Bluegrass In and Around Toronto: Urban Scenes, Regional Imaginaries, and Divergent Trajectories

by

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Abstract

Cultural scenes exist within a matrix of other cultural, economic, political, and geographic forces. They come to fruition through the lived trajectories, imagined constructs, and cultural practices/work of scene participants. Focusing on the bluegrass scene in Toronto, Ontario ca. 1955-1985, this thesis highlights the complexity of these intersections by tracing the contours of a growing music scene within a rapidly developing city. Appearing on the surface as a cohesive socio-cultural formation, interview and archival data reveals heterogeneity and fragmentation in Toronto's bluegrass scene as participants contributed to adjacent scenes, exchanged conflicting values, and variously moved in and around the changing city. Indeed, the scene was marked by encounter between various social and demographic groups and included different fields of activity. Moreover, it was imbued with shifting conceptualizations of Toronto, often in relation to other regional imaginaries.

Throughout this thesis I switch between several theoretical approaches/terms, with each lens illuminating different facets of the scene. *Community* enables an analysis of grassroots activity directed towards building knowledge around bluegrass while *groupings* reveals lines of fragmentation. *Network* draws attention to participant relationships and sites of encounter, highlighting the work of key scene-builders. As the scene grows, *art world* provides a more holistic view focused on the development of a robust professional infrastructure for bluegrass in the Toronto area and beyond. Meanwhile, *assemblage theory* blurs boundaries, presenting parallel scenes and divergent movements that intersected with, but also operated separate from the bluegrass scene. Situated within urban ethnomusicological research and drawing on microhistorical methods, this exploratory approach illustrates how individuals make sense of their city and their urban lives through cultural activity.

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it's just music, and at the same time highlighted the inherent value in that. Finally, I offer my unwavering gratefulness to my wife, Katherine. Her support saw this project through and her regular invitations to put down my work and go for a hike together kept me grounded.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Why Bluegrass in Toronto?

Why bluegrass in Toronto?—This question surfaced again and again over the course of my doctoral work. For many research participants, while they seemed content to share experiences of participating in an urban Canadian bluegrass scene, the genre's American roots were a more fruitful field of inquiry. In order to truly understand bluegrass, it was often suggested, I should embark on fieldwork trips to the music's Appalachian "heartland" and states like Kentucky, North Carolina, or Tennessee. Among colleagues, family, and friends, the question was less imbued with an in-depth knowledge of and fascination with the genre's presumed origins, but still contained certain regional and cultural assumptions. Here, the question—why bluegrass in Toronto?—came from a place of puzzlement. Many had simply never coupled the concepts "bluegrass" and "Toronto"—the former a style of country music associated with rural American culture, the latter a large, cosmopolitan Canadian city. Indeed, while Toronto-based musicians have performed bluegrass for over half a century, the genre has always occupied just one small niche within the city's expansive and tremendously diverse musical landscape. As such, it would be misleading to suggest that Toronto is decidedly a "bluegrass city."

So then, why bluegrass in Toronto?

The history of bluegrass in Toronto, and in particular the scene that emerged from the 1950s through to the early 1980s, provides opportunities to examine the relationship between a growing city and the cultural life of its citizens. For Toronto, these mid-century decades were a period of rapid development informed by emerging, sometimes competing visions of urban life and the urban landscape that saw the city's core transformed into a modern metropolis while its

periphery sprawled outwards and into the developing suburbs of Southern Ontario. Likewise, this is the period in which bluegrass emerged as a distinct, recognizable genre, at first thriving within the commercial country music realm before finding an audience among folk revivalists in the 1960s. Through the folk revival, a new young urban fan base emerged, which, by the late-1960s, contributed to a vibrant bluegrass movement that included an extensive festival circuit and a network of local scenes across the United States and Canada (Rosenberg 2005, chaps. 3-10). While Toronto is not a characteristically "bluegrass city," then, its position as a major hub within this scenic network becomes evident over the course of this thesis.

Mid-century Toronto's bluegrass scene has been documented, but it has not been subject to an in-depth historical analysis.[1] In doing so, this thesis positions bluegrass within the city's lively popular music landscape, which includes more commonly historicized activities among folk, rock, and rhythm and blues musicians (see, for instance, Henderson 2011, Jennings 1997, and Mitchell 2007). A historical treatment also provides opportunities to examine the dynamism of cultural scenes, observing how they come together, transform, fragment, and intersect with other fields of collective sociocultural activity. Throughout, I situate my analysis within the realm of urban ethnomusicology by drawing links between scene activity and the city's development during this time. This approach not only considers the impacts of geographic, economic, and demographic changes on the shape of an urban music scene, but also how individuals make sense of the city and their urban lives through their cultural activity. How, for instance, do participants utilize locally produced music to construct narratives about and situate themselves within their city? Conversely, I also examine how urban surroundings contribute to one's understanding of a musical genre. Exploring the obscure history of bluegrass in Toronto, then, this thesis illuminates

[1] Through the 1970s participants in the scene documented activities and shared their experiences in local newsletters and magazines. These will be discussed more thoroughly throughout the thesis. Neil Rosenberg also provides a brief introduction to the Toronto area scene in his seminal history of the genre (2005, 363-365).

how cities and music are entwined through the lived trajectories, imagined constructs, and cultural practices of scene participants.

Literature Review and Background

Bluegrass

Bluegrass emerged as a sub-genre of commercial country in the 1940s, but has roots in Anglo-Celtic folk song and tunes, blues, jazz, African American spirituals, and other forms of pre-war popular musics. It is an ensemble form that conventionally includes acoustic guitar, bass, mandolin, fiddle, dobro, and, perhaps most recognizably, banjo played in the three-finger (Earl) Scruggs-style. Instrumentally, bluegrass is a virtuosic form that demands tight rhythmic coordination, often at quick tempos, and an ability to execute improvised solos. Meanwhile, the vocals, inspired by country, blues, and gospel, often resound in a high tenor—commonly referred to as the "high lonesome sound"—and involve three and four part harmonies. Observing this kind of musicianship on a professional level can prove altogether exhilarating. At the same time, because of an emphasis on collective music-making, bluegrass has also become popular among amateur "pickers"[2] who congregate for informal jam sessions.

Regionally, bluegrass is most strongly associated with the rural American communities along the Appalachian range, and especially the state of Kentucky, home of the widely acknowledged "father of bluegrass," Bill Monroe. As such, the genre is imbued with romantic narratives and imagery of pre-industrial, rural life that surface in song lyrics, performance aesthetics, and fan discourse. However, while bluegrass was certainly influenced by Monroe's musical experiences growing up in rural Kentucky, it was developed as a distinct genre during his years working in urban American industrial centres and performing/recording in cities like Atlanta, Greenville,

[2] "Picker" is a colloquial term for bluegrass instrumentalists. It is derived from the picks and picking styles used on guitar, mandolin, and banjo.

Pittsburgh, and Nashville, which was emerging as a hub in the commercial country music industry (Rosenberg 2005, 40-46). Indeed, despite the notions of rural authenticity that surround bluegrass, the genre has thrived in urban contexts since its origins.

Similarly, bluegrass is often presented as distanced from and/or more artistically pure than "mainstream" country music (Malone 2002 [1968], 323-324; Peterson 1997), despite its connection to the commercial country music industry. Bluegrass enjoyed a commercial breakthrough in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1939, Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys introduced their brand of old-time inflected country music to WSM's Grand Ole Opry, and soon after made their first recordings for Victor Records (Rosenberg 2005, 46-52).[3] During the War years, they continued to perform on the popular country radio show, tour the eastern United States, and record singles, all the while developing an audience in the urban areas where rural migrants were settling for work (51-64). The genre, however, really began to take off in the post-War years when the most celebrated version of Monroe's band maintained a busy touring schedule and released a stream of singles on Columbia records that would emerge as standards in the bluegrass repertoire.[4] During this time, Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys also inspired the formation of other "golden era" groups such as Flatt and Scruggs, the Stanley Brothers, and the Bailey Brothers (78-90).

The genre continued to flourish during the first half of the 1950s, a period in which fans, journalists, and disc jockeys first began referring to the music as "bluegrass" (Rosenberg 2005, ch. 4). Approaching the 1960s, however, a characteristically niche bluegrass market began to develop among those seeking an alternative to the emerging country-pop "Nashville sound," as

[3] Bill Monroe's life and career are discussed in greater detail in Finch 2016, Rosenberg 2005, Rosenberg and Wolfe 2007, and Smith 2005.

[4] Monroe performed with some manifestation of the Blue Grass Boys throughout his entire career. The "classic" late-1940s line-up referred to above included, as always, Monroe on mandolin, Lester Flatt (guitar/vocals), Cedric Rainwater (bass), Chubby Wise (fiddle), and Earl Scruggs (banjo).

well as rock and roll, which was dominating the youth market in America (116-120; 132-134). In addition to long-time country music fans, bluegrass also found an audience among young people involved in the urban folk revival. Championed by prominent revivalists like Ralph Rinzler and legions of aspiring banjoists, bluegrass acquired a new life as part of the revival. Second generation bands like the Country Gentlemen, the Dillards, and the Kentucky Colonels began to form in cities and college towns throughout the United States. Meanwhile, targeting the folk market, Flatt and Scruggs enjoyed massive success through the 1960s and Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys became a training ground for young talent.

By the mid-1960s, the emergence of "folk rock" pulled the revival into the commercial rock and pop world and the broader movement began to splinter into smaller, genre-oriented "named-system revivals" (Rosenberg 1993a, 177-178). In this context, bluegrass' dedicated fan base began grow into what Rosenberg refers to as a "consumers' movement" (2005, 217) built around magazines, instructional books, instruments and accessories, record albums, and a summer festival circuit that exploded during the 1970s and 1980s. In the decades following, this bluegrass industry infrastructure has endured and expanded, resulting in numerous record labels, an annual awards ceremony, a hall of fame, an international industry body (i.e., the International Bluegrass Music Association), and a dedicated following of instrumentalists and devotees that idolize early icons and support contemporary performers.

Bluegrass first became subject to scholarly analysis in folklorist Mayne Smith's "An Introduction to Bluegrass" (1965).[5] Since then, scholars have analyzed bluegrass performance conventions (Adler 1982, Bealle 1993, Finch 2011, Finch 2012, Kisliuk 1988), audiences (Cantwell 2004), styles (Cohen 1969, Rockwell 2011), and regional representations (Sweet

[5] At the time he wrote "An Introduction to Bluegrass," Mayne Smith was a folklore graduate student supervised by ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam.

1996). The bluegrass industry (Fenster 1993, Fenster 1995, Finch 2016, Tunnell and Groce 1998), local scene and related sociocultural activity (Hambly 1980, Lena 2012, Mitsui 1993), and bluegrass revivalism (Nusbaum 1993, Rosenberg 1993b) have also appeared in the literature.

Many of these subjects surface in the three major historical works on bluegrass music. Bill Malone's (2002 [1968]) chapter-length survey of bluegrass laid the groundwork, contextualizing the genre within the broader history of country music. Robert Cantwell (2003 [1984]) takes a more impressionistic approach in his comprehensive examination of bluegrass' divergent social and cultural roots. In addition to providing an overview of the genre's key figures and developments, Cantwell elaborates on bluegrass' connection to Anglo-Celtic folk song, African rhythmic conventions, blackface minstrelsy, and class constructs. Perhaps the most notable work on bluegrass, however, is Neil Rosenberg's (2005 [1985]) exhaustive history, which balances detailed discussions of key personalities, events, and other infrastructural components (e.g., record labels, venues, magazine and book publishers, festivals, fan clubs, etc.) with analyses of the sociocultural currents that influenced bluegrass' development in its first fifty years.

One of strengths of Rosenberg's history is how it illustrates bluegrass' growth from a single band's experimentation, to a lucrative market in the early country music industry, and finally into a movement made up of artists, entrepreneurs, enthusiasts, and an international network of scenes. Toronto, and Canada in general, loom heavily in his discussion of the broader movement and, describing how the genre was introduced to the city, he shares three observations. First, the city's geographic location in Southern Ontario meant that residents had access to American radio stations that broadcast country and bluegrass music. Related to this, because radio nurtured an audience, and because of the manageable cross-border drive, Toronto was often included in the tour itineraries of well-known professional performers (2005, 363). Second, as one of Canada's

largest cities, Toronto had become something of a cultural hub and in the 1960s was a major site of the urban folk revival in the country. Not only did this bring more touring American bluegrass performers to the city, but it created opportunities for local performers, and spawned interest among local youth participating in the revival, including newly arrived draft resisters from the United States (364). Finally, and perhaps most significant for my own research, Toronto's economic pull drew working-class musicians from Canada's other provinces who became part of a local bluegrass scene (363). Chapter two of this thesis explores these migration patterns, focusing on migrant relationships to and ideas about the city. This sets the ground for a more in-depth discussion of the social, cultural, and class dynamics that shaped mid-century Toronto's bluegrass scene.

In addition to expanding on Rosenberg's initial writing on bluegrass in Toronto, this thesis takes on the familiar cynicism surrounding urban-based bluegrass, which, as will be discussed throughout, has been presented as derivative or "inauthentic." I explored some of these themes in my Master's research on Toronto's current bluegrass scene (see Finch 2011 and Finch 2012 for portions of this research). Focusing on the performance conventions and stage banter of contemporary acts like Crazy Strings/the Foggy Hogtown Boys and the Hamstrung Stringband, my prior work considered authenticity as a dynamic quality of experience constructed in the moment of performance. (By offering an account of bluegrass activity in Toronto in the first decade of the twenty-first century, in some respects it also serves as a postscript to this thesis). At this juncture, I do not intend to legitimize or defend urban/Toronto-based bluegrass. Nor do I attempt to authoritatively elucidate abstract constructs such as authenticity or tradition. Rather, I consider how such notions and related genre conventions, variously conceived, impact socio-musical practices, encounters, and dynamics within an emerging urban scene. Where previous

research has explored the contours of bluegrass as a genre, this study aims to animate bluegrass through the lived experiences of scene participants.

Toronto

The City of Toronto—formerly known as the Town of York and before that settled by the Mississauga, Iroquois, and Wyondot peoples—was incorporated by British settlers in 1834 (Williamson 2008, ch. 2).[6] Located along the north shore of Lake Ontario, the city enjoyed easy access to the resources required to nourish an industrial economy and a growing population. With a productive and thriving alcohol distillery, as well as sugar, grain, and meat processing plants plotted along its coastal rail bed, Toronto emerged as one of early Canada's industrial centres through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Likewise, strong industry required and attracted human resources and Toronto also became the country's most populous city, drawing waves of immigrant settlers from the United States (including African Americans who were fleeing enslavement), Great Britain, continental Europe, and Asia.

This growth trend continued in the years following World War II. Immigration from Europe resumed, spurred by conflict and displacement in countries like Italy, Poland, Lithuania, and Germany (among others), and many of the new arrivals contributed to Toronto's rapid development during the second half of the century. Mid-century Toronto also saw the growth of other industries revolving around manufacturing, (English) media, and, perhaps most notably, finance. Indeed, during the period covered in this thesis, Toronto overtook Montreal, Quebec—Canada's historical economic centre—as the nation's corporate and finance capital (Carroll 2002, 123-127).

[6] As Canada's largest city, Toronto has been subject to innumerable historical treatments. My broader historical background of the city is informed by Kilbourn 1984, Lemon 1985, and Williamson 2008.

Beginning in the 1950s, political leaders also set the course for the city's outward expansion. In 1954, the small, independent municipalities, townships, and villages surrounding Toronto were united as a Metropolitan government that shared responsibility for developing and maintaining regional services.[7] In an era that saw the construction of a highway system and a sprawling suburban infrastructure, this merger, the first of several, presupposed a number of geo-political shifts that would shape what became known as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In addition to Metro Toronto, the GTA also includes the nearby Durham, York, Peel, and Halton regions. These expansive swaths of land contain suburban areas like Mississauga, Burlington, Markham, and Pickering, which, from the 1960s on, experienced ballooning populations as middle-class families left the urban core and waves of immigrants continued to settle in and around Toronto.[8]

Over the course of the twentieth century, Toronto also emerged as a (multi)cultural hub. The Toronto Symphony Orchestra, National Ballet of Canada, and Canadian Opera Company were all established in the city during the first half of the twentieth century. The Art Gallery of Ontario, established in 1900, became the largest gallery in Canada and featured the work of internationally renowned artists. Performers from around the world also appeared at a number of the city's prominent venues including Massey Hall and the Royal Alexandria Theatre. Starting in the late-1960s, as newcomers from around the world began to settle in waves of chain migration, Toronto was recognized as home to a variety of culturally diverse arts scenes and festivals. With this, in addition to being a Canadian destination for North American and British artists, the city also surfaced on the tour itineraries of renowned artists from South Asia, the Caribbean Islands,

[7] These communities consisted of, in addition to the City of Toronto, Long Branch, Etobicoke, Mimico, Weston, Leaside, Swansea, New Toronto, Forrest Hill, Scarborough, York, North York, and East York.

[8] In the late 1960s, immigration trends in Canada shifted in conjunction with an emerging discourse and policy landscape focused on promoting multiculturalism as a national principle. During this time, newcomers began to arrive in waves of chain migration from South Asian, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, and African nations.

the Middle East, Africa, and the rest of the Americas. Finally, for some, the social buzz of Toronto's small neighbourhoods and cultural/arts scenes has also had a romantic, bohemian appeal. This cultural pull factor will become particularly evident in Chapter two's discussion of Yorkville Village and the city's folk revival scene, but as explored in the concluding chapter, it has become increasingly important in understanding economic and urban development in postindustrial Toronto.

Toronto's music scenes, institutions, and history have surfaced frequently in ethnomusicological and related scholarly research. Numerous studies have considered the city's diverse cultural landscape, focusing on non-Western musics (Chan 2001, Clarfield 1976, Cohen 1982, Galvan 2002, Mercier 2007/2008, Parvaz 2011, Satory 1987, Warwick 2000, Wolters-Fredlund 2005, Wrazen 2007). This body of work delves into themes such as migration, musical transformation, cultural imaginations, and the at times problematic discourse of multiculturalism. Toronto has served as a geographic site in ethnomusicological discussions of space, place, and locality (Finch 2011, Gallaugher 1999, Strachan 2014). Researchers have also considered the links between musical/music-related practice and cultural institutions/policy in the city (Bisson 2007, Finch 2015, Marsh 2006). Conversely, while many scholars examine music in Toronto, Doucet (1998) surveys representations of Toronto in "song and sound," alluding to the city's noteworthy status within Canada.

Many of the themes outlined above surface in the discussions to follow. The historical scope of this research, however, illuminates certain shifts, parallel developments, and contingencies that appear when closely examining the intersections between an emerging music scene and a growing city over the course of several decades. Scholars have previously explored Toronto's musical history (Elliott 1997, Guiguet 2007, Jennings 1997, Smith 1996) and the city has

featured prominently in histories of popular musics in Canada (Barclay, et al 2001, Edwardson 2009, Mitchell 2007). Here, it is important to highlight the contributions of Edwardson (2009), Jennings (1997), and Mitchell (2007), whose historical work overlaps with the period and musical activity covered in this thesis. Edwardson positions Toronto's mid-century rock and folk scenes within an in-depth history of Canadian popular music and the developing domestic music industry. Mitchell and Jennings, on the other hand, take a close look at folk music activity in the city's Yorkville Village scene during the during the 1960s and 1970s. The former draws connections between urban folk revivals in the United States and Canada, while the latter offers a more conventional historical narrative, focusing on well-known names, venues, and events.

Among the numerous historical works on Toronto that are not directly related to music, Henderson (2011) and Sewell (1993 and 2009) are particularly relevant to my research. Henderson's *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* utilizes archival and interview research to examine how politics, culture, class, generational tensions, economics, and the media all contributed to Yorkville Village—the city's infamous "hippy ghetto" turned upper-class commercial and residential district—as both a tangible and imagined urban space (118). Community activist and former Toronto mayor John Sewell surveys the same period (i.e., 1950-1980) in his two volumes on urban development in Toronto. His work is notable in that it offers a detailed, sometimes insider account of the political decisions and rationales that influenced the Greater Toronto Area's growth and development over the course of the twentieth century. By drawing connections between, on the one hand, a relatively obscure urban bluegrass scene, and, on the other hand, the large scale, well-documented institutional and sociocultural developments discussed by the above authors, this study resembles a microhistory. Indeed, examining the

personal narratives, various trajectories, and cultural practices of scene participants becomes a way of piecing together histories of both mid-century Toronto and bluegrass.

Developing Theory and Shifting Terminology

There are many ways to describe how individuals assemble around a musical genre, and indeed, scholars have employed various concepts and terms when approaching this subject. While some terms, like *scene* or *community* or even *group* surface interchangeably in everyday discourse, elaborated upon they can become critical tools for examining collective cultural activity. In recent decades cultural scenes have surfaced as a vibrant field of study, enabling scholars to examine social processes and cultural work (Blum 2001, O'Connor 2002, Straw 2004, Waxer 2002), identity constructs (Finch 2015, Matsue 2009, Shank 1994, Stahl 2001), cultural production and consumption (Bennett 1997, Straw 2002), and the blurred boundaries between local, national, and global cultural fields (Olson 1998, Straw 1991), among other subjects. For Will Straw (1991, 2002, 2004), whose work most influences my analysis in this area, scenes are flexible, indefinite, but still decipherable, hives of social and cultural activity. They are distinctly local in how they become associated with particular sites (e.g., venues or gathering spaces) and places (e.g., the D.C. punk scene, Ma*d*chester club scene, or the Toronto bluegrass scene). However, they are often influenced by, and at times can influence, sociocultural currents that transcend the local. While terms like "scene" and "community" are often used interchangeably, Straw makes a distinction, maintaining that the latter describes a more finite and distinguishable social configuration. Think of, for instance, the social and musical activity surrounding an organized, local bluegrass appreciation society, of which there were several in the Toronto area. As I discuss in Chapter Four, Straw is not interested in marking socio-cultural clusters as *either* a scene *or* a community, suggesting that, for some, scenes can

cultivate a "sense of community" (1991, 373). He does, however, seem to regard loose, nebulous scenes as the more fruitful unit of analysis.

The notion of community(ies), however, should not be dismissed and can also help understand certain social processes, formations, and experiences within a broader scene. Indeed, the kinds of relationships and sense of unity and purpose that some of my research participants describe correspond with Straw's definition of community. Wenger's (1998) work on "communities of practice," in which groups build knowledge and skills through regular, goal-oriented social interaction, has been particularly helpful in making sense of how scene participants collectively learned and/or learned about bluegrass (see Chapter three). In this study, examining communities of practice also affords an opportunity to deal with the daunting messiness of an expansive scene by observing more concentrated and intimate sociocultural activity.

Even seemingly mundane concepts like "group" provide a starting point for deeper analysis. In particular Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström's (2003) typology of "groupings" and Slobin's (1992) discussion of "affinity groups" highlight not only the circumstances that draw people together, but also how boundaries between groups are established, maintained, and transcended. Observing the (usually informal) encounters between various groupings within a complex scene highlights an internal heterogeneity and a compelling, sometimes tense social dynamic. As will become apparent later in this thesis, the formation of groups can also presuppose scene fragmentation.

Whereas employing terms like scene, community, and group can lead to impressionistic, though no less scholarly rigorous understandings of collective sociocultural activity, the term *network* opens up more systematically analytical possibilities. As Brinner (2009) demonstrates in

his research on Israel's "ethnic music scene," network analysis can lend a sense of structure to a cultural scene. Brinner's network models—intricate maps of variously connected nodes—reveal prominent individuals, the quality and character of participant relationships, and flows of knowledge and other resources. Drafting these kinds of detailed network diagrams in my examination of the Toronto area bluegrass scene is impractical given the scene's size and steady transformation. Doing so, it seems, risks producing a false sense of authority and rigidity in depicting an otherwise fluid social configuration. However, the language of and classifications provided by network analysis—informed by Brinner's work—prove useful in identifying key players, hubs, and relationships that contributed to the scene's early development (see Chapter Four).

Social theorists have also developed a specialized language for describing collective cultural activity and complex social configurations. Howard Becker (1982) describes how individuals, institutions, conventions, and discourses all contribute to and operate within distinct "art worlds." His work aims for a holistic account of the cultural work and social contexts that impact the production, circulation, and consumption of art. Meanwhile, Deleuze and Guattari (1987), as well as DeLanda (2006), consider how various parts interact to continuously shape and reshape what they call an "assemblage." In this study, assemblage theory, which recognizes that parts (e.g., individuals, institutions, or component assemblages) have a life independent of the whole, becomes a tool for dissecting the Toronto area scene and examining encounters between adjacent groups/scenes (see Chapter Seven).

All of these concepts—scene, community, group, network, art world, assemblage—bring something to my analysis and, at times, can be employed simultaneously to examine various facets of bluegrass activity in the Toronto area. At points in the thesis's historical narrative,

however, specific terms seem more appropriate as individuals come together, disperse, reassemble, and fragment into still other groupings. Because of this, many of the following chapters begin with a theoretical discussion that frames the kinds of social formations, practices, and events described therein. These discussions inevitably deviate into other relevant theoretical territory that informs my analysis. Instead of advocating for any one of the above terms or adopting an overarching theoretical framework, then, throughout this thesis I maintain an exploratory approach to employing, adapting, and building theory in correspondence with scene developments. While I do not commit to a single concept/sociocultural formation, however, the term "scene" emerges as both a theoretical device, in the sense described above (and in more detail in Chapter Four), as well as an informal catch-all, since it was used most commonly by my research participants.[9]

At times, the terminology used for describing social formations and cultural flows highlights different fields of activity. Terms like community or group, for instance, are compatible with analyses of grassroots movements, personal relationships, and localized activity. Art worlds and assemblage, on the other hand, can contain all of these things while incorporating more formalized institutions and large-scale structures. These terms enable us to consider, for example, how the Toronto area bluegrass scene is positioned within a global network of bluegrass scenes and a bluegrass/country music industry. Or, how the notion of "Canadian bluegrass," which began to surface in the 1970s, is underpinned by a cultural nationalism that occupied public discourse and informed a robust body of Canadian cultural policy during this period. Indeed, the Toronto area bluegrass scene did not emerge or grow in a cultural vacuum. Slobin's (1992) discussion of *subculture*, *superculture*, and *interculture*, provides a way to deal with the broader cultural contexts and intersections that surround a local scene. I engage with

[9] Research participants also commonly employed the terms "community" and, most plainly, "we."

Slobin's work more thoroughly in Chapters 4 and 6. Put simply, however, subculture—another colloquial term for an interest or value-based group—refers to small scale, geographically-bound activity, while superculture takes account of private and public cultural institutions or forces (e.g., record companies, cultural policy, etc.), which at once seem detached from but are ultimately entwined with grassroots activity. Meanwhile, interculture, seeks to capture cultural flows and currents that transcend regional or national boundaries (e.g., the urban folk revival, the presence of American country music radio in Eastern Canada). Each of these fields becomes clearly identifiable over the course of this study. More interesting, however, as Slobin emphasizes and as I hope to illustrate, is how they intersect, bleed into one another, and are mutually dependent. This is perhaps most evident in Chapter Six's discussion of an interconnected grassroots bluegrass scene and professional infrastructure.

Migration is another key theme in this thesis. Early on, I discuss how people from rural Canada, the United States, and suburban or residential Toronto were all drawn into the city. We also see how people associated with the bluegrass scene move through the city, congregating at hubs and in particular areas. Later, I examine migrations out of the city and, as the scene extends beyond Toronto, the flows between cities and towns throughout Ontario. Kiwan and Meinhof's (2011) work on music and migration offers a theoretical approach for exploring how these kinds of migrations shape a cultural scene. By tracing the individual trajectories of migrant musicians, they reveal complex transnational networks comprised of human relationships, "spaces of cultural activity," and institutions (7).[10] Within these networks, a musician's "transcultural" and/or "translocal capital" establishes connections to and enables them to be musically active in "multiple locations, at 'home,' in diasporic or in other more diversified settings" (4). These

[10] Kiwan and Meinhof also identify "accidental hubs," which position the researchers as part of migrant musician's transnational network.

forms of capital—informed by Bourdieu's (1986) notion of cultural capital—refer to the ways that musicians strategically employ or distance themselves from national, regional, or local styles and sounds in their own creative activity (Kiwan and Meinhof 2011, 8-10). In a settlement context, these cultural manoeuvres can impact migrant musicians' social, creative, and economic opportunities, as well as their personal geographic trajectories.

Kiwan and Meinhof's discussion of music, migration, and translocality complements critical regionalist theory. As Powell (2007) explains, the concept of a region does not imply one rigidly bound space or place, but rather "a network of sites" (4). Different urban/suburban hubs, for instance, come together to form the Southern Ontario region (e.g., Toronto, Kitchener, Mississauga, Windsor, Hamilton, Ottawa, etc.). These urban centres are also connected to numerous small towns and rural communities within the region. All of these places are brought together through economic relationships and population flows. In a region like Southern Ontario, which is in close proximity to parts of the United States, these flows regularly cross national borders, establishing further reaching regional relations.

Physical trajectories and boundaries, however, represent only one limited dimension of the kinds of relations that define regions. Critical regionalist theory, which seeks to observe and problematize the rhetorical power of these relations, also considers regions as imagined, as cumulatively developed and contested cultural constructs (Powell 2007, 5). Here we can begin to see conceptual relationships between and within regions, including intersections between official designations and vernacular understandings of space and place. "At any site on the landscape," Powell argues, "multiple definitions of place are continually in play and at work, sometimes convivially and sometimes antagonistically" (Ibid.). He elaborates:

> Ideas of property, of homeland, of natural resources, of infrastructure; of city, county, school district, economic development zone, environmental hazard; of shit-

> hole, unspoiled paradise, dullsville; of wildness and weirdness and domestication and discipline—all swirl and interconnect and contend and contest in any given space (Ibid.).

Like the "social imaginary," which Taylor presents as a complex of "images, stories, and legends" (2002, 106) that help structure social interactions and practices, the kinds of constructs described above—regional imaginaries—have become particularly potent in contemporary postindustrial societies, and are shaped by cultural history, media, governmental policy, late capitalist economics, demographic shifts, and in juxtaposition to other regions. In this way, critical regionalism corresponds to the aforementioned assemblage theory. An assemblage, much like a region, "emerges in terms of its dynamic relationality and its aggressive way of organizing historical details and intersocial connections" (Herr 1996, 11). Of course, individuals, along with things like topography, climate, and the built environment, are at the centre of region/assemblage formation. As will become evident throughout this thesis, (extra)musical practices and related discourses provide one way for individuals to continuously make sense of and construct meaning around regions.

Methods

Ultimately, this thesis is envisioned as a history. More precisely, by focusing on participant's views, experiences, and practices within a broader history of both bluegrass and Toronto, this study can be considered a "microhistory." John Brewer (2010) notes that such histories are small scale, rely on multiple, often divergent points of view, and, befitting the question "why bluegrass in Toronto?," challenge the conventional notions of "who and what count as history" (Brewer 2010, 99). Microhistories focus on the everyday, the historically mundane, as way of relating broader histories and revealing "an otherwise obscure social world" (91). Perhaps most significantly, they emphasize the agency of historical actors. Participants, in Brewer's terms, "are

the subjects not objects of history" (89). This is an important distinction in my research, for I view the scene and the city as not merely contexts of participants' everyday musical practices, but as produced through these practices.

It also means that rather than attempt to construct a totalistic history of a solidified scene, I acknowledge the inevitable gaps, biases, and incongruences that emerge when operating on such a small scale. Indeed, while the detail and narrative arc of this history are rooted in a robust foundation of in-depth interviews and archival research, it is not definitive. Rather than ignore those inconveniences that get in the way of producing a clean, authoritative historical account, however, a microhistorical approach encourages scholars to engage with discrepancies and examine perspectives that might otherwise be disregarded as skewed or misinformed, but can reveal certain assumptions, discursive tensions, and areas of fragmentation.

Research participants, of course, were not included haphazardly without concern for some fundamental historical accuracy. And certainly, some participants played a more central role in developing my understanding of the scene. My contacts for this research started with a small list of names garnered from Canadian bluegrass records and/or provided by my supervisor, Neil Rosenberg, who, through his own scholarly interest in bluegrass, established relationships with musicians and enthusiasts throughout Canada. During the early stages of my research, this list expanded rapidly as a handful of eager-to-help individuals provided other leads to prominent musicians, organizers, entrepreneurs, and enthusiasts. In particular, Doug Benson, co-founder of the defunct Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee (TABC), maintained contact with many scene participants and facilitated both one-on-one and group interviews. Through him, it quickly became apparent that many of the friendships that were established through the scene in the 1960s and 1970s had endured, with some participants meeting up regularly in small groups, or

less frequently during TABC reunions. Over the course of five months in 2013, I conducted in-depth interviews with many of the people in my growing list of research participants. During this time I was also invited along to social gatherings at bluegrass shows in Toronto and in former TABC members' homes. These informal engagements provided opportunities to meet participants and discuss bluegrass in a more general sense. Listening to old friends reminisce or directly share what they thought was an important detail about the Toronto scene they participated in, also provided details, interpretations, and points of departure that I introduced into my formal interviews.

Throughout my fieldwork I also facilitated numerous small group interviews (ranging from two to four participants). Similar to the informal social gatherings, during these meetings participants fed off of each other's comments or collaborated to accurately recall events. And, naturally, sometimes they would challenge one another's recollections or understanding of scene activity, developments, and dynamics. In this way, the small group interviews resemble Hyltén-Cavallius' (2012) interpretation of "memoryscaping," in which individuals "are involved in sharing, discussing, and even negotiating memories" (290). He elaborates, citing Katherine Young's notion of "joint storytelling," by describing how groups of people "[assemble] a memoryscape out of different and sometimes diverging memories of places, artists and songs" (Ibid.). These kinds of interviews not only underlined shared points of significance, but perhaps more compelling, they enabled discrepancies, disagreements, and disparate perspectives to become entangled.

For the most part, I piloted these small group sessions with my own set of questions. At points, however, the dynamic shifted and participants began to take the lead, asking questions of each other as a way to understand their peers' retrospective viewpoints, activities, and

participation in the scene. In these situations, my research benefitted from their rapport as longtime friends and companions in the Toronto area bluegrass scene, highlighting the small, (inter)personal stories and events that influenced the scene or their involvement in it. In addition, some participants shared media (locally produced albums, personal field recordings, videotaped television appearances, magazines), and memorabilia (e.g., an original TABC event banner, photographs, etc.) that also shaped our discussions. These items seeped in and out of our interview sessions, often serving the dual purpose of stirring nostalgia among the participants and calling attention to something of significance for my research. Indeed, as some participants repeatedly described events, spaces, or people as "pivotal" to understanding the scene and urged me not to overlook certain fine detail in my analysis, it became clear that I wasn't the only one invested in this research project.

As I began to explore documents related to the Toronto area bluegrass scene, it also became apparent that this desire to historicize scene activity emerged relatively early. Between 1967 and 1987, participants in the Toronto area scene documented their activity—directly and indirectly—through newsletters and, later, magazines. In addition to providing a concrete timeline of how events unfolded, these documents present some of the dialogues, debates, infrastructural developments, and discursive shifts that took place during the scene's boom period. Doug Benson's handmade newsletter, *Bluegrass Breakdown* (7 issues published between 1967 and 1969), provides a glimpse of the early scene formation as enthusiasts began to find each other and put forward ideas for promoting bluegrass in Toronto and the rest of Canada. Later, the *TABC News* (80 issues published nearly every month between 1972 and 1980) depicts the growth of an interconnected grassroots scene and a professional infrastructure for bluegrass in Canada. The launch of the glossy *Canadian Bluegrass Review* (54 issues published between 1978 and

1987) signaled an expanding network of bluegrass activity across the country and broader interest in promoting and learning about Canadian bands, sounds, and festivals. In addition to these three main archival sources, local bluegrass activity appeared in other small newsletters (e.g., *Sing & String*, *Breakdown*) and occasionally in the mainstream media (e.g, *the Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, CBC Radio). For this research, the value of these sources is in the countless editorial notes, opinion pieces, event listings, reader letters, reviews, and educational as well as historical features (including features on the TABC), all of which corroborate, and at times challenge or further nuance some of the historical details that surfaced in the interviews.[11]

Finally, I want to address the issue of geographic boundaries. While this study begins in Toronto, it soon becomes evident that the personal trajectories and creative activity of participants extends well beyond the city proper. Indeed, by the final chapters, this thesis could be considered a history of bluegrass in the province of Ontario, or even part of a larger history of Canadian bluegrass. Because of this, I often refer to bluegrass in the "Toronto area" or "in and around Toronto." These qualifiers capture both the development of the city and movement through the growing network of smaller urban hubs and suburbs in mid-century Southern Ontario. Placing Toronto at the centre of this activity—which was equally vibrant in areas throughout Ontario like Hamilton, Burlington, and London—risks flirting with the loaded geopolitics surrounding the much-derided notion of Toronto as the "centre of Canada."[12] Grounding my research in Toronto, however, affords a close analysis of the complex migratory

[11] Neil Rosenberg provided full runs of *Bluegrass Breakdown*, *TABC News*, and *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, as well as other archival items from his personal collection currently available at the Memorial University of Newfoundland.

[12] Toronto centrism, and criticisms thereof, surface regularly in Canadian media and public discourse. The independent documentary film *Let's All Hate Toronto* (2007) presents a direct, albeit tongue-in-cheek overview of the antipathy towards the city.

patterns, urban push and pull factors, urban development, and established, but flexible regionalisms and place narratives that continuously shaped a well-documented cultural scene.

Chapter Summary

As a whole, this thesis presents a fairly straightforward, linear history of the development of the Toronto area bluegrass scene from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s. Exploring different theoretical approaches throughout, however, illuminates different facets of scene activity and produces new insights. Therefore, the chronological boundaries between chapters are often blurred, with overlapping analysis adding further depth to our understanding of particular periods.

Chapter two sets the course for this study through a discussion of three major migratory trends that would shape scene dynamics: 1) the migration of rural, working-class Canadians to Toronto (especially from the Atlantic provinces); 2) the movement of young middle-class people into and through the urban core; and, 3) the arrival of American immigrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of whom were conscientious objectors to the Vietnam war. Examining each of these migratory trends helps to contextualize subsequent chapters by shedding light on the early history of bluegrass in Toronto, the city's post-World War II development, local folk revival activity, and a pervasive countercultural movement.

Chapter three focuses on individual and collective efforts to learn/learn about bluegrass music in the years preceding a recognizable scene. Here we began to see the formation of a loose community working towards building bluegrass knowledge. Observing many enthusiasts' sense of distance from bluegrass' presumed rural heartland, this discussion offers a way to explore some of the dominant place narratives attached to Toronto and the American regions from which the genre emerged.

Chapter Four overlaps with the previous chapter by describing the coordinated scene- and network-building activities that resulted in a grassroots infrastructure for bluegrass in the city. Here, particular individuals, institutions, and spaces began to emerge as hubs within an increasingly palpable local scene. At the same time, it also becomes clear that the Toronto scene is positioned within and connected to a larger, transnational bluegrass movement. The scene-building activity discussed in Chapter Four served as a catalyst for the intensification of bluegrass activity during the second half of the 1970s. I examine these developments in Chapters 5 and 6, shifting terminology to consider how grassroots collective activity contributed to and became entwined with a professional art world made up of working bands, record labels, studios, media, and a growing festival circuit. Two major developments stand out in these corresponding chapters. First, as integrated grassroots and professional networks expanded, by the mid-1970s the links between bluegrass activity in Toronto and in other areas throughout Ontario became more pronounced. Second, influenced by a heightened nationalist discourse in post-Centennial Canada, emerging professional bands found support among local audiences who were beginning to form ideas around, negotiate, and, in some cases, embrace the notion of "Canadian bluegrass."

Chapter Seven covers the same period as the previous two chapters (ca. 1975-1980). Instead of emphasizing the ways that the scene was expanding and becoming more solidified, however, I draw on assemblage theory to examine emerging lines of fragmentation. Here, I revisit the migratory trends discussed in Chapter two as a way of charting various parallel scenes and divergent movements that intersected with and sometimes challenged the Toronto area bluegrass scene. The concluding chapter describes the gradual decline of bluegrass activity in and around Toronto through the 1980s before offering some final thoughts on the implications of this research in relation to contemporary urban scenes in postindustrial Toronto.

Chapter Two

Migration and Movement: The Early History of Bluegrass in Toronto

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Toronto experienced waves of immigration from the British Isles, continental Europe, and China. While many were escaping socio-environmental disasters (e.g., the Irish famine) or persecution (as in the case of European Jews), most were drawn to the economic opportunities available in a rapidly developing industrial urban centre. This pull factor became even more pronounced in the aftermath of World War II as North America was shaped by waves of immigrants from decimated regions throughout Europe. Because of the city's substantial and wide-reaching immigration history, by the 1960s Toronto was beginning to acquire a reputation as a "world in a city" (Troper 2000).

While newcomers from overseas have and continue to influence Toronto's social, political, economic, and cultural profile, the historical emphasis on transcontinental immigration—informed by the post-Centennial discourse of national multiculturalism—overshadows equally significant histories of short-range migratory trajectories within Canada and the United States. People from Canada's other provinces, nearby towns, as well as stateside regions have long passed through or settled permanently in Toronto. This was especially so during the post-War years, when an urban construction boom, in conjunction with the development of the Trans-Canada Highway, drew residents from Canada's more economically depressed regions. In his study of the reception of migrants from the Atlantic provinces, for instance, Greg Marquis (2010) notes that the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area received "an estimated 1,000 [Canadian born migrants] a month […] between 1956-1961" (para. 3).

In some respects, the early history of bluegrass in Toronto illuminates movement to and within the city, as well as accompanying attitudes towards migrants and the changing urban

landscape. Focusing on the pull of mid-century North American cities, this chapter examines how small-scale migrations created the conditions for a local bluegrass scene by providing a patchwork of diverse individuals, creative resources, and knowledge sets. I begin by profiling Toronto's first bluegrass group, the York County Boys. Their story highlights the migration of rural, working-class Canadians, particularly from the Atlantic provinces, but also from nearby small towns. Drawn to Toronto's employment opportunities, many newcomers arrived with shared musical traditions or interests, including exposure to country and bluegrass music broadcast from far-reaching American radio stations. As is the case with many mass migrations, these musical interests served as points of exchange and community-building among newcomers.

I then consider the trajectories of middle-class urban and suburban youth, as well as youth from elsewhere in Canada, during the late-1950s and through the 1960s. In this case, young people were drawn to the city's cultural and social opportunities, which provided an urban bohemian alternative to "square" suburbanism and rural conservatism. Perhaps the most visible manifestations of this trend were the urban folk revival and Toronto's burgeoning Yorkville scene, both of which contained countercultural elements that would maintain a complex relationship with local bluegrass throughout the late-1960s and 1970s. During the height of the folk revival in Toronto (ca. 1960-66), middle-class youth were only minimally involved in public bluegrass performance. Their presence, however, is essential in understanding the discourses of authenticity, formation of genre boundaries, and social dynamics that would permeate the local bluegrass scene through the 1970s.

Finally, I consider the arrival of young American immigrants in the late 1960s and 1970s. In addition to evading mandatory military service, conscientious objectors were often motivated by their own romantic conceptualizations of Canada as a "peaceable kingdom" (Edwardson 2009,

88) and, despite Toronto's metropolitan character, the nation's sparse, natural landscape. Along with other demographic groups mentioned above, American migrants, many of whom participated in stateside folk scenes, are recognized as key collaborators in developing a Toronto area bluegrass scene.

