrumental compositions included in the English guidelist, with a revised choral music section to reflect a higher proportion of French text songs.

The aim in preparing the guidelists was not merely to produce lists of recommended repertoire, but also to provide sufficient detailed information on each work so that teachers could locate music particularly well suited to their own students. In the guidelists, a page of evaluation is included for each recommended work. The evaluations are designed to provide specific guidance as to musical aspects (e.g., style, mood, form, compositional techniques). Details are also provided regarding degree of difficulty, recommended grade level, duration, instrumentation or voicing, price, technical challenges, effectiveness in performance, student appeal, and useful pedagogical aspect of each work. Where a recording is available, this is listed, and a sample page of score for each price is included.

In general, repertoire was selected with elementary and secondary school performers in mind, although with the most difficult works, university use has also been suggested. Recommended grade levels as well as degree of difficulty have been indicated because there are cases, for example, where a technically easy work may be too juvenile in style for a grade seven or eight class which nevertheless needs easy music. Teachers need to be able to locate suitable repertoire which is musically challenging but technically easy enough so that the students are able to go beyond the notes of their own parts and can hear the interrelated sounds of the whole ensemble and the general musical structure and patterns of tension and release.

Obviously, not every published Canadian work of good musical and educational quality was listed. An effort was made to keep the guidelists to a manageable size and to achieve some balance in the listings, for example between music in a modern idiom and music written in more traditional styles; between young composers and well-established composers; and between recent publications and older materials widely available in schools. It is a fallacy to think that all Canadian music is similar in style. The guidelists provide examples of Canadian music written in a variety of styles, from traditional to mildly contemporary to avant-garde. Of course, choice of repertoire involves individual taste, and there is no intention on the part of CMC and CMEA to limit teachers to the specific published pieces selected for inclusion in the guidelists.

Research Into Unpublished Canadian Music

In fact, published music represents a relatively small proportion of the total creative output of Canadian composers. Unpublished compositions remain a largely untapped source of possibly useful pedagogical material. Phase Two of the Adaskin Project is designed to tap this resource by identifying unpublished Canadian compositions suitable for student performers. The present focus is on music for student bands, string orchestras, and brass chamber ensembles.

Locating unpublished music has been a real challenge. The main sources have been:

(i) the national and regional libraries of the Canadian Music Centre,
(ii) the files of the Adaskin Project, and
(iii) the Music Division of the National Library of Canada in Ottawa.

In addition, notices have been published in various national and provincial journals for music educators, describing the Project and requesting help in locating music.
Letters have also been written to composers not associated with CMC, to music educators identified in Phase One of the Project as having been involved in writing and/or teaching Canadian music for student performers, and to the librarians of all the military bands in Canada.

The level of difficulty of each located composition is being assessed. Pieces judged to be too demanding for the average high school ensemble are being eliminated from further consideration. Each composition judged to be of a suitable degree of difficulty for elementary or secondary school students is being analysed in detail. Wherever possible, the detailed analysis of a piece is being supplemented by teachers' reports of the classroom-trial of that piece. In Phase Two, we are following the model established in Phase One — that is, we are drawing on the expertise of practising teachers when evaluating music in terms of its suitability for student performers. Obviously, however, it is more difficult to obtain evaluations of unpublished repertoire since such music may never have found its way into a school. Where we could discover no school performances of an unpublished work which seemed worthy after a study of the score, we have sought one or more teachers willing to classroom-test the piece.

Experienced music educators from across Canada have assisted in the development of detailed guidelines for assessing the level of difficulty of pieces, and in the development of standardized frameworks for the analysis of technical challenges, musical characteristics, and pedagogical value. Standardized forms have been developed for teachers to use when reporting on their classroom-trial trial of particular pieces. The aim has been to provide as objective a basis as possible for obtaining the detailed information on which to base the selection and evaluation of repertoire.

Although research objectivity has been sought, it is obvious that subjective response to music cannot be ignored. Each teacher, each teaching situation, each group of students is unique. The researcher cannot safely generalize from the results of the classroom-trial of a piece in one particular teaching situation. And composers do not neatly compose pieces so that the level of difficulty is standard for all the instruments of the ensemble. The assessor must use his or her educational and musical judgement when assigning a level of difficulty to a composition. He or she may have to describe a piece as being Difficult for some instruments, Medium for some, and perhaps Easy for the others. This may in fact make the piece particularly well suited for an ensemble which contains players with a wide range of technical competence, but it makes it difficult to make a neat, objective assessment of the level of difficulty. And even when assessors describe the technical challenges of a specific piece, using a standardized framework, each assessor tends to place his or her own emphasis on which aspects are most significant, and each assessor must decide how the individual specific technical aspects of the piece are interrelated.

Ideally, the classroom-testing process should involve a large number of teachers with different backgrounds, musical interests, and abilities, representing a wide variety of teaching situations, and various types of students. But the reality of the situation is that large numbers of trials have been impossible to obtain using volunteer teachers, and with the available money and time for reproducing and mailing scores and parts. But even one or two classroom-trials of a composition provide valuable information to supplement detailed analysis of the score, and to that extent even a limited classroom-testing program is of value. The classroom-testing
also serves an important purpose in introducing teachers and students to Canadian pieces which they would otherwise not have encountered.