Exploring these migratory trajectories, as well as the discourse that accompanies them, invites a critical regionalist approach to the spatial and cultural dynamics within Toronto's bluegrass scene. In his study of how (and to what ends) Appalachia is socially constructed as a region, literary scholar Douglas Reichert Powell (2007) maintains, "region is always a relational term" (4). He elaborates:

> When we talk about a region, we are talking not about a stable, boundaried, autonomous place but about cultural history, the cumulative, generative effect of the interplay among the various, competing definitions of that region. And in so doing, we are, inevitably, contributing to that cultural history, participating in the ongoing creation of regional identities (5).

Indeed, looking at the development of the Toronto area bluegrass scene reveals how local scene activity involves networks of exchange, participation, and discourse that extend across regional, provincial, and national borders. This chapter, then, not only provides historical context for the development of bluegrass in Toronto, it also introduces the themes of movement, dialogism, and regional imaginaries that pervade the city's bluegrass scene into the 1970s and beyond.

The York County Boys and Interprovincial Migration to Mid-century Toronto

In the years following World War II, economic priorities in Canada shifted from resource-oriented industries towards manufacturing and its offshoot sectors in the country's rapidly growing urban-suburban regions.[13] In and around Toronto, many individuals found work in industrial sites such as auto plants and textile factories; others occupied downtown office

[13] Natural resources remained a large part of the economy in certain regions throughout Canada.

buildings in the city's finance and commerce sectors; and still more provided services for the growing population or were drawn towards the booming construction sector responsible for expanding and/or reinforcing an increasingly strained residential and commercial infrastructure. In order to seize this economic surge, the city required labour power well beyond the capacity of domestic human resources and political leaders reluctantly reached out to Eastern and Southern European immigrants, as well as those residing in rural areas throughout Ontario and the rest of Canada.[14]

To varying degrees, the core members of the York County Boys were each influenced by the push and pull factors that shaped the small-scale trajectories of individuals migrating to and moving within an expanding city. Mike Cameron (guitar) came from the small town of Beaverton, just over 100 kilometres north of Toronto, and arrived in the city after securing a job manufacturing machine guns at the tail end of WWII.[15] Brian Barron (fiddle), on the other hand, grew up in the village of Long Branch, a mostly residential development in the southwest corner of Toronto.[16] Still living at home when the band formed in 1954, Barron represented a generation of suburban youth drawn to the city's social and cultural opportunities (more will be said about this trend in the following section). The remaining three group members—Rex Yetman (mandolin; Jamestown, Newfoundland), Fred "Dusty" Legere (bass; St. Paul, New Brunswick), and "Big" John McManaman (banjo; Springhill, Nova Scotia)—all arrived in Toronto between 1948 and 1952. They came to the city as young men looking for work and were

[14] In Canada, anti-immigrant sentiment and exploitative policy festered in the first half of the 20th century. Harold Troper (2000) notes that many "non-British or -American immigrants" were originally unwelcome in cities and nudged, through Canadian immigration policies, "into non-urban and labour-intensive industries like railway construction, mining, lumbering, and, most particularly, farming" (5).

[15] Historical details about the York County Boys are drawn largely from an unpublished article by Neil Rosenberg (2000), the transcript of an interview Rosenberg conducted with Rex Yetman in 1999, and Adrian Bevis' (1978) profile of the group in the *TABC News*.

[16] After a series of amalgamations starting in 1967, Long Branch, once an independent municipality, officially became part of the City of Toronto in 1998.

part of a large outmigration from Canada's Atlantic provinces. Because east coast migrants surface so prominently in the development of bluegrass in Toronto, the remainder of this section focuses largely on the York County Boys' story in relation to this migration and prevailing attitudes towards "Maritimers."

In his research on this migratory trend, Greg Marquis (2010), notes that the percentage of Toronto's population born in the Atlantic provinces (i.e., New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, P.E.I., and Newfoundland) had grown from approximately 4 per cent in 1951 to 4.7 per cent a decade later (para. 3). What's more, by 1961, Atlantic Canadians residing in Toronto "represented 49 per cent of all interprovincial migrants" (Ibid.). This, of course, corresponded with a massive population decline in the Atlantic provinces as young, working-class men and families withdrew from the precarious work available in rural resource sectors, attracted instead to more stable and gainful construction and manufacturing jobs in developing urban areas.

Rex Yetman's migration story reflects the character of Atlantic Canada's demographic shift. He was raised in the Bonavista Bay area of Newfoundland, a region whose population was particularly impacted by outmigration to Ontario during the 1950s and 1960s (Marquis 2010, para. 5). Like many families in rural Newfoundland, Yetman's father, a carpenter, was accustomed to working abroad for long stretches. During the 1920s and 1930s he would leave to work in Boston or New York from spring until early winter. Into the war years, the migratory trajectories shortened as Yetman's father, and later his older brothers, began spending the seasonal working months in Newfoundland's capital city, St. John's. Approaching the 1950s, some of Yetman's brothers sought more stable, year-round work and set out to establish roots in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Their relocation followed a chain migration pattern, in which the brothers entered a loose support network of acquaintances, family, and other east coast migrants already

settled in the new territory. In 1951, Rex Yetman, now aged seventeen, and his parents reconnected with their family in Southern Ontario. The following year he pursued a construction job that took him to Toronto, where the presence of Atlantic-Maritime migrants was significant (Rosenberg 1999).

As a result of chain migration, many migrants settled in certain neighbourhoods across Toronto which provided a community support network of peers with shared experiences of the rural-urban transition (Marquis 2010, para. 9). While this meant that informal communities formed, to some extent, among clusters of Canadians from the east coast, a more accurate portrayal would include migrants from rural Ontario and Quebec associated with working-class communities. Indeed, many relationships that began in the work place subsequently trickled into public gathering spaces and leisure time. This social dynamic is reflected in the formation of the York County Boys.

In mid-century Toronto, country music clubs, held in places like the Polish Hall in the city's west end, were a regular recreational gathering space for rural working-class migrants (Rosenberg 2000). Club members[17] would congregate on Sunday evenings to perform and listen to country music in the company of friends, workmates, and fellow migrants. During this time, strong country music markets were fostered in the rural communities throughout Southern Ontario and Eastern Canada that were within broadcast range of American radio stations. Rosenberg (1976; 1994; 2005, 177) and Narváez (1978), for instance, have both examined the popularity of country music in the Atlantic provinces where American radio station WWVA from Wheeling, West Virginia, and its popular country music program "World's Original Jamboree," was a prevalent facet of the rural mediascape. Both authors note how American

[17] Rosenberg (2000) notes that requiring "membership" was a strategy to undermine local bylaws that "forbade the charging of admissions on Sundays."

country music was incorporated into the repertoires of local musicians, and describe the regional styles that emerged as performers fused this popular commercial influence with local folk music culture. Indeed, Maritime artists such as Hank Snow, Wilf Carter, and Don Messer, as well as early bluegrass artists such as Vic Mullen and Ron Scott, became key players in the early Canadian country music industry.[18] Meanwhile audiences in the Atlantic provinces, along with other parts of rural Canada, became the predominant market for country music.

Several members of the York County Boys evoke the presence of commercial country music and the ways it mingled with grassroots music in their communities. Members of Rex Yetman's immediate family were amateur instrumentalists and music enthusiasts who regularly gathered to listen to the WSM's Grand Ole Opry on Saturday nights. He recalls his intrigue upon first hearing artists like Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys and the Lonesome Pine Fiddlers on the Opry: "I really didn't know what instrumentation they were using then, like I'd never heard anybody call it a five-string banjo. And I was wondering how you could get all those notes in. Thinking [they] were playing with a flat pick[19] (Yetman interview with Rosenberg, 1999).

John McManaman, who was also raised in a relatively musical family in Springhill, Nova Scotia, started experimenting on his father's guitar as a child. He recalls tuning into WWVA from West Virginia on Saturday nights where he grew fond of music by the Lilly Brothers and Molly O'Day (Rosenberg 2000). His family was acquainted with Ron Scott, a resident of Amherst, Nova Scotia and an early bluegrass performer who released the first Canadian

[18] Ron Scott and Vic Mullen both hailed from Nova Scotia. Scott spent much of his adult life performing in Quebec and Ontario (more about his career below). Mullen worked as a musician in Southern Ontario through the 1950s, playing most notably with the Barrie-based band Country Harmony Boys before returning to Nova Scotia where he joined the cast of Don Messer's *Jubilee* and formed his own group, the Birch Mountain (Berland 1979, 22-26). Both artists performed with the York County Boys.

[19] This is in reference to the single plectrum used to pick a guitar or mandolin. The banjo style that Yetman is referring to involves three finger picks used to create rapid arpeggios. This sound would be very difficult to achieve with a flat pick.

bluegrass single in 1957.[20] Influenced by Scott, McManaman would eventually begin developing a bluegrass repertoire on mandolin and fiddle (Ibid.).

Through the late-1950s and into the 1960s, Ron Scott was also involved in country/bluegrass and folk music scenes in Montreal. There he performed as a member of the Cinch Brothers alongside artists like Bobby Hill and Jean Carignan, among others. He and Hill also hosted the popular country music radio program, *Hometown Jamboree* on Montreal's CFCF. In many ways, the Montreal and Toronto area scenes developed in parallel and, as will become apparent throughout this thesis, there was a fair bit of contact and movement between the two scenes.

Meanwhile, in rural Ontario, Mike Cameron remembers the square dances hosted on his family's farm near Beaverton. He admired his musical aunts and uncles, especially his uncle Ambrose Greenwood who played fiddle with the local troupe Hannigan's Mountaineers. He also recalls listening to his grandmother's collection of early country records, which included the pre-bluegrass sounds of the Carter Family and the Monroe Brothers (Rosenberg 2000). Encouraged by family and others in the community, Cameron began to develop his own instrumental skill at an early age, starting on the Hawaiian guitar before purchasing a Hensel flattop guitar in later years (Ibid.).[21]

The York County Boys came together through work-facilitated relationships that carried over into the informal country music club gatherings. Yetman recalls how a co-worker who knew he was interested in music, invited him to the Polish Hall to meet his friend John McManaman, who frequented the Sunday night country music sessions. The two discovered a mutual enthusiasm for bluegrass and soon after decided to form a guitar and fiddle duo. Despite early difficulties learning bluegrass in a city with limited resources for exploring the music, the duo were able to

[20] "The White Rose" b/w "When the Bees are in their Hive" (Spartan 4-447-R).

[21] Arthur Hensel built guitars in Toronto from the 1920s through to the 1950s. Many of his instruments were sold through the Toronto-based instrument retailer, R.S. Williams and Co.

secure occasional gigs within the country music club scene. At one such show, they encountered Mike Cameron, who was singing harmony in another country group. After chatting for some time, the three, enthralled with bluegrass, decided to form a group and devoted the next several months to honing their musical knowledge and skill. Conveniently unemployed during this time, they spent their days in Yetman and McManaman's west-end apartment, learning their instruments and building a repertoire. McManaman took up banjo and helped Yetman find his way around a borrowed mandolin. Equally important in this learning process were the hours spent listening studiously to early bluegrass recordings and trying to capture the sounds of Bill Monroe and Flatt and Scruggs (Rosenberg 2000). I discuss these kinds of learning strategies in greater detail in Chapter three.

Given the trio's lifestyle and dedication to learning bluegrass music during this period, it seems appropriate to consider some prevalent attitudes towards and stereotypes about rural east coast migrants in mid-century Toronto.[22] Because of their perceived clustering in working-class neighbourhoods like Parkdale, St. James Town, and the Warden Woods housing project (Marquis 2010, para. 9), migrants from Atlantic Canada had a conspicuous presence within the city. Following from this, an ambivalent cultural identity made up of both negative stereotypes and romantic appreciation began to form around those labeled as "Maritimers" (Marquis 2010). On the one hand, Maritimers (a catch all term for anyone from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, P.E.I., and New Brunswick)[23] were viewed as hard-working, simple "folk" who "took the time to enjoy the important things in life" (para. 7). Maritimers, who presumably moved at a slower pace, valued community and, weren't afraid to get their hands dirty, represented an admirable—

[22] It is important to note that there is no indication of whether or not members of the York County Boys experienced direct prejudice. Nor am I suggesting that the band members' biographies legitimate these stereotypes.

[23] Historically, only Nova Scotia, P.E.I., and New Brunswick are considered Maritime Provinces. Those three provinces, with the addition of Newfoundland and Labrador, are often referred to as the Atlantic Provinces.

naive—vestige of pre-modern values. On the other hand, however, they were problematized as uneducated, rowdy deviants whose thirst for alcohol and predilection for welfare benefits negated their reputed work ethic. In a 1963 interview, for instance, Mildred Dimms of the Metro Travellers' Aid Society, plainly expressed the perceived challenge of east coast migrants, stating, "People from the Maritimes are often uneducated**,** unprepared for big city life and have little to offer" (Dimms in Marquis 2010, para. 11). Toronto alderman Michael Grayson further developed the negative stereotype, putting forward the notion of freewheeling Maritimers, settling in the city's limited affordable housing while living off of the public purse: "You have a fellow drive up here in a broken-down car, climb into the St. James Town area, get on welfare and he's having the time of his life" (Grayson 1965 in Marquis 2010, para. 12).

At times, these divergent views of Atlantic Canadian migrants surfaced in the complex image of a rough-hewn, troubled, but sincere and vulnerable figure. Combined with a romanticized working-class deviancy, one redeemable facet of this Maritimer stereotype was their presumed attachment to a longstanding folk culture, often marked by informal music-making. In Toronto, Marquis (2010) observes, such representations appeared in exposés with titles like "Hard Luck Maritimers" (Morrison, *Toronto Daily Star,* 1965) and "With Guitar and Dreams: Maritime Migrants: White Socks in the Big City" (Bagnell, *Toronto Globe Magazine*, 1969). In these pieces, Maritimers not only casually perform country songs like Merle Haggard's "Sing Me Back Home" at local gatherings, they *are* the beer-swilling and easygoing, broken and displaced characters that populate country music lyrics, and which ran counter to the dominant puritanical values of mid-century Toronto.

Marquis observes another dimension of the Maritimer stereotype that is particularly relevant to the development of bluegrass in Toronto. Local leaders and media, he notes, drew frequent

comparisons between Atlantic migrants and rural Appalachian people who were similarly attracted to employment opportunities in Northeastern and Midwestern American cities. Writing for the *Toronto Daily Star* in 1965, for instance, Harold Morrison views Maritimers as the "spiritual cousins" of those living in the Appalachian regions (para. 13) while another report refers to the Maritimes as "Canada's 'deep south'" (para. 27). Mary Hufford (2002) argues that Appalachia has been socially constructed as the "other to modernity" (62) and represents all that rapid development leaves behind—"community values, uncommodified nature and artistry, wholeness" (64). This is met with a parallel impulse to nurture vulnerable Appalachians as they are thrust into the modern world (Ibid.). Indeed, Maritimers, like Appalachian migrants, were often subject to a paternalistic romanticism that questioned the rootsy rural migrant's ability to cope with the pressures of urban life (Marquis 2010, para. 7). As east coast Canadians became more visible in the Toronto area bluegrass scene through the 1970s, such comparisons circulated among many participants, though, given Appalachia's valued position in the overall narrative of bluegrass music, romantic appreciation took priority over concern for their wellbeing.

Returning to the formation of the York County Boys, in the process of securing their first gigs, the novice group auditioned a number of additional players to round out their bluegrass sound, and were eventually joined by Fred Legere (bass) and Brian Barron (fiddle). Legere moved to Toronto from St. Paul, New Brunswick in 1948. He was moderately interested in music as a child, but only pursued it in earnest upon joining a country band made up of fellow New Brunswick migrants living in Toronto.

Brian Barron, who grew up in a residential community on the edge of Toronto, was a capable fiddler and a welcome addition to the group's developing sound. What's more, at sixteen years of age—"just old enough to have a driver's license" (Rosenberg 2000)—he had few

commitments and, unlike some of the working-class fiddlers appearing at the country music clubs, was open to playing in a semi-professional band. Adding to the group's dynamic, McManaman occasionally paired with Barron for lush twin fiddle numbers that further distinguished the York County Boys' bluegrass sound from other local country acts.

By 1954 the York County Boys were a cohesive unit and were having little difficulty finding work in and around Toronto. Between dances, fall fairs, farmer's markets, and country music clubs, Yetman recalls regularly filling the band's schedule with three to four gigs a week (Rosenberg 2000). Through the mid-1950s the group became increasingly professionalized. In 1955 they landed a high profile gig opening for their idol and Grand Ole Opry star Bill Monroe. The next year they auditioned for and were featured on the Canadian Broadcasting Company's (CBC) nationally televised and immensely popular talent show "Pick the Stars," where they successfully competed against elite performers. Hoping to capitalize on this exposure, in the summer of 1956, the York County Boys organized a Maritime tour.

This venture highlights two noteworthy details. First, it speaks to the interprovincial lines of communication and two-way traffic that often connect migrants to their homelands. Indeed, Legere and McManaman, the group's two Maritime-born members, laid the groundwork, setting up gigs within driving distance of Moncton, New Brunswick, as well as regular appearances on CKCW radio and television, also based in Moncton. The remaining band members followed once these engagements were arranged. Second, the group's decision to target the Maritimes underlines the region as a thriving market for county music. The York County Boys benefitted from this enthusiasm. The shows were well advertised through the band's weekly television and radio appearances and, as Yetman recalls, "We were getting letters coming into the radio station

from Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island asking us to come play there" (Yetman interview with Rosenberg 1999).

Given the band member's largely working-class backgrounds, it is perhaps unsurprising that the excitement surrounding their professional performance activity was, at times, offset by the common middle/working-class anxieties associated with employment and income security. For Cameron, who was concerned about losing his job as a shipper in Toronto, these tensions began to surface just a few weeks into the group's tour when he decided to return to Ontario. Somewhat disheartened, but sensitive to what Yetman refers to as Cameron's "work conscientious[ness]" (Ibid.)—and unwilling to continue without their guitarist and emcee—the band packed up their car and abruptly returned to Toronto. This change of course not only illustrates the tensions that can exist between the demands of conventional fulltime employment schemes and artistic loyalties within a professionalizing ensemble, it accents the economic territorialization of mid-century Canada.

Upon returning to Toronto, the York County Boys were deflated and went on a brief hiatus. Not long after, however, Philip Anderson approached the band to record a full-length album for Arc Records, a label he was attempting to launch in the Toronto area. Excited about the opportunity, in 1958[24] they entered what Yetman describes as a "make-shift," single microphone studio in Scarborough, then a developing suburb on Toronto's eastern border (Yetman interview with Rosenberg 1999). The session took just one afternoon and yielded a mix of contemporary bluegrass covers from artists like Bill Monroe, Flatt and Scruggs, and Reno and Smiley, as well as instrumental tunes, including McManaman's original "York County Breakdown."

[24] In his interview with Neil Rosenberg, Yetman seems unsure of the recording and release dates of the York County Boys' album. He suggests fall 1957, but given the roll out of Arc Records, which was established in 1958 and began releasing records in 1959, it's more likely the band gathered in a studio sometime in 1958.

The resulting album, *Bluegrass Jamboree*, was released sometime later in 1959 and situated the York County Boys securely within the growing Canadian country music industry. Often cited as the first full-length bluegrass album produced in Canada, the album's sound was distinct within the Canadian country landscape and the band was able to corner a niche bluegrass market. With the release of *Bluegrass Jamboree* their music appeared on radio stations throughout Ontario and they secured additional exposure on television programs like CBC's *Country Hoedown*. What's more, their gigs became more prestigious, with opening slots for Bill Monroe, the Bailey Brothers, and national tours supporting Mac Wiseman (Rosenberg 2000). Not only did *Bluegrass Jamboree* benefit the York County Boys' professional status, selling over 30,000 copies, it was also a gem for the fledgling Arc Records (Ibid.).

At the same time that the band was making waves among Canadian country music fans, a new market for folk music began to emerge among mostly urban youth. Several authors have observed the complex status of bluegrass within the early 1960s urban folk revival (e.g., Cantwell 2003, ch. 8; Malone 2002, ch. 10; Rosenberg 2005, chs. 5 and 6; Thompson 2004, 154-157). For many revivalists, bluegrass, with its acoustic instrumentation, homespun aesthetic, and a repertory peppered with old-time tunes, represented a folk "authenticity" entirely separate from what was happening in the commercial music industry. At the same time, cultural and political tensions between young urban revivalists and seasoned, often southern bluegrass performers influenced both the former's attitudes towards the artists and, consequently, many artists' performance style in revival contexts. In the following section, I will examine the folk revival in Toronto in greater detail. For now, however, I want to consider how this new audience impacted the York County Boys' career.

As the most visible local bluegrass act, the York County Boys were, to some extent, well received by folk revivalists in the Toronto area. In addition to the intimate coffee house gigs that came with entertaining this new audience,[25] perhaps the most notable indicator of their acceptance among Toronto folk enthusiasts was the band's appearance at the first Mariposa Folk Festival in August 1961. Mariposa, which was modeled after the popular Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island, was originally held in the town of Orillia, about 130 kilometres north of Toronto. The York County Boys were placed on a two-day bill that featured emerging Canadian folk artists such as Bonnie Dobson, Omar Blondahl, Jean Carignan, and Ian Tyson and Sylvia Fricker[26] (Jennings 1997, 35-36; Mitchell 2007, 80-82). On the Friday night of the festival, they were also featured at a more informal "Midnight Street Jamboree," where the band provided instrumental tunes for an open-air square dance (Jennings 1997, 35-36; Rosenberg 2000).

The York County Boys, however, were not immune to the mixed attitudes towards bluegrass music and performance that circulated within the folk revival. In May 1961, the newly established Guild of Canadian Folk Artists invited the band to perform on a bill at the University of Toronto's Hart House Theatre. In his generally positive review of the band's set, John Stricek (1961) notes "The York County Boys were the first introduction of 'Bluegrass' music to many Torontonians" (10). He then alludes to the music's prevalence in the country's east coast and acknowledges the band's musical skill, despite their discordant sense of humour:

> The Maritime provinces enjoy clear radio reception from Tennessee, the origin of 'bluegrass,' which now thrives on our east coast. We thank the York County Boys for importing it further inland. These lads are proficient instrumentalists and their music blended well with the theme of the evening, though perhaps their humour did not (Ibid.).

[25] Similar to folk revival scenes throughout northeastern American cities and college towns, coffee houses were a primary site for live folk music in Toronto. Some of the more notable coffee houses associated with the city's folk scene in the early 1960s, when the York County Boys were active, include the Village Corner, the Penny Farthing, the Gate of Cleve, and the Fifth Peg (Henderson 2011; Jennings 1997; Mitchell 2007, 118).

[26] Soon after Mariposa, the duo achieved commercial success as Ian and Sylvia.

In his analysis of bluegrass stage banter, John Bealle (1993) notes that "while urban revival audiences were enthusiastic about bluegrass *music*, they were slow to accept and understand the humor that […] accompanied it" and that "some ordinarily reliable stage devices were largely misunderstood" (67). With this in mind, Stricek's uncomplimentary reaction to the York County Boy's humour is unsurprising. Fred Legere and Mike Cameron, who were responsible for much of the York County Boy's comic stage banter, mimicked the skits of established American country groups and developed "funny man/straight man" routines for the group's live show (Rosenberg 2000). While speculative, it is possible that many in the Hart House audience viewed the band's banter as hokey, unsophisticated, or awkwardly presumed a layer of irony. Alternatively, the routines, which made frequent use of "hillbilly" character tropes rooted in minstrelsy (Bealle 1993, 66), might have clashed with the political sensibilities of many urban folk revivalists.

A few months later, covering the band's Mariposa set for the American folk music magazine *Sing Out!*, Samuel Gesser obliquely criticizes what he views as a stale performance, stating "this Canadian (?) [*sic*] Bluegrass group emitted a musical sound that pleased everyone in the audience except that small minority who look for invention between musicians, not repetition" (Gesser in Rosenberg 2005, 177). Gesser's comments are typical of the prickly discourse of (folk) cultural distinction that surfaced within the urban folk revival and, as discussed later, often mingled with leftist political ideology. Moreover, by directly questioning the band's legitimacy as a "Canadian [?] Bluegrass group," Gesser, a Montreal-born writer and producer, provides an early example of the reservations surrounding Canadian-made bluegrass, a dominant discursive theme through the late 1960s and into the 1970s.

As the 1960s progressed, the York County Boys slowly fizzled out as a cohesive performing unit. Adrian Bevis maintains that the band were "casualties" of the declining interest in country or folk music in the wake of rock 'n' roll's popularity (*TABC News* March 1978, 2). Indeed, by the mid-1960s rock began to supplant folk as the preferred music among much of Toronto's youth culture (Henderson 2011, 40). Though the market for bluegrass would only grow into the 1970s, it is possible that the music's niche appeal pushed band members in different directions. Brian Barron, for instance, took his talents to other local country groups, including the popular Caribou Show Band and Eastwind. Likewise, Fred Legere provided bass for local country and folk artists before moving back to New Brunswick and starting a hardware business. Throughout much of the 1960s, Yetman and McManaman would assemble makeshift groups to fulfill engagement requests for the York County Boys. They even made regular appearances on television programs like *The Tommy Hunter Show* and *Country Music Hall.* They too, however, were drawn to other projects and interests. McManaman pursued work as a solo artist and studio musician. Meanwhile, Yetman became interested in raising show horses on his farm near Toronto while playing scarce gigs on the side. In 1979 he built a house in Jamestown, Newfoundland, preparing to make a permanent move back to his hometown.

By the time of Southern Ontario's bluegrass boom in the 1970s, the York County Boys were no longer an active group. They did, however, retain a low level celebrity among local enthusiasts, who might spot members at an informal picking session or on festival grounds.[27] As more domestic bands began to surface through the decade, they were also recognized as "pioneering bluegrass in the Toronto area" (Bevis, *TABC News* March 1978, 2). The band's out-of-print first album became a prized item among local record collectors (Benson, *Bluegrass*

[27] Adrian Bevis makes a special note of spotting Cameron, Yetman, and McManaman at the 1974 Shelburne Fiddle Festival (*TABC News* Nov. 1974, 4) and there is a passing reference to their attendance at picking sessions in the October 1973 *TABC News* (3).

Breakdown March 1968, 2) and in 1984, AHED Music, a small conglomerate that subsumed Arc Records, reissued *Bluegrass Jamboree*.[28] In an attempt to cement the band's historical import, the liner notes state: "…almost thirty years later [the York County Boys] would become a legend in the history of Bluegrass Music in Canada."

The Folk Revival in Toronto: Movement In and Around the City

By the early 1960s, many Toronto youth, like their counterparts in cities and college towns throughout the United States, were drawn to folk music, as well as some of its surrounding political and cultural ideals. This cultural moment, the folk revival, was rooted in a more politicized folksong "movement" (Cantwell 1996, 21) that emerged out of the economic and political turbulence of the 1930s. During this time, leftist political and labour organizations, largely concentrated in the northeast urban areas, advocated for the struggling American working-class and were particularly concerned with the plight of rural southerners (Mitchell 2007, 56).

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, through the accounts and collections of folklorists like Cecil Sharp and John and Alan Lomax, a romantic imagination already surrounded the cultural life of the rural south. Here, working southerners were viewed as the noble "common man" whose cultural practices were survivals of an uncontaminated pre-modern society. By the early 1930s, due in part to the Lomaxes' audio recorded folksong collections, an aesthetic domain was established around the idea of "the folk" which contributed to the creation

[28] The reissued album was retitled *A Bluegrass Legend* (AS 8219).

of a "cult of authenticity" (Filene 2000). Field recordings, the Lomaxes believed, cut out the socially privileged middleman and enabled "the folk" to present themselves to America.[29]

The notion of folksong as a vessel for the "voice of the people" (Filene 2000, 70) took on added weight in the highly politicized socialist movements. Conceptualizing themselves as allies of "the folk," Gillian Mitchell (2007) notes how many leftists were not so invested in the idea of rural southerners as victims, but instead aligned themselves with the "organic intellectualism" of grassroots activists and labourers (56; see Gramsci 1971, 5 for a discussion of organic intellectuals). Furthermore, as champions of folk culture, "simple," unrefined folksong not only represented pre-modern communal values, but, for northern urban audiences, the voices of "folk heroes" like Aunt Molly Jackson and Woody Guthrie were a repository of grassroots populist politics (58).

As the organized labour movement carried on into the 1940s, folksong became an increasingly prominent tool for political mobilization and folksingers were a ubiquitous presence at rallies and other venues for collective activity. Furthermore, middle-class, formally educated folksingers became increasingly conspicuous, sometimes appearing alongside glorified southern performers. The New York City-based Almanac Singers, for example, featured the Harvard educated Pete Seeger, within a collective of folk icons like Woody Guthrie, Josh White, and Burl Ives, who also played a tremendous role in popularizing folk song through both his solo performance career and weekly radio show, *The Wayfaring Stranger*. For a brief period, between 1940 and 1942, the group, which paired topical lyrics and an acoustic stringband sound, performed regularly at leftist political gatherings (Mitchell 2007, 60).

[29] That said, the collecting team relied heavily on mass media to promote their "discoveries." In doing so, they (especially the elder John Lomax) influenced how singers were presented and received. This is most evident in their working relationship with African American folk and blues musician, Lead Belly (Filene 2000, 57).

In addition to their overtly political engagements, there was also a demand for the Almanac Singers in New York City's growing folk music scene. Alongside union rallies and party fundraisers, the group appeared at more leisurely "hootenannies," where fellow activists, folk enthusiasts, and casual scene participants gathered to make and/or enjoy music in an informal social setting. This social facet of their performance sphere indicated an emerging commercial market for folk music, which the group capitalized on by recording and promoting a handful of albums.[30] The Almanac Singers were one of the first folk acts to sell recordings, but were unable to build upon their small successes before intergroup tensions and, with the United States' entry into WWII, military service pulled the group apart. It wasn't until after the war that Pete Seeger's new ensemble, the Weavers, set the stage for folk music as a commercial genre. Like the Almanac Singers, the Weavers were aligned with leftist politics. The group departed, however, in their refined sound. With clear vocal delivery, polished harmonies, and clean instrumentation the Weavers' music, like the work of former Almanac Singer and folk-popular music crossover star Burl Ives, was not only more focused than previous folk acts, it had tremendous commercial appeal.

The Weavers' initial rendezvous with the "mainstream" lasted just four years before they disbanded in 1952 when individual members were investigated by the House of Un-American Activities Committee and subsequently blacklisted as communist sympathizers.[31] Still, Mitchell (2007) argues that because of their popularity, "folk music had entered the public consciousness" (66) and became a somewhat visible, intellectual undercurrent in the popular music landscape. Folk music's true commercial potential was realized, however, with the release of the Kingston

[30] The Almanac Singers released four albums: *Songs for John Doe*, *Talking Union*, *Sod Buster Ballads*, and *Sea Chanties*, all released in 1941. The music on these 78rpm sets was influenced by the sounds of commercial country and western music and consisted of original labour songs, brazen political material, and traditional folksong.

[31] The group reunited in 1955 and disbanded again in 1963. They reunited occasionally up until the early 1980s.

Trio's immensely successful "Tom Dooley" in 1958.[32] This resulted in what Rosenberg (1993) calls the "great boom," a period in which young, middle-class urban audiences championed folk music and professional folk artists. Competing with rock 'n' roll groups and, to a lesser extent, jazz ensembles, folk music maintained a significant share of the lucrative youth market. From the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, youth-oriented folk scenes surfaced in cities and college towns throughout the United States. In addition to the amateur and emerging artists appearing at coffee houses and converging on public spaces like New York City's Washington Square, numerous commercial artists following the Kingston Trio's successful model, began to appear on the popular music charts.

The commercial facet of the folk revival complicated the political and cultural values rooted in the earlier folksong movement. Folk revivalists still produced protest music and, in the highly politicized early 1960s, maintained an activist presence, especially within the civil rights movement (Jackson 1993, 75-76). Unlike their predecessors in the 1930s and 1940s, however, the new generation did not seem as interested in organized political associations or advocating for radical social reform (Cantwell 1996, 22). Rather, as prominent revivalist John Cohen argues, folk enthusiasts during the great boom were more concerned with issues of human values (e.g., humanitarianism, anti-commercialism, living an authentic existence, etc.) (Ibid.). The tensions that surfaced between folk authenticity, political duty, and the commercial career trajectory are famously discernible in the early career of Bob Dylan who, in the first half of the 1960s, composed scathing protest songs, love ballads, and humourous stream of conscious pieces, all the while grappling with his artistic drives, commercial ambitions, and an imposed public identity as a folk music darling.

[32] Numerous scholars have commented on "Tom Dooley" as a popular culture phenomenon. In particular, see Cantwell 1996, Jackson 1993, and Mitchell 2007.

* * *

Toronto was a major site of the urban folk revival in Canada, and for those concerned with defining Canadian identity during this time, young people's interest in folk music represented yet another example of American cultural encroachment (Mitchell 2007, 72-76). While there is certainly some truth to this, the folk revival in Toronto was not simply a transplanted cultural phenomenon. Rather, it was shaped by regional, national, and transnational currents, and—as an ideological ethos—became a vehicle for making sense of local conditions. In the decades prior to folk music's boom period, domestic scholars and collectors like Helen Creighton and Kenneth Peacock, albeit spurred by stateside curiosity, had already begun to explore and promote rural Canadian folksong (Guigne 2008). What's more, early Canadian folksong collectors and performers, like Edith Fowke and Alan Mills, were also involved in leftist political activity (Greenhill 2003; MacDonald 2008). In the 1950s, many of Toronto's urban Jewish youth were introduced to both humanitarian ideals and labour songs through the nearby Camp Naivelt. This summer camp, run by the Jewish Women's Labour League, was inspired by similar leftist camps in the United States, but it tied Toronto's folk revival scene to a broader transnational secular Jewish culture (Mitchell 2007, 62-64). As the scene grew in the early 1960s, several notable artists and innumerable casual participants were associated with Camp Naivelt (Ibid.; Jennings 1997, 37).[33] In addition to the undeniable pull of American popular cultural icons and media representations of "the folk," then, conditions were ripe for public interest in Canadian folksong and a proliferation of domestic folk artists.

Finally, while some Canadian folk enthusiasts were strongly aligned with high profile American social movements (e.g., Civil Rights, and later the anti-Vietnam war movements) the

[33] The influence of Camp Naivelt was acknowledged on several occasions over the course of my fieldwork interviews and camp attendees were often described as a visible contingent within Toronto's folk revival scene.

social critique fostered in Toronto's folk revival scene also allowed many youth participants a conceptual space to disrupt the puritanical image of a rapidly developing city. Mid-century Toronto, derisively referred to as "Toronto-the-good," was a famously moralistic city with an old guard political establishment and reputation for being socially uptight, culturally stale, and overwhelmingly White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant.[34] In an inspired diatribe for *The Globe and Mail*, journalist Scott Young expounds this image of Toronto:

> Long ago a moth imprisoned in a musty purse invented the Toronto mind. It is a mind poured in a mould made of narrow building laws and red brick and the scarlet letter and the white feather and of people who, when challenged, wrap themselves in Union Jacks and sing 'God Save the Queen' like hell. It is a mind of pump organs in the parlour and drapes drawn so the rugs don't fade—and what if they also shut out the sun? (Young [1966] in Kilbourn 146)

The urban folk revival, and especially the coffee houses associated with it, provided an alternative space for young people in Toronto and its suburbs to evade their hometown's "square" character. Toronto's first coffee houses, located around Gerrard Street, were established by post-War European immigrants. Stuart Henderson (2011) explains, "for many cynical students and artists […] the coffee house suggested a Euro-bohemian hangout unlike any previously known to the city" (33). Approaching the 1960s, as unlicensed coffee houses were cemented as sites for growing folk revival activity, and as the "Gerrard Village" scene, displaced by a municipal development project, relocated slightly northward to Yorkville Village, the hip youth culture associated with that neighbourhood became a defining, and for some, disturbing, element of the city. Adrian Bevis, who would become a key player in developing the Toronto area bluegrass scene, recalls his introduction to Yorkville's coffee houses:

> When the coffee houses started opening in the late fifties, my parents […] thought that they were dangerous, crime-ridden places because the whole image of bohemia was […] drugs [and] late hours. […] You didn't go out late at night. If

[34] According to William Kilbourn (1984), however, by 1961 the city was "more than half Roman Catholic" (136).

> you did you were either a delinquent or you were sort of straying from the path. […] I went down to the first coffee house, the Village Corner, which was on Avenue Road […] and I remember I stood at the door fifteen minutes not having the courage to go in because I just had this image in my mind of my parents saying, 'Be *very* careful…and if there's any sign of trouble, just get out!' So, I finally went in. And here's this smoke-filled room […] and immediately my eyes started to water. I sat down, and a young lady said, 'Do you want coffee?' And I had never drank coffee in my life. […] Then on came the performer. […] So I sat there and I kept having to go out and clear my eyes because there was no ventilation. That was how I started in the folk scene. Well, I got hooked. I started going to every [coffee house] I could find because I found a list of them: The Bohemian Embassy, the Purple Onion, and then the Riverboat and the Gate of Cleve, and others that I've probably forgotten. (Bevis; personal communication May 25, 2013)

Bevis' account speaks to the coffee house scene's deviant reputation, as well as its bohemian appeal for young Torontonians drawn to folk music and the earthy, non-conformist folk image. More-or-less liberated from adult supervision and parental pressure, the city's coffee houses were public spaces where teenagers could deepen cultural knowledge, increase cultural capital, experiment with identities, and explore potential sexual relationships (Henderson 2011, 99). In addition, as primary gathering sites in the urban folk revival, they became spaces where middle-class suburban youth, by simply patronizing them, could challenge societal norms, especially in relation to the perennial revival concerns: consumerism, authenticity, and the dehumanizing strain of modern urban life.

Interestingly, there is some overlap between, on the one hand, the revivalist values that drew Toronto area youth deeper into the city's nightlife and, on the other hand, the anti-urbanism that contributed to the rapid suburbanization that many baby boomers were trying to escape. One of the more prevalent revival anxieties was the impact of urbanization on the sense of community associated with pre-modern rural life. Accessible and inclusive folk music not only reflected these communal ideals, but also provided a way for artists and audiences to align with romanticized folk cultures in ways that challenged a perceived hollow urban existence. In his

writing on the development and growth of mid-century Toronto, John Sewell (1993) notes how politicians and city planners were also apprehensive about promoting urban living. Inspired by the Chicago-oriented City Beautiful Movement, as well as the principles of Modern City Planning, those guiding Toronto's development in the first half of the twentieth century viewed cities as inherently corruptive, unhealthy, and otherwise unlivable (4-5). Instead, there was a general sense among local leaders, as well as artists and intellectuals, that pastoral, morally virtuous small communities were a more humane habitat. Going forward, city planners attempted to rectify these public health-cum-moral concerns and restore aesthetic and social harmony by designing separated spaces for living and for labour (11-12). Toronto's urban core—viewed as inappropriate for family life—would continue to serve as the fast-paced, callous, and (morally) polluted location of work. Meanwhile, low-density suburbs—an ideal "mixture of city and country" (16)— were developed to provide a more naturalistic, "healthier" environment for families.[35]

Don Mills, located northeast of Toronto's urban core, was the city's first large scale, privately developed suburban design experiment. With construction beginning in 1953,[36] Don Mills was conceptualized as a cluster of self-sufficient neighbourhoods isolated from the metropolis through idiosyncratic road design and ample green space, and serviced by area schools, community centres, and shopping plazas (Sewell 1993, 82). And, while the development was originally intended to be mixed-income, its presumably wholesome and safe family environment, buttressed by larger building lots, gratifying amenities, and a sense of privacy, was tremendously popular among Toronto's upwardly mobile (95). Indeed, a new home in Don Mills was something of a status symbol (174-175).

[35] Sewell observes how this division was also marked along gender lines (16). Suburbs, a domestic realm, were envisioned as the domain of women, while men, the providers, were expected to venture into the "urban jungle."

[36] The Don Mills development was completed in 1963.

At the same time, for many youth coming of age in Don Mills and similar developments in the Toronto area, the suburbs epitomized the vapid trappings of a materialistic conformity. Moreover, sleepy suburban life seemed to augment Toronto's musty, unexciting image. For those drawn to folk music and invested in revival discourse, the suburb's city-country blend offered neither a pre-modern rural purity nor the compelling social effervescence of the city. Marrying the two romantic ideals—"simple," undiluted music traditions in an urban bohemian setting—the urban folk revival provided an outlet for discontented Toronto youth to engage in a soft rebellion against middle-class suburban culture by aligning with disenfranchised folk musicians (Mitchell 2007, 90-91). Many young revivalists, Mitchell notes, gravitated towards artists most often associated with southern and western rural America as a chance to encounter "valid cultural experience" (93). Recalling his attitudes as a folk revival participant, Adrian Bevis evokes this yearning:

> In a city like Toronto, which up until the sixties [was] very British-oriented, there was absolutely no tradition of singing at home. […] It was a desert. And so, the only time you ever sang [was] if you were a church-going family…you did the stilted, lugubrious hymns, that are intolerable to listen to because they're so lethargic. And even then, you're doing it without any sense of commitment because it's just so flat. It's neither like black gospel nor Southern Pentecostal or…it's nothing, it's terrible. (Bevis; personal communication May 25, 2013)

As "tourists […] traveling in someone else's culture" (Posen 1993, 128), revivalists attempted to create a distance from what they viewed as their own prosaic cultural background. In the process of forging a social identity, however, Mitchell reminds us that while this cultural tourism was rooted in both respect and concern, many revivalists were inadvertently perpetuating a romanticized folk "other" (101-102). Such regional imaginaries would surface and mingle in complicated, often problematic ways as the Toronto area bluegrass scene developed through the

late 1960s and 1970s.[37] I want to conclude this section, however, with a brief look at how bluegrass was embraced by folk revivalists and its marginal presence in Toronto's folk revival scene.

* * *

Bluegrass music, as discussed in the previous section, had an uncertain position within the North American folk revival. While it emerged as a distinct genre within the post-War commercial country industry, its sound and repertoire—rooted in pre-War commercial 'hillbilly' music, Anglo-Celtic folksong and tunes, as well as African-American blues, jazz, and spirituals—are endowed with a pre-modern mythology that was in tune with the sociocultural ideals of many folk revivalists (Finch 2016; Rosenberg 2005, 65-94). Bluegrass was first teased out of the commercial music realm through the writings of folklorists and arch-revivalists like Mike Seeger and Ralph Rinzler. Seeger's liner notes for the 1959 Folkways album *Mountain Music Bluegrass Style* not only served as a bluegrass primer, but described how the music acts as a repository of traditional sounds and songs. Seeger also observed the changing audience for bluegrass, explaining how rural people have "come to prefer the more sophisticated music of commercial country music bands," while "city-bred" folk enthusiasts were beginning to take interest in country styles rooted in "old-time hill music" (Seeger 2004 [1959], 103).

In a 1963 feature for *Sing Out!* magazine, Ralph Rinzler further promoted bluegrass as a folk music genre by rebranding bluegrass pioneer and Opry star Bill Monroe as a veritable folk artist/hero. Here, he profiled the artist's rural, working-class origins, his informal community-based music education, and rooted his particular style of country music in a mélange of "traditional" Anglo-Scottish and African-American musics. Moreover, like Seeger, he made a special note of distinguishing bluegrass from much disparaged "mainstream" country, asserting

[37] I discuss this in more depth in Chapter Three.

that Monroe's "respect for and belief in his music […] has enabled [him] to resist the trends of Nashville…" (Rinzler 2004 [1963], 140).[38]

Seeger and Rinzler were also influential musicians. As a member of the New Lost City Ramblers, Seeger and his bandmates (John Cohen and Tom Paley) brought their interpretations of old commercial hillbilly recordings to the New York City folk scene. What's more, in his own performances, as well as his liner notes, he championed Scruggs-style banjo as an outgrowth of earlier American banjo styles. Indeed, the Seeger-produced Folkways compilation *American Banjo Scruggs Style* (1957) inspired countless banjo players participating in the Sunday jam sessions at New York's Washington Square (Rosenberg 2005, 110).

Meanwhile, by 1960 Rinzler was playing mandolin with the urban folk revival's leading bluegrass group, the Greenbriar Boys. As the only professional and most well regarded bluegrass group to emerge out of the Greenwich Village folk scene, the Greenbriar Boys had earned some measure of folk "authenticity" as the first northern band to appear at the Old-time Fiddlers Convention in Union Grove, North Carolina (Rosenberg 2005, 148). Their status was elevated when they won Union Grove's old-time band contest in 1960 (158). Folklorist Bruce Jackson (1993) remembers them as an "excellent revival group" (78), while Ellen Stekert (1993 [1966]) refers to them as an "excellent imitator group" (97). Stekert's more debasing appreciation of the Greenbriar Boys suggests a tension deriving from the band members' middle-class urban roots. The discontentment with urban revivalist bluegrass, and "citybilly" culture in general, is exemplified in Hunter S. Thompson's 1961 review of a Greenbriar Boys' performance at Gerdes Folk City, a seminal venue in the Greenwich Village folk scene. Describing "one of the strangest

[38] Around the time of his *Sing Out!* feature, Rinzler became Monroe's manager for a short period and introduced him to what Rosenberg (2005) refers to as a "national network" of non-southern "folk revival bluegrass musicians" (185).

sights [he's] ever witnessed in The Village," Thompson zeros in on the band's stage talk as characteristically revivalist:

> With the fiddle taking the lead, the fraudulent farmers set off on 'Orange Blossom Special,' then changed the pace with 'Sweet Cocaine'—dedicated said one, 'to any junkies in the audience.' [...] It was this sort of thing—hip talk with a molasses accent—that gave the Greenbriar Boys a distinctly un-hillbilly flavor (Thompson 2004 [1961], 156).

For Thompson, bluegrass and hillbilly music's appeal in the folk revival represented the "avant-garde's" ongoing pursuit for cultural distinction, which, in this instance, meant gravitating towards fringe and supposedly "low" cultural forms (156). He continues, alluding to what Mayne Smith (1984) would later refer to as the "gentrification" of the bluegrass audience (36):

> "Here I was, at a 'night spot' in one of the world's most cultured cities, paying close to a dollar for each beer, surrounded by apparently intelligent people who seemed enthralled by each thump and twang of the banjo string—and we were all watching a performance that I could almost certainly see in any roadhouse in rural Kentucky on any given Saturday night." (Thompson 2004 [1961], 157).

In some ways Thompson's response to the Greenbriar Boys resembles Sam Gesser's critique of the York Country Boys (discussed on pg. 40). Both authors' comments seem rooted in a vague ideal of folk authenticity tied not only to the groups' abilities to pull off convincing bluegrass performances, but also to certain regional and class narratives. Thompson—a Kentucky native-cum-bohemian icon—appears to experience a form of cognitive dissonance. For him, the New York band is not necessarily substandard so much as a striking, if somewhat distasteful example of the fusion between rural, working-class and hip urban culture. Gesser, on the other hand, views the York County Boys' performance as trite. This in part seems related to their unsuitable Canadian cultural backgrounds. However, among educated and politically-oriented Canadian folk revivalists, with which Gesser was aligned, it would be remiss to ignore certain anti-American undertones comprised of equal parts negative cultural stereotypes, fear of cultural

dominance, legitimate socio-political critique surrounding things like McCarthy-era anti-socialism, racial inequality, and militarism.

Perhaps because of this, bluegrass was only a minor component of Toronto's folk revival scene. As discussed in the previous section, the York County Boys, who, for the most part, came to bluegrass as working-class country music enthusiasts, garnered some attention from local revivalists. The Gangrene Boys, a short-lived group of young folk musicians, were the only other notable bluegrass ensemble gigging around Toronto during the mid-1960s.[39] Unlike the York County Boys, the Gangrenes were firmly embedded in and a product of urban folk revival culture. The group—Rick Fielding (guitar and lead vocals), Andrew Hermant (banjo), David Wilcox (mandolin), and Tony Quarrington (bass)—emerged circa 1965, each drawn to the buzzing Yorkville scene. Fielding and Wilcox arrived on the scene from Montreal,[40] Hermant was raised in Toronto, and Quarrington lived with his family in the newly developed Don Mills suburb before settling in the downtown area. All were part of the University of Toronto student community and attracted to the music in Yorkville's coffeehouses.

As a model for hip, urban bluegrass, the Gangrene Boys looked to the Greenbriar Boys. With high profile revivalists and capable musicians like Ralph Rinzler and John Herald, the Greenbriars boasted serious credentials. Bassist Tony Quarrington elaborates:

> They were just a really good band. They had really authentic voices. [People] always [talk about] that high lonesome sound. They had that. John Herald had this unusually high voice, really good guitar player. Ralph Rinzler was the mandolin player. […] He was also historically important because […] he was responsible for a lot of Smithsonian recordings. So he would find some of the material they did. Which made it more interesting than other bands who were just kind of commercial bluegrass bands (Quarrington; personal communication Aug. 3, 2013).

[39] In his history of the Yorkville scene, Nicholas Jennings (1997) briefly mentions the Dirty Shames, a Toronto-based jug band who, during a jam with the up-and-coming Neil Young, played "bluegrass versions of Beatles songs" (81).

[40] With increasing media exposure and word-of-mouth through the mid- to late-1960s, many youth throughout the rest of Canada flocked toward the nation's hip, countercultural hub (Henderson 2011, 120).

The Gangrene Boys peppered their repertoire with a handful of original instrumentals, as well as bluegrass versions of songs by popular revival artists such as Bob Dylan. In this way, they were, according to Quarrington, "a little ahead of what other bluegrass groups were doing at the time" (Ibid.). Influenced by Rinzler's approach in the Greenbriars, however, their core repertoire was made up of material they sought out on older bluegrass recordings.

The Gangrene Boys also appreciated their New York counterparts' sense of humour, which was more compatible with the sensibilities of many revivalists. Rather than the minstrel-based comedy routines of many southern bluegrass bands (Adler 1982), the Gangrene Boys' stage show maintained an animated youthful silliness, which also served to create an ironic distance from their otherwise sincere musical performances. Quarrington recalls the Greenbriars' comedic influence and offers a telling example:

> [The Greenbriar Boys] were always joking around. That was one thing I think we tried to model ourselves after. To be very silly. Like, Andy [Hermant] would be playing some kind of banjo solo and Rick [Fielding] would kind of walk behind him and yank up his underwear. All of a sudden the solo would get faster and higher. Just little stupid bits […] like that. (Ibid.)

During their brief stint (ca. 1965-1970), the Gangrene Boys were well known within the local Yorkville scene, but, despite a few high profile gigs, had only a modest following. They appeared at the 1966 Mariposa festival (scheduled, to their chagrin, just before bluegrass and folk icon Doc Watson), secured club and barn dance gigs on the outskirts of Toronto, and performed several shows at the Seven of Clubs, a venue in the city's east end which hosted prominent folk acts like Phil Ochs, Arlo Guthrie, Buffy Sainte-Marie, as well as the Greenbriar Boys. Suggesting Yorkville's heightened capital along geographic lines, Quarrington asserts that the Seven of Clubs was an "important folk club because it *wasn't* in Yorkville" (Ibid.). While his

band could pull off successful shows at this club "in the depths of Scarborough," they were "not at the level" to play the Riverboat, Yorkville's most renowned coffeehouse (Ibid.).[41]

Quarrington, however, also ascribes some of the Gangrene Boys' struggle to secure steady and noteworthy gigs to club owners' reluctance to hire bluegrass bands "because they [didn't] really fit anyone's idea of anything" (Ibid.).[42] Again, this alludes to the marginal position of bluegrass within the urban folk revival. Indeed, like the York County Boys, the Gangrenes found themselves having to navigate the genre boundaries between country and folk musics. They appeared, for instance, on Carl Smith's nationally syndicated *Country Music Hall*, as well as Oscar Brand's more folk-oriented television program, *Let's Sing Out.* While the band's name, a play on words also inspired by the Greenbriar Boys, may have provoked knowing chuckles in Yorkville's countercultural folk scene, television producers hoping to appeal to a broader, more wholesome country music audience were disinclined to showcase a group named after a bacterial infection. As an alternative, the producers of *Let's Sing Out* suggested the uninspired "Bluegrass Ramblers," which the group adopted for performances situated outside of their hip urban scene. At the same time, some traditionalists within the local revival scene were critical of Quarrington's use of an electric bass in the ensemble. He recalls a review in the *Toronto Telegram* in which entertainment reporter Sid Adilman, commends the band's overall performance, but disapproves of how "Tony Quarrington booms along unsubtly on the electric bass" (Ibid.).

Through the late 1960s, folk revivalists were a declining presence within the Yorkville scene and the Gangrene Boys fizzled out as a unit. The individual members remained active as

[41] The Gangrene Boys did, however, participate in the Riverboat's weekly open-mic "hootenannies." In April 1967, Andrew Hermant had the opportunity to play bass with the Greenbriar Boys at the Riverboat.

[42] Quarrington also notes that he and his band mates were pulled in different directions (e.g., school, other musical pursuits, etc.) resulting in a more casual approach to their work in the Gangrene Boys.

musicians, folk and otherwise, but approaching the 1970s, Yorkville's cultural climate was more reminiscent of Haight-Ashbury's vibrant, quasi-political psychedelia than New York's Greenwich Village folk scene. An acoustic folk music scene continued to thrive in Toronto, mostly associated with the Mariposa Folk Festival. As a larger cultural phenomenon, however, the folk revival was beginning to splinter into the numerous genre-oriented "named-system revivals" that would surface through the 1970s, and include the "bluegrass revival" (Nusbaum 1993, 203-219; Rosenberg 1993a, 177-178; Rosenberg 1993a, 194-202). Meanwhile, many Toronto youth were now drawn to rock music and Yorkville was becoming increasingly populated with louder, electrified bands like the Ugly Ducklings, the Sparrows, and the Mynah Birds. Commenting on his departure from the Gangrene Boys, Quarrington alludes to these shifts: "By the summer of 1967," a year after their Mariposa performance, "I was doing more of a rock thing than a bluegrass thing because that's the kind of year it was" (personal communication Aug. 3, 2013).

American Migrants in Toronto

From the mid-1960s and into the 1970s, an estimated 30,000-plus Americans arrived in Canada as conscientious objectors to the United States' military campaign in Vietnam (Churchill 2012: 228). Many of these migrants settled in large cities like Toronto, which had an extensive support network of students, artists, and grassroots activist organizations like the Toronto Anti-Draft Program. In addition, as discussed above, throughout the 1960s Toronto's Yorkville scene was a major site of the urban folk revival in Canada. Along with community supports and employment opportunities, this cultural pull factor appealed to many draft resisters involved in

folk and bluegrass revival scenes located in cities and university towns throughout the United States.

For many young Torontonians, the arrival of hip, progressive Americans who, through their very presence in Canada, were endowed with a tremendous degree of countercultural capital, signaled the city's awakening from its stodgy, "Toronto-the-good" slumber (Churchill 2010, 31). At the same time, many American draft-resisters had complex affections for a perceived Canadian culture that, on the surface, complemented many of their social and political values. In some respects, Canada as a nation wielded a heightened degree of soft power during the 1960s and 1970s. Along with the internationally renowned Expo '67 in Montreal, this was largely attributed to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's perceived anti-militarism and openness toward Vietnam war-resisters. Some draft resisters, such as Eric Nagler, who arrived in Toronto from New York City in 1967, were attracted to the notion of Canada as a "peaceable kingdom" (Edwardson 2009, 88). For Nagler, however, this political compatibility was tempered with regional stereotypes and a jocular appreciation for the nation's perceived quirkiness and provincial character:

> I probably had some of the standard stereotypes about [Canada]. It was the small, provincial neighbour to our north, and the friendly country […]. But, what was more was that it was not polarized. You know, people were prejudiced, but they weren't prejudiced like the North and the South […]. The [Vietnam] war was tearing the [United States] apart. And whatever the issues were up here, they paled in comparison to what was happening down there […]. So, it was a lot easier to get along […].Toronto was simple. It was square. It was small compared to New York and Brooklyn even. And safe […]. It was a very unhip town. But, in those days, there was Yorkville going on and there was the Riverboat coffee house…. (Nagler; personal communication July 24, 2013).

Despite Toronto's perceived squareness, Nagler alludes to a redeeming pocket of cultural vibrancy within the city: Yorkville. David Churchill (2010) notes how Yorkville, and associated spaces such as Rochdale College and the University of Toronto (U of T) campus, "offered

elements of North American youth culture and individuals who could often connect [American expatriates] to more political and artistic scenes" and enabled newcomers and Canadian-born citizens to "experiment" with countercultural lifestyles as part of "affective communities" (32).[43] For many draft resisters, a major launching pad into additional alternative networks was the Toronto Anti-Draft Programme (TADP, est. 1967) and, later, the Union of American Exiles (UAE, est. 1968). These organizations, outgrowths of U of T's student activist community, served as support networks by helping newly arrived Americans find employment and housing (oftentimes a couch or temporary shelter), navigate Canada's social support system, and work towards Landed Immigrant status (34). What's more, both organizations fostered a sense of community among American expatriates and their allies through publications like the UAE's *AMEX* newsletter and the TADP's *Manual for Draft-Age Immigration to Canada* (1967), which Churchill describes as a "bible for resisters who wanted to make the move north" (33).

From these organized expatriate activities, American migrants became involved in other political, occupational, and artistic communities. In this way, the American migration experience differed significantly from that of other immigrant communities who had more difficulties expanding their social and support networks. "[B]eing able to participate in the public culture and social space of Toronto," Churchill (2010) argues, "was of course mitigated by factors including education, class background, opportunity, and race" (36). During the late 1960s, for instance, the University of Toronto and York University, located in the city's northwestern metropolitan region, were expanding and seeking both students and faculty (32). This was an economic pull factor for many Americans, including Eric Nagler, who enrolled as one of the first students in U of T's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Meanwhile, Chuck Crawford,

[43] In discussing "affective communities," Churchill draws on the work of Leela Ghandi (2006).

who arrived from Ann Arbor, Michigan circa 1970 and played a leading role in the development of bluegrass in Toronto, took a faculty position at U of T's recently established Erindale College.

Nagler and Crawford, among other American migrants, also became active participants in Toronto's folk music scene and its sister bluegrass scene, which was beginning to emerge towards the end of the 1960s. Again, entering these social scenes was a relatively natural transition for young Americans who benefited from the cultural knowledge and credibility acquired in stateside folk scenes. Crawford, for instance, was an active musician and organizer in Oberlin College's (Ohio) vibrant folk scene in the late 1950s. There, he became a regular participant in campus folk song circles and, in the summer of 1957, toured summer camps as a member of the Folksmiths, an eight-student collective billed as a "travelling folk workshop."[44] By 1960, Crawford (mandolin), along with Neil Rosenberg (guitar), John Schuler (banjo), and Franklin Miller (fiddle), formed a bluegrass band called the Plum Creek Boys. While this group was short-lived, they achieved some recognition when they opened for the Osborne Brothers at the first college bluegrass concert in Antioch, Ohio (Rosenberg 2005, 155). Crawford's experiences and connections within the folk scene benefitted his transition into Toronto's social life. Upon arrival, he met up with Jeff Piker, an acquaintance from his college folk scene years and American migrant, who told him about regular bluegrass picking sessions in the city's High Park and Fiddler's Green Folk Club. The Bluegrass Revival, Crawford's first local bluegrass group, emerged from these sessions, which I discuss in greater detail later.[45] The Bluegrass Revival would become fixtures in the Toronto scene through the 1970s as the house band for a monthly bluegrass open mic and jam session at Egerton's Pub, an establishment affiliated with

[44] In 1958, Folkways Records released a document of the Folksmith's summer tour titled *We've Got Something to Do* (FA 2407).

[45] The original line-up for the Bluegrass Revival was Crawford (guitar), Mike Higgins (guitar), Tom McCreight (bass), and Don Hinde (banjo). Hinde was later replaced by Bob Forrest and then Buddy Weston, an immigrant from Czechoslovakia whose banjo virtuosity earned him great acclaim in the Toronto area bluegrass scene.

Ryerson University. They also appeared regularly at the earliest bluegrass festivals and concert events in Southern Ontario. In addition to his musical participation, Crawford and his wife Pleasance, became central organizing figures in the city's emerging bluegrass scene through much of the 1970s.

Similarly, Eric Nagler spent his teenage years learning banjo in New York's Greenwich Village scene and fraternized with prominent folk revivalists like Eric Weissberg, David Grisman, and Bob Yellin at the weekly jam sessions in Washington Square. Through this activity—and through his relationship with Martha Beers of the Beers Singing Family—he had established connections with folk scene participants in Montreal and Toronto prior to migrating to Canada. In particular, upon arriving in Toronto, he was supported by Estelle Klein, a friend of the Beers family and Mariposa's artistic director. Participating in old-time music jams and performing on coffeehouse stages throughout Yorkville, Nagler thrived in Toronto's folk music scene.

Inspired by his experiences in Greenwich Village, the scene also provided entrepreneurial opportunities. In 1969, Nagler, along with two other American migrants, Jan Burda and Steve Scantlon, established the Toronto Folklore Centre. The shop was modelled after Izzy Young's Folklore Centre in New York. Like Young's renowned Greenwich Village hangout, the Toronto Folklore Centre proved to be an essential resource to the scene providing instruments, instructional books, records, lessons, as well as a space for jamming, public workshops, and socializing. With Estelle Klein's Mariposa offices situated on the upstairs floor of the building, located on Avenue Road, just north of Yorkville Village, the Toronto Folklore Centre was a hive of revivalist activity in the city. As will be discussed in Chapter Four**,** it would also become a primary site for scene building among bluegrass enthusiasts in Toronto.

Conclusion

The migratory patterns and related socio-cultural phenomena discussed in this chapter would continually shape the local bluegrass scene as it developed and expanded in the following decades. People from Atlantic Canada continued to arrive in the Toronto area in the latter half of the twentieth century, and many drew on their appreciation of bluegrass and country music to forge networks within the East Coast diaspora, among other groups of people. Through the 1970s, migrants from Canada's Atlantic provinces would contribute to local bluegrass as musicians, organizers, and entrepreneurs. While many of these migrants circulated freely within the local bluegrass landscape, there was also the sense that a parallel bluegrass scene was beginning to emerge, populated with more working-class enthusiasts, including East Coast migrants, and having a greater affinity with bluegrass' country roots. Often, the bifurcation of the scene was captured in the categorical distinction between, on the one hand, "country boys" and, on the other, "citybillies," "hippies," or "folkies." Approaching the 1980s, these distinctions would become more pronounced as bluegrass activity dispersed throughout small-town Ontario, became more festival-oriented, and, in some ways, became more politically conservative.

Meanwhile, a handful of the local youth who discovered bluegrass through their interest in the folk revival continued to explore the genre in spite of shifting cultural trends within the city. By the late 1960s, as the folk revival was apparently in its twilight and began to splinter into smaller scale "named system revivals," some bluegrass enthusiasts took a more diligent approach to developing and sharing their knowledge of the music. These individuals would become the primary scene-builders within Toronto. Some would hone their musical skills, form bands of their own, and teach up-and-coming musicians. Others would dedicate their energies to promoting bluegrass in the city and consciously establishing scene spaces within the Toronto

area. It's important to note that this young urban contingent was not homogenous in their allegiance to the leftist countercultural politics that pervaded much of 1960s and 1970s youth culture in North America. Still, many scene organizers approached their mission to promote bluegrass music with a zeal rooted in alternative cultural discourses of collective activity and grassroots mobilization. Over time, this would lead to further migrations as the bluegrass scene converged with developing ideological strands within the counterculture, such as the "back-to-the-land" movement.

Finally, Americans contributed to Toronto, and more broadly, Ontario's bluegrass scene from its very genesis. Individuals like Eric Nagler and Chuck Crawford, among others, were not only a strong musical presence in the scene, but, drawing on their experiences in stateside folk scenes, provided valuable ideas, resources, and concrete connections. In addition to the participants that migrated to and settled in the city, the nascent Toronto bluegrass scene (ca. 1968-1975) was shaped by collaborations and encounters that crossed the Canadian-American border. In the following chapter, I consider how bluegrass enthusiasts in Toronto learned the music and formulated ideas about the genre—a process informed by another kind of American encounter, albeit on an imaginary level.

Chapter Three

Reaching Out in the Dark: Learning Bluegrass

> In order to become a committed professional performer of bluegrass in the [San Francisco] Bay Area, it appears the individual must consider turning away from most of the alleged ideals and some of the trappings of city living and forsake their mainstream of popular music and comfortable lifestyle for an adopted one. […] But for the bluegrass musician in Southeast [of the United States] one refines and modifies what one has learned from family, friends, and local acquaintances. For the city-bred musician it often entails denying, ignoring, or selectively suspending one's cultural inheritance […], participation in usual social activities, and mass cultural standards of conduct. […] Entry into this new existence is usually accompanied by feelings of ambivalence. (Hambly 1980, 112).

In his examination of bluegrass musicians in Berkeley, California, Scott Hambly (1980) considers various approaches to learning bluegrass "extracontextually" (112), commenting on the musical outcomes. Separated both geographically and culturally from what he, and many others, viewed as the genre's heartland in the American Southeast, Hambly observes how West Coast urban musicians grappled with "mainstream" social and cultural values that presumably run counter to the community, familial, religious, and economic values from which bluegrass emerged. What's more, in the absence of commonplace community encounters with mentors, and rural Southeastern music-culture in general, first generation urban musicians (i.e., 1950s-1960s) relied on mass-mediated resources such as recordings and instructional books, and engaged in creative practices such as musical transcription in order to learn bluegrass. While the variety of musical influences available in this urban context could at times produce exciting bluegrass-oriented fusions, some musicians, Hambly asserts, took an "archtraditionalist" approach to the genre in "advocating a return to the past through the re-creation of bluegrass music" (113). Even so, he adds, much Bay Area bluegrass exhibits, if not a specifically "urban character," then the influence of "California's putative, laid-back, easy-going lifestyle […], a

spirit of social egalitarianism and personal individualism" (114). In the Bay Area, he elaborates, underachieving musicians tend not to "develop the ideas or technical execution behind subtle yet powerful timing or unequivocally precise notes" (115). Instead, like their counterparts in New York and Boston, Bay Area musicians clumsily prioritize speed in their performances because, Hambly notes, "fast tempos are superficially the most significant factors which distinguish bluegrass from other contemporary forms of live musical performance" (Ibid.). Here, he seems to suggest that while the Bay Area has produced some exceptional musicians,[46] in urban contexts bluegrass is perhaps most appealing as an alternative socio-cultural or political statement. "In the Bay Area," he maintains, "well-balanced musicality is often abandoned in favor of exhibitionism" (116).

In urban Toronto, aspiring bluegrass musicians held similar attitudes towards the genre's rural American origins and were not immune to a nagging sense of cultural distance, which was magnified by the city's reputation of staleness and its Canadian locale. This chapter explores the modes of learning among would-be bluegrass performers in the Toronto area with a focus on the notions of authenticity and regional character that were concurrently developed and learned. I begin by looking at some of the ethnomusicological literature on learning and musical competency (Brinner 1995, 2008/2009), combining this work with a discussion of the geo-cultural distance identified by some Toronto-based bluegrass musicians. I then take a closer look at the extramusical ideas that were developed and circulated among bluegrass enthusiasts during this early knowledge-building period. In particular, I examine the idealization of Southeastern American culture and "American bluegrass," considering how this discourse imbued evaluations of local bluegrass. The two final sections focus on individual and collective learning practices. Here, it becomes clear that learning a style of music goes beyond private woodshedding, but also

[46] He cites mandolinist David Grisman as an example.

involves "communities of practice" (Wenger 1998) in which individuals—musicians and nonmusicians alike—operating within informal social groups and bands, develop, discover, and negotiate musical/cultural "conventions" (Becker 1982, 29). Examining how participants in the formative years of the Toronto area scene learned and/or learned about bluegrass, we can begin to decompartmentalize forms of knowledge, ways of knowing, and participants' roles.

Competence, Regionalisms, and Communities of Practice

Processes and practices of acquiring musical knowledge occupy a small, but growing, corner of ethnomusicological research,[47] with most studies focusing on distinctions between "informal" and "formal" learning (Green 2002; Finnegan 1989; Jaffurs 2004; Strauss 1984), enculturation (Blacking 1973; Green 2002; Nketia 1973; Wachsmann 1966; Zemp 1971), the minutiae of musical study (Brinner 1995, Campbell 1995; Green 2002; Iguchi 2008; Sudnow 1978), and musical transmission between student and teacher (Booth 1987; Brinner 1995; Neuman 1980; Pecore 2000; Wong 1991) and within communities (Garrison 1985; Iguchi 2008; Kreutzer 1997; Mans 1997). Brinner (1995) draws these themes together most effectively in considering how performers develop musical "competence" within a Javanese gamelan ensemble. Broadly defined, "musical competence," he states, "is an integrated complex of skills and knowledge upon which a musician relies within a particular context" (1). This includes knowledge of technique, particular styles, genre boundaries, history, and performance etiquette, among other things. Focusing on performers, he is interested in how such knowledge is "conceptualiz[ed], distribut[ed], and utiliz[ed]" in the moment of performance (Ibid.). While Brinner deals primarily with performing musicians, however, he recognizes that musical competence involves "the

[47] See Szego 2002 for a comprehensive literature review on the subject of learning and knowledge transmission as it surfaces in ethnomusicology, as well as a discussion of many of the works cited here.

interrelationship of different types of knowledge" that come into play depending on the confluence of various contextual factors, which are not necessarily limited to performance practice and the musical-sound environment, but include "simultaneous or consecutive nonmusical activities or events" (Ibid.).

In addition to different types of knowledge, Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström (2003) describe various actors or roles involved in building, bearing, and disseminating knowledge. In their analysis, some actors—"doers"—leap into musical-cultural practice as a way of building knowledge, while others—"knowers"—occupy themselves with books, magazines, liner notes and other texts. They become bearers of extramusical and contextual knowledge (50). And then there are "makers," those who mainly serve a role as distributors of knowledge and learning implements (51). For the most part, Lundberg et al demarcate "doers" "knowers" and "makers," but remind us that individuals can "switch between" these roles (Ibid.). My analysis of the milieu in which knowledge was developed, exchanged, and employed in Toronto's nascent bluegrass scene illustrates this dynamic. I examine, for instance, the ways in which musicians and nonmusicians contributed to activities ranging from the directly musical (e.g., picking techniques or working on the sonic dynamics of ensemble music-making) to the music-related (e.g., discussing which record shop offers better prices) to the seemingly nonmusical (e.g., organizing festival trips). The musical knowledge that surfaced and circulated in this context, however, intersected with other forms of personal, social, political, regional, and cultural knowledge in ways that nuance and introduce tensions between Lundberg et als "doer," "knower," and "maker" roles.

In considering how musical competence is developed, Brinner dedicates a significant portion of his study to learning processes and practices. Like much of the research noted above, he

makes a distinction between "directed learning (education within a pedagogical tradition)" and "other forms of 'picking up' knowledge" (117), and provides detailed accounts of specific practices such as listening, repetition, and attending to feedback. Rather than isolate these practices, however, Brinner highlights "how these processes are […] combined" (117). Many of the musicians in Toronto's bluegrass scene, for instance, had experience with both "formal" and "informal" music education outside of bluegrass, which influenced their approaches to and musical growth within that genre. The types of knowledge mentioned above also impact the combination of learning practices. Many musicians utilized instructional books and, as a scene infrastructure solidified, enrolled in lessons or workshops. At the same time, "informal" learning processes in which novice musicians develop competence through participation alongside more advanced performers were often favoured over "formal" processes. While the former represented an organic pedagogical ideal somewhere between participant observation and osmosis, for many in emerging bluegrass players, the latter was associated with austere middle-to-upper class western values.

The apparent hierarchy of learning processes within the bluegrass scene can be linked to ideas about musical enculturation, which Green (2002) defines as "the acquisition of musical skills and knowledge by immersion in the everyday music and musical practices of one's social context" (22). Among musicians and nonmusicians alike, incidental experiences of or casual experimentation with musicality, starting from the very early stages of life, is the source of a foundational musical competence (Szego 2002, 711). Through organic processes of enculturation, individuals acquire some sense of melody, rhythm, sound production, and the "viscerality of musical experience" (Ibid.), whether or not they choose to develop these into a

trained skill set. Within a particular society, then, enculturation often results in a fundamental "shared musical competence" (Ibid.).

Musical enculturation, however, is not a neutral process but part of a more holistic cultural immersion informed by issues of class, race, gender, politics, nationality and so on. Because of this, ideas about enculturation fed into romantic narratives of American bluegrass culture in ways that created a sense of cultural distance for many Toronto-based bluegrass musicians. Indeed, some viewed their own perceived musical enculturation as a barrier; something to be overcome, or at least become resigned to in their attempts to learn bluegrass. In addition to dedicating hours to reading instructional books, listening to recordings, and private rehearsal, for many, learning bluegrass in Toronto was about gaining what Brinner (1995) calls "access to competence-enhancing opportunities" (114) and "special keys," that is "an item or group of items that is thought to contain the essence of an entire domain of knowledge […]" (129). Here, Brinner is referring to pieces of music, for instance, which might significantly enhance one's technical ability and overall musical or stylistic knowledge. Given the emphasis on "informal" learning processes and musical enculturation, within Toronto's bluegrass scene, and arguably bluegrass culture in general, the notion of special keys to knowledge can be expanded to include events (e.g., American bluegrass festivals) and individuals (e.g., renowned musicians). Despite the dynamic, ever-shifting nature of competence then, it appears that many approached bluegrass in a way that demonstrated commonplace assumptions about the "finiteness, stability, and authenticity of knowledge" (Ibid.).

Learning bluegrass as part of a "community" was one way of bridging this perceived cultural distance. If regular, organized jam sessions, for instance, did not exactly emulate the romantic ideal of growing up in an American bluegrass heartland like North Carolina, they attempted to

model and implement the casual music-making-cum-learning practices associated with the culture from which bluegrass presumably emerged. Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of a "community of practice" provides a helpful way forward for examining such a learning environment. Simply put, "communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger 2006, 1). This broad definition is open to communities of varying sizes, structures, and degrees of formality. A community of practice can take the form of a workplace task group that assembles during regular mandatory meetings. Alternatively, the community might come together sporadically, converging on a particular site through the organizational efforts of a few core "members," only to disperse and reconvene at an undetermined time, perhaps at another site, and likely with some absentees and some new participants in the mix (3). In the context of this research, communities of practice would include informal jams, formal workshops, and small group gatherings among musicians within emerging bluegrass bands. While I discuss learning in a band context to some extent here, I focus primarily on the diversity of skills and activity that contributed to more expansive and ephemeral social configurations in the Toronto area bluegrass scene.[48]

Wenger is clear to point out that a community of practice is different from a "community of interest," which might share a more casual interest in an area (e.g., bluegrass music), without particular learning goals and "expertise" among its members. Alternatively, communities of practice are made up of "practitioners"—specialists in a particular "domain"—who "develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice" (2). Admittedly, Wenger's distinction is vague and overly rigid. The nascent Toronto bluegrass scene can be viewed as both a community of practice *and* a

[48] A more thorough discussion of local bands and band formation appears in Chapter Six.

community of interest. Like the former, members held specific goals around developing and distributing knowledge about bluegrass, and it included members who attained some degree of bluegrass expertise, a concept that is relative based on the community's composition and focus at a given time. Like the latter, however, the community was made up of individuals who came from a variety of backgrounds and were not necessarily experts, but concerned more with sharing personal views of the music or socializing with peers in the presence of bluegrass music. Perhaps it could be said, then, that the early bluegrass scene was more of a community of practice (i.e., those learning to play bluegrass) within a broader community of interest (i.e., those looking to discuss or enjoy bluegrass) (Fischer 2001, 4).

Even this characterization, however, does not adequately clarify the notion of "practice." Wenger's focus on "practitioners" (i.e., experts or specialists), for instance, can potentially limit analysis to or privilege the role of bluegrass musicians (both aspiring and accomplished). This would certainly be appropriate for examining bands and band development. As we'll see in this chapter, however, the communal contexts in which musicians learned to play bluegrass in Toronto's early scene not only included musicians, but collectors, writers, instrument makers and repair people, and amateur archivists/historians.[49] As participants in a community of practice, all of these different players contributed to and drew on a "shared repertoire of resources" (Wenger 2006, 2) for making sense of local bluegrass. Examining how individuals learned/learned about bluegrass in Toronto, then, we can begin to see how musical competence intersects with what linguist Vijay Bhatia refers to as "discursive competence," which accounts for "various levels of competence we all need in order to expertly operate within […] general socio-cultural contexts" (2004, 144). Specifically, Bhatia is interested in the complex of textual, generic, and social

[49] Of course, some participants engaged in several of these practices.

knowledge that individuals develop and draw upon as they participate in various social contexts, including communities of practice (144-145).

Here, it seems appropriate to consider what Howard Becker (1982) refers to as "conventions;" the established tools, aesthetic values, and lines of discourse which inform the processes and relations through which art is collectively produced. Within the conventions of "traditional bluegrass," for instance, the music of "golden era" (ca. 1940s-1950s) artists like Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers, and Flatt and Scruggs is viewed as the genre's aesthetic paragon. Additionally, particular instrument types (e.g., a Martin dreadnought guitar or an F-style mandolin), techniques (flat picking guitar or Scruggs-style banjo picking), and performance styles (e.g., "unamplified" instruments, sharing microphones) are often preferred or elevated as an ideal. For many, these conventions come to determine how bluegrass music is made and how it sounds. Nevertheless, other possibilities exist (e.g., using an electric bass) and are circulated within groups of bluegrass musicians and enthusiasts. Conventions can be pre-existing and imported from other scenes or a broader set of cultural values, and they imply some sense of standardization in artistic production.[50] But, as Becker notes, "conventions are seldom rigid and unchanging. […] Artists can agree to do things differently, negotiation making change possible" (31, 32). Much of this negotiation materializes in evaluative discourses as group members "[try] to decide what is and isn't art [i.e., bluegrass], what is and isn't their kind of art [i.e., bluegrass], and who is and isn't an artist" (36). Within Toronto's fledgling bluegrass scene, this was an ongoing negotiation that expanded beyond musicians, but still impacted their learning processes and musical output, whether "conventional," divergent, or somewhere in between.

[50] For Becker, conventions are adopted, circulated, and negotiated within an "art world," a concept that will be explored more fully in Chapters 5 and 6.

No matter the variety of roles that can exist within a community of practice, its effectiveness as an environment for developing skills and knowledge hinges on social participation, which, along with actively contributing to the group (e.g., sharing knowledge, providing learning resources, taking on particular tasks, etc.), involves "constructing *identities* in relation to [the community]" (Wenger 1998, 4). Wenger elaborates, arguing that participation in a community of practice "shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do" (Ibid.). Following from this, we can begin to connect the processes of acquiring procedural knowledge (e.g., learning to execute Scruggs-style banjo) and propositional knowledge (e.g., learning a history of banjo styles) to the construction of broader worldviews related to identity and positionality. In this way, as Wenger (2003) notes, examining communities of practice "[allows] us to see past more obvious formal structures such as organizations, classrooms, or nations, and perceive the structures defined by engagement in practice and the informal learning that comes with it" (3).

Viewing facets of Toronto's nascent bluegrass scene as a community of practice, we can see that as groups develop their knowledge of bluegrass, they also construct and employ hierarchies of learning, regional narratives, and genre conventions. Furthermore, as a concrete scene begins to develop, we can also see how connections are forged, scenic boundaries are drawn, and how stratification emerges and is negotiated within the scene. The following sections build upon this theoretical discussion of learning, enculturation, and distance by taking a more detailed look at some of the learning contexts, practices, and discursive threads that surfaced in the early years of Toronto's bluegrass scene.

Fundamental Barriers: Distance, Enculturation, and "American Bluegrass"

I first became aware of the perceived difficulties of learning bluegrass in mid-century Toronto upon meeting singer and instrumentalist, Adrian Bevis at an informal gathering of the by-then defunct Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee (TABC).[51] Some former members of the Committee, which was established in 1968 and dissolved in 1980, were still in contact on a regular basis; others surfaced at the TABC reunions, usually organized around Bill Monroe's birthday; and still others, some thirty-plus years later, were now the subjects of memory and speculation. On this evening, a dozen or so members of the Committee, all over sixty years of age, convened at a venue called the Tranzac Room. I sat across from Bevis in the small venue filled with longtime companions, both of us focused on the performance area where Houndstooth, a band of youngish-looking pickers, were hosting a weekly bluegrass night.

Appearing each Thursday, Houndstooth are something of a fixture at the Tranzac. Despite the event's regularity, however, there is an impromptu quality to the band's performances.[52] They seem to maintain a core personnel but, once in a while, substitute musicians might appear. On some occasions, the members of Houndstooth will spot a friend at the bar or peaking through the venue doors and ask them to join in for a few songs. Alternatively, musicians might arrive as if from nowhere, unpack their instrument and tune on the side of the performance area,[53] before merging with the band, exchanging only quick, friendly acknowledgments. The "guests" seem to vary in their musical skill. Some take their time settling in to the performance context and may have to search a little harder for ideas during their solos; others blend in with ease, their addition

[51] The TABC will surface periodically throughout this chapter. For an in-depth discussion of the Committee's origins see Chapter Four.

[52] I attended the Tranzac bluegrass night approximately six times between 2011 and 2013.

[53] The Tranzac has several performance spaces. In the front room, where this bluegrass night is held, there is no raised stage. Rather, musicians perform on an area of the main floor.

noticeable, but not intrusive; and some demonstrate remarkable virtuosity. Despite these differences, all seem familiar with and able to pilot the repertoire in a collective setting.

While there is an unscripted quality to this bluegrass night, it is not an open mic. Houndstooth, and their guest musicians, are part of a small but vibrant bluegrass and old-time scene that has emerged in Toronto over the past fifteen years and includes a network of professionals, semi-professionals, casual performers, experienced teachers and their students, as well as regular bluegrass nights and "bluegrass brunches" at a variety of downtown locations.[54] Some musicians are active in a number of bands and able to secure several gigs a week, some produce recordings, and others are content to perform in less formal jam settings. This environment, which provides various opportunities for knowledge sharing and performance, has cultivated a sustainable and thriving network of amateur, proficient, and virtuosic musicians. If the members of Houndstooth do not exhibit the smooth showmanship often found on the bluegrass festival circuit, they are undoubtedly a skilled group of musicians, fluent in the conventions of bluegrass music. Yet, when I observed Bevis' response—arms crossed, a stoic gaze periodically broken by a "humph" that could read as either approval or dissatisfaction—I was unsure if he shared my enthusiasm for the band.

When I asked Bevis about this he revealed that he was quite impressed with Houndstooth's skill, but also expressed awe at how their experiences of learning bluegrass might have differed from his own, fifty years prior:

> The new generation that we heard at the Tranzac, that group…they are '90s kids […].[55] They get their access from YouTube to every visual, and audio performance you ever

[54] The most well known bluegrass night, and arguably the current scene's origin point, takes place on Wednesdays at the Silver Dollar Room. See Finch 2011 and 2012 for a more in-depth discussion of the Silver Dollar bluegrass night and the contemporary scene.

[55] The members of Houndstooth appear to range in age from the early twenties to their forties, so they are not necessarily all "90s kids." While Adrian's generalizations about how the band members may have been exposed to bluegrass effectively demonstrate changing contexts, it shouldn't be assumed the members share homogenous learning experiences/practices.

> wanted. They get stuff that we could only have dreamt about back in the early days. We had to subsist on record album covers. Now they can see the bands live, they can see what the stage acts were like. […] Now, they're still not up to…I mean, I was listening very closely to their singing…and, it's not American singing. But, it's so much different than what you would've heard in 1972, by a Toronto group. You put them side-by-side, last night compared to 1972, a Canadian-Toronto group…you would hear the difference. And the playing…you'd wonder how the early '70s [group], how they could even get on stage. Not just virtuosity, but musical ideas…the fluid playing…and the ability to toss stuff in and make it sound legitimate. (Personal communication May 25, 2013)

As Bevis suggests, building a strong musical knowledge was one of the early challenges for Toronto-based bluegrass enthusiasts in the years preceding any sort of identifiable local scene. While information about bluegrass history and key figures was disseminated through liner notes and folk magazine articles, the greater challenge was among aspiring performers attempting to learn this technically demanding music. Working through a small number of instructional publications (mostly geared towards banjo), employing creative listening-copying practices like adjusting the revolutions-per-minute on a turntable, and sharing breakthroughs with fellow enthusiasts, determined pickers slowly assembled a repertoire of songs, tunes, and licks. Reflecting on the limited resources in Toronto, instrumentalist and instrument repairperson, Bruce Dowd compares the patchwork learning processes during the 1950s and 1960s to "reaching out in the dark" (Personal communication, May 15, 2013).

Further complicating their learning processes, many Toronto area musicians were dogged by a sense of geographic and cultural distance from the perceived American "source" of bluegrass music. This "hurdle"—essentially, the notion of an unsuitable enculturation—was rooted in broader urban folk revival discourses of rural "authenticity." In mid-century Toronto, however, it was amplified, on the one hand, by the fact of living in Canada, often viewed as the United States' provincial neighbour and, on the other hand, the city's reputation as "square" and cultureless. In the previous chapter, I discussed how this image of Toronto propelled local folk

revivalists towards seemingly legitimate cultural experiences associated with working-class and/or bohemian life. Within the city's bluegrass scene, this sense of cultural distance (and cultural discontent) spurred romantic narratives of bluegrass as quintessentially "American," and of "American bluegrass" as pure, ingrained, and sonically ideal. While American bluegrass was revered, however, it also posed an inevitable foil as some local musicians seemed to pursue bluegrass in spite of their undesirable Toronto upbringing.

Bevis, for instance, maintains that when urban American folk enthusiasts encountered rural southern migrants, they were able to "hear the real thing" (Personal communication, May 25, 2013). When aspiring musicians heard the "real thing," he continues, "it didn't take long before you realized, if you were going to sing the music you'd have to pull your socks up and start working. You couldn't just toss out something…people would start to say, 'good God, that doesn't sound authentic'" (Ibid.). The situation was even more trying in urban Canada where, Bevis theorizes, "no one even knew what a southerner was. Or if they did it was in political terms: 'red neck,' 'racist,' or southern plantations. When it came to music, no one knew what the high lonesome sound was" (Ibid.).