Using the information obtained from the detailed score analyses and from the classroom-trials of selected pieces, the Adaskin Project researchers are now preparing annotated guidelists of recommended unpublished Canadian compositions suitable for student bands, string orchestras, and brass chamber ensembles. These guidelines will provide teachers with information which will guide them in locating and teaching music which is appropriate for their students. These three guidelists will be published by CMC in honour of 1986 as International Year of Canadian Music.

Publishers will be approached with the idea of encouraging them to make commercially available to teachers the recommended unpublished repertoire. Hopefully, the prestige of national organizations like CMC and CMEA, backed up with the specific recommendations of experienced teachers, will have some influence with the publishers. Financial subsidies for publishers may be necessary to make new repertoire available. Financial subsidies for publishers may be necessary to make new repertoire available. Many music publishers in Canada are in a precarious position financially and are uneasy about undertaking publication of a contemporary work for which they feel there will be a small commercial market. In a sense the problem with contemporary music in the schools is a circular one — teachers are unfamiliar with contemporary Canadian music for student performers because relatively little has been published. And publishers, perceiving that there is very little demand for contemporary Canadian music, are generally not interested in risking publication of this type of music. But teachers will never develop experience and confidence in working with contemporary Canadian music unless there is a good variety of it on the market.

Efforts to Expand the Canadian Repertoire

Research in Phases One and Two has indicated that there is a real need for additional repertoire written specifically for student performers, particularly junior and intermediate level singers and instrumentalists. Junior orchestras, bands, and chamber ensembles are particularly in need of music which is technically easy but musically expressive and interesting.

Phase Three of the Adaskin Project is designed to encourage the creation of new Canadian repertoire for student performers. Over the years, the Project has been involved directly and indirectly in a variety of commissioning ventures. To date, fourteen works commissioned by the Adaskin Project have been published, and a number of other commissioned pieces remain unpublished. In addition to the pieces commissioned directly by the Adaskin Project, a number of works have been commissioned by other organizations co-operating with the Adaskin Project. For example, I worked closely with the 1983 CMEA conference committee in commissioning Robert Bayley and Janis Kalnins to write new works especially for that conference. As Adaskin Project Director, I have worked directly with the Ontario Music Educators’ Association in several commissioning ventures, and have acted as liaison with other provincial MEAs, encouraging them to undertake such projects with local teachers and composers. For example, Michael Miller’s *Song of the Woods*, an operetta for children, was commissioned by the New Brunswick Teachers’ Association Music Education Council as its contribution to Phase Three of the Adaskin Project. Premiered in 1980 in Sackville, New Brunswick, *Song of the Woods* was performed again at the 1983 CMEA National
Conference. I have also co-operated with the Alliance for Canadian New Music Projects, providing advice on some of their projects designed to create music for school ensembles. (The Alliance is an Ontario-based group which holds a week-long non-competitive Showcase festival of contemporary Canadian music at centres in Ontario every two years). In addition, I have advised individual teachers interested in undertaking commissioning projects. I have produced a list of suggestions for people who want to commission a composition for a particular situation, and I have tried to act as a match-maker, putting interested teachers and composers in contact with each other. For example, I recently helped a high school band teacher in Elliott Lake in northern Ontario to make contact with composer Victor Davies. Through a grant from the Ontario Arts Council, the teacher was able to commission Mr. Davies to write a band piece. Through the Canadian League of Composers' Composer-in-the-Classroom program, Mr. Davies was able to visit Elliott Lake to work directly with the students and teacher, creating a piece well suited to the students' capabilities.

The importance of having composers work directly with teachers and students cannot be over-emphasized. It is valuable for the composer to have the opportunity to discuss with teachers the problems and objectives of music education. Teachers may be able to suggest to the composer the sorts of materials which would be useful in a classroom situation. The interaction between teachers and composers can be mutually valuable. Many teachers and students are unfamiliar with contemporary compositional techniques, and they can learn a great deal from working with a composer who is able to describe the kinds of musical effects he is seeking in his composition. For the teacher and student there is real excitement and a sense of responsibility and achievement in preparing a new work and presenting a premiere performance. If teachers can share their ideas with sympathetic, interested composers, and if those composers can react to those insights into the educational process and can use their imaginations to create exciting sound materials for the classroom, there are possibilities for development and musical growth for everyone — students, teachers, and composers.

The selection of repertoire for teaching purposes is one of the educator's most important responsibilities, for music must be at the centre of music education. The teacher owes it to his students to choose the best possible repertoire, weighing all the various factors related to his specific situation, using his musical and educational judgement. The John Adaskin Project has sought to expand the repertoire of Canadian music suitable for student performers, and to make teachers aware of the available repertoire. When teachers are aware of what Canadian music is available for their large and small performing ensembles, and when they have access to support materials to guide them in their choice and teaching of this repertoire, they will be more likely to include Canadian music as an integral part of a well-balanced music program, thus fostering Canadian students' awareness of their national cultural heritage.

FOOTNOTES