While Bevis' comments are laden with generalizations, they reflect some of the perceived fundamental issues with local bluegrass expressed by Toronto area bluegrass enthusiasts during the 1960s and 1970s. Musically, as he suggests, these challenges appeared most noticeably in Canadians' struggle to reproduce the "high lonesome sound," referring to the high-pitched singing style associated with Bill Monroe and other early bluegrass acts. This is a sound, it was often suggested, that came naturally to rural American musicians. Bevis explains, recalling his first excursion to an American bluegrass festival:

> You walk into the grounds and you'd hear a group of ten-year-olds singing, sounding like an established bluegrass band, they were that good…So help me God, here's this

> little girl with a string bass, and she's playing away. Soon as they open their mouths, you get the professional sound. Just allowing for the fact that their voices aren't mature, it sounds the way it's supposed to sound! People would hear it from the moment they're born. (Personal communication May 25, 2013).

These ideas are reiterated in more commanding terms in a 1977 *TABC News*[56] article by Jack Guest. Here, however, Guest alludes to the frequently coupled view that Canadian attempts at bluegrass are simply inferior:

> These people [Americans] have grown up with the music and it has been in their families for generations, whereas this is not the case in Canada. Bluegrass music in Canada seldom dates back more than one generation. Consequently we can't match the quality of American music. (1977: 2)

And, in a later article, commenting on some of the professional Canadian bluegrass acts to emerge in the late 1970s,[57] Guest asks in straightforward terms: "Can Canadian bluegrass music ever be as good as the original music in the United States?" After praising the tight harmonies and tastefully unhurried playing south of the border—"good bluegrass is not a race"—he concludes, "we [Canadians] have a long way to go to be the equal of a people who have been playing the music from the beginning" (1979a, 4).

Like Bevis, Guest puts forward notions of an inherent musicality that non-American bluegrass performers simply cannot access by virtue of their cultural distance from the community contexts and lived experiences that produced bluegrass music. The distinguishing musical elements of what Bevis refers to as "the real thing"—smooth vocal harmonies and easygoing instrumentation—are evoked in equally abstract terms that can best be described as "feel." In her ethnography of informal learning practices among popular musicians, Lucy Green (2002) describes feel as the "ephemeral details" within a musical performance (32). Attempting to replicate a particular feel demands musicians to approach general stylistic attributes such as

[56] A more in-depth discussion of the *TABC News*, the primary vehicle of the Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee, appears below.

[57] See Chapter Six for a discussion of this period.

"pitches, rhythms, and forms" in more nuanced ways that account for "the precise timing of notes on or around the beat, the exact and often changing sound or timbre of each instrument, the sensitive interrelations and responses between the instruments and many other subtleties" (Ibid.). For Green, capturing the appropriate feel of a style is the product of quick, in-the-moment micro-adjustments made possible by a familiarity that comes with repeated exposure through listening. For many participants in Toronto's bluegrass scene, however, it would seem that achieving the "right feel" required more than exposure, but complete immersion.

Because many emerging bluegrass enthusiasts—especially those associated with the folk revival—were pursuing a post-secondary education, it should be noted that notions of inherited musical ability-cum-cultural authenticity also had some traction in the academic realm. Neil Rosenberg, who was a burgeoning folklorist and bluegrass banjo player at Indiana University in the early 1960s describes his attempts to separate his academic work from his musical pursuits. Like many young players throughout North America, he learned by listening to records, making tapes, and interacting with his "folk music revival peers" (1995, 278). These learning processes were imbued with self-doubt and internal conflict. "I'd accepted my [academic] teachers' view," he states, "that my music-making was less authentic than that of people who'd somehow 'inherited' it" (Ibid.). Rosenberg even attempted to hide his musical activity from his academic mentors. At the same time, his own internalization of these ideas shaped his participation in his local bluegrass scene, which included seasoned professional bluegrass players associated with artists like Bill Monroe. "I assumed that these people's musical experiences were more authentic than mine and that my role among them would necessarily be that of an apprentice, just as it was in graduate school. In essence," Rosenberg reflects, "I was an outsider in both worlds" (278-279).

Returning to Bevis' comparison of contemporary bluegrass bands in Toronto and local musicians in the 1960s and 1970s, we can see how this sense of cultural distance was also internalized as an impediment that was reluctantly accepted, if not overcome. "You can't blame the first generation of Toronto kids," he relents, "what else were they gonna do?" (Personal communication May 25, 2013). Those musicians who could afford to do so, Bevis suggests, could make an extended field trip to a place like North Carolina, but even that would be a fruitless venture when it came to capturing the feel of the music. He recalls his own cross-border excursion in 1972 when he encountered a young Jerry Douglas:[58]

> We went down to a festival in Warren, Ohio and on the bill was Jerry's father and his band, and teenage Jerry Douglas is with the band. He's playing a Gretsch pseudo-Dobro…he hadn't even gotten a real Dobro. He was playing better than any professional. Just a teenager. And I asked him, I said, 'Well, I try to play Dobro, too. How did you manage to get so proficient so quickly?' He said something to the effect of 'it's all there. It's not hard…you just listen.' It's all *there* [i.e., in rural America]; it's not all there up here [i.e., in Canada]. (Ibid.)

Despite the perceived setbacks, Bevis and his peers carried on with their mission to learn bluegrass music:

> What can you do when your enthusiasm exceeds your technical ability? […] No one stopped and said, 'oh, are we really prepared?' They just did it. So, they put a record on the turntable, and they tried to approximate the tenor parts and the baritone parts, and they tried to be able to at least play a solo break that wasn't pathetic, and they'd do the best they could. (Ibid.)

For many Toronto-based bluegrass enthusiasts, the idealization of "American bluegrass" implied a notion of "Canadian standards" (Ibid.) of performance. Though never clearly articulated as a set of parameters, these standards surfaced in evaluative discourses that presumed a culturally determined "ceiling" which Canadian talent could not surpass, while at the same time exhibiting appreciation for local musicians' individual efforts. What's more, they resulted in an inclusive social environment that emphasized participation and enthusiasm over virtuosic

[58] Jerry Douglas would later become an acclaimed Dobro player and bluegrass star.

musicality. These standards, presented as downgraded but nonetheless worthwhile, are perhaps best exemplified in Bevis' evaluation of his own development as a Dobro player:

> [The Dobro] was my main instrument for years. I never got more than sort of passable, but I didn't stop and say, 'Oh gosh, I'm not playing like Josh Graves!' I was trying to copy his style, but I didn't sound like him. At best I sounded like a moderately competent imitator. But again, that was fine for the times. Fine for the '70s. (Ibid.)

In Chapter Six, I consider how attitudes towards local bluegrass and "Canadian standards" became increasingly complex as many enthusiasts, influenced by heightened nationalistic discourse through the 1970s, began to embrace the idea of "Canadian bluegrass." The following sections, however, provide a more detailed overview of the individual and community-oriented knowledge-building practices in the early scene.

Learning Bluegrass in Toronto

Scarce Resources and Creative Learning Practices

By most accounts, resources for learning bluegrass in mid-century Toronto were scarce. Many aspiring musicians, of course, experience a lack of direction and difficulty identifying the "most effective" learning resources as they explore a new style.[59] In Toronto, however, this barrier was augmented by a veritable geographic distance from material resources (e.g., recordings, preferred instruments, instructional books, other bluegrass musicians/teachers) and a perceived cultural distance from the "source" of bluegrass music (i.e., rural Southeastern United States). Bruce Dowd, who arrived from Ottawa just as a bluegrass scene was beginning to form in Toronto, describes the environment during this time:

> Let's go back to the late '60s in Canada. There weren't really very many authorities out there that you could go and beg, borrow, or steal ideas or information from. I mean, it was available in the States, if you were able to get there. But, up here, there was a whole

[59] I should note that the "most effective" resources vary among musicians.

> lot of just reaching out in the dark. And, the thing is, everybody was in the same boat. […] I think that's maybe one of the things that made that time period somewhat unique. (Dowd; personal communication May 15 2013)

In many respects, the learning narratives of Toronto-based musicians are similar to accounts of aspiring bluegrass musicians in other parts of Canada as well as the United States who also struggled to access information about bluegrass during this period. Dowd's comments, then, reflect the potency of the regional constructs that informed scene participants' musical activity and understanding of bluegrass music.

Stepping back even further to the mid-1950s, this sense of being "in the same boat," collectively "reaching out in the dark" is best exemplified in the York County Boys' early woodshedding endeavours in a band setting. As noted in the previous chapter, with little more available than the bluegrass music broadcast on American radio shows, the members of the York County Boys initially struggled to figure out particular licks, instrumental techniques, vocal styles, and band dynamics. The lack of resources gave rise to a number of improvised "solutions" and exchanges that drew on prevalent, often cumbersome informal learning practices involving observation, attentive listening, and repetition. Rex Yetman recalls:

> We were trying to learn. You couldn't learn nothing, you know. You couldn't even buy a record around Toronto […] They didn't know what you were talking about. […] Mac Wiseman had a record out that you could buy in stores. I don't know of any other record you could buy from any of the music stores in Toronto in them years. (Yetman interview with Rosenberg, 1999).

Echoing Dowd's comments, Yetman notes "if somebody went to the States, they would pick [recordings] up" (Ibid.). While they were in short supply, however, the ability to slow down phonograph recordings enabled members of the York County Boys to focus on difficult passages. This was particularly helpful for banjoist John McManaman, who would capture the

details in a rapid succession of notes "by listening to Earl Scruggs on 78 records, slowed down to 33 1/3 speed" (Rosenberg 2000, 5).[60]

Radio was also one of the York County Boys' primary sources for hearing bluegrass music. In the absence of a tape recorder, however, radio broadcasts provided only slapdash learning opportunities. "The radio stations […] would play a bluegrass song three or four times a day maybe," Yetman remembers, "you just got the one shot at it […] and see what you could learn. You're glued to the radio when it came on" (Yetman interview with Rosenberg, 1999). If he was prepared when these chance encounters with a bluegrass song arose, Yetman would focus on the break, soloing with his mandolin over the recording. This rehearsal method is now well established in the form of "play along" instructional recordings, and is meant to enhance a musician's comfort and adeptness in ensemble performance. Without the option to repeat the ensemble experience, however, it was a decidedly disjointed process and provided little opportunity to refine solos in a band setting.

The difficulty of learning from phonograph recordings and radio was exacerbated by more fundamental challenges. "Most times [when] you were trying to learn a break […] you were doing it in the most awkward way because you didn't know any better." Yetman explains, "This is when somebody would come, you'd get them to show [you] how" (Ibid.). If the York County Boys and participants in the future bluegrass scene felt a distance from the "source" of bluegrass, they benefitted from Toronto's proximity to the American border[61] and its status as one of Canada's major urban centres. Indeed, for touring American bluegrass bands looking to satisfy or grow a Canadian fan base, Toronto, with its numerous venues, potential country music

[60] Along with more recent technologies like YouTube, using modified recorded sources remains a common method for analyzing challenging pieces of music (Green 2002, 73), and has become an increasingly less awkward process with the accessibility of software that enables users to slow down digital audio files without affecting pitch.

[61] Toronto is approximately 154 kilometres from Buffalo, New York and 378 kilometres from Detroit, Michigan.

market, and accessibility via a developing cross-border highway system, provided an ideal Canadian tour date.

The Bailey Brothers, from Happy Valley, Tennessee, were one of the early and more frequent bluegrass bands to perform in Toronto during the 1950s and they became a key resource for the York County Boys. "We would go see them and get backstage," Yetman recalls, "and get the guys to show us: 'How do you do this?' […] Then we had our instruments out in the car, so we'd go out and try and remember […] it's kind of a hard way to learn" (Yetman in Rosenberg 1999, 6-7). Again, this disjointed process wasn't ideal, but provided opportunities to consult with professional bluegrass artists and ascertain some of the instrumental techniques that were otherwise concealed in audio recordings. Over the course of several visits, and as the York County Boys developed their musical skills, they were billed as a supporting act during the Bailey Brothers' Toronto dates. This working relationship presented further learning opportunities during backstage exchanges and post-performance jam sessions.

For an aspiring Toronto-based bluegrass band, encounters with the Bailey Brothers, as well as Mac Wiseman's band, who were also coming to the city during the 1950s, offered something resembling a mentor-apprentice relationship. Overtime, the York County Boys became more capable and confident in their musicianship, and began to perform regularly in the Toronto area. This led to a chance encounter and gig with Bill Monroe in July 1955 during one of the York County Boys' weekly Sunday night spots (Rosenberg 1999, 9). Upon arrival, the band was taken aback by the presence of one of their bluegrass idols. "We were about to pick up and leave," Yetman recalls the band's sense of intimidation, "he was like God to us" (Ibid.). To make matters worse, the incipient band were scheduled to follow Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys. Instead of withdrawing from the gig, however, the band seized another potential learning

opportunity. Sharing a dressing room, it appears that the two bands—one a crack group of professional country music celebrities, the other scrambling, but determined amateurs—made only casual exchanges. Still, McManaman insists that "[The Blue Grass Boys] taught me more in that one day than all that time of studying records" (Ibid., 10).

While the details of this encounter are vague, McManaman evokes what Brinner (1995) calls "special keys," those designated wellsprings of musical knowledge (129). It isn't clear exactly what McManaman learned from Bill Monroe and his band, though he was apparently impressed upon realizing that each member could convincingly play all of the instruments in the ensemble (Rosenberg 1999, 10). Whether from observation or direct instruction, it's likely that the members of the York County Boys did take away some concrete knowledge from their first meeting with the Blue Grass Boys. But, it's also reasonable to suggest that the heightened prominence of this exchange and its pedagogical value is imbued with the romantic mythologies surrounding Bill Monroe, the rural American origins of bluegrass, and the extraordinary prospect of narrowing, if not the cultural,[62] then the geographic distance from these knowledge-bearers. Regardless of the mythology surrounding Bill Monroe's status as a "special key," this meeting certainly did not hurt the York County Boys' musical development and career. Not only did playing alongside Monroe lend the band a measure of legitimacy, but, through the remainder of the 1950s and much of the 1960s, they became a "go to" Canadian act for touring artists, securing opening spots and participating in casual jams with professional bluegrass stars, including future members of the Blue Grass Boys.

[62] As discussed in the previous chapter, some have noted a cultural affinity between working-class rural Canadian migrants and the Appalachian peoples who are often associated with bluegrass and old time. Such narratives often employ oversimplified and damaging stereotypes. That said, unlike middle-class bluegrass enthusiasts associated with the urban folk revival, the members of the York County Boys do not allude to a sense of "cultural distance." Alternatively, for them, geographic distance was identified as a more significant barrier to learning bluegrass. While some members did make an occasional cross border trip, these excursions, like their deserted Maritime tour, coincided with occupational concerns.

* * *

In a *TABC News* profile of the York County Boys, Adrian Bevis (1978) reminds readers, "in those far off days [i.e., 1950s] a budding musician, more often than not, learnt his music in a veritable vacuum" (1). This sense of isolation echoes some of his own experiences and as a case in point he describes his lack of direction and musical awareness upon purchasing his first guitar in 1958. Just ten years old and drawn to guitar-wielding folksingers, he mistakenly bought an arch-top guitar "set up for Hawaiian playing (strings an inch off the fingerboard)" (Ibid.). "I didn't know this," he confesses, "and the chap who sold it to me for $10.00 didn't mention anything either. And so it was, in those very early days. No one knew from NOTHING!" (Ibid.). Bevis proceeded to struggle through the *Doc Williams Simplified By-Ear Guitar Course* (1942). "[There was] a little photo of an arch-top guitar [in the book]," he recalls, "and I said, 'Oh, that's what I've got.' […] I would look at the book, the chord formations…I could not press the bloody strings down" (Bevis, personal communication May 25, 2013). Eventually a family friend identified and remedied the modification on Bevis' guitar (a raised nut for use with a slide), and he taught himself to play.

Many of Bevis' early learning experiences were characteristically experimental, exploratory, and private. In his adolescent years, however, this solitary woodshedding was influenced by observations, lessons, and exchanges that took place among a growing network of interested peers within the city's folk revival scene. Bevis recalls, for instance, how he learned to sing harmony after bartering for resources with another folk enthusiast:

> I realized in the early sixties that I couldn't sing. I heard myself on tape and it was so bad that I said to this fellow who had a pretty good tape recorder, 'look, how about you trade your tape recorder for my banjo?'—because he liked the banjo. 'I'll have your tape recorder and I will learn how to sing harmony.' That's exactly what I did. I spent hours singing along with myself until I was finally able to sing on key. If I

> hadn't had that tape recorder, it wouldn't have been easy, because you couldn't walk into a room and hear [harmonies]. People [in Toronto] didn't know how to harmonize, and so everyone would sing in unison. (Bevis, personal communication May 25, 2013).

Ensconced in Toronto's folk scene, Bevis' musical development continued in both private and public. He frequented song circles, participated in numerous folk groups, and gathered with peers to listen to and analyze records. It was during a casual listening session, Bevis recalls, that he was first enticed by bluegrass music:

> I dropped into somebody's place. They were playing records and on came Flatt & Scruggs. As soon as I heard, Josh Graves' Dobro playing, I was hooked. There was something about the Dobro sound. But then, the singing…there was something about the harmony and the way they put it together. It was just so foreign to what I was used to. The fourths and fifths and the melody, and the harmony, and the interplay. It was so unusual and yet it was so right. (Ibid.)

While the York County Boys struggled to find bluegrass recordings in Toronto during their formative years, by the early 1960s, in part due to the urban folk revival's youth market, more bluegrass LPs were available in the city. Taking his lead from the liner notes of Mike Seeger's compilation album *Mountain Music Bluegrass Style* (1959), Bevis devised a checklist of notable artists—Red Smiley, Jim and Jesse, the Osborne Brothers, Bill Monroe—and sought out their recordings at Sam the Record Man, one the city's most prominent music retailers during this time. Within weeks of hearing Josh Graves' Dobro, Bevis amassed a small collection of bluegrass records. Listening to them, he developed a knowledge of bluegrass repertoire and sounds. What's more, through liner notes and the occasional folk magazine article, he acquired an understanding of bluegrass history and common discussions within the genre community. Still, given bluegrass' marginal status within the urban folk revival, it was difficult to find people who shared his enthusiasm for the music or knew anything about bluegrass performance. Again, he was left to explore on his own.

It wasn't until a few years later that Bevis decided to learn bluegrass, and specifically the Dobro, a steel guitar with a resonator and heightened action for use with a metal slide bar.[63] In 1968 he found a classified ad in the *Toronto Daily Star* that read: "Dobro for sale—Steele's Tavern—Rick Fielding."[64] Upon arriving at the bar/performance venue, however, Bevis' excitement was quashed when he realized that Fielding was not, in fact, selling a Dobro, but rather a metal-bodied National resonator guitar. "I had no interest in metal Nationals whatsoever," Bevis remembers his reaction, "because I knew you had to have a wood-body Dobro [for bluegrass]. It didn't matter how popular [Nationals] were for blues, I was not a blues player" (Personal communication May 25, 2013). Here, Bevis employs a genre "convention" (Becker 1982, 29) concerning the appropriate instruments for making bluegrass music, which he discerned from his examination of the resonator guitars featured in performance photos and album artwork (Bevis, personal communication May 25, 2013). In this instance, Bevis' tenacity with regard to obtaining a wooden-bodied Dobro also surfaces in relation to other genre conventions (i.e., appropriate instruments for making blues music). Such conventions, however, do not simply materialize through private interpretative work or in dialogue with other genre systems. By their very nature, they are formulated, learned, transformed, and circulated within the kinds of social contexts that were beginning to develop around bluegrass.

A Bluegrass Community of Practice

Bevis' failed attempt to acquire a Dobro was not completely in vain. That evening at Steele's Tavern he met amateur music journalist, perennial organizer, and bluegrass devotee, Doug

[63] In fact, Dobro is the name of an instrument manufacturer that has produced several resonator-style instruments. The name, however, is used generically in reference to the style of guitar described above. Steel slide guitars like the Dobro were immensely popular in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, especially among Hawaiian musicians, and became a signature sound in early country music (Malone 2002 [1968], 127). Bevis is cognizant of the irony that his first troublesome guitar was modified to function as a Dobro, the instrument that would later lure him into bluegrass music.

[64] Recall, Rick Fielding was the guitarist and singer for the Gangrene Boys, discussed in Chapter Two.

Benson, who overheard Bevis' knowledgeable comments about steel guitars. "He and I started talking about [bluegrass]," Bevis recalls, "[and] he wanted to start a Toronto bluegrass association." This encounter marked a transition in Bevis' musical development. Through Benson's networking prowess, he became aware of other unconnected bluegrass enthusiasts scattered throughout Toronto and the surrounding area. Within months the Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee (TABC) was established and, now in possession of a Dobro, Bevis was learning bluegrass as part of a community of fellow enthusiasts that included both musicians and non-musicians. I discuss the TABC's origins in more detail in the following chapter. For now, however, I want to focus on the Committee as a community of practice in which participants developed musical skills and negotiated bluegrass conventions.

In the TABC's formative years, jams or "picking sessions" were a primary outlet for exchange among bluegrass musicians and enthusiasts. From the very beginning in 1968, TABC business meetings coincided with picking sessions. Initially, the sessions were held at Toronto's High Park during the summer months and, in the winter, at a small folk club called Fiddler's Green. Within a few years, there were several regular picking sessions throughout the city, most notably the weekly jams at Ryerson University's Egerton's Pub and at Bruce Dowd's apartment on Harbord Street.[65] Jam sessions provided opportunities for enthusiasts to get together, share records, listen, and perform. Learning was emphasized at jams and the Committee experimented with ways to create valuable music-making experiences for musicians of various skill levels. Fiddler's Green sessions, for instance, were divided into three groups that jammed simultaneously. Openness and fluidity was encouraged between the groups so that musicians could participate where they felt most comfortable and so beginner and emerging performers could "take part and learn from the more accomplished players" (Anonymous 1972, 1). Chuck

[65] I provide a more detailed discussion of some of these places as scene hubs in Chapter Four.

Crawford (1978), one of the TABC's more accomplished pickers, notes that this setup "sounds like chaos from outside but when you are in the middle of it, it can be exciting" (8).

The Egerton's picking session-cum-open mic, which took place each Saturday afternoon, was, in some ways "more formal" (Crawford 1978, 8), but also encouraged openness and accessibility. A memorandum in the *TABC News* emphasizes the session's casual atmosphere and encourages pickers of all levels to participate:

> The jam session at Egerton's serves a two-fold purpose. It is a very comfortable spot for bluegrass listeners to hoist a few beers and relax to the sounds of our local pickers; and it gives anyone and everyone who wants to join in an opportunity to sing, pick, or just strum along in the background. […] Every picker who wants to join in is more than welcome. There is a practice room upstairs for people to work out a number or two before 'performing'—or you can just join whoever is currently on stage (Anonymous 1974a, 1).

It's important to note that the audience—not necessarily musicians, but identified here as "bluegrass listeners"—are viewed as a valuable component of this session's welcoming atmosphere. Recounting a recent afternoon at Egerton's the author emphasizes the audience's contributions:

> There was an appreciative group drinking and listening who did not mind attempts at their requests and who certainly posed no threat to anyone who might have felt bashful about picking for an audience. […] They are only jam sessions and a professional performance is not expected from anyone (Ibid.).

In addition to serving as a listening and participating audience, nonmusicians contributed to jam sessions in a number of other ways. Perhaps most notably, Doug Benson, along with other musicians and nonmusicians, organized sessions in High Park and Fiddler's Green. "Since I wasn't a musician," he recalls, "I was finding other channels for expressing my interest [in bluegrass]" (Benson, personal communication Aug. 6, 2013). Benson says he was able to commit to his role as an organizer of jam sessions, as well as other TABC activities, "because I wasn't preoccupied, as some guys were, with learning to get good on an instrument or playing or

wanting to sing. I'd go to jam sessions…we organized jam sessions, but it wasn't for my benefit. It was so I could hear some of the guys who could play" (Ibid.). At the Fiddler's Green sessions, some participants also served as "referees" (*TABC News*, Nov. 1973). In this organizational role, volunteers arrived early, set up the space for separate groups, collected a fee for the jam,[66] and stayed afterwards to close down. At TABC-affiliated sessions, nonmusicians and audience members often arrived with records, magazines, or other bluegrass-related memorabilia to share with participants. Recognizing the various forms of participation and extramusical activity that occurred at picking sessions, in 1976 the Committee's newly appointed "librarian," Steve Pritchard, was assigned to appear at sessions with back issues of the *TABC News*, promotional material, and items for review such as albums and books.

Picking sessions became one of the main venues for negotiating a variety of bluegrass conventions ranging from jam etiquette, preferred repertoire, and "best practices" for a successful session. The October 1973 Fiddler's Green jam, for instance, was marked as particularly spirited because of the variety of bluegrass instruments, and the balance of instrumentals and vocal songs. "The credit for the success of this session," as stated in the *TABC News*, "goes to those who came early, kept the tunes going, and dug back in memory for old ones to try out" (Nov. 1973, 1).

The emphasis on older, perhaps more obscure songs is particularly notable. During the scene's formative years, participants converged around what has come to be known as "traditional bluegrass," an industry endorsed label that emerged in response to the genre's stylistic sub-categorization. Through the late 1960s and into the 1970s, as artists began to explore creative possibilities by including electric instrumentation, experimenting with different

[66] The TABC implemented a cover fee of 0.50 cents to help with Fiddler's Green's operational costs. This was viewed as a gesture of appreciation for club owner Tam Kearney's support of the Committee. In 1977, when the venue was struggling, the TABC raised the fee to $1.00.

arrangements, or fusing bluegrass with elements of rock and/or jazz, discussions of what is and isn't bluegrass—what's going too far, what's holding artists back—were a mainstay within the local scene.[67] Some participants have indicated that the Toronto scene, in its early years, was characteristically purist and dismissed local "bluegrass-oriented" acts like the Good Brothers and Big Redd Ford, as well as American "progressive bluegrass" bands, whose stage shows were inspired by rock concert conventions. Indeed, the Committee upheld this reputation for CBC broadcaster Stan Rogers,[68] who, in a 1974 feature on the city's bluegrass scene, states "the [TABC] kind of look the other way when the Good Brothers are mentioned because the Committee is more interested in the very traditional form of bluegrass—it's a very rigid thing with them" (Rogers and Tyson 1974). While views of progressive bluegrass were certainly not homogenous, a survey of the *TABC News* also indicates a dominant idealization of the "traditional."

Through discussion, feedback, and gestures among performers and observers, over the course of a jam session participants collectively formulated, communicated, and learned socio-musical conventions. This is not to suggest, however, that participants harmoniously arrived at particular conventions, such as a predilection for traditional bluegrass material, instruments, and styles. Negotiating conventions in a social context could be imbued with tension, frustration, and a sense of alienation. Adrian Bevis (1979), for instance, discusses his temporary exit from bluegrass in the mid-1970s, when, "after a period of time certain anomalies began creeping in" to his jam session contributions (1). He elaborates on the difficulty of incorporating other styles of music stating, "I discovered in the midst of a regular bluegrass session I'd want to sing 'Long Gone Lonesome Blues' or 'Tupelo County Jail,' or play chop rhythm on an arch-top guitar or,

[67] It should be noted that these discussions were happening on a broader level among bluegrass fans throughout North America.

[68] Stan Rogers later earned acclaim as a folk singer in Canada.

for heaven's sake, try 'Old Cape Cod' or 'Fly Me to the Moon'" (Ibid.). These commercial country and pop songs were "not a very popular choice of material at a bluegrass session" (Ibid.). What's more, he became bored by the uncompromising approach to the traditional bluegrass repertoire. "The same songs, over and over," he complains, "at the same tempo, and with the same lack of arrangements. Oops, a dirty word—arrangements!" (2). He continues:

> Why should most other forms of music enjoy unlimited scope for arrangements, while bluegrass should remain in such a rigid format. And the chords! Why, those same 3 or 4 major chords and very little chance to throw in a major seventh or a ninth or a minor demented! Yes indeed, when all these questions came calling, […] I realized that while I still enjoyed some aspects of bluegrass, I was more and more bothered by other aspects. (Ibid.)

For Bevis, conventions within his local scene became a burden. As a musician, he wanted to explore other trajectories. At times, when these urges were not too distant from bluegrass, as in the case of early commercial country music, the tepid response was frustrating. Likewise, within bluegrass picking sessions, Bevis felt stifled when he wanted to try unconventional guitar types, introduce rhythms that would deviate from the music's traditional "boom-chuck" pulse, or explore different chord voicings. At the same time, drawing on broader dialogues among North American bluegrass enthusiasts, he cites the lack of fiddles as one of the scene's setbacks and alludes to his own purist leanings. "It always struck me as rather puzzling," Bevis laments, "that the original bluegrass twin fiddles (of Monroe) gave way to the mandolin-banjo of the Country Gentlemen so easily" (2). Indeed, Bevis is not entirely at odds with some of the aesthetic conventions that determine how traditional bluegrass music should sound.

Lou Moore, whose Toronto-based band Big Redd Ford received mixed reviews in the late 1970s because of their progressive leanings, is more candid about the frictions that could surface in these kinds of negotiations. He recalls:

> There was a lot of people who had their heads up their asses. […] Music's music. Just because somebody plays Stanley Brothers and plays it well, and then turns around and plays [jazz violinist] Stefan Grapelli, doesn't make them any less a musician. It doesn't make the song that they just sang by the Stanley Brothers any less a song. […] But there was a lot of that. It just seemed to be really silly to me (Personal communication, May 30, 2013).

For Moore, these tensions were rooted in a fundamental incongruence between ways of knowing among "musicians" and "nonmusicians." He maintains that those who had issues with musical experimentation were mostly "the bluegrass societies, the people who did a lot more writing and talking than they did playing." In some ways, this speaks to Lundberg et al's observation that "doers" and "knowers" locate musical "quality and authenticity" in distinct areas (50). While the former are interested in the experiences that come with "actually doing," the latter are concerned with "procedures and external conditions" (Ibid.). In this instance, the tone of Moore's comments suggests that these ways of knowing do not only co-exist or represent switchable roles, but can produce internal and social conflicts.

All of this evokes both the predetermined and flexible character of artistic conventions (Becker 1982, 29). Traditional bluegrass ideals regarding instrumentation, repertoire, and styles of playing exist beyond the local, circulating within a larger genre world. They are learned through independent research, observation, and social encounters. Brought into localized social contexts, however, conventions are negotiated, accepted, challenged, and revised as they encounter other musical, as well as, political, cultural, and economic value systems. Among musicians, conventions influence learning trajectories and performance decisions. Here, working with and through conventions can provide a sense of direction, as well as stimulating creative challenges. Alternatively, musicians might feel discouraged from participating if they feel that the conventions are too rigidly enforced by the social group. As will be discussed in Chapter Six,

the flexibility and ongoing negotiation of conventions within a scene pointed a way forward for what eventually came to be labeled "Canadian bluegrass."

Despite Lou Moore's earlier reservations about "the people who did a lot more writing and talking than they did playing," it's important not to overlook how this kind of activity contributed to knowledge-building efforts in the nascent scene. Complementing the intense social atmosphere at picking sessions, the *TABC News* (published 1972-1980) and its predecessor, *Bluegrass Breakdown* (published 1968-1969), provided a vehicle for local participants to both exchange musical knowledge and engage in dialogue around bluegrass and scene conventions. The *TABC News* in particular was used to carry out the Committee's mission to promote bluegrass in the Toronto area and, in addition to reviews, opinions, local band reports, and event listings, frequently included educational pieces. For musicians, the handmade newsletter published in-depth instructional features on mandolin picking styles, reading banjo tablature, and bluegrass harmony singing. A guide to purchasing a hi-fi system is geared toward album collectors, but also those wanting to learn bluegrass. The author extols the benefits of using a quality tape deck, which allows musicians to pause songs, play back music at half speed, and record runs at a slow tempo, speeding them up afterwards to judge their accuracy (Goldberg 1974, 2-3).

The TABC emerged during a time of heightened interest in bluegrass across North America. As a result, by the mid-1970s, participants benefitted from a deluge of bluegrass-related publications and had greater access to resources than local fans in the preceding decades. A 1976 *TABC News* article aims to help aspiring musicians sift through the numerous instructional books published in the first half of that decade and offers some advice on learning from books. Instructional books, the author states "illustrate music otherwise too quick and complicated to be

easily learned by watching professionals or slowing down records" (Hinde 1976, 1). What's more, they can guide students through a step-by-step learning process that gradually builds on acquired skills, and they're cheaper than hiring a teacher. However, instructional books, the author warns, vary greatly in usefulness, with some providing subpar transcriptions and others barely comprehensible (Ibid.). Standing by another dominant bluegrass convention, the author maintains that "listening is still the best way of learning bluegrass […] any book's value will be multiplied many times if recorded illustrations are used in conjunction with the book" (Ibid.; Cantwell 2003 [1984], 179).

In its mission to impart knowledge to bluegrass enthusiasts, the *TABC News* also catered to readers who were not necessarily musicians. In addition to biographical pieces on prominent artists and local performers, record reviews, and festival reports, the newsletter offered advice and guidance geared toward local fans. An article entitled "Picking Your Bluegrass Magazine" (1975), for instance, surveyed current periodicals and informed readers that the popular magazine *Bluegrass Unlimited* could be found at the Metro Toronto Music Library. Another issue of the newsletter provides a "consumer guide" to local shops offering bluegrass records, with comments on their selection, pricing, and staff helpfulness (Angus 1976, 1). Nevertheless, echoing the struggles of local enthusiasts in the 1950s and 1960s, the author concludes, "looking for stores that sell bluegrass records in Toronto is like looking for liquor stores in Salt Lake City – there aren't many and those that exist have a poor selection" (1).

In the process of educating local bluegrass enthusiasts, the *TABC News* directly and indirectly played a role in formulating, upholding, and circulating bluegrass conventions. Articles that contributed to the canonization of "golden era" artists or critiqued when bluegrass veered too far from its roots, posited a set of aesthetic values. Likewise, features on the history of

Gibson mandolins (Dowd 1974) and Martin guitars (Wager 1973) upheld those instruments as the genre standard. Bill Wager's two-part feature on Martin guitars goes further, analyzing the acoustic properties of older D-28 models—"the bluegrass standard" (Wager 1973, 4)—compared to contemporary makes. Explaining how years of continuous play loosens a guitar's top, resulting in a "full rich tone," he concludes that while older Martin D-28s are ideal, newly manufactured Martins will improve with age (Wager 1974, 3).

The *TABC News* was a hub of local bluegrass resources and, approaching the early scene as a community of practice, it became a space for coordination among those attempting to learn/learn about bluegrass. In addition to listing the times and venues for various jam sessions and other related activities, the newsletter regularly contained reader inquiries about teachers, as well as notifications when more advanced musicians in the scene were taking students. It also directed readers towards local shops like the Toronto Folklore Centre and Ring Music when new instructional books and recordings arrived in stock. Soliciting input from *TABC News* readers,[69] by the mid-1970s the Committee began taking their educational initiatives in a more formalized direction by offering workshops. Previously, the TABC held a one-off "introduction to bluegrass" workshop/membership campaign at the 1970 Mariposa Folk Festival. In 1974, however, Mariposa organizers approached the TABC about setting up a tent for the entirety of the weekend-long festival. This time, in addition to daily discussions catered to those who know bluegrass "in name only" (*TABC News*, May 1974, 6), the tent would host a series of specialized instrumental sessions. Like most TABC activities, the workshops were inclusive, emphasizing participation over performance ability. To encourage this, the organizers teamed up with Ring Music, who provided instruments to participants who did not have one available (Ibid.). The TABC tent appeared at Mariposa throughout the latter half of the 1970s and initiated more

[69] By subscribing to the *TABC News*, readers were registered as members of the Committee.

regular TABC organized workshops year-round[70] facilitated by some of the scene's more advanced players, such as Jim Hale (banjo) and Adrian Bevis (Dobro). The workshops were coupled with the monthly Fiddler's Green picking sessions and served the incidental purpose of enriching those gatherings. For instance, perhaps to address the dearth of material, which Bevis comments on above, a "Little Known Songs" workshop called on TABC members to share uncommon, but not overly challenging songs. Participants would then work on the material as a group. Such workshops provided group-learning opportunities with clearly defined educational objectives that supplemented individual learning practices. Indeed, by the mid-1970s the Toronto area bluegrass scene, under the auspices of the TABC, was functioning as a community of practice in the most absolute sense.

Conclusion

Aspiring bluegrass performers in mid-century Toronto employed a number of creative, "informal" learning practices largely centred on listening, observation, and repetition. Their methods, however, while common among beginning musicians across many popular music genres, were beset by a geographical and perceived cultural distance from the rural American source of bluegrass music. In early years, the geographical distance, while increasingly surmountable with the development of a cross-border highway system, resulted in a very real lack of resources (e.g., recordings, books, instruments) and mentors or knowledge-bearers. Indeed, 1950s and 1960s Toronto was not a hub of bluegrass activity and had nothing resembling a network or infrastructure to nurture bluegrass enthusiasts. The sense of cultural distance, however, was a product of regional and class imaginaries that subsisted on romantic narratives of

[70] With the explosion of summer bluegrass festivals starting in the 1960s, the period of reduced activity during fall and winter months came to be viewed as an "off season" among bluegrass bands and fans.

pre-modern rural American life, "authentic" community-oriented music-making, and presumably innate or culturally derived musical skill. These conceptualizations appeared alongside another set of narratives loosely evoking the perceived artificiality of modern urban life, and specifically rooted in views of Toronto as stodgy and culturally grey. In pursuing bluegrass, many musicians maintained a complex relationship with these narratives where, on the one hand, they strategically rejected certain aspects of local culture while, on the other hand, acquiescing to the "fact" that they would never achieve the same quality of musicianship as their counterparts in the United States. Subsequently, bluegrass enthusiasts pushed ahead, formulating and embracing local standards pertaining to musicianship, collective music-making, and, eventually, "Canadian bluegrass."

Musicians' accounts of learning bluegrass highlight both the private and public facets of developing musical competence. While these domains of learning are always entwined, approaching the 1970s, Toronto-based bluegrass musicians were presented with more opportunities to learn directly from other musicians and hone their skills in informal group and band settings. As I have argued above, by the mid-1970s a community of practice had coalesced made up of both musicians and nonmusicians. While I perhaps overemphasized the distinction between these two "parties" in order to highlight various contributions, it should be noted that within this community of practice, the musician/nonmusician divide was not rigid. Nor were forms of labour, incongruences, and knowledge necessarily compartmentalized along this line. Articles in the *TABC News*, for instance, were not only submitted by nonmusicians or "knowers/makers." Prominent musicians in the scene also helped assemble, distribute, and contributed to the newsletter. Likewise, during some picking sessions, musicians acted as primary organizers, and certainly records, books, and other items were exchanged between all

interested participants, regardless of musicianship or lack thereof. Moreover, depending on the context of a picking session and others involved, some participants might assert, qualify, or retract their status as musicians on an ongoing basis.

Just as ways of knowing and participant identities/roles were shifting and malleable, *types* of knowledge were also simultaneously constructed, augmented, and transformed. I should emphasize here that participants were not merely receiving and sharing established and static nuggets of "bluegrass knowledge." They were also producing new fields of knowledge. By the late 1970s, for instance, many participants were debating the sonic features, regional characteristics, and legitimacy of "Canadian bluegrass" (more on this in Chapter Six). Here we can begin to see how, as individuals and groups endeavour to make sense of a musical form, they are also making sense of their geographic, cultural, and social backgrounds, among other things. Furthermore, these processes—while creatively fertile, pedagogically valuable, and socially enticing—can be marked by tension, discord, and uncertainty.

In 1960s Toronto, bluegrass enthusiasts, otherwise dispersed throughout the city, benefitted immensely from the growth of a community of practice focused on exchanging knowledge, encouraging bluegrass appreciation, and promoting the music locally. This collective learning environment, however, did not surface organically. Rather, it emerged from the purposeful organizational and networking efforts of a handful of mobilizers. In the following chapter I take a closer look at these endeavours and consider how they cultivated a more fluid cultural scene and, eventually, an infrastructure for local bluegrass.

Chapter Four

Building a Scene: Networks and Grassroots Organization

> What really was important was the synergy of a bunch of like-minded guys. My god, we became such…you can see what kind of friendships we have to this day. Well, that was all forged in those days, by sitting around, brainstorming, and getting excited. Listening to music and saying 'What if? What about this? What about that? Where are we going next? Can we get down to Berryville or Bean Blossom? When's Carlisle this year?' […] And it was magic. (Doug Benson, personal communication Aug. 6, 2013)

In the epigraph above, Doug Benson describes the small exchanges and enthusiastic ambitions that, by the early 1970s, resulted in a vibrant local bluegrass scene, as well as a few long-term friendships. Here, the "synergy" between a small, but growing collection of bluegrass fans is characterized by an excited naiveté—an embrace of possibilities—that, waxing nostalgic, Benson can only describe as "magic." Indeed, at times cultural scenes seemingly possess an abstract magical quality. Participants, many only loosely connected, casually converge on local sites, momentarily dedicating their energies to a shared interest or goal before dispersing throughout the city. This clustering and dispersal repeats with varying attendance, different modes of social engagement, and at numerous locales. What's more, it can be multi-sited with simultaneous exchanges, encounters, and organized meetings occurring at pubs, concert venues, residential apartments, parks and street corners, while still retaining a sense of connectedness or totality.

The magical quality Benson describes can be attributed to two predominant characteristics of cultural scenes. First, the variability of participation and network-building within a scene can shift as individuals take on different roles and maintain different degrees of group investment. A participant might be drawn, for instance, to record exchanges but not so interested in attending live performances in a bar setting. Additionally, some participants will exercise considerable

initiative and commitment by taking on numerous organizational tasks and appearing frequently at scene gatherings, while others play more marginal or selective roles. This will often produce a scene structure involving a core group of organizers or leaders, devoted regulars, and peripheral members. Related to this, participants will establish various kinds of relationships determined by their scene activity, as well as other factors such as age, occupational background, class identity, et cetera. Some participants will maintain close ties within and outside of the scene, others will know each other only in passing, and still others will be no more than familiar faces. All of this variability can create a sense of spontaneity or serendipity as participants, some of who are strangers, congregate regularly and with little effort around presumably shared interests and goals.

The apparent effortlessness of these gatherings points to a second, seemingly "magical" quality of scenes: the organizational work that brings people together and achieves particular goals is often hidden or disguised. In scenes where there is a core group of mobilizers, much of this work is carried out by and only visible to a handful of individuals and regular volunteers. Furthermore, while tasks such as organizing shows and assembling newsletters can be labour intensive, other domains of work are disguised within the scene's social effervescence. Above, when Benson talks about brainstorming, putting forward ideas, asking questions, and pinning down details, it's in the context of "sitting around," "listening to music," "getting excited," and forging friendships. Moving beyond core participants, this kind of "recreational work" is dispersed into the casual interactions among various participants. And, while it doesn't feel like "work" in a traditional sense, these kinds of informal social activities are at the root of both how and why a cultural scene is produced.

Building on the previous chapter's discussion of how musicians and enthusiasts formed a community of practice to learn (about) bluegrass music, this chapter takes a closer look at the network- and scene-building activities that produced an infrastructure for bluegrass in the Toronto area. Drawing on Will Straw's (1991, 2002, 2004) discussion of scenes, I consider the broad range of activities, allegiances, and, conversely, "processes of differentiation" (1991, 373) that contributed to the formation of a local scene. These activities did not occur within a vacuum. Participants in the Toronto area were aware of and inspired by the swell of bluegrass-related activity happening in American cities and developments in the broader "bluegrass world." At the same time, scene-makers and participants were invested in local concerns and tied to local sites and landscapes, which ultimately played a role in shaping the scene. Indeed, several public spaces, residences, and private establishments became key sites for networking and dialogue among bluegrass performers and enthusiasts. I begin by exploring some of the theory that considers how art is collectively produced and appreciated. Here, I look beyond "communities of practice" and consider ideas such as "groupings" (Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström 2003; Slobin 1992), "networks" (Brinner 2009), "communities," and, of course, "scenes" (Straw 1991, 2002, 2004). This discussion will inform the remainder of the chapter, which provides a more historical account of the Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee's origins, focusing on some of the network-building strategies, transnational encounters, and negotiations of scene boundaries. While it is hoped that this "case study" contributes to broader discussions of urban music scenes, I intend to maintain the historical orientation of this thesis by detailing prominent participants, events, and sites as they surface.

Groups, Communities, Scenes, Networks

> "What do you mean by connection? We were just part of it." (Tam Kearney, proprietor of Fiddler's Green Folk Club, 2013 [2003])

In the previous chapter I discussed how individuals and small clusters came together in a more organized capacity with the goal of learning (about) bluegrass music. Here, the notion of "communities of practice" (Wenger 1998) was useful in describing how knowledge was formulated and exchanged in a social context. Of course, focusing on learning processes provides only limited scope when considering how and why people congregate to engage in music-oriented collective activity. Knowledge building is not necessarily recognized as the *raison d'être* of such groups (at least not explicitly by all participants) and it often occurs in conjunction with various other social processes. Exploring scenes in a holistic manner requires a consideration of broader and often more unruly concepts, including the very notion of "scene," which, up until now, I've employed with little critical attentiveness.

Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström's (2003) discussion of "groupings" provides the most generalized point of departure. Seeking to understand how individuals relate to one another in collective music-making contexts, the authors highlight five circumstances from which groups form: 1) segregation, 2) migration, 3) separation, 4) opposition, and 5) interest (46). They go on to describe each of these categories in turn, providing a helpful typology of possible group origins. When considered more closely as part of a case study, however, we begin to see how these origin categories rub against and bleed into one another. In the Toronto area bluegrass scene, while some categories appear more prominent than others, several are present. We have seen, for instance, *migrant* groups such as "Maritimers" and American draft evaders who are often identified along cultural, ethnic, political and class lines. Conscientious objectors and draft resisters can also be considered part of groups that emerged through shared *opposition* to the

United States' militarism. So too could those Toronto youth who rejected middle-class Canadian values and gravitated towards more "authentic" lifestyle ideals. When considered in generational terms, this group also falls into what Lundberg et al. describe as "groupings built through voluntary separation" (i.e., young vs. old) (47). Most obvious, the scene, as a grouping, came together through a shared *interest* in bluegrass music. Upon closer inspection then, what emerges is the coexistence and overlaying of the authors' groupings.

Things get more complex when we hone in on "choice of music" (Lundberg et al., 48) as the solidifying interest. In his discussion of subcultural "affinity groups," Mark Slobin (1992) considers how those "drawn magnetically to a certain genre" (72) interact with other subcultures (e.g., grassroots scenes) and "supercultural" forces (e.g., state cultural policy or the corporate music industry). His work highlights how groups rely on processes of distinction and boundary making, but brings into focus the fissures in those boundaries. Participants in Toronto's bluegrass scene, for instance, maintained relationships with, to greater or lesser extents, country, folk, and old-time on both subcultural (e.g., participating in local jams) and supercultural (e.g., tuning into transnational radio broadcasts or ordering commercial recordings) levels. What's more, bluegrass itself, a commercial music form that is often presented as "authentically" noncommercial, creates added potential for disjuncture in the formation of clear scenic boundaries. As I discuss in more detail below, for many, the nature of these alignments informed how they understood their position within the bluegrass scene.

Drawing on Simmel's examination of individual-group dynamics, Slobin speaks to the situational permeability of group boundaries and personal affiliations:

> Expressive culture is both what 'we' do and what 'I' do—and […] the two are so intertwined as to be inextricable. To sneak the superculture back into the discussion, it's also what 'they' do. No cultural rule says you can't pay allegiance to small, medium, and large groups simultaneously, and, as [Simmel] points out, this may be

> very attractive to individuals, who can locate themselves variably—hence comfortably—in different groups. (1992, 38)

The multifarious interactions between individuality, group affiliation, and superculture described by Slobin seem to resist any attempts to pin down a coherent social order. Proposing the term "scene," however, Will Straw embraces this incoherence while recognizing an accompanying sense of totality. "*Scene*," he maintains, "designates particular clusters of social and cultural activity without specifying the nature of the boundaries which circumscribe them" (2004, 412; emphasis in original). Straw suggests an openness and fluidity that corresponds with the multileveled interactions put forward in Slobin's analysis. He elaborates:

> A scene resists deciphering, in part, because it mobilizes local energies and moves these energies in multiple directions—onwards, to later reiterations of itself; outwards, to more formal sorts of social or entrepreneurial activity; upwards, to the broader coalescing of cultural energies within which collective identities takes shape. (Ibid.)

Here, Straw describes flurries of movement and initiative that allow for multiple forms of scene-building activities. Like the collective learning environments discussed in the previous chapter, participation in local music scenes is not limited to musicians, but includes a range of enthusiasts and entrepreneurs. As such, scenes also contain an array of practices that goes beyond performance and informal jamming to concert organization, record collecting, instrument building and repair, road trips, discursive practices like writing, and establishing local appreciation societies.

The openness described by Straw extends to the often-elusive boundaries that contain a scene. This can be viewed, for instance, with regard to bluegrass' shifting relationship to other genre-scene constructs like "folk music," and "country music," as well as related notions of commercial and noncommercial musics. Indeed, participants in my research not only approached bluegrass music from either one of these genre camps, but they also talk of negotiating an

appreciation for folk *and* country in their social lives as bluegrass fans and performers. What's more, the perforated boundaries of cultural scenes makes room for an analysis of migratory trajectories, collaborations, and cultural exchanges. Once again, consistent with Slobin's observations, while activity in the Toronto area bluegrass scene tends to have been very local, it involved networks of exchange and participation that extend across regional, provincial, and national borders. Indeed, as we watch the scene grow through the 1970s, it becomes more difficult to talk about a "Toronto scene" per se, and more helpful to view the city as a hub of transient activity.

Straw (1991) presents the notion of "scene" in contrast to "community." While scenes are unbound, protean, and difficult to pin down, communities, he states, "[presume] a population group whose composition is relatively stable […] and whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted in geographically specific historical heritage" (373). The notion of community, he adds in a later work, is characterized by a "cozy intimacy" (2002, 248). Straw's definition of community articulates well with Rosenberg's "named-system revivals" (1993a). Indeed, local interest in bluegrass provides an example of these genre-oriented revivals and enthusiasts can be viewed as part of a community. This is especially so when one considers formal bodies like the TABC and its newsletter, which are invested in bluegrass' historical import and advance clearly defined goals to promote the music in the Toronto area. Straw's distinction between "scene" and "community," however, is not rigid. "The point," he argues, "is not that of designating particular cultural spaces as one or the other, but of examining the ways in which particular musical practices 'work' to produce a sense of community within the conditions of metropolitan music

scenes" (373). Here, Straw alludes to the potential for experiential unity within the messiness of cultural scenes.

Employing network analysis in his work on Israel's "ethnic music scene," Benjamin Brinner (2009) attempts to bring some order to the mess by mapping the divergent relationships that make up a scene. His network models present scenes as an expanse of connected "nodes" (e.g., individual participants). The picture becomes increasingly intricate as it unfurls to reveal "clusters" (e.g., subnetworks), linked by individuals who flow between and establish relationships within various social circles (167). Naturally, the "links" between individuals within a scene have their own character and vary in terms of "strength," "directionality," and "relationship type" (170). Some links, for instance, are firm, having been fostered over a long period of time. Alternatively, contact between nodes can be relatively casual. Relationships might also play out on several levels and involve different forms of exchange (171). Consider for instance how participants in the country music club scene described in Chapter two might have maintained different relationships defined, on the one hand, by a shared occupational context and, on the other hand, recreational activity like music-making. These exchanges also exhibit a "directionality." In the bluegrass scene, this is perhaps most evident in the flow of musical and historical information between recognized knowledge bearers and "entry-level" enthusiasts.

The quality of these relationships, and the shape of the scenic network in general, are further defined by the status of particular nodes. Some individuals, for instance, are more connected than others and can be viewed as "hubs" within the network (172). Networks with only a few hubs are highly centralized and have a more visible hierarchy. Brinner also considers the "prominence" of particular individuals, a concept concerned more with the status of connections rather than the quantity. Prominent nodes might not necessarily hold a central position or maintain the most

relationships, but are valued in terms of *who* they are connected to (173). Related to this, some nodes and clusters are "prestigious" and have an attractive quality that draws the productive energies, resources, and knowledge of other nodes (Ibid.). If we consider this institutionally,[71] the Mariposa Folk Festival and its organizers can be viewed as a prestigious force in the Toronto folk scene. What's more, to some extent, that prestige spilled over to the TABC who were affiliated with Mariposa in the early 1970s.

Finally, some scene participants act as "intermediaries" or "mediators," serving as a kind of connective tissue between individuals (e.g., artists and audiences; teachers and students) and clusters (e.g., between the TABC and other bluegrass appreciation societies throughout North America) (174). Intermediaries range from venue operators to show promoters to the soundboard technicians that have an influence over the sounds transmitted from artist to audience (Ibid.). In addition, intermediaries such as the commentators and critics writing in the *TABC News* also impact how individuals make sense of the scene by framing the discourse around local activity and the genre in general (175).

Brinner goes to great lengths to map the different roles and relationship types that shape the contemporary "ethnic music scene" in Israel. Applying the same kind of detailed network analysis to a historical scene, however, proves difficult without opportunities to directly witness relationships in action; to observe how they change over time impacting various flows of information, productivity, and resources. While network models might render the Toronto area bluegrass scene more discernible, in the absence of corroborating ethnographic data, they run the risk of producing a false sense of cohesion and precision. All of that said, interview and archival data reveal that many of the roles, relationships, and network qualities described by Brinner were at work in the Toronto scene. With this in mind, the remainder of this chapter provides a

[71] Brinner considers the drawing power of prestigious universities, for instance (173).

historical look at how a local bluegrass scene emerged and persisted as network connections were established, strengthened, weakened, and dissolved. In the process, particular individuals and institutions will stand out as "hubs" and/or "intermediaries;" "prestigious" and/or "prominent."

Doug Benson and the Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee

> "Doug can fill you in on that." (Adrian Bevis 2013)
>
> "Doug could tell you a little bit more." (Steve Pritchard 2013)
>
> "I remember, I was up at Fiddler's Green [Folk Club] with the family […] and Tam [Kearney] came and tapped me and he said, 'There's somebody looking for Doug. There's a guy in the parking lot looking for Doug.' And I went out there and it was a bluegrass band. Apparently Doug had heard that they were going to be in the area and he said he might be able to get them a job at Fiddler's Green. Doug was well known. A lot of people knew him. They still do I think." (Chuck Crawford 2013)

It became apparent in the early stages of my research that Doug Benson was a key player in the formation of Toronto's bluegrass scene. Born in 1946, Benson grew up in an Anglophone family in Montreal, Quebec and came of age in that city's folk music scene. As a child, he and his older brother tuned in regularly to CFCF radio of Montreal and were particularly drawn to the live studio segments featuring Bobby Hill and the Canadian Country Boys. The group, Benson explains, sparked his interest in bluegrass music:

> The fact that he had these bluegrass people in his band […] helped to orient us to that kind of stuff. Guy Carpenter was on Dobro and steel. He ended up in Cody. Ron Scott was on mandolin […]. Paul Ménard on fiddle […] and before Paul Ménard was in Bobby's band, Jean Carignan […] was Bob's fiddler. So, he had super pickers. And hearing them on the radio had a big influence on us. (Benson personal communication Aug. 6, 2013)

It also helped that Hill lived only a block away from Benson's home and would obligingly perform for the brothers, about ten years his junior, on the front porch. "He was sort of a local

hero in a way," Benson explains, "because he was young, he was handsome, he was on the radio" (Ibid.).

Through his teenage years, Benson was becoming an avid country music fan, which for him, included bluegrass.[72] In 1964, at the age of eighteen and now pursuing an undergraduate degree at McGill University, he decided to take a bus down to Barre, Vermont where bluegrass star Bill Monroe was performing.[73] The trip was a turning point for him in terms of his appreciation for and dedication to the genre. He recalls the experience:

> I was able to go back stage, just on presumptuousness and dumb luck and blind enthusiasm. And there's Monroe with Peter Rowan on the guitar, Bill Keith on the banjo, Gene Lowinger on the fiddle, and they're rehearsing songs like 'Uncle Pen.' Like it was intense! And this is just in the dressing room. So, things like that make an impression on you. That was October 9, 1964 in Barre, Vermont. On October 31, 1964 I was at a Bill Monroe and Doc Watson concert […] in Boston. I'm not sure how my studies were going in the beginning of my second year at McGill. (Ibid.)

These early cross-border excursions were also crucial in growing Benson's personal network and his eventual prominence and prestige within the Toronto area scene. In addition to rubbing elbows with some of his bluegrass idols, on the return home from one of the October shows[74] Benson hitched a ride with Monroe's manager, folk music journalist and Greenbriar Boy mandolinist, Ralph Rinzler, who was bound for Montreal. Rinzler spent a weekend at the Bensons' home and became something of a mentor, encouraging Doug's enthusiasm for bluegrass and desire to promote the music locally. What's more, observing Rinzler, Benson got a sense of the value of networks in coordinating cultural activity and mobilizing potential resources. He explains:

> [Rinzler] was so well connected. He used my parents' phone and said 'Sam's

[72] Benson insists he was not particularly "category conscious," and indeed, through the 1950s, when he was exposed to bluegrass, the genre was firmly tied to commercial country music in name.

[73] Benson learned about the Monroe show from Canadian bluegrass pioneer Ron Scott, whom he had met through Bobby Hill.

[74] Benson doesn't recall which show.

> coming over in an hour and a half, is that ok?' I said, 'Yeah, ok. Sam who?' 'Sam Gesser.' Well, Sam Gesser was the Sol Hurok of Montreal. He was the impresario who brought in Pete Seeger, brought in Joan Baez, brought in whoever. And Ralph knew him! 'How do you know Sam Gesser?' I'm thinking that. But, then I realize, Ralph knows everybody. But, he's actually on the doorstep of my parents' duplex saying 'Hi Ralph.' And I forget what they were discussing, but there was a real movement and a real interconnectedness between Toronto, Boston, New York, Montreal, Philadelphia, Newport. […] I mean, even at that time it was there and I could see hints of it (Ibid.).

Shortly after these events, Benson became more involved in the Montreal folk scene and at one point served as president of the McGill Folk Music Society. In this role he availed himself of the network he had recently uncovered, calling on Rinzler to organize performances by Bill Monroe and Doc Watson on the university campus.

Through the mid-1960s, Benson was also becoming increasingly dedicated to bluegrass music, in part due to the emergence of weekend bluegrass festivals. The first bluegrass festival he attended—and in fact, the *first* bluegrass festival—was held on Labour Day weekend, 1965 in Fincastle, Virginia. The festival's organizer, Carlton Haney, who had been promoting and managing bluegrass artists for several years prior, believed he could capitalize on a dedicated bluegrass audience by presenting many of the genre's biggest stars as a package over the course of three days (Rosenberg 2005, 204). Coached by Ralph Rinzler, who was now affiliated with the Newport Folk Festival, Haney envisioned a festival grounds that brought together onstage professional entertainment, workshops for amateur musicians, and contests that would highlight up-and-coming talent (204, 206). Catering specifically to bluegrass fans, he also included a gospel set on the Sunday morning and a concert billed as "The Story of Bluegrass," which was largely a celebration of Bill Monroe's music (206). For Haney, the artists, and fans, the festival was a tremendous success. In the years to come, Haney continued to organize Labour Day weekend events in Roanoke and later Berryville, Virginia. His format provided the model for

Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Festival in Indiana (est. 1968) and the many other weekend festivals that would make up a summer circuit by the 1970s. Through the late-1960s, these festivals would become the rendezvous point for a bluegrass revival and "consumer movement" (217).

The earliest bluegrass festivals mostly had a cult appeal to the niche audience that had maintained an interest in the music through all of the shifts in commercial popular music in the preceding decades. Most of those who attended the first festivals were dedicated enthusiasts of the music, the instruments, the artists, the history, and/or the culture. For bluegrass fans and musicians, and probably Canadian fans in particular given the sense of distance discussed in the previous chapter, these festivals were viewed as "rites of passage" (Rosenberg 2005, 277). Doug Benson, one of the handful of Canadians lured to the early festivals, retains the star struck wonder of casually encountering bluegrass icons:

> We went out under the trees when we got there, and there was Del McCoury with Billy Baker and Chris Warner and his band from Pennsylvania…they weren't even scheduled to be on the bill, they were just there. Literally everybody, every named bluegrass band was [at Roanoke '65]. The thing about '65 is that the Stanley *Brothers* were there! I mean, Carter [Stanley] wasn't well enough to be there in September '66. He died a few months later. But, September '65, there he was! Ralph [Stanley], Carter [Stanley], and George Shuffler. (Benson, personal communication Aug. 6, 2013)

In addition to serving as a rite of passage for hardcore bluegrass enthusiasts, these early festivals were also sites for networking and setting the groundwork for local scene building. In the company of fellow devotees, Benson was present on what he felt was the "ground floor" of an "international movement" to promote bluegrass music (Ibid.). Indeed, Rosenberg (2005) notes that much of the discourse surrounding bluegrass during the mid-1960s was focused on promoting and expanding the audience for the music within the larger country music landscape (274-275). Festivals, which could ideally attract curious music enthusiasts and also provide a site for organizing amongst longtime fans, were viewed as a key component in achieving these goals.

While Benson didn't pick or sing, he was a gifted writer and outgoing organizer who saw his role in this "movement" as a responsibility. "It's hard to imagine how little known bluegrass was with the general public at that time," he recalls. "There was a real missionary zeal to it, speaking for myself. Because I wasn't a picker, I wanted to make a contribution in another way." (Benson, personal communication May 24, 2013)

* * *

In June 1967, recently married and having just completed his degree, Benson, now twenty-one, moved from Montreal to Toronto to pursue a fast-track teaching program offered by the University of Toronto's Ontario College of Education.[75] By the following September he was teaching at a high school in the city. Motivated by the fervent energy he encountered at bluegrass festivals and encouraged by fellow enthusiasts, in his spare time Benson began to produce a handmade fanzine called *Bluegrass Breakdown* (published fall 1967 – summer 1969). The do-it-yourself magazine—a mixture of rule-drawn lines, hand-drawn illustrations, ink stamps, and typed articles, opinions, and classifieds—was produced using a spirit duplicating Ditto machine that was available at Benson's school. *Bluegrass Breakdown* featured historical and biographical pieces, reports from some of the early festivals, nearby concert listings, song lyrics, and a letters section. While Benson authored most of the content, the few pieces from other contributors shed some light on the early bluegrass network, and specifically how it wasn't necessarily Toronto-oriented. The letters section, for instance, features comments from readers in Montreal, Nova Scotia, and cities throughout the United States. One issue even includes a letter from a subscriber in Germany. A contribution from Eric Nagler, who had recently arrived in Toronto as a draft resister, details his experiences in New York City's bluegrass scene. This points to an awareness

[75] The College is now known as the Faculty of Education and is affiliated with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).

of the broad readership and balances features on more obscure Canadian bluegrass pioneers like Ron Scott. Recognizing *Bluegrass Breakdown*'s position within a more widespread genre world, one issue's masthead describes it as "the international bluegrass journal with a Canadian accent" (Aug.-Sept. 1968).

Benson's magazine was also viewed by high profile folk revivalists and bluegrass enthusiasts. Scholar Archie Green was a subscriber, once expressing to Benson his appreciation for the magazine's scrappy aesthetic (Benson, personal communication Aug. 6, 2013). So too was revivalist celebrity Mike Seeger, who even contributed to the letters section, responding to a piece by Toronto-based musician Rick Fielding that dismissed the commercialism of the Osborne Brothers (Seeger 1968, 5). Analyzing the content and gleaning information on the magazine's readership, it appears that Benson was part of a small, but tremendously dispersed network of bluegrass enthusiasts that would most often assemble at festivals.[76] Like its far more visible predecessor *Bluegrass Unlimited*, *Bluegrass Breakdown* was in part meant to serve, grow, and keep this network connected during the time between festival gatherings.

In the process of putting together *Bluegrass Breakdown* and corresponding with fellow enthusiasts mostly located abroad, Benson was formulating a vision for more localized promotion within the widespread network. "I came out with a concept called the 'continental coordinating committee.' In other words," he explains, "a circuit" (Benson, personal communication Aug. 6, 2013). To be sure, such a structure was already beginning to emerge with local appreciation groups surfacing in cities throughout the United States connected to institutions like *Bluegrass Unlimited*, which had the cachet and resources to assist in organizing concerts. Benson sought to formalize this clustering and solidify the links connecting different

[76] My thesis supervisor, Neil Rosenberg, also notes that he subscribed to *Bluegrass Breakdown* while living in Indiana and before knowing he would move to Canada.

groups. Above all, he wanted to cultivate this kind of localized grassroots activity in regions throughout Canada. Through previous festival connections and the *Bluegrass Breakdown* subscribers list, he was already aware of a Canadian audience for bluegrass. Now, however, he was interested in narrowing his scope and finding bluegrass fans and pickers in the Toronto area. At the 1968 Berryville Bluegrass Festival in Virginia, he took concrete action in this personal mission. Here, he visited *Bluegrass Unlimited*'s promotional booth, where he copied by hand the addresses for the small number of Toronto subscribers, some of whom he already knew, others he did not. Not only would the list help expand the readership for his own fanzine, but, he hoped, some of those individuals might be interested in forming a regional organizing committee.

Shortly after the Berryville festival, Benson had his first encounter with Adrian Bevis at Steele's Tavern.[77] Recalling a conversation between the two, he evokes the heady optimism during this time:

> We were in conversation about our mutual passion for bluegrass. And everything sort of came together, you know. 'Let's take the contact information from the Berryville Festival, the enthusiasm that we're feeling now, and the fact that there's more than the people on this little paper list that are interested. But, we've got a nucleus. (Benson, personal communication May 24, 2013)

Just a couple of months later, on September 22, 1968, Benson and his then-wife, Linda, welcomed a handful of local bluegrass enthusiasts into their Keele Street apartment.[78] In between admiring Benson's bluegrass LP collection, the group shared their appreciation for the genre and envisaged the kind of bluegrass activity they would like to see in Toronto. "There was a certain underground aura to it" Benson recalls, "Like, nobody knows about this stuff that we love. Maybe we can change that. A 'we'll show them,' type of thing" (Ibid.).

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[77] This meeting is recounted in greater detail in Chapter Three.

[78] Benson recalls that approximately ten to twelve people attended the inaugural meeting. In his 1973 piece on the origins of the TABC, Bevis notes that, in addition to himself and Benson, Eric Nagler, Brian Riseborough, Ross Weber, David Wilcox, John Gould, Dave Richardson, Norm and Jack Gordon, and Andrew Bregg were present.

The "underground aura" that Benson describes in his living room that afternoon was a local manifestation of a larger dialogue occurring among bluegrass fans during the late 1960s. This is probably best reflected in an article titled "A Bluegrass Manifesto" published in the August-September 1968 issue of *Bluegrass Breakdown.* Here, contributor Joe Grondin from Brossard, Quebec imagines building knowledge and expanding the network of bluegrass supporters "from the hard core outward" (10). He maintains that such a task requires "deliberate and well-organized" action, and advocates for the formation of a "Canadian Bluegrass Music Society" made up of regional chapters. In addition to organizing regular meetings and picking sessions, the regional groups would encourage compatible musicians to form bands and coordinate with other regions to support touring acts across Canada. What's more, the umbrella society and its branches would advocate for more visibility of bluegrass on local television and radio. Finally, Grondin asks, "Why not have a Canadian Bluegrass Festival?" (Ibid.). For this ultimate task, he appeals to the "hard core": "Why wait for someone else to put on a festival for us here? After all, we are supposed to be the bluegrass diehards in this country" (Ibid.). Responding to these kinds of ideas, by the end of their meeting, Benson and his guests resolved to take initiative in promoting bluegrass locally under the moniker, the Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee.[79]

The TABC's initial priority was to bring live bluegrass to Toronto and by early November they were already organizing their first concert at the Colonnade Theatre. For the Committee's breakout event, Benson paired his Canadian bluegrass idol, Ron Scott, with a makeshift York County Boys roster that included, Rex Yetman, John McManaman, Wally Dean, and Bill Gibbs, who played an opening set before backing Scott. The Committee considered the concert a

[79] Benson concedes that this was a "mundane," purely utilitarian name. He notes that they attempted to derive an acronym from the word "grass," but did not want to misrepresent themselves as a marijuana advocacy group, nor attract tired jokes from those who associated the music with the drug (Benson, personal communication May 24, 2013; Benson 1968, 14).

success and a step in the right direction of achieving their goals. “For a great many people,” Bevis writes, “this was quite likely the first LIVE Bluegrass group they had ever seen and for others it was the only chance to see live bluegrass in some time” (1973, 2). They quickly took on another concert scheduled for January 19, 1969, this time featuring an up-and-coming Canadian act called the Southern Ramblers. The band, whose members hailed from Montreal, Quebec and Guelph, Ontario, reflecting the dispersal of the Canadian scene, were described as a “commuter bluegrass group” (Benson 1969a, 1). This observation alludes to the value of Canada’s, and particularly Ontario’s developing highway system as part of a deeper public infrastructure that benefitted the scene.

For their next concert event the TABC wanted to take on the challenge of bringing a prominent American act to Toronto. After some consideration, the Committee decided to approach Ralph Stanley and booked him for two sets at the Colonnade Theatre on April 27, 1969. Bringing in an American act was viewed as a landmark achievement for the fledgling TABC. There was no doubt, however, that the show was more financially demanding than their previous efforts (Bevis 1973, 3). In order to build on the success of this collectively funded concert, the Committee would have to increase their financial viability by attracting more members and concert attendees. “Expansion and growth,” Bevis asserts, “were the order of the day” (2).

The TABC’s Ralph Stanley concert is also notable because it was presented in partnership with the Montreal Area Bluegrass Committee, which was established on December 26, 1968, and chaired by Doug’s brother, Lyle Benson. Stanley performed in Montreal on the evening before his Toronto appearance, tracing the beginnings of a small Canadian circuit. Not only did the emergence of two “area bluegrass societies” at the end of 1968—albeit both associated with the

Bensons—signal a growth in local bluegrass activity, but the Ralph Stanley concerts provided the first opportunity to demonstrate the potential of collaboration between regional scenes. Indeed, the promise of two Canadian dates was likely a strong selling point for the visiting American artist.

With the success of a few concert events, regular Committee meetings at the Canadian Indian Centre on Beverley Street, and plans for continued activity, Benson drew on his experiences as a founding member of the TABC in a *Bluegrass Breakdown* article titled "How to Form an Area Bluegrass Committee" (1969a, March-June, 2-3, 10, 12, 14-15). The sprawling piece serves equally as a TABC recruitment tool, a set of guidelines for those looking to establish their own committee, and a call for readers to "inject some life into the bluegrass scene in your town" (2). In it, Benson offers his thoughts on a variety of subjects from how to break even with a concert event (try to secure a free hall, encourage all members to promote the show, and limit complimentary tickets) to the value of attaining non-profit status (it opens up doors to government grants) (1, 2, 10). As a model for other area committees, he offers the TABC's structural hierarchy, which includes a chair, vice-chair, treasurer, secretary, as well as a variety of sub-committees chaired by members and focused on specific tasks. Benson is aware, however, that committee business needs to be balanced with recreational activity and provides some advice for incorporating picking sessions into the meetings:

> First, don't hold picking meetings at the home of someone who rents […] let your members stay in good with their landlords. Second, no booze at meetings <u>period</u>. Third, have 'Executive Meetings' (open to the rank and file, however) for a strictly no-nonsense thrashing-out of business matters and 'General Meetings' where everyone shows up for an afternoon of music-making <u>following</u> thirty minutes of discussing the Executive's policies and proposals. (10; underline in original)

Benson's recommendations for starting an area committee recall the kinds of network structures and directional flows described by Brinner (2009, 170-174). Here, the TABC is

represented as an inclusive hub that directs knowledge, resources, and opportunities outward, from a group of "hard core" enthusiasts—or, the Executive—to those more casually interested in bluegrass. Explaining the functionality of the names Toronto and Montreal Area Bluegrass Committee, he sustains this idea. "Committee" appropriately reflects "the potentially small size of the organization" and the locally oriented work of "a small nucleus, a working committee reaching out to a wider audience" (14). At the same time the organizational name acknowledges the scene and the city's pull factor, and the potential to draw resources inward. "The word 'area' is meaningful," Benson continues, "because both the Toronto and Montreal committees […] have become the focal point for bluegrass activity for miles around" (Ibid.). Adding further dynamism to the network, Benson decentralizes Toronto and Montreal's Committees as institutional hubs by suggesting that future organizations adopt the name "_____ Area Bluegrass Committee" (Ibid.). "It would be kinda nice […] to have a far-flung network of like-minded committees united in name as well as in aims…solidarity and all that" (Ibid.). While the centralized depiction of Toronto's scenic network is accurate to some extent, then, flows within the scene were not necessarily coherent and unidirectional. Observers can step back to reveal a constellation of linked individuals and institutions and shift their gaze to other clusters of bluegrass activity.

In his call for more localized and coordinated bluegrass activity, Benson asks, "When will YOUR Area Bluegrass Committee be formed?" (2). He continues, exhibiting the tenacity of what Rosenberg (2005) calls "bluegrass believers" (361-362): "Hopefully the manifesto outlined in this article will stir you and your bluegrass cronies to action. Our motto is: 'Today eastern Canada, tomorrow the world!' Help us realize this global take over" (Benson 1969a, 2). It seems that bluegrass fans throughout Ontario paid heed to Benson's call, or at least to the broader

dialogue around promoting the genre as it surfaced at festivals and in magazines like *Bluegrass Unlimited*.[80] As will be discussed in the following chapter, over the course of the next decade bluegrass associations were established in regions throughout the province.[81] While most of these associations did not adopt Benson's "area committee" naming template, through the 1970s the groups collaborated to bring American bluegrass artists to Canada and to support a surge of domestic talent. What's more, by the late 1970s, two umbrella organizing bodies were established—the Bluegrass Canada Club and the Northern Bluegrass Committee—that focused on coordinating tours and other events drawing on the resources of the smaller local associations.

* * *

In "How to Form an Area Bluegrass Committee" Benson notifies his readers that the newly established TABC will be taking over the production and distribution of *Bluegrass Breakdown*. Not only would the minimally, but widely-circulated fanzine provide an "international voice" for the TABC, but drawing on the assistance of Committee members would enable *Bluegrass Breakdown,* which was published sporadically up until this point, to appear quarterly (1969a, 3). Looking forward, Benson concludes, "TABC Secretary Adrian Bevis' offer to assist me in putting together the rag from now on has already doubled the *BB* staff, so things are looking up" (Ibid.). Interestingly, all of this appeared in what would be the final issue of *Bluegrass Breakdown*. The Committee would not have another vehicle until the appearance of the *TABC News* in February 1972. This is not to suggest, however, that the potential for a vibrant local bluegrass scene suddenly lost steam with the creative energies and resources dispersed among several enthusiasts, rather than just Benson. With the regular publication of high quality periodicals like *Bluegrass Unlimited,* the *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Newsletter*, and,

[80] Benson's "How to Form an Area Bluegrass Committee" was reprinted for a larger audience in *Bluegrass Unlimited* (July 1969b), 6-10.

[81] Similar "area committees" also began to form throughout parts of the United States.

appearing in 1970, Carlton Haney's *Muleskinner News*, which all offered record reviews, opinion pieces, historical essays, and festival listings, it's understandable why producing their own newsletter did not become an initial priority for the TABC. Instead, the Committee focused their efforts on recruitment, organizing local events, and enjoying bluegrass both at home and abroad. Indeed, to echo Benson, by the early 1970s things were "looking up" for bluegrass fans in the Toronto area.

Sites of Encounter, Exchange, and Scene-building

Up until this point, I have briefly mentioned some of the prominent sites for bluegrass activity in Toronto. Enthusiasts gathered regularly at Fiddler's Green Folk Club and Egerton's Pub. Here they organized events, made music, and exchanged recordings, opinions, and knowledge. Similar activity would occur at private residences such as Doug Benson's west end Keele Street apartment, Bruce Dowd's apartment on Harbord Street, and Pleasance and Chuck Crawford's home near the city centre on MacPherson Avenue. During the summer months this kind of activity would be relocated outside to High Park and later Ramsden Park. The Colonnade Theatre was an early favourite for the TABC's concert events, but the Committee would also organize shows at Fiddler's Green, the Tranzac Room, and more informally, in obliging members' living rooms. The Toronto Folklore Centre and the Mariposa grounds also became key sites of TABC recruitment and education. Like the key individuals, these sites can be viewed as highly charged nodes within the scenic network. Where they differ, however, is in how sites emerge as hubs. Spaces such as Egerton's or High Park only become part of the scenic fabric through the trajectories, social life, and processes of emplacement (Blum 2001, 22) enacted by individuals. Their significance emerges through the dialectical rubbing between what Henri

Lefebvre (2002 [1974]) designates as "perceived," "conceived," and "lived space," a complex that accounts for how we make sense of and utilize spaces in our daily lives, as well as how dominant structures of authority regulate representations and usage of space. The prominent sites in Toronto's bluegrass scene, for instance, were influenced by a variety of geographic, economic, and relational factors such as proximity to public transit, access to legal permits, affordability, and personal associations. In addition to this, Straw (2002) maintains, "Scenes extend the spatialization of city cultures through the grafting of tastes or affinities to physical locations" (15). This complements Nicholas Entrikin's (1991) observation that places of concentrated activity become repositories of "human goals, values, and intentions" (11). In Toronto's bluegrass scene, then, the spaces where participants congregated were imbued with the often shared, but sometimes divergent values surrounding the cultural, social, and aesthetic ideals of bluegrass circulated in the wider discourse community.

The remainder of this section provides an overview of some of the key sites of scene activity in the TABC's formative years. Of course, it's difficult to include *all* of the sites where bluegrass enthusiasts gathered throughout Toronto. As participants repeatedly converged and dispersed, and scene activity moved throughout the city, some locations, like Pizza Patio and the Matador, provided only transitional or even one-off accommodations. Furthermore, the significance of certain sites will inevitably vary among participants based on their own experiences, preferences, and spatial trajectories. With this in mind, the following highlights a selection of key sites for scene building between 1968 and 1973, the years preceding a much more professionalized environment for local bluegrass discussed in the next chapter.

High Park

Toronto's High Park, sprawling southwest of the Bloor-Keele intersection, was a primary site of scene activity during the TABC's first five years. As summer approached in 1969, the recently formed Committee shifted their regular meetings/jams from indoor locations like Doug Benson's apartment, just north of the park, or the Canadian Indian Centre, to High Park's sculpture garden. The gatherings took place on the first Sunday of each month, and while they no doubt helped solidify networks and allow participants to explore ideas for Committee initiatives, they prioritized music-making and socializing over "business." What's more, they were decidedly open to all interested parties and were family-oriented. A note in the May 1974 *TABC News*, for instance, reminds readers that the session will be resuming and invites participants to "bring the family, your instrument, a picnic, and have a bluegrass afternoon" (3). Mike Lloyd, a frequent attendee at what became referred to as the "first Sunday picking sessions," comments on High Park as an ideal venue for creating an easygoing atmosphere, stating "there was a couple of nice open spots there where you could get some sun [and] where you could come in under the trees with the sculptures" (personal communication May 24, 2013). Benson recalls participants' children running through a nearby wading pool, and from an organizer's perspective, notes the ease of setting up in the public space. "You just showed up," he maintains. "Like, we didn't have to get a permit from the city. We just went there" (personal communication May 24, 2013).

The light, placid air of these summer afternoon sessions was reinforced by High Park's reputation as a bucolic retreat within the metropolis. One of the city's largest and most notable green spaces, High Park was entrusted to the City of Toronto by its original owners, John Howard and Jemima Meikle, in 1873.[82] With numerous trails, ponds, and gardens, it has long served as a public recreational and event space for Torontonians. By the late 1960s, the park's

[82] In the following decades the park grew as the City purchased neighbouring land from other private owners.

amenities included a small zoo, a children's play area, Colborne Lodge (the Howards' historic residence), a cafe, and a baseball diamond. The sculpture garden was installed in 1967, just a few years before the TABC began to converge on it for their first Sunday picking sessions. For many Toronto area residents, High Park was, and remains, a place to flee urban congestion or suburban mundanity, to take a weekend stroll, and to be amongst others in a mostly groomed naturalistic setting. In many respects, these attributes also corresponded with some of the ideals that circulated in the early bluegrass scene regarding down-to-earth, accessible communal activity. Indeed, the High Park picking sessions aimed to recreate the casual, outdoor music-making that some participants had observed at stateside festivals or at least read about in bluegrass periodicals.

All of this is not to suggest, however, that the sessions were absent of lifestyle or musical tensions between participants. Like all TABC organized activities, participants of various political, economic, and class backgrounds were present at the first Sunday picking sessions. They did, however, provide a marked alternative from the politically charged, subversive gatherings among artists and musicians associated with Toronto's Yorkville Village, which by the late 1960s was equated with youth counterculture and "hippy" values. In his study of Yorkville during the same period covered here, Stuart Henderson (2011) describes the awkward encounters between "hippies," "squares," "sight-seers," and local authorities during a summer 1967 "love-in" at Queens Park: "Young Villagers approached passerby, offering them flowers and their love. Police, unsure of what their role should be, spent their time pulling long-haired teenagers down from trees" (184).

Steve Pritchard, who circulated in the Yorkville scene and was also drawn to local bluegrass activity, notes that the High Park picking sessions were not associated with Yorkville's youth

culture and did not attract the same kind of attention from concerned politicians or police. While there was certainly overlap between the two scenes, High Park provided a geographic distance from Yorkville Village, which for many Torontonians, represented an otherworldly "hippy ghetto" in the city's centre (Henderson 2011, 118). "Yorkville," Henderson argues, "was widely understood to constitute a threat to the established order, and to the common sense of an affluent postwar society, through its inhabitants' apparent rejection of many of the basic tenets of the real" (24). So, while at its height in the late 1960s, the Yorkville scene attracted weekend "tourists" from the surrounding area seeking to witness the spectacle around the Bloor Street-Avenue Road intersection (116-117), High Park was a more agreeable weekend destination for many middle-class families. By the same token, Pritchard makes a distinction between the High Park picking sessions and Yorkville gatherings stating, "it was just a different thing. It was viewed as safe…[it] could've been mistaken for a family picnic" (personal communication June 4, 2013).

For the TABC, the High Park picking sessions also provided exposure for the fledgling committee. As one of the city's most utilized public spaces, the sessions not only seized the attention of curious passersby, but casual encounters resulted in return visits from individuals who would become key scene participants and enthusiastic Committee members. For instance, Joe King (aka Joe LeBlanc), an accountant and amateur country singer who had come to Toronto from Cheticamp, Nova Scotia, stumbled upon the bluegrass session after a pick-up softball game in High Park. Doug Benson recalls with vivid detail, "Joe was playing softball over at one of the ball diamonds and then he heard us playing and he came running over, grabbed somebody's guitar and he sang "The Girl I Left in Sunny Tennessee" (personal communication May 15, 2013). In the following decades, Joe King acquired a following among country music fans in the

city, as well as in the Maritime provinces, was a regular at TABC events, and contributed to the local scene through his involvement with the Country Music Store and its regular jam sessions.[83] The first Sunday picking sessions also provided an entry point into the local bluegrass scene for Chuck Crawford, who heard about the jams through word-of-mouth from a fellow American migrant. Soon after, Crawford began participating in the sessions and became a leading figure in the TABC.

The High Park picking sessions set a template for TABC-initiated gatherings that endured up until the very end of the 1970s. Beyond their "first Sunday" regularity, the sessions demonstrate how the Committee's vision of a local bluegrass scene hinged on public spaces that encouraged open socialization among musicians, non-musicians, and casual observers. At the High Park picking sessions regulars crossed paths with first-time attendees and those who simply chanced upon the cluster of musicians, enthusiasts, and their families. This mix struck a balance between the kind of organizational energy that maintained spaces for bluegrass in the city while, through its public nature and imprint on the Park's soundscape, creating the conditions for unanticipated encounters that expanded an awareness of local bluegrass and welcomed contributions from interested parties. In summer 1975, the first Sunday picking sessions were moved to Ramsden Park, shifting the event to a more central area of the city and on the northern boundary of Yorkville Village. By this time, however, as the euphoric sheen began to dull on the 1960s countercultural moment and the once "hippy ghetto" was becoming increasingly gentrified, many youth dispersed to other locales (both within the city and beyond) and gravitated towards other interests. Meanwhile, the Ramsden Park sessions retained the welcoming spirit of their predecessor—the official reason for the relocation was the park's accessibility, located near the Rosedale public transit station (*TABC News*, June 1975, 3). It probably helped that the park was

[83] The Country Music Store (est. 1977) is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Seven.

within walking distance of the new TABC chair, Chuck Crawford's home, which also served as the Committee's residential headquarters. In addition to situating the picking session closer to the city's centre for equidistant commutes, research participants have acknowledged that this may have been a secondary consideration, if not a decision inspired by Crawford's familiarity with his own neighbourhood. Likewise, High Park, which is also accessible by subway, was located within walking distance of TABC founder Doug Benson's Keele Street apartment.

Fiddler's Green Folk Club

Each year, as the winter months approached, the first Sunday picking sessions were moved indoors to Fiddler's Green Folk Club, a small property located in the parking lot behind and owned by the North Toronto YMCA at 130 Eglinton Avenue East. Fiddler's Green was established by Tam Kearney and Jim Strickland, Scottish immigrants who met at the Toronto Folklore Centre in 1970 (Guest 1979b, 1). Both had operated clubs in Scotland and wanted to introduce a "British style folk club" to Toronto. Commenting on the presence of urban American-style coffee houses in his adopted city, Kearney observes that "none of it had the atmosphere or the feeling that the Glasgow or the Scottish clubs had" (Stevenson 2013 [2003]). Here, Kearney is making a distinction between a folk "club" and coffee houses like the Bohemian Embassy and the Riverboat, which he views as formal performance spaces and were known for hosting established folk acts. He continues:

> Clubs in Scotland allowed people to sing who just walked in the door and said, 'can I sing a few songs?' And we'd just let them sing, and that way they gradually built up experience [and] repertoire. […] That would allow young people, young singers a chance to go on the stage and sing. Some of them were pretty bad and some were absolutely terrific. (Ibid.)

Kearney and Strickland opened the club, which was formerly the Old Back Door coffee house and was at this point, according to Doug Benson, a storage facility in disrepair, soon after securing tenancy from the YMCA in 1970 (Benson, personal communication May 24, 2013). Immediately, they began to reach out to the community, placing leaflets in the doors of neighbouring businesses and posting promotional flyers at the Toronto Folklore Centre. While Kearney states they "had to use business principles in order to pay the rent," they never lost sight of their primary goals to create a space for informal, amateur folk music-making and to have fun (Stevenson 2013 [2003]).[84] Jack Guest (1979b) captures this relaxed approach in his feature on Fiddler's Green for the *TABC News*:

> The basic philosophy of the club was to be non-profit and to keep the admission price as low as possible, as well as to be friendly. […] The management, the performers and the audience are all friends and mix freely together. There is no barrier between those people on the stage and those in the audience as is the case in so many other clubs (1).

During an era when many of the remaining coffee houses from the height of the urban folk revival were closing down, Guest maintains that the community focus of Fiddler's Green was "the true attraction of the club and is most likely the reason it has been so successful" (Ibid.). Perhaps, however, it is more accurate to suggest that Kearney and Strickland were able to tap into the shifting character of the urban folk revival towards genre-oriented "named-system revivals" (Rosenberg 1993a, 177-178). Catering to the appreciation societies that emerge from this kind of fragmentation, Kearney explains how the club "allowed any musical organization free access to the building for a night they wanted to put on" (Stevenson 2013 [2003]). As such, Fiddler's Green, which was open seven nights a week, hosted conventional folk music nights, song circles, Irish nights, and, on the first Sunday of every month, a bluegrass afternoon. As

[84] Kearney emphasizes that he was always most interested in having fun and alludes to the frequent pranking at Fiddler's Green, stating "You couldn't turn your back or somebody was going to try something" (Kearney in Stevenson 2013 [2003]).

Kearney states, half-jokingly, "We were philanthropic to the folk world" (Ibid.). Unsurprisingly, this support was reciprocated. During times when the club was in financial need, local folk heavy hitters like Bruce Cockburn, Ian Tyson, or Stan Rogers would volunteer a performance at Fiddler's Green to help raise funds.

In addition to hosting the first Sunday picking sessions, Fiddler's Green served as the TABC's social hub and primary locale for Committee-organized events. The proprietors' community-oriented vision for the club, their flexibility in making the space available to various interest groups, and their camaraderie with patrons created an ideal environment for casual gatherings and impromptu performances. All of this also aligned with the emphasis on accessibility and community bonding within the early bluegrass scene. Fiddler's Green, then, served as an ideal space for and the owners were receptive to events like the Committee's potluck dinners, instructional workshops, and bluegrass record auctions. Moreover, it's important to note that unlike most venues in the city—and most British folk clubs—Fiddler's Green did not have a license to serve alcohol, which kept these events, like the High Park gatherings, family oriented.[85] The club, however, was not simply a "community centre" catering to the city's folk scenes. It also functioned as a conventional performance space and regularly featured up-and-coming and high profile folk acts. With regards to bluegrass music, through the 1970s Fiddler's Green hosted emerging Canadian bands like Cody, the Dixie Flyers, and the Humber River Valley Boys, as well as established American acts like Charlie Moore and the Dixie Partners, J.D. Crowe, and the Country Gentlemen. At times, however, even these stage shows could take on a more informal, cordial atmosphere. In particular, appearances by Bill Monroe and the Blue

[85] In many listings for events at Fiddler's Green, the TABC also asked participants not to bring their own alcoholic beverages.

Grass Boys, Earl Scruggs, and Bluegrass 45 have attained heightened significance in TABC lore and illustrate the relaxed, often slapdash atmosphere of Fiddler's Green shows.

On April 16, 1971, Benson arranged an impromptu performance at Fiddler's Green following appearances by Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys and the Earl Scruggs Revue on *The Tommy Hunter Show*, a nationally broadcast country music variety show filmed in Toronto. For members of the TABC, who had been starved for bluegrass on local television and were knowledgeable of a notorious feud between Monroe and Scruggs, this was a major event in the city. "When the word got out on that," Benson remembers, "we kicked into gear by securing a block of tickets for the taping of the show" (personal communication May 24, 2013). Aware of Benson's talent for rallying a crowd on the fly, Tam Kearney offered to host an after show party if he could bring some of the bluegrass stars to Fiddler's Green. Taken aback by his own forthrightness, Benson states, "I somehow cajoled both Bill and Earl into coming over, and I guess maybe the pitch was that we'll order in some pizza" (Ibid.). Benson organized a car pool to the club immediately after their performances, clearing a portion of the studio audience in the middle of taping. "In retrospect, we could've finessed it a little better with the CBC people. They probably thought, 'What the hell is going on? These people were given tickets for the duration and now they're leaving!'" (Ibid.).

The crowd that arrived at Fiddler's Green was, Benson jokes, "a name-dropper's paradise" consisting of local favourites like David Wilcox and Ian Tyson, alongside American bluegrass royalty, which, in addition to Monroe and Scruggs, included Kenny Baker and Rual Yarbrough (Ibid.). The rare opportunity to see Scruggs and Monroe not only perform together, but to apparently reconcile their differences was not lost on those in attendance, including the performers. Benson recalls:

> Monroe looked at Earl, looked at the audience, looked around and said, 'A man couldn't pay to have a fella like Earl Scruggs play guitar for 'em.'[86] In other words, his way of saying 'you folks maybe don't appreciate what's happening here.' It was actually, I think, part of the thawing process between Earl and Bill. Because they had been estranged for a number of years. The thing that I remember from hanging out with them backstage in the green room [of the *Tommy Hunter Show* studios] is that Cedric Rainwater […] had just died a few months prior and they were talking about his passing and his funeral and his death. So, I think that was part of the repair between the two of them […]. They'd lost an old friend and band-mate around that time (Ibid.).

This event has a lasting weight for those who were present and was cited in nearly all of my interviews with former TABC members. Some, like Benson, recognize that the meeting was part of a longer "thawing process" between the two artists in the early 1970s. Others remember it as a significant moment in the history of bluegrass, referring to it as "the first meeting of Monroe and Earl Scruggs after they broke up" (Pritchard, personal communication May 22, 2013). Above all, the event is viewed as notable in the TABC's history and nostalgically celebrated as a testament to the local bluegrass scene's energy, enthusiasm, and resourcefulness. Furthermore, the evening is usually recalled in reference to Fiddler's Green, as a testament to its significance in the city's musical history and as a gathering place for local bluegrass enthusiasts.

A few months later, in August 1971, Benson had similar success when Bluegrass 45, a band from Japan who had recently recorded their self-titled debut for Rebel Records, were touring the United States. Through his connection with Rebel's Canadian representative, Doug Benson made last-minute arrangements to add a Toronto date to the band's tour itinerary. The discussions were set in motion, he recalls, "on about a Friday or Saturday leading into the Civic Holiday weekend to set up a concert at Fiddler's Green on the holiday Monday" (personal communication May 24, 2013). With just a few days' notice, Benson employed the TABC's telephone tree to promote the show. Reflecting on the flurry of activity leading up to what turned out to be a well-attended

[86] Benson explains that Scruggs, known more for his banjo playing, opted for guitar during the session while Blue Grass Boy Rual Yarbrough played banjo.

performance, he marvels at the Committee's resourcefulness in a way that illuminates the sense of community within the scenic network, as well as the centrality of Fiddler's Green in making the event possible:

> You got to wonder what communication was like thinking back. Pre-email, pre-fax, pre-technology. […] Just the jungle telegraph, you know. Get on the phone. And we passed the hat for the band. So it was just like, 'Ok, they're coming. Here's the time. It's, of course, at the Fiddler's Green.' Everything was in that era for us […] because you need a venue for jam sessions, for concerts, for grabbing a group from Japan on their way through with no notice (Ibid.).

For TABC organizers, Fiddler's Green's value as a site in the local bluegrass scene was tied to their relationship with Tam Kearney, who Benson affectionately refers to as a "closet bluegrasser" (personal communication May 24 ,2013). "That was just his idea of a joke," Benson maintains, "to let on that he didn't care about [bluegrass]" (Ibid.). Indeed, while Kearney's own musical inclinations veered more towards Irish traditional folksong—he sang with the well-known ensemble Friends of Fiddler's Green—his support of other folk scenes could cross over into participation. In 1970, for instance, he joined TABC members on a charter bus excursion to Indiana for the Bill Monroe Bluegrass Festival. "You see, Tam didn't draw a line," Benson explains, "He didn't say bluegrass was over there, hippies over there, draft dodgers over there. It was like [mimics a Scottish accent], 'You like the music? Come on in then'" (Ibid.). Steve Pritchard elaborates:

> What it did, it gave all those groups a place to intermingle. And as a result the culture grew from that. It was the place for them to go. They could go there every Friday or every Sunday or whatever and they'd meet other people of similar interest. (personal communication May 24, 2013)

Reflecting on Kearney's contribution to the bluegrass scene just months after his death on March 6, 2013, Benson laments, "That was our Tam. We miss him. […] We were lucky to have him.

[…] There wouldn't have been half as much accomplished without him" (personal communication May 24, 2013).

The Toronto Folklore Centre and the Mariposa Festival Grounds

In Chapter two I introduced the Toronto Folklore Centre, located on Avenue Road near Yorkville Village, as a hub in the city's folk scene and as the entrepreneurial venture of three American migrants: Eric Nagler, Jan Burda, and Steve Scantlon. The Centre also served as a meeting place for bluegrass enthusiasts and a key resource in the developing infrastructure for local bluegrass. As such it established a link to the remnants of the 1960s urban folk revival that helped grow the Toronto area bluegrass scene, while at the same time impacting the scene's social dynamics, boundaries, and discourses in complicated ways.

The Folklore Centre was modeled after a Greenwich Village shop operated by Izzy Young and was spurred by some of the "gaps" Nagler identified in Toronto's folk scene upon arriving in the city. "My sense was that Toronto knew very little," Nagler says, "Even things like guitar strings. The only guitar strings you could find here were Black Diamond strings, that were the crappiest […] strings" (personal communication July 24, 2013). In August 1969, Nagler issued a letter to his folk revival peers announcing his intentions and soliciting input. "Dear Folk," he begins:

> The rumour of a folklore centre coming to Toronto is true!! […] We believe there is a strong need among the folk of the Toronto area for such an establishment. There is no music store in Toronto which caters expressly to the folk crowd. You have to go one place for National finger picks, another for DiAngelico strings, across town for just the right banjo bridge, etc. The Toronto Folklore Centre will attempt to stock exactly the things you need. In fact the main purpose of my writing you at this time is to determine what your needs are (Nagler 1969).

With some mentoring from Izzy Young in New York City, Nagler and company officially opened the Toronto Folklore Centre a month later, in September 1969, with a joint party

celebrating both the store's grand opening and the TABC's first anniversary (Benson, personal communication June 4, 2013).

The Toronto Folklore Centre was viewed as a pivotal resource in the city's folk scene and, according to a feature in the *TABC News*, an "alternative to the 'chrome and neon' music stores" (1977, 1). The unnamed author of this piece notes that while other music stores in the city tried to capitalize on the 1960s folk revival by advertising instruments and books associated with folk music genres, the Folklore Centre's financial objectives ran parallel to an interest in fostering the local scene. Like Fiddler's Green, the owners of the Toronto Folklore Centre, which was essentially a music shop and school, had an open door, casual approach to their business that encouraged community building among folk enthusiasts. Recalling the store's layout and atmosphere, Nagler explains:

> Our front room didn't look like a music store. There were instruments all over the walls, but there were couches and chairs and people came and they played. Sometimes they would play formally, like some particular evening where everybody would get together. But, lots of the time, people just showed up and we played music together. And, the purpose of the store was to enable us to do that in a lot of ways. (Personal communication July 24, 2013)

Within this relaxed atmosphere, patrons could register for lessons, purchase records, or bring their instrument in for repair. The store also boasted a knowledgeable staff—fellow 'folkies'—that could offer advice on the new and used musical instruments available in the store. What's more, unlike other music shops in the city that dealt primarily with established instrument suppliers, the Toronto Folklore Centre supported local luthiers, such as Jean Larrivée, who in the early 1970s was building the first Larrivée guitars, averaging one per month in his basement workshop (Nagler, personal communication July 24, 2013). "The Folklore Centre was the centre for Larrivée guitars," Nagler proudly maintains, "and they were really good. They're beautiful guitars" (Ibid.).

While acoustic instruments from well known brands like Martin and Gibson—which the Centre also carried—certainly attracted folk enthusiasts, the attention to detail in providing high quality, handmade local guitars helped the Toronto Folklore Centre corner the folk market and, at the same time, baffled more conventional music retailers. Nagler recalls:

> Salesmen used to come in and they'd say, 'Ok, I've got some electric guitars and I've got some saxophones.' And I'd say, 'I don't want any! This is just a folk music store.' And they would look at me so sadly, 'You poor, sap. Don't you realize how to run a music store?' […] I remember one time the guy from B & J [Music Ltd.] came in and said, 'Okay, I've got a bass for you.' I said, 'It's an acoustic bass?' He said, 'Yes, yes! Acoustic-electric.' I said, 'No!' (Ibid.)

Nagler's tenacity in setting up a boutique music shop for the city's niche, and by the 1970s, arguably declining folk market did not seem to make much business sense, but resonated with local enthusiasts. Adrian Bevis remembers the Centre as the "Mecca for acoustic instruments," maintaining "I practically lived there. It was *the* spot" (personal communication June 4, 2013). Indeed, for the city's broader folk arts and music scene, the building that housed the Toronto Folklore Centre at 284 Avenue Road was a focal point. In addition to the storefront, which had teaching rooms and hosted weekly workshops on everything from folk tales to dulcimer building, Nagler's partner, Martha Beers had a pottery studio in the basement and co-founder Jan Burda occupied one room with a shop for guitar repair/building.[87] Perhaps most significant, Estelle Klein ran the Mariposa Folk Festival offices at 284 Avenue Road. While the offices served more as an administrative space than a public gathering space, Mariposa's neighbourly presence helped solidify the Toronto Folklore Centre and its address as a hub for the city's folk scene.

The Toronto Folklore Centre was a tremendous infrastructural support to the city's emerging bluegrass scene. Just as the Centre provided the wares to participate in a variety of other folk genres, they also carried instruments and accessories, instructional books, and recordings geared

[87] Nagler, Beers, and Burda actually *did* live in the old residential building's upstairs apartments.

toward bluegrass enthusiasts, accompanied by knowledgeable staff that could direct both neophyte and longtime bluegrassers. As mentioned in Chapter two, the Folklore Centre offered educational workshops on bluegrass instrumental technique, often facilitated in association with the TABC, and employed private teachers like Denis LePage and Jim Hale, both of whom specialized in bluegrass banjo and would make significant contributions to the scene through the 1970s. The Toronto Folklore Centre supported and promoted TABC concert events by not only providing a wall on which to hang concert posters, but also by serving as an outlet for ticket sales. Approaching the 1980s, the Centre was hosting what had become one of the city's primary bluegrass institutions, the first Sunday picking sessions.

TABC organizers also benefitted from their relationship with Eric Nagler, who was one of the original Committee members and, through his own network connections, helped establish an association with Mariposa that validated the Committee within the city's folk scene. This resulted in the TABC tent and workshops appearing at Mariposa each year. In addition to broadening bluegrass knowledge and appreciation, the Committee's presence at Mariposa was viewed as a valuable recruitment opportunity. Like High Park, the TABC tent served as a rallying point for current bluegrass scene participants, but also exposed casual fans or curious observers wandering the festival grounds to some of the local bluegrass activity. From the initial twelve members present at the Committee's first meeting in September 1968, TABC membership ballooned to approximately 265 members by the mid-1970s, due in large to the Mariposa recruitment campaigns (*TABC News* Sept 1974, 4).[88]

[88] This number reflects the *TABC News* subscribers list. During the TABC's peak in the mid-1970s, the list fluctuated between approximately 200 to 300 members as new subscribers joined and old members who failed to pay dues were removed from the mailing list. This, of course, does not necessarily imply that former subscribers were not participating in local activity. Also, while many subscribers were located in the Toronto area, the *TABC News* had a broad reach across Ontario, the rest of Canada, and into the United States. Based on fiscal reports presented in the *TABC News*, there is evidence that membership numbers began to gradually decline through the late-1970s.

Despite early consternation from other local music retailers about Nagler's lack of business sense in limiting himself to the folk market, as well as ownership and location changes accompanied by financial highs and lows, through much of the 1970s, the Toronto Folklore Centre was a modestly successful venture. Nearly every issue of the *TABC News* mentioned the Centre in its events listings and bulletin section, alluding to its position as a major site of activity in the bluegrass scene, not to mention other folk music and arts scenes in Toronto. The idea of a community-oriented music shop, highlighted by national interest in the nearby Yorkville Village, also inspired other "folklore centres" in cities throughout Canada like Halifax and Ottawa. Moreover, the Toronto Folklore Centre established a model for other small businesses looking to serve the folk and bluegrass markets. Through the 1970s, record and instrument shops like the Millwheel, Ring Music, and Pickin' Parlour all surfaced in Toronto. 'These businesses are not large,' according to a feature in the *TABC News*, 'They are not aimed at the general public, but rather people with serious interest in bluegrass, blues, and folk music in general" (April 1977, 1). As sites of exchange and resource-providers, they also established an infrastructural support network for local bluegrass.

Bus Excursions and American Festivals

Annual bus excursions to American bluegrass festivals—namely Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Festival in Bean Blossom, Indiana—were one of the TABC's major early initiatives.[89] As a scene "site," these excursions are difficult to pin down. They were, of course, mobile; they happened infrequently, but regularly each summer; and, they were limited in participation by whoever could afford to go and by bus capacity. What's more, their destinations were not local,

[89] The festival is colloquially referred to as "Bean Blossom" (Adler 2011, 124).

and thus exceptional among the usual social trajectories within the scene. Participants, that is, were not intimately familiar with the festival grounds as they were with High Park, Fiddler's Green, or even the Mariposa grounds, and they encountered unknown individuals from scenes throughout North America and nearby communities. That said, I include the bus trips and the American festival grounds here because they commonly surface in Committee narratives as not only historically significant, but also as noteworthy sites of scene activity.

The first Bean Blossom "bus tour" took place in June 1970 and was, for many participants, an introduction to bluegrass festivals (Bevis 1974, 1).[90] While the festival was certainly the highlight, however, the bus and accommodations also became spaces for exchange and recreation among scene participants. TABC member Lionel Pelletier humorously recalls the enthusiasm among many of the musicians during the trip:

> We were at the bus terminal, and anyone who played was already on the bus playing. They played all the way down there. Twelve hours. And then they played in the parking lot all the time they were there. Then they got to the hotel and they played all night in the hotel. I almost didn't like bluegrass! (Personal communication May 14, 2013)

Among the unabated picking, Pelletier could be found documenting the trips with his ever-present camera while Benson worked on his own writing projects for the inaugural issues of the *TABC News* or *Bluegrass Unlimited*. Indeed, the Bean Blossom tour bus was a hive of activity.

Above, I echo Neil Rosenberg (2005) in suggesting that American festivals like Bean Blossom were often viewed as a "rite of passage" where longtime bluegrass devotees could not only see their favourite acts perform on stage, but could learn from them at workshops and even casually jam or mingle with them on the festival grounds (277-278). Indeed, for those on the Bean Blossom charter bus who, according to Adrian Bevis, "braved the unknown," the

[90] There were no bluegrass festivals in Canada at this time. It was also, according to Doug Benson, the first ever charter bus to appear at Bean Blossom (Personal communication May 14, 2013).

excursions were presented as a rite of passage that had an "overwhelming" impact (1974, 1). Speaking some forty-plus years later, Lionel Pelletier proudly recalls his two Bean Blossom trips and specifically an occasion when Bill Monroe greeted him upon visiting the Canadian charter bus (personal communication May 14, 2013). Bevis, on the other hand, remembers standing shoulder-to-shoulder with bluegrass stars, listening to their discussions while Benson retains the image of older men on the festival's property line playing the music of their era. "We thought, man, this is bluegrass heaven," he states, "Here's guys doing old Monroe Brothers stuff and old pre-bluegrass material, and the early bluegrass stuff […] and they were just quietly competent and into it" (personal communication June 4, 2013).

These lasting experiences not only provided a vision for the kinds of events they wanted to reproduce in the Toronto area, but also imbued the participants with a measure of cultural distinction within the larger scene. Like the "pivotal events" that stand out in popular music history (e.g., Bob Dylan "going electric" at Newport or the Woodstock festival), within the Toronto area bluegrass scene, there was a value assigned to "being there"—on the bus, at Bean Blossom—and a sense that participants were "insiders." Bevis (1974) refers to participants as "Bean Blossom Buddies" in his historical feature on the TABC (1), and in promoting subsequent bus tours, organizers simply appealed to past experiences and camaraderie: "Ask the Bean Blossom Special veterans what our bluegrass tours are like" (*TABC News* Feb. 1972, 1).

Doug Benson refers to the festival bus excursions as "spin-off activities that were not official TABC events but were organized around the same nucleus of people" (1978, 6).[91] However, while the annual trips were certainly not a closed affair, in some ways they were distinct from many other activities in their limited accessibility. Indeed, the trips could prove quite costly and

[91] That said, three TABC members (Benson, Ross Hoover, and Mike Lloyd) are credited with organizing the three bus trips between 1970-1972 (*TABC News* Feb. 1972).

thus became an exclusive event for those who could afford to participate. For instance, depending on how many participants could be recruited, the 1972 Bean Blossom excursion cost between $50-$55 per person (approximately $325 adjusted for inflation). That cost entailed festival admission, bus fees, accommodations (described as "expensive, but good"), and transportation to and from the festival grounds each day. In order to secure the bus and hotel, participants were required to put forward a $25 deposit in advance. Perhaps fittingly, the excursion (and its price tag) were "geared to the person who works regular hours (9-5, Mon.-Fri.)" (*TABC News*, April 1972). The bus would leave Toronto on the Friday at 6:30 p.m. and return at 8 a.m. the following Monday. Of course, many factors might exclude individuals from going to a weekend festival. However, in a diverse scene consisting of professionals, tradespeople, part-time and shift workers, as well as students, the prerequisites for taking part in the excursions highlight how "the same nucleus of people" who attended, and who were able to accrue the associated cultural capital was, to some degree, economically determined. To be sure, there is no indication that an ability to attend the Bean Blossom bus excursions was ever a source of tension or wielded with a pretentious tone. Still, as will become apparent throughout this thesis, distinctions in class and occupation, as well as socio-political ideology, would figure in how scene participants engaged with one another, understood bluegrass, made sense of their city, and would ultimately shape the scene.

* * *

High Park, Fiddler's Green, the Toronto Folklore Centre, Mariposa, and the annual bus excursions to American bluegrass festivals are some of the more significant sites of activity in the early development of Toronto's bluegrass scene. As mentioned at the outset of this section, they were by no means the only prevalent sites in the scene, and surely others like Ramsden

Park, the Country Music Store, and, outside of the city's borders, the Bluegrass Canada Festival in Carlisle, Ontario, would become focal points as the scene expanded through the 1970s. These spaces became sites of encounter, visualization, planning, and music-making. As such, like the key individuals and clusters who worked to build a scene, they occupy positions within a (trans)local network and are made vital through the lived trajectories of and social interactions among scene participants.

"The Folkies Don't Get It": Scene Boundaries and Directionality

Above, I have attempted to illuminate a network of participants and sites in examining the coordinated efforts that produced a vibrant local scene. The processes of distillation involved in constructing a historical narrative render comprehensible an otherwise unwieldy and potentially unbound scenic network. Moreover, the history that I have produced thus far provides a depiction of relatively harmonious and fluid social relations. Indeed, as a recreational scene, conflict between participants was the exception and the atmosphere was characteristically light at jams, meetings, and other local bluegrass events. Nevertheless, tensions did occasionally surface around negotiating the scene's fuzzy boundaries, and, on a more formal level, determining the most appropriate ways to direct collective efforts.

In Chapter two I discussed how bluegrass as a genre straddled the perforated, but often rigidly imposed line between folk music's presumed "authenticity" and country music's "commerciality." In addition to the distinction between commercial and noncommercial music, this marginal position contains class and lifestyle assumptions that influenced encounters within and shaped the boundaries of Toronto's bluegrass scene. Benson captures the pervasiveness of these entangled constructs when he states, "It was part of our DNA to be at least facetiously aware of that dichotomy between 'country' and 'folk,' which meant 'country' and 'city'"

(personal communication Aug. 6, 2013). For many scene participants, these loaded distinctions surfaced in complex ways, demanding strategic affinities with adjacent scenes and genre constructs, and producing an ambivalence characterized by a sense of insider gratification and outsider self-consciousness. Within this context, bluegrass enthusiasts were often able to circulate among seemingly different groups by appealing to both country music populism and folk purism.

Navigating the boundaries between "folk" and "country"—imagined not only as genres but also as lifeways—involved a continual process of refining the terms of distinction. In order to establish allegiances, as well as a space for their own interests and competencies, bluegrass enthusiasts demonstrated their appreciation for a variety of bluegrass-related genre constructs, without veering on the side of becoming "too country" or "too folk." Recalling an occasion when he and a group of bluegrass fans went to see Nashville country star Conway Twitty at Massey Hall, Benson alludes to this balancing act and the accompanying feelings of anxiety and humourous defiance:

> We went to see Conway at Massey Hall. We were excited and we were sort of a little leery that some of the folky purist types wouldn't approve. On the other hand we were defiant. 'Screw 'em! We got it figured out and they don't get it' [Laughs]. With the general public, we were bluegrassers. […] But within the acoustic world, we were country guys wishing we could come out of the closet as being country guys. Well, we're bluegrassers, but not the hillbilly shit, ya know [laughs]. (Personal communication Aug. 6, 2013)

To be sure, when Benson singles out the "hillbilly shit," he is not rejecting that early commercial country music genre, which had some value within the urban folk revival. Rather, he is distancing himself and his peers from conventional hillbilly stereotypes related to rowdiness, narrow-mindedness, and a general lack of sophistication. Lionel Pelletier hints at this in his comparison of bluegrass and country music audiences. "To me, I still see country guys as

drunkards," he confesses, "Belligerent, you know. But bluegrassers…some of them get drunk, but they're not as belligerent as country [fans]" (personal communication May 15, 2013). It should be noted that Pelletier and many of the participants in this research are avid country music fans and aficionados. Pelletier's comments, then, are best understood not as a rejection of the music, but reflective of his own discomfort with, and acceptance of, some of the ideas associated with country music culture.

Steve Pritchard adds further nuance to the lines of distinction, instead comparing audiences at bluegrass and folk festivals. Like Pelletier, he advocates for the sophistication of bluegrass audiences, while recognizing that the connection to country music enables forms of behaviour and discourse that might alienate many urban folk revivalists:

> The audience at a bluegrass festival was radically different than the audiences at a folk festival. […] The bluegrass people were different. They were rural. They were intelligent, they were rural, they really liked music and they liked playing music, but they didn't seem to have the same city sophistication that the folk people did. Or, have the same type of education. Even though they were smart and most of them had as much money or more money than what the folk people had. It was just their social status. And the bluegrass bands could get away with jokes and presenting bands and saying things because they were country folk and they were more open to hearing off-coloured things and thinking it was okay. It would go to some really negative, racist, bigoted, things as well. And the city guys were more, the ones who went to folk things, steered away from that. They were more sophisticated and more educated and more clean than what the audience was for bluegrass (personal communication June 4, 2013).

In his comments, Pritchard suggests that he and others in the Toronto bluegrass scene occupied a shifting middle ground between the rural, working-class conservatism he associates with bluegrass festivals and the political progressiveness associated with the urban folk revival. While his characterization of festival audiences is overly generalized, it speaks to the sense of not quite fitting comfortably into two seemingly disparate worlds. For him, the point of negotiation was the casual bigotry that he witnessed on the festival grounds and that was commonly linked to

rural, working-class America. For the most part, those who came to bluegrass by way of the urban folk revival did not want to imply an allegiance with such values. At the same time, many were drawn to a notion of a community-oriented "bluegrass culture" to the extent that they could reconcile unfavourable social and political attitudes, or at least attempt to understand them as an unfortunate facet of the broader cultural context. At times, as exemplified in Pritchard's analysis, efforts to appreciate these disagreeable elements exhibit an Othering tone that recalls familiar tropes related to "the folk." However, many also experienced a genuine desire to participate in the imagined "bluegrass culture" and meaningful relationships were forged between individuals with conflicting values and beliefs, both stateside and in the local scene. Perhaps in some ways then, social interaction within the bluegrass scene cultivated a more nuanced, less politically loaded understanding of class relations.

On a local level, the perceived dichotomy between "folk" and "country" created an awkward, if sometimes overblown, dynamic within some of Toronto's overlapping music scenes. Pritchard, for instance, contends that Estelle Klein, wanting to avoid upsetting folk revivalists, only "begrudgingly" included bluegrass at Mariposa (personal communication June 4, 2013). Doug Benson, however, suggests that bluegrass' middle-position was a "mixed blessing" (personal communication, June 4 2013). While "dealing with […] two separate scenes" could be exhausting, he maintains that "bluegrass people were fortunate in the sense that […] we had a sort of spiritual home as co-conspirators with the country crowd, and because of the folk acceptance of bluegrass, we had that in with Mariposa" (Ibid). Ironically, then, through the ongoing definition and negotiation of boundaries, participants like Benson found further opportunities for encounter and network building on the scene's peripheries.

The sometimes fraught overlapping of genre constructs and the subsequent push and pull between local scenes evokes the "directionality" that Brinner observes in musical-social networks. Highlighting the relationships that connect nodes in a network model, he notes that productive energies, resources, and other exchanges have a directional flow. In a general sense, for instance, knowledge flows primarily from teacher to student; money flows from audience to performer; and, conversely, music flows from performer to audience (Brinner 2009, 171-172).[92] "The direction of flow along links," Brinner argues, "affects the character of that network" (172).

As one of the core institutions in Toronto's bluegrass scene, the TABC's executive members were able to influence the direction of resources and collective energies in ways that would ultimately shape the scene. Unsurprisingly, in the TABC's formative years, establishing these flows could be a source of tension as members debated the Committee's purpose. While everyone could agree that the TABC existed to promote bluegrass in the Toronto area, there were two main views on how this goal could be achieved. On the one hand, some members wanted to direct their efforts towards bringing American groups to Toronto, while others thought it would be more fruitful to create the conditions for Canadian acts to emerge by developing a local infrastructure. Adrian Bevis elaborates:

> Sometimes [the TABC meetings] were a little contentious. Doug was very pro bringing in Monroe. There were other Canadian factions that didn't see the point of bringing in American groups. They wanted Canadian groups. […] So, there really was a recurring issue of should the effort be in bringing in American groups, or should there be a focus on Canadian groups. And, of course, you could argue that with the American groups, you're getting some classics. (personal communication June 4, 2013)

Ultimately TABC members did not commit to just one of these missions and were able to both organize performances with American acts and also establish local spaces for bluegrass-related activity. Nevertheless, the issue of whether to transport bluegrass *to* or nurture bluegrass *in*

[92] Of course, these flows vary in strength and balance, and are not immune to disruption.

Toronto was a perennial debate, especially as more professional Canadian bands began to form through the 1970s.

This issue highlights how the directional flows that shaped Toronto's bluegrass scene were part of a network that extended beyond the city's borders. In the late 1960s and through the 1970s, North America experienced a widespread surge of interest in bluegrass that was spurred by the shift toward niche "named-system revivals" as well as recurrent exposure in television and film soundtracks (e.g., *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Deliverance*), and resulted in a "bluegrass consumers' movement" (Rosenberg 2005, 217; 250-271). Within this context, bluegrass in Toronto calls to mind Slobin's (1992) discussion of "micromusics," which he famously describes as "small musical units within big music-cultures" (1). Exploring the intersections between these two extremes, Slobin identifies three fields of musical activity: 1) "local musics," which are limited in reach and audience; 2) "regional musics," which refers to music that has somewhat greater mobility and a broader audience dispersed over a larger, roughly defined area (e.g., think of the Greater Toronto Area, or even Southern Ontario, as opposed to Toronto-proper); and, 3) "transregional musics," which, like bluegrass from the 1940s on, traversed regional, and even national boundaries through tour itineraries and other facets of the mediascape like radio broadcasts, film and television, and commercial recordings (7-9).

These "types of music" are distinct in their mobility and levels of exposure, but they should not be viewed as segregated. Rather than identify which musics occupy which category, it is perhaps more fruitful to examine how particular genres or styles operate on local, regional, and transregional levels and how the fields intersect as resources, ideas, individuals, and productive energies flow between them. Activities within Toronto's bluegrass scene (e.g., jams, listening

sessions, concerts, festival bus excursions, the production and distribution of the *TABC News*) entail and are shaped by the intersection of local, regional, and transregional flows. These flows are glaring when, for instance, an American artist crosses the border for a performance in Toronto or, conversely, when a bus full of Canadian fans travels to an American festival. But, even the most "local" scene activity—bound to a small area and limited to minimal resources—bears a broader regional and transregional influence. Amateur musicians at an informal picking session in someone's home, for instance, might refer to the sounds heard on commercial recordings from established American artists; one participant might describe how his/her instrument was set up stateside at a festival booth; others might discuss a notice they read in the *TABC News* telling readers to tune into Bob Wood's new bluegrass radio show broadcast out of nearby Ajax, Ontario on CHOO-AM (*TABC News* April 1979, 3). The intersection between these fields, as will become apparent in the following chapters, became increasingly prevalent as an infrastructure for professional bluegrass emerged through the 1970s, and as scenes began to converge in other regions throughout Ontario and Canada. Here, directional flows between grassroots scenes and within the professionalized network were facilitated by coordination and collaboration between participants and the production of a "Canadian bluegrass" mediascape. All of this coincided with ancillary developments like the growth of small towns throughout Southern Ontario and the expansion of the 400-series highway network, which enabled artists to tour a regional circuit, increased audience accessibility to festivals and other bluegrass events, and made it possible for casual pickers to drop in on jam sessions located not only in Toronto, but nearby cities and towns like Mississauga, Burlington, Hamilton, Richmond Hill, or however far a participant was willing to drive. As a result, in addition to the directional flows that

circulate through, reach into, and extend beyond a local scene, by the mid-1970s trajectories were becoming more solidified within a broader network of scenic clusters.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to account for some of the more visible people, institutions, activities, and relationships that helped shape Toronto's bluegrass scene from 1968 to the mid-1970s. While the overview provides an adequate historical depiction of bluegrass in the city during this period and, perhaps to a greater extent, highlights the dynamism of an emerging scene, it is necessarily partial. Regardless of the exclusions that come with constructing a historical narrative, within the nebulous scope of a scene, much is undocumented, unnoticed, or forgotten. What's more, over time the prominence of different individuals and places changes, relationships become more or less potent, and priorities shift. Central figures might take a more peripheral role or disappear completely just as new leading figures and key sites emerge.

In summer 1973, Doug Benson and his family moved back to Montreal and that September, five years after the first TABC meeting, members of the Committee regrouped to discuss their purpose and their future. At the meeting, a new executive was formed with Chuck Crawford taking a leading role,[93] and it seemed that the TABC was revitalized. However, while fall 1973 certainly represented the beginning of a new era for the Committee, this was not preceded by a lull in activity or enthusiasm. Quite the opposite, as has been suggested in this chapter, local bluegrass activity was thriving and expanding at the outset of the 1970s with more possibilities for fans to indulge in the music, more opportunities to see American acts, and even more concert events featuring up and coming Canadian bands on the bill. This all led up to the first Bluegrass

[93] As noted in Chapter Two, Crawford arrived in Toronto from the United States in 1970. He was joined on the new executive by Adrian Bevis, Mike Lloyd, Tom McCreight, and Terry Moorehead.

Canada Festival on August 3-5, 1973 in Carlisle, Ontario, just an hour's drive from Toronto. The festival had a stirring impact, if only meagre financial success, and was, up to this point, the largest bluegrass event to happen in Canada. In the coming years, Bluegrass Canada would grow into one of the largest festivals in North America. Within this context, then, the TABC wasn't reinvigorated so much as it became more visible, shifting its focus to relaunching the *TABC News*. Now appearing monthly, the newsletter offered reports and commentary on the world of bluegrass, with an emphasis on the local, all the while providing a site for discussion, debate, and networking. Moreover, as will be discussed in the next chapter, with advertisements for local shops, an ever-lengthening coming events section, and reviews of Canadian-made bluegrass records, the *TABC News* was central to and provides a glimpse of a professionalizing scene.

Chapter Five

The Makings of an Art World, part 1: Expanding Beyond the Toronto Area

> In the few short years that I've been playing, I've watched something develop in our part of the country. It's been quite a pleasure for me to watch. And that's that the musicians who started playing four or five years ago (and who are still playing) have, as far as I can see, worked hard and improved. The groups that are playing around here, now, I enjoy listening to them because the quality of their music has improved. Also, I feel a certain kind of comradeship with them. We can be at a festival in the summertime and we'd know each other. We've watched each other grow. We can play together and enjoy each other's company and that, to me, is an important thing and a very enjoyable event. All of these people, I know, have actually done something. They've accomplished something. It appears that they want to accomplish more. That makes me happy. (Brian Pickell in Couchie 1978a, 13)

From the establishment of the TABC in 1968, the Toronto area bluegrass scene underwent immense growth and transformation. Coinciding with a renewed interest in bluegrass—specifically, festivals—throughout Canada and the United States, local bluegrass events were proliferating and drawing larger, well-informed audiences. Nearby local hubs in cities and towns throughout and beyond Southern Ontario were also coordinating more purposefully to produce a fertile (trans)regional scene. Indeed, through the kinds of scene-building activity discussed in the previous chapter, by the mid-1970s, the network for bluegrass activity was expanding. One of the more noticeable shifts in the scene's character was a growing emphasis on professionalism. As Brian Pickell of the Humber River Valley Boys indicates in his comments above, talented local bluegrass musicians, many of whom had thrived in the scene's early days, were beginning to form bands and gain recognition. They were also beginning to populate the bills of bluegrass concert events throughout Ontario, record albums, tour, and appear in the pages of the revamped *TABC News* and a new high-quality, glossy magazine called the *Canadian Bluegrass Review*. All of this professional activity was not only supported on a grassroots level by local bluegrass organizations, but also by independent record labels, small studios, local radio, and businesses

like the Toronto Folklore Centre and other shops mentioned in the previous chapter. Bluegrass in Ontario, and Eastern Canada in general, also benefitted from a cross-border expansion of the American festival circuit.

Over the course of these developments, scene participants maintained familiar ideas about and idealization of "American bluegrass culture." As the scene began to coalesce through the 1970s, however, other threads of discourse began to surface around the notion "Canadian bluegrass" and professionalism. These developments corresponded with a growing interest in supporting domestic culture in post-Centennial Canada. Indeed, the national discussion around defining and promoting "Canadian culture" augmented and challenged conventional discourse in the local scene.

This and the following chapter provide a historical survey of the developing infrastructure for professional bluegrass in the Toronto area and beyond. Throughout, I focus on how the social dynamism of grassroots cultural scenes pervades the ensuing, more concrete professional "art world" (Becker 1982) in ways that reflect local concerns, shape professional networks, and accent the instability of prevailing genre constructs. This dynamism, of course, presents historiographical challenges. Because there were so many individuals, organizations, and regional scene clusters acting simultaneously through the mid to late-1970s, the developments described here resist a rigid linear treatment. Therefore, in order to render a more digestible account of the surge in adjacent collective activity, this period is presented in two parts. In this part, I proceed with the previous chapter's historical narrative, examining the TABC's renewed focus on covering local activity in their monthly vehicle. Then, observing the expansion of the scenic network, I broaden my reach to include a number of other institutional and grassroots supports that built on the TABC's early activity. These sections will further highlight an array of

scene-building work, now directed towards more ambitious initiatives. They also serve to contextualize the next chapter's—part two's—in-depth overview of notable bands, festivals, labels, and studios, all of which contributed to a developing infrastructure for professional bluegrass and articulated with emerging discourses around professionalism and "Canadian bluegrass." Before tackling this vibrant period in local scene history, however, I want to revisit and expand upon some of the theoretical concepts and categories that have been employed thus far.

Genres, Scenes, Art Worlds

On a surface level, the more concrete and professionalized milieu for local bluegrass that developed by the mid-to-late 1970s was altogether different from the fluid, grassroots cultural scene that existed during the TABC's early years. In order to make sense of how these transformations took place and the resulting shape, we need to explore additional concepts and processes. One possible way forward is to plot a linear passage through various sociocultural categories. This is precisely what Jennifer C. Lena (2012) proposes in her analysis of genre construction and evolution. Lena views genres as "systems of orientations, expectations, and conventions that bind together industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of music" (6). Here, musical "styles" are closely linked to genre communities, which transform over time, ultimately altering the style.[94] She identifies four genre forms/sociocultural configurations that represent a series of phases. Genres begin in the "Avant-garde" phase. At this point, resources are limited and activity is highly localized, small-scale, and experimental. As the Avant-garde garners attention, consolidates resources, and becomes

[94] While "genre" is commonly used to refer to musical idioms such as "bluegrass," Lena adopts the term "style" in such instances. "A genre exists," she argues, "when there is some consensus that a distinctive style of music is being performed" (6). In order to avoid becoming bogged down with terminology, I employ the term "genre" more globally to account for particular styles, sounds, practices, and social configurations.

increasingly codified in terms of style, conventions, and practice it enters a "Scene-based" phase. At this point, observers can link certain musics and associated values to particular, often localized scenes (e.g., Seattle scene-grunge music). If interest in Scene-based genres reaches a certain level, they can enter an "Industry-based" phase where the music and artists encounter broader corporate and legal structures that have a stake in the music's distribution, market presence, and related flows of capital. This is when a genre is most visible and has the most lucrative potential. When mass interest peaks and eventually wanes, genres often enter a "Traditionalist" phase where the music maintains the niche interest among specialists and academics, inspires the formation of appreciation societies and clubs, and is subject to preservationist discourse (9).[95]

Much of the bluegrass activity I have described thus far can be situated somewhere in Lena's phases and, going forward, her analysis will certainly illuminate the processes through which a distinct notion of "Canadian bluegrass" was formulated. Bluegrass was a solidified, recognizable genre by the time people like the York County Boys and Adrian Bevis became interested and began to learn the music. Through the 1940s and into the 1970s it maintained a shifting, mixed-market industry presence. At the same time, through its association with the folk revival in the 1960s, bluegrass arguably occupied what Lena would call the Traditionalist phase. The collaborative learning practices of participants through the 1950s and 1960s, however, correspond with the activities she associates with the "Avant-garde" phase, if not in the desired bluegrass sound, than in the experimentation, smallness of scale, and dearth of resources. As more picking sessions began to emerge, through "Traditionalist" activity like the formation of the TABC, specific locations began to surface as hubs and things looked characteristically

[95] Lena's genre phases build on sociologist Richard Peterson's work (e.g., Peterson 1972). The two began developing the theory discussed above in Lena and Peterson 2008.

"Scene-based." Meanwhile, local enthusiasts continued to encounter a longstanding "Industry-based" genre through commercial recordings, mass media, and cross-border excursions.

Erratically applying Lena's phases to the Toronto area bluegrass scene is not intended to bewilder. Rather, I want to highlight the limits of an overly rigid, processual model. Like a historical treatment, Lena's phases can provide a helpful, preliminary sketch of how genres evolve. A closer examination, however, reveals a more tangled scenario in which all of these phases can exist simultaneously.

Brinner's (2009) network analysis offers an alternative transitional perspective that, in its apparent simplicity, enables more nuanced approaches to examining the professionalization of a grassroots scene. He argues that loose, mercurial scenes have the potential to grow into organized and highly productive "art worlds"—Howard Becker's term for the various, coordinated practices dedicated to the production and circulation of art (Becker 1981; Brinner 2009, 200). Like "scene," "art world" is a term that encompasses a large array of practices, institutions, individuals (artists and non-artists alike), and network relations. "Art world," however, describes a far more solidified network and infrastructure for cultural production and consumption. Over time, "through increasing elaboration and tightening of the network connections," a more robust infrastructure—an art world—begins to surface where individual nodes, clusters, and spaces become more visible, roles more clearly defined, and processes more routinized (Brinner 2009, 200). What's more, within an art world, participants often coalesce around ways of thinking (e.g., notions of authenticity, evaluative criteria, extramusical beliefs, etc.) (200-201). Brinner is clear in noting that this does not necessarily imply homogeneity. Indeed, as we have seen in the Toronto area bluegrass scene, individuals represent various political, social, and economic backgrounds. Rather, participants contribute to and formulate

ideas within a "discourse community" (202). Employing this idea, Brinner focuses more on musical exchanges and constructing aesthetic conventions (e.g., mandolin picking patterns or harmonic arrangements considered most appropriate for bluegrass). The notion of a discourse community, however, extends to extramusical activity. In his original writing on art worlds, Howard Becker (1981) maintains that "aestheticians" and critics have a central role in shaping how art is understood, evaluated, and produced by not only employing established discursive themes, but also formulating new evaluative and critical discourses to make sense of and legitimate emerging cultural practices and forms (131-137). This certainly applies to the Toronto area bluegrass scene, where participants circulated notions of "American bluegrass" music and culture in evaluating local activity and music-making. However, as the regional infrastructure and network for producing bluegrass thickened and expanded through the 1970s, resembling something more akin to an art world, a discourse community began to form around the notions of "professionalism" and "Canadian bluegrass."

In examining these transformations, it doesn't appear that Brinner supports an entirely rigid, linear momentum from the loosely organized scene—or what he calls "isolated clusters"—towards a highly coordinated, and in this case, *professionalized* art world. Unlike Lena's processual model, here the art world grows out of, but doesn't necessarily supersede grassroots scene activity.[96] Rather, as participants articulate local concerns and negotiate prevailing genre constructs, the social effervescence of the cultural scene pervades and continuously shapes the more concrete professionalized art world. Keeping all of this in mind, the following sections detail the various practices and cultural developments that spurred the growth of a multifaceted and professionalized bluegrass art world that extended beyond the Toronto area.

[96] It should be noted that Lena also applies the term "art world" to her phases, stating "Genre communities are art worlds: networks of cultural production, distribution, and consumption" (6).

A Professionalizing Scene and the *TABC News*

Through the scene-building work of a collection of enthusiasts and musicians, by the early to mid-1970s bluegrass was becoming increasingly present in and around Toronto. Established American acts were playing concerts in the city; record shops were beginning to stock more bluegrass albums; instrument shops employed knowledgeable salespeople and teachers; musicians of varying skill levels were congregating for casual picking sessions while enthusiasts—musicians and otherwise—swapped records, bluegrass memorabilia, and festival road trip stories. Within this milieu, beginner and intermediate instrumentalists were able to grow as musicians and began to form bands. At the same time, as interest and opportunities for exposure grew, semi-professional bluegrass bands from surrounding areas found a supportive audience for their music.

In the fall of 1973, the TABC's newly formed executive, with Chuck Crawford serving as chair, re-evaluated their position and purpose in the flourishing scene. They still wanted to provide community forums for knowledge-building, appreciation, and music-making; they wanted to take a leading role in organizing trips and maintain an organizational presence at events like Mariposa; and they would also continue to dabble in concert promotion. Now, however, with heightened interest and energy, activity in the scene was less centralized and the TABC's mobilizing role was diminished. In addition to the Committee's monthly picking sessions and annual excursions, clusters of enthusiasts were getting together independently to jam, setting up gigs for their own newly formed bands, and figuring out how to make records.[97] Moreover, there were signs that small, interconnected scenes and associations were surfacing in

[97] Of course, it's likely that this kind of "independent" activity was occurring to some degree all along and was only becoming more visible through media like the *TABC News*. As discussed below, however, the gradually increasing amount of content in the *TABC News'*s events listings indicates that this kind of decentralized activity was growing.

cities throughout Ontario and the rest of Canada, which could become potential tour itineraries for emerging bands. In 1974, all of this activity caught the attention of Stan Rogers, who produced a special on Toronto's bluegrass scene for the Canadian Broadcasting Company's (CBC) nationally syndicated folk music program, *Touch the Earth*. During the show, which features interviews with Doug Benson, Chuck Crawford, and audio from the first Sunday picking sessions at Fiddler's Green, host Sylvia Tyson asks Rogers, "Would you say there had been a bluegrass revival in Toronto?" Rogers replies:

> Not just specifically in Toronto. The more I talk to the Bluegrass Committee people…there's an outfit in Montreal that's a splinter group of the Toronto Area people and it's headed up by a fella named Chuck Benson [sic].[98] There's another group out West, and just this summer Canada's first really big annual bluegrass festival started up in Carlisle[, Ontario] (Rogers and Tyson 1974).[99]

As Canada's largest, primarily English-speaking city, in many respects Toronto was still a northern bluegrass hub during this time. However, with clusters of enthusiasts establishing bluegrass associations and organizing events in small towns and cities throughout Ontario and beyond, it was becoming clear that Toronto was just one part of a much larger network of scenes. Responding to this, the TABC executive decided to shift their priorities towards relaunching the *TABC News* as a monthly magazine that would link the dispersed scenes by covering all of the bluegrass activity happening in (mostly Southern) Ontario. Benson recalls the shift:

> I think it's fair to say that Chuck and Tom [McCreight], after I left in '73 and they took over, you might say the newsletter became the focal point of the organization. Now we're a communications source telling people where to go to jams and to performances. […] And that was a mimeographed, good-looking [newsletter] (personal communication May 24, 2013).

Crawford elaborates:

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[98] The Montreal Area Bluegrass Committee was chaired by Doug's brother, Lyle Benson.

[99] Rogers is referring to the Bluegrass Canada festival, which actually debuted in 1973. The festival is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

> The idea for the newsletter was I think pretty much Tom [McCreight]'s. And it was basically just to get a schedule out of activities and of concerts and stuff like that. With the idea that maybe we might sponsor some concerts. […] So we started putting that out once a month (personal communication May 13, 2013).

In previous chapters I introduced the *TABC News* as an assortment of reports, reviews, feature articles, opinions, listings, and classifieds, as well as a site of exchange for bluegrass enthusiasts in Canada and especially the Toronto area. Now I want to take a closer look at how the newsletter was produced in order to capture the kinds of small-scale grassroots activity that contributed to the development of a professional art world for bluegrass in this part of the country.

After a couple of attempts to produce a single page newsletter throughout 1972, the *TABC News* was officially launched as a monthly vehicle in October 1973. Unlike *Bluegrass Breakdown*, the first three-page issue was streamlined, though not necessarily polished, resembling a typed business memorandum. The Committee's board of directors was listed on the first page, just beneath a plain masthead. The minimal events list was instructive, asking readers:

> How do you like your bluegrass – with or without beer?
> - with beer – Egerton's Oct. 20
> - without beer – Fiddler's Green Oct. 21 (3).

The authors also describe Egerton's, which has a sound system and "cold beer," as an "ideal spot" to start a monthly open mic/picking session (*TABC News*, Oct. 1973, 1). The "Minor Notes" section, which would serve as a space for point form news pieces and updates throughout the *TABC News'* entire run, included member/subscription fee reminders, listed record label promotions, directed readers towards stateside LP dealers, and plugged Ring Music, a new instrument shop in Toronto. The October 1973 *TABC News* also featured the first of Adrian Bevis' four-part series on the history of the Committee. This series recounted how and why the TABC formed and outlined some of scene activity that occurred in the years preceding the

newsletter. Appearing only five years after the formation of the TABC and at times composed as a chronological description of significant events, Bevis' series also suggests that Committee members attributed a sense of historical import to their organization and the scene.

With its 8-1/2" x 11" pages stapled together in the top left corner, the *TABC News'* aesthetic had more in common with a do-it-yourself "zine" than a polished magazine like *Bluegrass Unlimited*.[100] That said, over time the newsletter's layout and style evolved, with more illustrations, regular features, a sense of organized flow, consistent formatting, and a striking, minimalistic masthead that incorporated the TABC's new logo (see Figure 5.1).

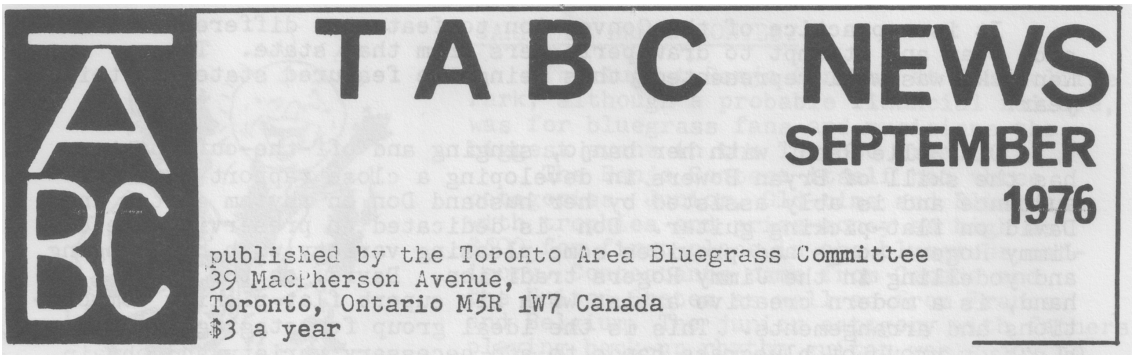


Figure 5.1—*TABC News* masthead, 1976

Assembling and distributing the newsletter required the coordinated effort of a core group of Committee members who would gather monthly for what Doug Benson describes as "newsletter parties" (personal communication, May 24, 2013). In the following exchange, Benson, who was no longer present in the Toronto scene at this time, asks Committee member Steve Pritchard about the gatherings:

Pritchard: It was a volunteer thing where you put together the newsletter.

Benson: Collation, stapling, addressing, mailing? Well, you tell me, I wasn't there. I was back in Montreal.

[100] *Bluegrass Unlimited* went through a series of format changes through the late 1960s and 1970s. Around the time when the *TABC News* appeared, it was published as a small booklet with neatly compiled content, modeled after another folk revival era magazine, *Blues Unlimited*. By the mid-1970s it began to appear in a more traditional, glossy magazine format.

> **Pritchard:** That's what it was. Everybody had a part. A stapler or a folder or something. And you'd put it all together and you'd have a beer or a coffee. And you went to Chuck's house. Pleasance [Crawford] was there and their two kids were there. And it was a very traditionally, sparsely furnished house.
>
> **Benson:** 39 MacPherson. A landmark.

In fact, in its first few years, the *TABC News* was assembled and distributed from Tom McCreight's Willowdale address in Toronto's north end. By 1976, however, work on the newsletter revolved around the Crawford family's Toronto residence and, indeed, 39 MacPherson Avenue became a scene "landmark" as the TABC's administrative hub. In addition to taking on individual assembly tasks, Chuck Crawford and a handful of core and executive members provided much of the content while Pleasance Crawford played a key role in the newsletter's design and layout. "Pleas[ance], she does historical landscape research," Chuck explains, "and knew about cutting and pasting and putting things together and was a better editor than I was in terms of getting stuff out" (personal communication, May 13, 2013). Piecing together the *TABC News* each month was a collective effort that called on the various skills, resources, and abilities of TABC members.

The TABC executive also solicited content from the broader membership, who were encouraged to send in classified ads, questions and opinions, event notifications, and festival reports. A note in the December 1974 issue, for instance, asks subscribers to submit their classified requests by the tenth of each month and gives an indication of the newsletter's reach by the mid-1970s: "If you're on the market to buy or sell an instrument why not mention it to the other 300 readers of the TABC News, too?" (Anonymous 1979a, 4; underline in original).

As the scene grew and professionalized, members increasingly contributed to the *TABC News*, submitting artist profiles, album and concert reviews, and advice columns on subjects like

instrument care, shopping for stereo equipment, and finding the best local deals on bluegrass recordings. To be sure, only a handful of members routinely submitted content (soliciting member input was always a struggle for the TABC executive). Nevertheless, observing the newsletter's swift evolution—the widening breadth of news/comment-worthy material, the in-depth exchanges between members, and the implementation of regular features, such as a record review section that focused primarily on Canadian releases—provides a valuable depiction of how the grassroots scene was beginning to exist as part of a professionalizing art world.

Over the course of several years, the TABC executive attempted to formalize the process of assembling their newsletter. At first, these efforts appear to correspond with activity in the professionalizing milieu, and indeed the executive was likely inspired by the high quality output and publishing jargon associated with magazines like *Bluegrass Unlimited*. Formalizing the *TABC News'* production, however, was arguably more of a necessity in order to adequately cover the explosion of local and regional bluegrass activity. It also coincided with the executive's relocation to Chuck and Pleasance Crawford's residence. The September 1976 issue announces that 39 MacPherson Avenue is the new TABC headquarters (3). In the same issue, a piece entitled "TABC Gets Organized" explains that 39 MacPherson, along with other executive member addresses, will host monthly meetings where "the contents of the newsletter will be discussed" (4). During this time member participation was prioritized as a way to "spread the labor and get more people and ideas involved in the TABC News and other activities of the Committee" (Ibid.). As such, some members volunteered to oversee newsletter sections: Mary Millar compiled the "Coming Events" and "Minor Notes," Ossie Branscomb, proprietor of a new record shop called the Country Music Store, managed the mailing list, and Denis LePage, a prominent banjo player in Toronto, was in charge of record reviews (Ibid.). The TABC also

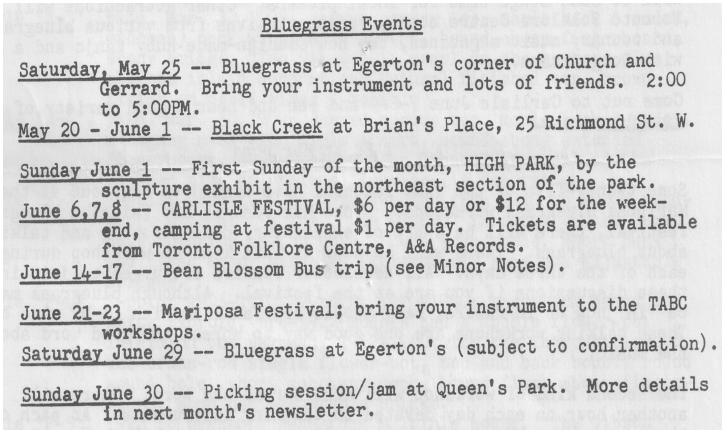
established an "editorial group" that would solicit content for the newsletter. "The individuals in this group," the author(s) explain, "will choose topics for articles, contact authors, and see to it that the material is ready on time" (Ibid.). The motive here was to further decentralize the TABC by reaching out to the broader network and incorporating more voices in the newsletter and in Committee operations. "If [the editorial group] is diverse enough and works hard the News should be able to tap some of the interesting material from bluegrass musicians and enthusiasts in the Toronto area" (Ibid.).

A few months later, in the January 1977 issue, the TABC described its "Editorial Policy," or lack thereof. It's worth quoting this piece at length since it not only gives insight into how *TABC News* content decisions were made, but also provides a grassroots perspective of the scene's expansion, professionalization, and relation to other local musics:

> The truth is we do not have a clear policy. We encourage anyone to notify us of bluegrass events and to write articles on bluegrass. Once we have received an item, we decide whether it is appropriate. Most of our major articles come to us by our request so we know they are appropriate. Smaller items are not looked at too critically unless we are short on room. Too strict a policy would be a mistake. Any person or organization interested enough in the TABC to send us information should not be rebuffed. There are some musicians who have played bluegrass music in the Toronto area for several years and have joined bands that play various other types of music. We think that subscribers would like to know when they are playing in Toronto and where. Clubs that book an occasional bluegrass band or musicians should be mentioned even if they aren't always doing bluegrass. We also think that many subscribers are interested in all the events taking place in some clubs in Toronto, not just the bluegrass events. If Tam [Kearney] books Guy Lombardo into Fiddler's Green we'll put it in coming events…if there's room. (Anonymous 1977, 2)

As suggested in this piece, the open "editorial policy" shaped the newsletter's events listings in ways that illustrate the growth and intensification of (semi)professional activity. While early issues of the *TABC News* usually listed just a small number of shows/jams, by the mid to late-1970s the coming events list was regularly over a page long, extended well beyond the Toronto

area, and included many gigs by Ontario-based groups, as well as a smattering of non-bluegrass events (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3).



Bluegrass Events

Saturday, May 25 -- Bluegrass at Egerton's corner of Church and Gerrard. Bring your instrument and lots of friends. 2:00 to 5:00PM.
May 20 - June 1 -- Black Creek at Brian's Place, 25 Richmond St. W.

Sunday June 1 -- First Sunday of the month, HIGH PARK, by the sculpture exhibit in the northeast section of the park.
June 6,7,8 -- CARLISLE FESTIVAL, $6 per day or $12 for the weekend, camping at festival $1 per day. Tickets are available from Toronto Folklore Centre, A&A Records.
June 14-17 -- Bean Blossom Bus trip (see Minor Notes).

June 21-23 -- Mariposa Festival; bring your instrument to the TABC workshops.
Saturday June 29 -- Bluegrass at Egerton's (subject to confirmation).

Sunday June 30 -- Picking session/jam at Queen's Park. More details in next month's newsletter.

Figure 5.2 – "Bluegrass Events," *TABC News* May 1974

COMING EVENTS
(continued)

21	Bluegrass Jam Session at Egerton's, Toronto, 2:30 PM
21	Cody, Golem Cafe, Montreal
23-28	Kent County Pickers at Harbour Inn, Owen Sound
23-28	Humber River Valley Boys at Hotel Frontenac Kingston
23-28	Salt Spring Rainbow downstairs at El Mocambo, Toronto
23-28	Bob Webb and the Outta Town Band, Little Porky's Brickhouse, 21 Yorkville Avenue, Toronto
25-28	Joe Val and the New England Flyers at Country Way, Ottawa
25-28	Rural Retreat at Barton's Inn, New Dundee
27	Dixie Flyers at Pioneer Sportsman Club, Kitchener
27	Colin Linden at Fiddler's Green, Toronto
29	Skyway Bluegrass presents Joe Val and the New England Flyers at the Firestone Vets' Hall, 67 Kenilworth Avenue N., Hamilton, 2 PM
May 30-June 4	Foxglove, Little Porky's Brickhouse, 21 Yorkville Ave., Toronto
May 30-June 4	The Great Sneezy Waters at the Horseshoe Tavern, Toronto
3-4	Wolfgang Brothers at Upper Chalet, Dagmar Resort, Ashburn
2-4	John Allen Bluegrass Revue, Country Way, Ottawa
3	Bill Garrett at Fiddler's Green, Toronto
3-5	Bluegrass Canada 1977, Courtcliffe Park, Carlisle
6-11	The Stonemans, Little Porky's Brickhouse, 21 Yorkville Ave., Toronto
6-11	Wheat Strawberry Country at Horseshoe Tavern, Toronto
8-11	Carl Storey at Country Way, Ottawa
10	Dixie Flyers in Ilderton (north of London)
10	Eric and Marty Nagler with Mark Rust at Fiddler's Green, Toronto
10-11	Humber River Valley Boys at Upper Chalet, Dagmar Resort, Ashburn
11	Bluegrass Blades at Firestone Vets' Hall, Hamilton, 2 PM
12	Bluegrass Blades at Golden Valley Inn, Dundas, 2 PM
17-18	Bluegrass Blades at Upper Chalet, Dagmar Resort, Ashburn

Figure 5.3 – "Coming Events, continued," *TABC News* May 1977

Likewise, the *TABC News'* annual festival listing also ballooned during this period (see Figures 5.4 and 5.5). The 1974 summer festival schedule, for instance, provided a small list of American festivals within a twelve-hour drive from Toronto, and "gleaned from Bluegrass Unlimited" (Anonymous 1974b, 1; underline in original). By 1977, the festival listing was a page long with the real estate split equally between events in the United States and Ontario. The 1979 schedule contained over two pages of Ontario festival listings. As I discuss in the next chapter,

this growth was related to a larger bluegrass festival trend in which Canadian towns became part of a growing transnational circuit. For now, however, I want to focus on the dispersal of the kinds of grassroots activity described above.

Festivals

Festival time is here again! These festivals are all within twelve hours' driving range of southern Ontario. Estimates of driving times are in parentheses, starting from Toronto.

JUNE	
28-30	Charlotte, Mich.: The Stringbean Memorial Bluegrass Festival, free, Fair Grounds (6 hours)
28-30	Toledo, Ohio: Glass City Bluegrass Festival (5 hours)
29-30	Columbus, Ohio: 5th Annual Mid-Ohio Festival, Frontier Ranch (10 hours)
29-30	York/Davidsburg, Pa.: Deer Creek Fiddlers Convention once removed, Bermudian Creek (12 hours)
JULY	
4	West Grove, Pa.: Annual Talent Contest, Sunset Park (10 hours)
12-14	Fremont, Ohio: Portage Trail Bluegrass Festival, Portage Trail Park (6 hours)
17-19	Quaker City, Ohio: Hill Folk Festival (10 hours)
19-21	Midland, Mich.: Michigan Bluegrass Festival (relocated from Port Huron), Midland County Fair Grounds (6 hours)
26-27	Harowoodlands, Nova Scotia: 3rd Annual Nova Scotia Bluegrass and Old-time Music Festival (nearby...if you're on holidays in Nova Scotia)
26-28	Columbus, Ohio: 1st Annual Columbus, Ohio, Bluegrass, Country and Folk Festival and Arts and Crafts Fair, Campgrounds Ameri cana (10 hours)
AUGUST	
2-4	Ottawa, Ohio: 4th Annual Ohio National Bluegrass Festival, Hillbrook Recreation Area (6 hours)
16-18	Corinth, New York: Smokey Greene's Bluegrass Festival (10 hours)
16-18	Gettysburg, Pa.: Gettysburg Bluegrass Music Festival, Crazy Horse Campgrounds (12 hours)
23-25	Bristolville, Ohio: Lone Hickory Bluegrass Festival, Playpen Park (8 hours)
25	Stanstead, Quebec: Ayers Cliff Fair Old Time Fiddle Contest (south of Sherbrooke)

This information, gleaned from Bluegrass Unlimited, is subject to change. Check again before starting out.

Figure 5.4 – "Festivals," *TABC News*, June 1974

FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

ONTARIO FESTIVALS

June 3-5	Carlisle, Bluegrass Canada '77, Courtcliffe Park, (a flyer was enclosed in the March issue) Court Weaver, Carlisle, Ontario, L0R 1H0, 416-689-5708, Toronto 923-8988
June 24-25	Petrolia 8th Annual Southwestern Ontario Fiddle Championship, Petrolia Arena, Mrs. H. Mosienko, Box, 733, Petrolia, Ont.
June 24-26	Toronto Islands, Mariposa Folk Festival, Margot Kearney, 131 Roehampton Ave., Toronto, M4P 1P9, 487-9347.
June 25	Burlington, Craft Fair all day Bluegrass Show..
June 25	Skyway Bluegrass Campout, Courtcliffe Park, Carlisle, Ontario. Streets and Hills, Bluegrass Blades, and Border City Bluegrass. Skyway Bluegrass, P. O. Box 933, Burlington, Ont.
July 1-3	Trout Creek Community Bluegrass Festival, 30 Miles South of North Bay. Humber River Valley Boys, Border City Bluegrass, Cumberland Whale, L. B. Siler and the Round Mountain Boys.
July 3	Medonte Country Music "Pick-in" - featuring winners of the May 21-st competition. 'Up-Country',RR#1,Hillsdale,Ont.
July 15-17	Waterford, Waterford Bluegrass Festival, Waterford Lakes Park. Country Gentlemen, Jim and Jesse, Lester Flatt, Wildwood Express, and others. Waterford Lions Club, Box 463, Waterford, Ontario.
July 15-17	Sudbury, Ontario, Northern Lights Festival Boreal, Bell Park Amph. Northern Lights Festival, P. O. Box 1236, Stat. "B", Sudbury, Ontario.
July 22-23	Durham, Canadian Open Banjo Competition, Durham and District Community Centre, Mrs. Kees Van Geem, R. R. # 4, Durham, Ont. N0G 1R0, 519-369-3010.
July 22-24	Ashburn, Ontario, Upper Chalet Bluegrass Festivals, Upper Chalet Dagmar Resort. Cross Country Grass, Dixie Flyers, Streets and Hills, Kent County Pickers, Humber River Valley Boys, Sault Spring Rainbow Band Competition. Glen Degenkolb, R.R.#1, Ashburn, Ont.
July 29-31	Ashburn, Ont. Upper Chalet Festival, Upper Chalet at Dagmar Ski Resort. Carl Leich and the Hayloft Ramblers, Border City Bluegrass, Tradesmen, Log Cabin Boys, Rick Johnson's County. Fiddle Competition. Glen Degenkolb, R. R. #1, Ashburn, Ont.
August 5-6	Shelbourne, Canadian Open Old-Time Fiddlers' Contest, Shelbourne Arena. Ken Gamble, Box 27, Shelbourne, Ont. L0W 1S0, 519-925-2830.

Figure 5.5 – "Festival Schedule: Ontario Festivals," *TABC News* May 1977

The Expanding Network of Institutional Supports

The Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee played a pioneering role in developing a network of local bluegrass enthusiasts and performers. In the 1970s, its newsletter, the *TABC News*, responded to an escalation of bluegrass-related activity by promoting events, stimulating discussion, spotlighting emerging talent and resources, and strengthening knowledge through feature articles on bluegrass history, instruments, and related activities (e.g., record collecting, festival road trips, etc.). As the network expanded and bluegrass became increasingly professionalized through that decade, a number of other institutional supports emerged in towns and cities throughout Ontario. In 1976, for instance, the Skyway Bluegrass Club was officially established to promote bluegrass in the Burlington-Hamilton region of Southern, Ontario. The club formed from a core group of approximately twenty musicians/enthusiasts that met for

regular jams in Tony deBoer's Burlington home (Aikman 1986, 6) and quickly grew to approximately 200 paid members, in large part due to founding member Ed Belliveau's marketing prowess. As a matter of course, the jams outgrew deBoer's home and were relocated to the Burlington Naval Veteran's Club (Ibid.). Skyway's primary objectives were to organize jam sessions, arrange member reunions at festivals, and perhaps above all, promote performances by American artists like Larry Sparks, the Lilly Brothers, and J.D. Crowe. In this respect, Skyway picked up where the TABC left off when they shifted focus from concert promotion to their newsletter circa 1973.

Soon after Skyway was formed, the Pineridge Bluegrass Association was set up in Oshawa, Ontario in 1977. Separated by 120 kilometres of highway—that incidentally pass through the city of Toronto—"a bond developed between the two clubs with members regularly visiting each others' clubs" (Aikman 1986, 7). What's more, realizing Doug Benson's original vision for a network of area bluegrass committees,[101] Skyway president Ed Belliveau began to collaborate with other organizations. In 1976, he suggested coordinating a concert circuit to make it worthwhile for American artists to tour the Southern Ontario region. His proposition enticed the TABC executive, prompting them to revisit concert promotion with the support of Skyway and Pineridge members (*TABC News* Oct. 1976, 5). To draw nearby bluegrass fans to events and concerts in the Burlington-Hamilton area, Skyway began offering discount admission fees to individuals that held memberships with other bluegrass associations such as the Meyers Creek Bluegrass Club (Belleville), the Brantford Bluegrass Club, and the Ottawa Bluegrass Committee. In 1980, yet another organization, the Northern Bluegrass Committee (NBC), was established by Rena Arbuckle, Tom Trepanier, and Bill Bowman (deBoer 2015). Coordinating with local bluegrass clubs and associations, the NBC promoted concert tours throughout Ontario, especially

[101] As discussed in Chapter Four.

during the winter months, pairing well-known American acts like the Country Gentlemen, Ralph Stanley, and Spectrum, with Canadian acts such as Cross Country Grass, the Dixie Flyers, and Foxglove (Edmonton, Alberta).[102]

Up until the second half of the 1970s, the *TABC News* was the only publication dedicated to bluegrass music in Ontario, and Canada for that matter. While some of the newly formed organizations published their own newsletters (e.g., Pineridge assembled the *Pineridge Express* and the Northern Bluegrass Committee occasionally attached a supplementary newsletter to the *TABC News*), most local area committees utilized the TABC's relatively widely circulated vehicle to advertise events and update their members. At times starved for newsletter content and obligated by their mission to promote bluegrass in the region, the TABC executive were contented to include these items in their news section. From a reader perspective, however, updates about the associations sprinkled throughout Ontario pointed to both the expanding network of and increased integration between scene clusters.

In 1977, two couples—Juanita and Derek Tutt and Ron and Barbe Mills—launched a new magazine called *Breakdown*[103] that was directly inspired by the "growing popularity of [bluegrass] in Canada" (Tutt et al 1977, 3). The publishers, noting that their home base in Elmvale, Ontario "is a far cry from the ever increasing popularity of bluegrass in Toronto,"[104] sought to shift the discourse away from an emphasis on the Toronto area by covering a larger Ontario scene (Ibid.). By this time, however, despite the Committee's official name, content in the *TABC News* included activity throughout much of the province. Instead the major difference between the two newsletters is that while the *TABC News* maintained a grassroots tone—

[102] The Northern Bluegrass Committee continues to promote concerts in Ontario under the direction of founding Skyway member, Tony deBoer.

[103] *Breakdown* is not affiliated with Doug Benson's earlier newsletter, *Bluegrass Breakdown*.

[104] To be precise, it is 135 kilometres north of Toronto.

announcing local meetings, rallying enthusiasts, appealing to members—*Breakdown*, like more established music publications, was squarely focused on the developing professional industry. In a polished, well organized magazine format, the first issue of *Breakdown* contained reviews of Toronto area shows by J.D. Crowe and Lester Flatt, an interview with Bruce Good of the immensely popular crossover act the Good Brothers, and a column by bluegrass festival promoter and radio personality Don Bird. For reasons that are unknown, *Breakdown* had little impact and ceased publication after its inaugural issue. The magazine, however, offered an example of what was possible, and perhaps inevitable, for print media in the professionalizing bluegrass art world.

Where *Breakdown* discontinued seemingly upon arrival, Pat and Jack Buttenham's *Canadian Bluegrass Review* (*CBR*) covered the thriving professional environment with far greater success, in part because of its link to the grassroots scene(s). Modeled after the American publication *Bluegrass Unlimited*, *CBR*, like the abandoned *Breakdown*, was a polished magazine, filled with photographs, colour cover art, and an impressive layout. Needless to say, for a small household operation, publishing the *CBR* with some regularity was hugely labour intensive. The Buttenhams, however, had a feasible rollout plan and tremendous support—even pressure—from the grassroots base.

In early 1978, the *TABC News* informed readers of the project and rallied their support.[105] When the first issue of *CBR* arrived on May 1, 1978, salutations from the TABC, Skyway, and Pineridge appeared throughout the magazine. Despite its slick presentation, however, in her first editorial, Pat Buttenham[106] reduced the distance between publisher and audience by addressing her readers directly, as peers, and announcing that she was responding to the call for an "all

[105] *Breakdown* was never mentioned in the *TABC News*.

[106] Pat Buttenham was the face and voice behind the *CBR*. Her husband Jack, who is listed as the magazine's publisher, took a less visible role.

Canadian bluegrass" magazine and soliciting content from readers, especially those "in the *Know*" (4; emphasis in original). She also outlined their initial publication strategy: after committing to three issues in 1978, the Buttenhams would assess *CBR*'s success and decide how to proceed (e.g., monthly, bi-monthly, or cease operations).

The *Canadian Bluegrass Review's* first year, according to the *TABC News*, was an "absolute financial disaster" (April 1979, 2) and Pat Buttenham admitted that it would be a challenge to keep *CBR* "in the black," noting that subscriptions from TABC members would help immensely (Anonymous 1979b, 4). Months earlier, *CBR* subscription slips were included in the *TABC News* and the membership evidently responded to the call.[107] Beginning in 1979, the Buttenhams were able to publish their high-quality bluegrass magazine on a bi-monthly basis, with each issue containing a cover feature on a Canadian act, record reviews, festival updates and reports, and advice columns for professional musicians such as a regular feature on recording in a studio. Indeed, *CBR* was a professional magazine reporting on, and a part of, the professional infrastructure. The Buttenhams, however, were also attuned to the local activities of their supporters and balanced their features on emerging stars with area committee lists, updates, and histories, regional reports submitted by people like Neil Rosenberg (Newfoundland) and Bob Fuller (Quebec), instructional material for beginning and nonprofessional musicians, and publicity for local bluegrass radio shows airing across the country. In this respect, the *CBR* upgraded, refined, and expanded the *TABC News*' coverage of bluegrass activity in Canada. So much so that the TABC executive readily admitted:

> Now that we have the *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, we don't need the *TABC News* except for the Coming Events. A one-page flyer listing the bluegrass events in the Toronto area will provide the play-by-play while the [*CBR*] does the colour commentary (Anonymous Sept. 1978a, 1).

[107] In addition to subscriber support, a *CBR* fundraiser was also held in Toronto, featuring some of the most notable Canadian groups.

For the time being, the TABC continued to publish their full newsletter, though it became increasingly slim and sporadic approaching the 1980s.

Building on *Canadian Bluegrass Review*'s popularity, Pat Buttenham endeavoured to further consolidate the various elements of the growing network when she announced the First Canadian Bluegrass Conference, to be held in Collingwood, Ontario on November 12, 1978. The conference included representatives from the local area committees, festival organizers, musicians, and enthusiasts, and, according to TABC representative Steve Pritchard's report, encompassed a wide variety of themes focused on the festival circuit, including "management, promotion, security, site and facilities, stage and backstage, crafts and displays, hospitality, follow-up, professionalism, contests, '79 schedule and possibility of a bluegrass association" (1978, 3). During this time, complaints were also surfacing about the presence of disruptive "rowdies" at Canadian bluegrass festivals and there was a sense that American audiences were more appreciative and respectful. In addition to coming up with ways to "segregate" festival attendees with portable sound systems, conference delegates discussed the benefits of advertising their festivals in the United States as a way to "gradually replace Canadian rowdies with American Bluegrass fanatics" (Ibid.). Finally, aware of a growing state support for developing Canadian cultural industries and content, festival organizers and musicians were encouraged to seek support from the Ministry of Culture and Recreation, as well as the Ministry of Industry and Tourism (Ibid.).

Almost a year after the Canadian Bluegrass Conference, and just a couple of months before the second conference, *CBR* presented the Canadian National Bluegrass Awards on September 15, 1979 at Ontario Place in Toronto. An ultimate testament to the developing professional art world, the awards show included the most well known Canadian bands (many of which are

profiled in the next chapter) performing and competing for a variety of awards[108] presented by prominent organizers and musicians, such as Canadian bluegrass pioneers Vic Mullen and Ron Scott. Award winners were decided by fans who were issued ballots in the *TABC News* and *CBR,* and the event was scheduled following the festival season in order to "allow each voter maximum time and opportunity to decide upon their favourites" (Anonymous 1979c; voter ballot attachment). According to a piece in the *Globe and Mail*, the event was lively and included a "healthy dose of the sort of pickin' and grinnin' upon which this particular musical style is formulated" (Niester 1979, 13).

Altogether, the Canadian National Bluegrass Awards successfully represented the professional environment and zealous fan base. There were, however, some critiques. Arguing that fans and associations are biased towards their favourite or local bands, Steve Pritchard (1979) called for a top down selection approach (e.g., an "academy") that would rely on "qualified media people familiar with all possible candidates" (1; underline in original). Pritchard also observed a regional bias in the awards show, noting how at times it seemed like a "popularity contest among familiar Southern Ontario bands" (Ibid). Concluding that the awards show is good for Canadian bluegrass and that the Buttenhams should be applauded on organizing an otherwise successful event, he adds "next year […] I would hope that the winners are truly representative of the best country wide musicians" (Ibid.).[109]

* * *

In this short chapter I have attempted to account for the intensification and dispersion of bluegrass-related collective activity in 1970s Ontario. Much of what I've discussed so far was

[108] Awards included a number of recognitions for the best instrumentalists on particular instruments, best entertainer, best band, and best album.

[109] The awards, now called the Central Canadian Bluegrass Awards, continue on an annual basis under the direction of the Northern Bluegrass Committee (deBoer 2015).

characteristically extramusical and would underpin the direct musical activity taking place in an emerging professional art world. As enthusiasts sought to make sense of and engage with the explosion of local bluegrass, their organizational and musical pursuits were accompanied by alternative discourses. Indeed, events like the Canadian National Bluegrass Awards and Pritchard's appeal to acknowledge "the best country wide musicians" might appear somewhat incongruous with earlier discussions about "Canadian bluegrass'" perceived shortcomings. Elaborating on the historical developments outlined in this chapter, in part two I explore these discursive threads in greater detail while focusing on some of the bands, institutions, and activity most associated with (semi)professional bluegrass during this period.

Chapter Six

The Makings of an Art World, part 2: Professionalism and "Canadian Bluegrass"

In Chapter Four I briefly introduced Mark Slobin's (1992) notions of "subculture" and "superculture." For Slobin, "subculture," an otherwise familiar term, refers to the lived trajectories and small-scale, localized group activities that nest within, intersect with, and are shaped by the hegemonic institutions, private industries, and ideologies that form a superculture (e.g., state cultural policy, the commercial music industry, dominant notions of Canadian culture). These terms are accompanied by another—"interculture"—that accounts for the cultural products or trends that cut across societies and national borders (e.g., internationally renowned artists, globally marketed genres, and transnational radio broadcasts) (2).[110] Up to this point, Slobin's -cultures have illustrated how local bluegrass activity interacts with and is shaped within a more expansive, transnational bluegrass domain. Moving forward, as I discuss the professionalization of Canadian bluegrass through the 1970s, along with the influence of a developing recording industry, state policy, and nationalistic discourses, his theoretical approach becomes more potent and will help resist the rigidity of a sequential model. Sub-, super-, and interculture are not "closed categories," and are most fruitful when viewed as "overlapping and intersecting planes and perspectives" (Ibid.). Underlining the critical significance of these junctions, Slobin argues, "The only way the -cultures exist at all is through interaction" (49). Rather than plotting a series of distinct phases, then, this openness allows us to witness the growth and transformation of a scene (and a sub-genre), while highlighting the interactions between different cultural planes that encompass the collective grassroots activity discussed previously, as well as the (semi)professional bands, nascent recording industry, and flourishing

[110] While I don't discuss it here, the interculture would also include things like global flows of capital and international copyright law.

festival circuit covered in this chapter. Before examining these facets of the professional art world more thoroughly, however, it's important to consider some of the contextual details and discursive shifts that coincided with the proliferation of bluegrass activity in the 1970s.

Emerging Discourses

The rapid growth of bluegrass activity in Ontario during the 1970s was underpinned by a national discussion around defining and protecting Canadian identity and culture. This nationalistic discourse, which really began to bubble around Canada's centennial celebrations in 1967, was informed by a desire to distinguish Canada from the United States socially, politically, and culturally. As discussed in Chapter two, Canada's image as "a 'peaceable kingdom' of social equality, multiculturalism, and a welfare state benefitting all Canadians" (Edwardson 2009, 88) attracted many young Americans looking to resist or evade militarism in the United States. For the most part, these migrants were welcomed by their young peers in universities, cultural scenes, and/or countercultural political movements. Conversely, many Canadian-born artists and their supporters called for immediate action against the influx of American cultural products on Canadian radio and television and were viewed as a threat to discerning or producing a distinct Canadian cultural identity. On a state policy level, this resulted in protectionist measures (e.g., Canadian content quotas), arts and culture grants, and governing bodies like the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to regulate domestic cultural industries.[111] At the same time, many commentators, both in established media and at a grassroots level, began to proudly embrace "Canadian music" and "Canadian artists" as their

[111] Canada's publicly supported cultural industries have been examined recurrently over the past forty years. For a more in-depth discussion of these developments see Audley 1983, Dorland 1996, Druick 2012, Edwardson 2009, Henderson 2008, Straw 2003, and Wagman and Urquhart 2012.

own (regardless of whether or not the artists themselves were aligned with such nationalist constructs).

In Southern Ontario's effervescent bluegrass art world, organizers were aware of new opportunities that could benefit their associations. As early as 1969, in the article "How to Form an Area Bluegrass Society," Doug Benson made note of the Canadian government's recent interest in national culture and emphasized the importance of positioning a group as a "non-profit […] whose aim is the advancement of cultural activity of one kind or another" (2). Several years later the Pineridge and Skyway bluegrass clubs would register as non-profits for this very reason and the TABC would consider a formal non-profit designation in order to take advantage of provincial tax and lottery laws surrounding concert ticket sales (*TABC News* May 1978, 6).

Meanwhile, inspired by the heady cultural nationalism, many enthusiasts began to embrace local talent in ways that augmented and challenged prevailing notions of American bluegrass' inherent superiority. To be sure, "American bluegrass" was still an imagined benchmark. But, many were departing from the idea of "Canadian bluegrass" as the quirky, lower-quality spinoff of an American original and produced new evaluative criteria that wasn't so invested in constructs of authenticity and musical purity. Some bluegrass enthusiasts, for instance, were warming to the idea of Canadian fiddle styles and regional inflections appearing in bluegrass music. Reporting on his positive experiences at the 1974 Shelburne Fiddle Festival in Shelburne, Ontario, TABC co-founder Adrian Bevis alludes to earlier preoccupations with American bluegrass and advocates for Canadian artists and Canadian fiddle styles within bluegrass music:

> Most people who are into Bluegrass in a big way tend to avoid the Canadian fiddle styles in favour of the Southern styles. […] My attention, like many others' in the TABC, was on the American bluegrass festivals and on American groups. This was typical of the sixties, for it is only in recent years that interest in Canadian content has become 'respectable.' […] No matter how enthusiastic we waxed over U.S. festivals, we were overlooking an orchid in our very own back

yard (Bevis, *TABC News* Nov. 1974, 3).

This kind of openness to "Canadian" influences further complicated the contentious dichotomy between "progressive" and "traditional" bluegrass. In a later review of a performance by the Toronto area band Station Road, Bevis applauds the group's varied repertoire, which blends folk and country styles and includes American bluegrass standards alongside traditional Canadian fiddle tunes. "The sound," he observes, "was at once more 'traditional' while at the same time more contemporary […]" (*TABC News* Feb. 1979, 2). Writing in the *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, Cathy Murphy echoes Bevis' sentiments stating, "Canadian bluegrass musicians are in an enviable position, in that there is a vast store of Canadian traditional music available to them as source material" (1980b, 16). In a striking departure from the conventional idealization of "American bluegrass," she continues, arguing that the Canadian traditional repertoire is in some ways "potentially more interesting than some of the current standard bluegrass instrumentals" (Ibid.).

One of several groups that drew heavily on Canadian music traditions was Montreal, Quebec's White River Bluegrass Band. In addition to recording an entire album of bluegrass songs in French, the White River Bluegrass Band regularly incorporated Quebecois fiddle styles and tunes into their repertoire. While they were a short-lived band and directly associated with activity in the Toronto area, observing critical response to their music from the *TABC News* and *Canadian Bluegrass Review* further illuminates emerging discourses around the legitimacy of "Canadian bluegrass." In a review of their self-titled sophomore album (1979)[112] the *TABC News*', Ian Angus labels the band's music "Quebec bluegrass" noting, "It won't appeal to the purist, I suppose: almost everything is played in a minor key, the vocals are not at all bluegrass

[112] Unlike their all-French debut album (1977), also self-titled, more than half of the songs on the 1979 record were sung in English or had English titles.

style, but in my opinion the mixture of styles works very well" (1979, 4). And, in a *CBR* review of the album, Kevin Berland asserts, "It's really good to see Canadian bands try for a synthesis, a living, growing mixture of music, rather than limiting themselves to cover versions of material from the south" (1980, 21).

The above comments represent an emerging counter-discourse that challenged the purist appreciation of "American bluegrass" and deprecating attitudes towards many Canadian bands. In an era when many were concerned with strengthening Canada's cultural industries, these nationalistic approaches to local bluegrass also merged with an emphasis on "professionalism," which, during the 1970s and 1980s, became a key evaluative criterion. "Professionalism," and the related notion of "professional quality," of course, are broad, multifarious concepts that encompass labour practices, artistic skill and knowledge, as well as a variety of other aesthetic principles. For many enthusiasts and musicians, stage presence, record production, depth of repertoire, musical virtuosity and "tastefulness," as well as overall image were all markers of professionalism that legitimized Canadian bands and notions of a "Canadian bluegrass sound." The discourse of professionalism enabled enthusiasts to move beyond narratives of regional roots or origins—whether American or Canadian—and speak to things like virtuosity and stage presence.

Professionalism was also marked by a group's ability to tour, secure television and radio appearances, and to release records with production values adhering to the aesthetic set by well-known American groups working in modern studios. And, of course, it helped if the album packaging *looked* like the professional-quality records released by a working band on a recognizable record label. As will be discussed shortly, by the second half of the 1970s, the

support of a handful of labels and access to small studios enabled Canadian bluegrass bands to produce records befitting record store shelves and radio play.

Initially, the emerging professional discourse seems at odds with the highly charged discourse of authenticity, which distinguishes the presumed sincerity and purity of bluegrass from more commercially oriented styles of country music.[113] Indeed, there was a sense that artists should cautiously navigate the divide between these prominent bluegrass ideals and the professional career trajectory. In a *CBR* feature on the popular group Dennis LePage and Station Road, Evan Linnell and Frank Baron (1980) flesh out this perceived binary, arguing that the band has skillfully managed the demands of traditionalism and commercialism:

> Often, the price of increased exposure, via the airwaves, is to commercialize the traditional bluegrass sound; to 'countrify' it with the addition of electric instruments and/or drums. It is difficult to balance a genuine love of traditional bluegrass with this cold fact of business life. [Denis LePage and Station Road] appears to have found that balance (10).

The dichotomy laid out by Linnell and Baron is contentious in its stark simplicity. (Certainly some bands viewed their progressive strides as an affirmation of their "genuine love of traditional bluegrass" and as an extension of the tradition). However, the authors' appraisal of Denis LePage and Station Road, a band that included an electric pedal steel on some of their recordings, alludes to both the resilience and mutability of the discursive threads circulated by participants within an ever-materializing art world.[114] In this case, prevailing notions of "American bluegrass" introduced particular expectations—what Becker calls "conventions" (1982, 29-31)—regarding what bluegrass should sound like and what it represents. Through verbal and musical dialogue within the scene, these conventions were adhered to, challenged,

[113] Of course, bluegrass has waded in the commercial music realm from its origins (Finch 2016; Rosenberg 2005, 6).

[114] To the consternation of some critics and fans, during the late 1960s and into the 1970s, the electric pedal steel guitar was growing in popularity among established bluegrass bands such as the Osborne Brothers and J.D. Crowe and the New South.

and built upon, sometimes all at once as participants formed a discourse community (Brinner 2009: 202) that converged on notions of professionalism and cultural nationalism.

* * *

With the above discursive shifts and contextual circumstances in mind, at this point it seems appropriate to take a more detailed look at some of the creative clusters and infrastructural components that circulated within and constituted the professional art world for bluegrass in Ontario and beyond. First and foremost, the remainder of the chapter—an attempt to account for and profile notable bands, labels, studios, as well as the festival circuit—serves a documentary function. It is, however, necessarily partial. Nevertheless, my selections further illustrate some of the salient themes that have surfaced in this thesis thus far while pointing to a broader network of bands, institutions, and activities that are excluded or only mentioned in passing.

Bluegrass Bands In and Around Toronto

Like the previous chapter's discussion of prominent scene spaces, accounting for all of the bluegrass bands that formed in Ontario through the 1970s would be a daunting, and not necessarily constructive pursuit. Some bands, for instance, were short-lived, only forming for a festival weekend, while other amateur groups were barely active. What's more, bands like the Good Brothers were quite successful on a commercial level, but only dabbled in the bluegrass sound at points throughout their career (as such, they will not be subject to an in-depth treatment here). Instead, I have decided to focus on acts that have some connection to Toronto, whether they were situated in or illustrate the expanding network by way of a significant link to or trajectory through the city. With regard to the broader bluegrass network, it will also become apparent that band personnel could be quite transient with some members switching groups,

leaving one band to start another, and entire bands transforming over a short period of time. While this traffic reflects exciting dynamics within the art world, I will not get bogged down in accounting for every personnel change in profiling particular bands.[115]

The following discussion focuses on bands that approached bluegrass as a professional venture. This includes both semiprofessional groups that maintained day jobs while still recording albums and appearing on the festival circuit, as well as groups that attempted to make a full-time living through gigging, releasing singles, and appearing on radio and television. I have selected mostly well-known bands whose narratives enliven some of themes that surface throughout this thesis (e.g., migration, notions of bluegrass authenticity, scene and genre boundaries, etc.).

* * *

The band **Cody**[116] provides a good point of departure, not only because they were one of the most enduring acts in Ontario, but also because they help us understand the extent to which coordinated bluegrass activity during the 1970s was dispersed throughout the province and beyond. Cody's core members emerged from an earlier group called the **Southern Ramblers**, who, as discussed in Chapter Four, headlined a TABC concert event in January 1969. With members residing in Montreal, Quebec and Hamilton, Ontario, the Ramblers were, according to Doug Benson (1969a), a "commuter bluegrass group" (1). They were also quite successful as a semiprofessional act, gigging often, appearing on stage with Bill Monroe, and even releasing a record—*Bluegrass Fire* (1967)—which, writing a decade later, in the wake of a local bluegrass recording boom, Pat Buttenham (1978b) maintains "still ranks with the best bluegrass ever recorded in Canada" (8). Forming just as the York County Boys and the handful of bands

[115] In most cases, the personnel I focus on appear on albums, in media profiles, and/or represent a particularly active or notable band line-up.

[116] In order to easily locate each band's narrative, the first reference to a band's name appears in bold.

associated with the folk revival were beginning to wind down, the Southern Ramblers represent a kind of transitional forerunner to the new generation of professional bluegrass acts that would emerge in the 1970s and with which Cody were most associated.

Cody were established in 1970 after Mike O'Reilly (mandolin; Ottawa) and John Partridge (guitar; Toronto) came together with members of the Southern Ramblers: Larry Miller (banjo; Toronto via Montreal), Dick Miller (bass; Montreal), Brian Riseborough (rhythm guitar; Toronto via Montreal), and Guy Carpenter (dobro; Montreal). As a semiprofessional act, each member held comfortable day jobs, which likely played into their decisions to reside in different cities. Despite the challenges of balancing work, performance, and long-distance commutes, however, Cody built on the achievements of the Southern Ramblers. Early in their career they appeared on CBC's *Canadian Express* and CTV's *Ian Tyson Show*, and also secured opening slots for well-known American acts like J.D. Crowe and the New South and Jim and Jesse (Buttenham 1978b, 7-8). Following a celebrated appearance at Bluegrass Canada '75 (*TABC News* Jan. 1977, 2), Cody gained a reputation as one of Canada's best live bluegrass acts—largely on account of MC Mike O'Reilly's stage presence[117]—and were a perennial favourite on the regional festival circuit.

In 1978 Cody released their first album on Posterity Records to great acclaim (Angus 1978b, 1-2; Couchie 1978b, 15). The album, entitled *A Tale of Three Cities*, embraced the band's multi-sited status during a time when many were relishing the growth of bluegrass across Canada. In the album's liner notes, they explain how the band's dispersal, while challenging, has shaped their identity and strengthened their resolve:

> We decided to call our album A Tale of Three Cities for the simple reason that

[117] Interview and published accounts of his ability to work a crowd are corroborated by his award for best entertainer at the First Annual Canadian Bluegrass Awards in 1979.

> Cody's history has been just that ever since we began performing together almost seven years ago. With three of us living in Toronto, two in Montreal and one in Ottawa, our homes have always been separated by about 400 miles of highway. As well as making our musical appearances pretty rare, the separation has produced some strange side effects. For instance, it's earned us the undying love of the telephone company, several car dealers and countless gas station operators. But we like to think that it has also brought some advantages. When we do get together, it's because we *want* to. As much as we're out to play good bluegrass, we're also out to entertain with a complete show (1978).

This enthusiasm was only validated by emerging American star, Jerry Douglas' interest in the group and his production credit on their album.

Just as Cody were releasing their debut album, the **Dixie Flyers** were putting out their sophomore effort, *Cheaper to Lease* (1978), on Boot Records. The Flyers formed in 1974 and emerged from a vibrant London, Ontario-based scene (just under 200 kilometres west of Toronto) that was attracting the attention of bluegrass enthusiasts throughout the province. "They defined what we refer to as 'London bluegrass,'" Steve Pritchard explained during a group interview with former TABC members (personal communication, June 4, 2013). When I asked for further elaboration on the notions of "London bluegrass" and a "London sound," Doug Benson chimed in, alluding to another active cluster of bluegrass musicians in the broader province-wide network:

> [The Dixie Flyers] defined ["London bluegrass"]. They were it. They had their own little empire. And they were a training ground for pickers. David Talbot, David Jack, Al Widmeyer, all these guys. The fiddle players…Pete Robinson. And crazy bass players like Brian Abbey and Dave Zdriluk. They were all characters! And they were funny! […] The thing is, they had real cerebral, off the wall, funny bits. Like Bert Baumbach; dead serious, straight face. Looks over at the sound man, 'Can you turn up the talent on this microphone please?' (personal communication, June 4, 2013).

The Dixie Flyers' "little empire" also included a series on regional television and a weekly radio show on London's CJBX.

In addition to their stage and media presence, the Flyers' success was in part due to their ability to bridge markets. Stylistically, they were positioned in the traditional bluegrass sound that appealed to purists. However, as Owen Roberts (1979) notes in a *Canadian Bluegrass Review* article entitled "New Rebels Maintain Tradition," the band put forth an "outlaw" image that also attracted contemporary country music fans. Describing their live shows, Roberts observes, "The band always seems to do better in a bar that mixes its entertainment selection between country and rock rather than straight [Country and Western]" (6). As a testament to the Flyers' ability to balance different audiences, in 1977 they received the Bluegrass Canada Festival's Gold Award for "best promotion of bluegrass in Canada." Perhaps most significant to diehard Canadian bluegrass enthusiasts, however, was their invitation to appear at Bill Monroe's Bean Blossom Bluegrass Festival in 1983.

Banjoist Denis LePage is one of the Dixie Flyers' more well-known alumni.[118] He was a founding member and appeared on their first three records. However, around the time of the band's third album, the instrumental *Just Pickin'* (1978), LePage relocated to Toronto where he worked as a banjo instructor and joined the band **Station Road**.[119] This group was formed by guitarist Bill Hill from Hamilton, Ontario, and included Roland Lapierre (fiddle; Toronto via New Brunswick) and Paul Howell (bass; Toronto via Tobermory, Ontario). Indeed, with members coming from areas throughout Ontario and Eastern Canada, Station Road's line-up reflects the centripetal force that larger cities like Toronto can have within a scenic network. When LePage joined in 1978, the band capitalized on his high profile status as a both a banjo virtuoso and former Dixie Flyer, adopting the moniker, "Dennis LePage and Station Road."

[118] As Benson notes above, several prominent Ontario bluegrass musicians performed with the Dixie Flyers. An extensive list can be found at www.dixieflyers.ca.

[119] LePage was replaced in the Dixie Flyers by David Jack, who, as it turns out, was a former member of Station Road.

Like the Dixie Flyers, cross-market appeal was key to Station Road's professional success. Their sound, however, embraced more "progressive" elements such as an occasional pedal steel—an electric slide guitar that is synonymous with the Nashville commercial country sound—and a repertoire of pop and rock covers performed in a bluegrass style. In their *CBR* feature on the group, Evan Linnell and Frank Baron (1980) observe, "Like most bluegrass musicians, Dennis LePage and Station Road are concerned with exposure, particularly in the southern Ontario market" (10). Alluding to a barrier, the authors add, "A lot of bluegrass is being played, in bars, at festivals, almost everywhere except the [radio] airwaves" (Ibid.). Indeed, despite his previous band's success on London area radio, LePage speaks to the difficulty of cracking Southern Ontario's commercial radio market: "With a single, we could possibly expect to get some airplay on some country stations, not necessarily the ones around Toronto, but some of the ones out west play a lot of bluegrass-oriented music and we may get some out east" (9). As suggested earlier, courting commercial radio ultimately involved negotiating creative decisions that could at once enhance their commercial appeal and earn detractors. Bill Hill speaks to these tensions, explaining the band's decision to include a pedal steel guitar on their self-titled debut album:

> We put a pedal steel cut on our last album and we got some flack from staunch bluegrass traditionalists. But we did it for the purpose of getting some airplay. […] We put that (pedal steel) in there because we liked it. We also thought, because it was nice and slow, that it could pass on the country charts. But the main reason was because we liked it. […] That's the idea, […] picking up something we like, it doesn't have to be a Stanley Brothers tune, it could be even be a Beatles tune, if it adjusts to the bluegrass sound that we want to get out (10,11).

Despite their progressive leanings, Hill is careful to emphasize the centrality of the "bluegrass sound" and to position his band firmly within the genre:

> Everybody [in the band] seems to be a pretty straightforward traditionalist, with a lot of progressive ideas that don't really include a lot of changes in the sound […]. An adverse

> reaction at least indicates that people are listening. […] But we're not going to do it (innovate) to that extreme where people are going to jump on the bandwagon and say we're a country rock band. […] We'll always be a traditional bluegrass band. That's the way we are. That's what everybody wants (10, 11).

The Big Redd Ford, a short-lived but well-known act from Aurora, Ontario (just fifty kilometres north of Toronto), seemed less interested in appeasing bluegrass traditionalists. The band was established circa 1976 by Lou Moore (vocals, guitar) and John P. Allen (fiddle). Moore, who started playing guitar as a child acquired some experience playing "real traditional bluegrass" as a bassist for **Tommy Wade and the Country Rebels**, a group that played regularly in Toronto's country music clubs before the 1970s bluegrass boom (Moore, personal communication May 30, 2013). An NHL hockey prospect during the early 1970s, he recalls the chance encounter on Allen's London-area farm that aroused his interest in forming a professional bluegrass act:

> I went to training camp for the Kansas City Scouts. It was their first year of expansion in the NHL [i.e., 1974]. And their training camp was in Port Huron [Michigan]. […] On my way back I stopped in London to see John P. Allen. When I was there, [American band] the Country Gazette, was at his farm house. So that was Allen Munde and Byron Berline and Roland White. They had a gig in London and John had invited them out for a dinner or whatever. And I just happened to come by. I was hooked, right there, because I had never heard the real guys from the States play. The harmonies and the way they played. It was just incredible, the difference. There was a smoothness. There was a real polish (Moore, personal communication May 30, 2013).

Moore and Allen were joined by John Saunders, a banjo player with a penchant for experimentation, as well as former Good Brothers bassist Michael Love. If Saunders and Love did little for the band's image among bluegrass purists, the pair contributed years of professional experience and immense instrumental virtuosity.

The Big Redd Ford made an immediate splash on the Ontario bluegrass circuit becoming festival favourites, regulars at Barton's Inn (an all-bluegrass bar near Kitchener, Ontario), taking up residencies in Ottawa, and playing alongside emerging American stars like Ricky Skaggs and

Jerry Douglas. They also maintained a strong link to the London scene through Allen, who lived nearby in Lambton County. Still, for Moore, who never lived in Toronto-proper, the Big Redd Ford was "part of the Toronto scene." He explains:

> In those days most of the music scene was in Toronto. The Midwich Cuckoo, the El Mocambo, the Horseshoe…you had to play all those bars. It was pretty good because you had all the festivals in the summer, but in the winter it was tough. You had a lot of bars going from disco to bluegrass, right. So, you'd go into a bar for six nights and on the Monday you'd still have the flashing floor and the disco balls and everything else, and you'd be doing Bill Monroe and Stanley Brothers and people would be lookin' at ya like you had four heads" (Ibid.).

In addition to bluegrass standards by Monroe and the Stanley Brothers, the band also merged jazz and other more commercial influences into their repertoire, which enhanced their popularity among Toronto's diverse audiences. Nevertheless, the members of Big Redd Ford found it difficult to establish a financially viable professional career as a bluegrass band, despite both their busy performance schedule and a willingness to expand their sound. "A couple of years went by, and we were playing," Moore recalls, "but we just weren't playing enough to make a good living" (Ibid.). Feeling the pinch, Allen eventually left the group for a more stable opportunity backing Canadian country/folk star Ian Tyson. The Big Redd Ford, in the meantime, persevered with the help of Moore's old Country Rebels bandmate, Randy Hill (mandolin). Hill's traditional bluegrass orientation counterbalanced the other member's progressive tendencies and strengthened their bluegrass credentials. "He gave us that authenticity of bluegrass," Moore states, "he had the high lonesome bluegrass tenor. He made us sound like bluegrass. But, we were still doing David Grisman and we'd do some Django Reinhardt/Stéphane Grappelli…I mean, the band was very well-versed" (Ibid.).

With Hill in the line-up, the Big Redd Ford recorded their sole self-titled album (1978) at Snocan Studios in Ottawa, Ontario. The record was produced by Jerry Douglas, who also

contributed Dobro, and while it was arguably more traditional sounding than bands like Station Road and other progressive acts in the United States, the tracks contained gestures to some of the "newgrass" elements in their live set. Alongside bluegrass standards like "Cryin' Holy" and "Roll on Buddy," were compositions by contemporary singer-songwriters like J.J. Cale, Michael Peter Smith, and Stephen Stills, Django Reinhardt's "Stompin' at Decca," as well as a couple of Lou Moore originals. Perhaps most notable to "Canadian bluegrass" enthusiasts, the album also included "Rebels You Rest," composed by Moore and Hill's former bandleader Tommy Wade. In a favourable review for the *TABC News*, Ian Angus (1978a) calls the song "Canada's only bluegrass classic" (6).[120]

On the festival circuit, in Toronto, and in towns throughout Ontario, the Big Redd Ford were generally well-received. Like other progressive acts, however, Lou Moore feels that local purists disparaged the band. Rather than shy away from musical exploration, however, Moore embraced the band's ability to experiment: "We were what I would call a progressive band," he maintains. Comparing the Big Redd Ford to other non-traditional bands, he adds "Everybody else, you know, they'd played some country music and call themselves 'progressive.' Or they'd add a drummer and call themselves 'progressive.' But we actually did Duke Ellington" (Personal communication, May 30, 2013).

While some members of Big Redd Ford championed their progressive digressions, over time a perceived lack of appreciation combined with the pressure to maintain a traditional bluegrass sound factored into the band's demise. Moore explains:

> The breakup of the band was like, 'what the hell, we've got great musicians sittin' in with us and we're playing great music. How can you […] think that we shouldn't be doing that. We're musicians. We *should* be doing that. That's our job. There were

[120] The prominence of "Rebels You Rest" was likely heightened when American band the Seldom Scene recorded the song in 1976. The Seldom Scene were particularly popular in Ontario after appearances at the Bluegrass Canada festival.

> musicians who could do it all [i.e., play and fuse various styles] and they never got any recognition […from] bluegrass societies. There was a time when if you plugged your guitar in you weren't accepted. Well, get with it, you know. […] That's how you get a good sound. That's how you entertain. That was very frustrating. That whole thing where people wouldn't open their minds. People were so shallow (Ibid.).

The members of the Big Redd Ford parted ways in the fall of 1979 (*TABC* Sept. 1979, 3). Shortly after, Moore delved further into progressive bluegrass/country-rock as an electric guitarist with the Good Brothers. Meanwhile, Randy Hill, who, Moore states, "was getting a lot of outside influence to play traditionally" (personal communication May 30, 2013) joined the **Humber River Valley Boys** (HRVB). By this time HRVB had already recorded two albums and garnered a following among Southern Ontario bluegrass fans. The band started in Toronto in 1974, where they busked regularly on the Yonge Street Mall (Pickell in Couchie 1978a, 11). Appearing with long beards and dressed in a hodgepodge of throwback "citybilly" attire, HRVB, perhaps more than any other bluegrass band during this period, maintained an aesthetic link to Toronto's hip youth culture and its folk music scene. This carried over to their sound, which incorporated old-time fiddle music (including Canadian barn dance styles), ragtime, gospel, and more intricately arranged original pieces such as banjoist Brian Pickell's moody "Late Snow" from the band's self-titled debut (1977). Indeed, like the Big Redd Ford, HRVB challenged bluegrass convention and were resistant to the demands of purists. In a 1978 *CBR* interview, Pickell explains the band's liberal approach to bluegrass:

> From the very beginning, we were a little eclectic. Through our whole development, there has been an absence of dogma. Basically, we're interested in old time country music, acoustically. So, that allows us to play string band music, ragtime music, traditional bluegrass and progressive bluegrass. […] I have a real bone to pick with purists. […] Because someone plays in a non-traditional manner, […] he's [not] a threat to traditional music. […] What you have, is something new that someone's created infusing more life into an already established style. I think that's a very healthy thing (Pickell in Couchie 1978a, 11).

In 1975 HRVB decided to take their music in a professional direction. Interestingly, this coincided with a migration out of Toronto to the small community of Lindsay, Ontario where accommodations were inexpensive and where, like the many young urbanites who relocated to small towns and farmland during this period, they could pursue the romantic ideal of a simple, rural lifestyle (Murphy 1976, 3).[121] Going professional required a certain measure of audience and market awareness within the band, which, interestingly, pushed them further towards a bluegrass format. Bassist Dave Harvey explains:

> A lot of the changes we went through were changes of necessity to keep the jobs coming in. Bands tend to bend a little bit to please an audience, within certain limits and without losing your integrity. At first we were playing lots of old-time string band stuff, which was fun to play; but the younger audiences wanted to whoop it up a bit more, and so we started playing more popular bluegrass-type tunes (Harvey in Murphy 1980a, 9).

In his comments, Harvey emphasizes the band's desire to maintain their "integrity" while responding to audience demands and cultivating a financially viable career. To do this, HRVB balanced their own purist ideals with creative decisions that would enhance their marketability. Their instrumentation remained entirely acoustic; they exhibited tremendous virtuosity and were open to unconventional arrangements, but sometimes opted for spirited unpolished performances; and, their diversions from bluegrass demonstrated a deep knowledge of "roots" music while avoiding the rock and commercial country crossovers that were a red flag for many enthusiasts. In this way they were perhaps more palatable to traditionalists than acts that incorporated electric instruments and drew on stadium rock performance convention. Commenting on groups like the Good Brothers or even his former band, the Big Redd Ford, Randy Hill observes, "There's so many […] hot-rod bands—just real contemporary bands now. Music doesn't have to be slick to be good" (Murphy 1980a, 10). This is not to suggest, however, that the band were not invested in honing a high quality stage show and growing a large, diverse

[121] I discuss "back-to-the-land" movement in more detail in the next chapter.

audience. They regularly sound-checked for over two hours prior to a performance (12) and were single-minded in their career ambitions. “I want to […] develop the [Humber River Valley Boys’] reputation nationally,” Pickell asserted near the release of their third record, “because I think it deserves to be heard and respected from one coast to the other” (12).

Whereas HRVB evoked the hip youth culture once associated with Yorkville Village, **Cross Country Grass**, a group whose members lived in Toronto’s suburbs and held working-class day jobs, represented another facet of the developing bluegrass art world. Cross Country Grass were a semiprofessional act and, like the York County Boys before them, balanced occupational commitments with their music-making pursuits. What’s more, and also like the York County Boys, many of the band’s members migrated to the Toronto area for work and became regulars in the local country and bluegrass scenes. As a teenager in the late 1950s, Amon Savoie (Dobro; tenor vocals) migrated with his family from Newcastle, New Brunswick to Toronto. Several years later, his nephew Eddie LeBlanc (guitar; lead vocals) followed and began playing in country bands like Roy and the Boys and performing at dances in the city’s Maritime clubs (Van Every 1981, 16). The two, both of whom settled in the suburb of Scarborough, grew up in musical families and were exposed to country and bluegrass through local parties and the popular “World’s Original Jamboree” radio show, transmitted from WWVA in Wheeling, West Virginia.

In Toronto, Savoie and LeBlanc attended the Saturday afternoon bluegrass jam/open mic at Egerton’s Pub where they met Buddy Weston (banjo) (15). Weston began playing banjo in his hometown of Liberec, in the former Czechoslovakia. Assembling a banjo from whatever parts he could find, he quickly formed the band Boot Hill and started playing festivals and contests near Prague (Crawford 1975, 1). While bluegrass’s popularity was growing in Czechoslovakia, Weston stated that in the 1960s, the playing was “not very good by North American standards,”

(ibid.) and, similar to his counterparts in Toronto, he felt hindered by a lack of learning resources and a sense of distance from the music's perceived heartland. In an effort to deepen his bluegrass knowledge, in 1969 he left Czechoslovakia, first landing in Melbourne, Australia and finally, in 1974, settling in Mississauga, a developing suburb on Toronto's western border (2).[122] There he quickly made an impression on the local bluegrass scene, placing in a number of banjo contests, participating in the weekly jams at Egerton's and Bruce Dowd's Harbord Street apartment, and performing with the band Bluegrass Revival alongside TABC members Chuck Crawford, Don Hinde, Mike Higgins, and Tom McCreight (Crawford 1975, 2; Van Every 1981, 17).

Savoie, LeBlanc, and Weston formed the core of Cross Country Grass, and in their early years they were most associated with the weekly open mic at Egerton's. Shortly after the Burlington-based act Streets and Hills disbanded in 1977, Charlie Street joined the group on mandolin. Street, who began playing guitar alongside his father at an early age, became interested in bluegrass after seeing American banjoist Sonny Osborne on Carl Smith's *Country Music Hall* television program (Van Every 1981, 18). Soon after, he bought a banjo and taught himself to play from recordings. He also began to participate in Niagara region jams and a regular session organized by the Skyway Bluegrass Club. In 1980, Street moved from mandolin to bass to make room for Cross Country Grass' newest member, Kevin Sullivan. Sullivan grew up in the Ottawa Valley and had previous experience playing bass with the group Bytown Bluegrass. In the late 1970s he relocated to Mississauga for work, bought his first mandolin, and quickly became acquainted with Toronto area bluegrass enthusiasts and picking sessions.

From the outset, Cross Country Grass had only modest ambitions as a semiprofessional bluegrass band. During the height of Ontario's summer festival boom, Savoie aimed to play

[122] It is highly likely that Weston's migration was also motivated by the volatile social, economic, and political situation in Czechoslovakia during the late 1960s. While he doesn't mention this, Weston's political consciousness is implied in the title of his original instrumental composition, "Iron Curtain Breakdown."

every weekend (Van Every 1981, 15). LeBlanc envisioned the band appearing on the same bill as American bands like the Osborne Brothers and the Seldom Scene (16).[123] Despite their semiprofessional status, however, the band were invested in maintaining high professional standards. In a 1981 *CBR* feature, for instance, Buddy Weston comments on the importance of cultivating a recognizable image, reliable reputation, and cordial rapport with his band's supportive fan base:

> Even though our group does not play full time professionally, I feel our image on stage is professional. For example, how a band dresses for the stage shows that they care about the image they project. It shows that they are together. Young people imitate musicians and identify with musicians so they should keep their act together and clear. No group should ever arrive ten minutes before they are to go on stage, play their set, and leave. They should be friendly with the people; associate with them. They owe that much to the public (Weston in Van Every 1981, 17).

Cross Country Grass' commitment to their stage show and their audience soon made them a fan favourite. Their popularity was confirmed at the 1980 Canadian National Bluegrass Awards, discussed in the previous chapter, where they came away with five awards as voted on by subscribers of *Canadian Bluegrass Review* magazine.[124] Capitalizing on this momentum, Cross Country Grass exceeded their initial aspirations—all the while keeping their day jobs—by releasing the album *Tribute to Bluegrass* (1981) on Canada's most prominent country and bluegrass label, Boot Records. The album was well received and, unlike efforts by some of the groups mentioned so far, charmed the sensibilities of local purists. In a gushing review of *Tribute to Bluegrass*, Kevin J. Berland (1981) states that "the real tribute is reflected back to Cross Country Grass, in the production of this first-class album." He continues, applauding the band on their perfectionism, "clean, classic trio harmonies," and the "traditional influences […] in their

[123] In her profile of Cross Country Grass, Sharon Van Every (1981) notes that the band would achieve this goal at the 1981 Bluegrass Canada festival.

[124] Amon Savoie won Best Dobro Player, Eddie LeBlanc won Best Guitar Player and Best Lead Singer, and the band as a whole were voted Best Bluegrass Band and Best Vocal Group (*Canadian Bluegrass Review* Feb./March 1980, 10-11)

choice of material and style" (16). In addition to traditional bluegrass standards, it is perhaps the album's title track, composed by Eddie LeBlanc, that most appealed to purists and progressives alike. "Tribute to Bluegrass" is a typical, uptempo traditional bluegrass song with lyrics that read like an A-list of celebrated bluegrass icons such as Bill Monroe, Flatt and Scruggs, and Doc Watson, among others. Then, in the song's final verses, LeBlanc concludes his joyous sermon on the virtues of bluegrass by expressing gratitude to some of his friends and counterparts in the scene:

> Then we have bands like Cody, and the late, great Charlie Moore[125]/
> Denis LePage and Station Road, Eddie [Poirier] and the Bluegrass 4/
> Bruce County Bluegrass and the Border City Band,
> Think that bluegrass music is the greatest in the land.

By the late 1970s, there seemed to be a perforated boundary between the professional and the grassroots that became most visible at weekend jam sessions, award shows, and in the pages of fan magazines. It was in this context that a semiprofessional group like Cross Country Grass were able develop a dedicated fan base and record a critically acclaimed album on the same label as their full-time counterparts. That said, approaching the 1980s the intensifying professional infrastructure and heightened popularity of bluegrass in general created even greater opportunities for artists willing and/or able to commit to touring year-round, recording regularly, and devising a brand.

Whiskey Jack, based in Toronto, flourished in this context, positioning themselves as a full-time, professional band, and, through the 1980s, becoming perhaps the most recognizable bluegrass group in Canada. While the band, established in 1977, was a relatively late arrival in the Toronto area scene, their origins go back the year prior when John Hoffman purchased his first mandolin. He was introduced to bluegrass by TABC president Chuck Crawford at the

[125] Charlie Moore is an American artist, but played often in Toronto and on the Canadian festival circuit during the 1970s.

University of Toronto's Erindale College folk music club (Bennett 1981, 6) and was initially drawn to "one time bluegrass, now country-rock […] band," the Good Brothers (Michele 1984, 34). Soon after, he began actively seeking band members at the Egerton's jam session, where he met fellow beginner Duncan Fremlin (banjo). "When John and I started playing together we were both real bad," Fremlin recalls, "so neither of us held the other back" (Bennett 1981, 6). Despite the perceived mutual benefit of their amateurism, Hoffman and Fremlin refined their sound with the addition of Chip Street (bass) and Bob McNiven (guitar) into what was now a full band.[126] Street, was a young, but experienced bassist who had already received acclaim as a member of Streets and Hills and, briefly, alongside his brother in Cross Country Grass. McNiven, somewhat of an outlier in the local scene, had a more storied musical background. He grew up in a Mennonite family in Pennsylvania and was a part of the Singing McNiven Family, a gospel band that toured eastern Canada and the United States (6-7). In the early 1970s he migrated to Toronto and enrolled in Humber College's jazz program where he also performed in a low-key bluegrass group called Open Road (Ibid.). An expert musician, McNiven would emerge as Whiskey Jack's primary songwriting force.

Whiskey Jack distinguished themselves as a professional act from their inception. In a *Canadian Bluegrass Review* feature, the band explains how they had a "plan" that drew on both Fremlin's business acumen and Hoffman's creative direction, "two important ingredients […] that enabled us to make the big jump from being a collection of pickers to being a professional band unit" (Bennett 1981, 8).[127] They quickly set out to record a demo, which they used to secure gigs around Ontario, and attempted to establish a distinct brand and sound that was accessible, adventurous, but undeniably rooted in bluegrass. They recall:

[126] Like most of the bands discussed so far, there were a number of line-up changes that preceded this most recognizable version of Whiskey Jack.

[127] This article is presented in a Q and A format, with no particular members identified as commenters.

> In the beginning we learned mostly from mainstream bluegrass records and books. Consequently we were doing the standards; "Old Home Place," "Love Come Home," "Salty Dog," "Dooley," "Fox on the Run" etc. Gradually we began to realize that there were countless other groups doing exactly the same thing; copying the 'big boys' as it were. If we wanted to reach that kind of 'big' stature ourselves (we were always ambitious) we had to do it our own way. It was inevitable then, that we would begin to draw on our varied musical backgrounds and interests (7).

This approach, of course, had the potential to attract criticism from bluegrass purists. However, while Whiskey Jack viewed themselves as a bluegrass band, they did not rely exclusively on the bluegrass market for their success. Rather, they purposely sought to appeal to a broad audience:

> A wise performer will take the audience into consideration in every aspect of his presentation. We have to face all types of audiences; young, old; educated, uneducated; country and western, rock'n roll, etc. […] So, we've geared our show to variety. We've got everything from silly costumes and musical gargling […] to soft and emotional songs like the Tennessee Waltz (7).

At the same time, the band did not want to completely alienate their core bluegrass audience:

> The tricky part is to combine all of these elements tastefully in a way that remains true to the Whiskey Jack sound. People seem to get uncomfortable if they can't categorize you. It's important for us not to lose touch with traditional bluegrass music for this reason. Audiences will be expecting to hear it and we'll be giving it to them, in healthy doses (Ibid.).

From a career standpoint, Whiskey Jack's ability to accommodate and entertain a diverse audience was effective and their success snowballed in the first half of the 1980s. In 1979 they released their first record, *Uptown*, which they viewed as a necessary credential. "In our quest for employment having the album was like having a diploma or something. We got a lot of work just because people knew we had an album out" (Bennett 1981, 8). Indeed, soon after releasing the record they organized their first national tour. By the mid 1980s they regularly performed "over 250 dates a year" and received radio airplay on regional country stations like CFGM in the Toronto area (Michele 1984, 36).

Whiskey Jack's career received an even greater push starting in 1981 when they began recording a recurrent television segment on the *Tommy Hunter Show*, which had a substantial audience on CBC's national network, as well as a following in the United States. For their dedicated bluegrass fan base, perhaps the peek of this achievement was a feature length profile in *Bluegrass Unlimited* magazine titled "Canada's Most Successful Bluegrass Band" (Michele 1984, 32-36). In that piece, the band members speak optimistically of the opportunities created through their professionalism and in-house organizational strength, maintaining, "We control our entire destiny; we have creative control, management control, money control, recording control…we control everything" (36). The tenacity presented here—what Michele describes as their desire to both "play bluegrass" and "survive" (1984, 34)—carried Whiskey Jack through the 1990s, when they recorded and toured with Canadian country icon Stompin' Tom Connors', and into the new millennium.

It is certainly conceivable that Whiskey Jack had a tremendous amount of control over their career trajectory. After all, despite the surge in popularity, these bands possessed a relatively small market share as niche genres like bluegrass have some distance from the most dominant mechanisms of the commercial music industry. Still, it would be a mistake to understate the support that they and other professional bands discussed here received from independent labels and recording studio personnel. The following section takes a closer look at some of those institutions that contributed to the professional art world for Canadian bluegrass.

Record Labels, Recording Studios, and Bluegrass on the Radio

Mirroring business practices in the American country music industry, during the 1950s a handful of small, regional Canadian record labels were either devoted to or developed strong

country and traditional music catalogues (e.g., Aragon Records, Arc Records, and Rodeo-Banff Records). These operations provided a foundation and model for the independent labels that would contribute to Ontario's professional bluegrass art world in the late-1960s and into the 1970s. Perhaps the most notable was Toronto-based Boot Records, which was established in 1971 and quickly emerged as Canada's preeminent country and folk label. For up and coming Canadian artists, Boot provided the resources to release albums on par with those distributed by comparable American labels like Vanguard, Rebel, Rounder, and Sugar Hill. Moreover, through the label's association with owner Stompin' Tom Connors and label mates like Ian Tyson and Liona Boyd, Boot offered a certain measure of legitimacy. Indeed, the Boot Records logo, emblazoned on an album sleeve, became a marker of professional Canadian musicianship.

Capitalizing on Canada's bluegrass boom and the corresponding stock of talent, in 1976 Boot Records inaugurated a bluegrass series with the release of the Dixie Flyers' *Light, Medium, Heavy* (Kolbuch 1981, 19). In the years to follow, the label amassed an extensive catalogue that included albums by Ontario groups like Denis LePage and Station Road, The Humber River Valley Boys, Cody, Cross Country Grass, and Whiskey Jack, as well as acts from other parts of Canada like the Ladies Choice Bluegrass Band (Halifax, Nova Scotia), the Bluegrass 4 (Moncton, New Brunswick), and mandolinist David Wilkie (Calgary, Alberta) (Ibid.). The albums, many of which were recorded with the help of producer David Essig and engineer Bob Lanois at the latter's Grant Avenue Studio in Hamilton, Ontario,[128] had a polished, high-fidelity sound and striking artwork that included professional photographs of the members, stylized band logos, and, at times, detailed liner notes. Many of the records also earned critical favour in the pages of the *TABC News* and *Canadian Bluegrass Review*. Perhaps more important to longtime local enthusiasts, however, the albums on Boot Records and other small labels were viewed as

[128] Grant Avenue Studio was established by Bob and his now well-known brother Daniel Lanois.

the start of something greater: a chance to recognize and promote the Canadian bluegrass talent that had emerged since the late 1960s. As Chuck Crawford notes in his review of Denis LePage's 1977 instrumental banjo record:

> It's good to hear that Boot and Woodshed are putting out more recordings of bluegrass musicians such as Denis, The Dixie Flyers, and the Humber River Valley Boys so that more people can hear that we have a fine group of bluegrass musicians in Southern Ontario (1977a: 4).

In the above comment, Crawford acknowledges Woodshed Records, an Ontario label started by the aforementioned David Essig, as another prominent facet of the local infrastructure for professional bluegrass (Essig 2011). Woodshed, established circa 1976, was a folk-oriented subsidiary of Canadian music mogul Harvey Glatt's Posterity Records. Over a decade removed from the urban folk revival's boom period, many artists and enthusiasts were now drawn to the notion of "roots" music, an umbrella concept that compiles a variety of characteristically vernacular music-cultures and genre categories (e.g., old-time, blues, zydeco, klezmer, etc).[129] In the 1970s, the discourse around roots music continued to emphasize constructs of "authenticity," "tradition," and a longing for pre-modern values, while at the same time acknowledging the musics' commercial potential. Michael F. Scully (2008) notes that this openness to commercial industry models was central to the success of American roots label Rounder Records, maintaining that the founders "understood [...] that people could simultaneously treasure their cultural traditions, enjoy the best that the commercial music world had to offer, and sometimes merge the two in a hybrid of modern, yet tradition-oriented, music that is entertaining, contemporary in feel, and culturally specific" (89). Woodshed, which shared Rounder's approach and erstwhile folk revivalist market, supported mostly Ontario-based artists like Chris and Ken

[129] As mentioned in previous chapters, Neil Rosenberg refers to this as a transition towards "named-system revivals" (1993a, 177-178).

Whiteley's Original Sloth Band and Willie P. Bennett,[130] who operated within and often fused a variety of roots genres (Ibid.).

Bluegrass, which from its very origins straddled the divide between "traditional" and "commercial," fit squarely into the emerging roots music ethos. As such, Woodshed was quick to embrace Ontario's emerging bluegrass talent. The label released the Humber River Valley Boys' first two albums, *S/T* (1977) and *Bar Room Daze* (1978), as well as Cathy Fink[131] and Duck Donald's self-titled debut record (1978), an album that was also released by the American roots label, Flying Fish Records. With uncompromising acoustic sounds and tight visual aesthetics depicting the artists in hippy-cum-citybilly garb and sepia tones, these albums exhibited a folksy, countercultural edge that was altogether distinct from the commercial country sleekness that marked many other Canadian bluegrass albums—albeit on an often evidently limited budget.

Boot and Woodshed were the most prominent labels releasing Canadian-made bluegrass in the 1970s and early 1980s. During this time, however, bluegrass and country record bins were stocked with full-length albums released by other, even smaller independent companies. Jack Boswell's Paragon and Marathon Records, for instance, were a visible part of the developing Canadian music industry and had their origins in a larger, multinational distribution system. By the 1970s, Boswell was well-acquainted with recording industry operations in Canada. In 1949, he started working as an "office boy" for All Canadian Record Facilities, the Canadian manufacturer and distributor for MGM Records; in the 1950s he was a sales representative for Quality Records, which had a manufacturing plant located in Scarborough, Ontario; later he was hired to help run Phonodisc, a small, but successful company that served as the Canadian

[130] Bennett was associated with bluegrass music through his first group, Bone China Band, as well as his concert and recording appearances with the Dixie Flyers.

[131] Cathy Fink was an American migrant from Maryland who began performing in the Montreal folk scene before teaming up with Duck Donald in Toronto (Carlin 2006, 67-68).

distributor for well-known American and UK labels like King, Chess, Pye, and Motown (Boswell, personal communication July 13, 2013).

In 1967, Boswell acquired another label, Allied Records, from North American food distributor M. Loeb Limited, and soon after established both Paragon and later Marathon Records as vehicles for his own production efforts (Boswell, personal communication July 13, 2013). Initially focusing on some of the psychedelic, folk-rock, and rhythm and blues groups associated with Toronto's Yorkville and Yonge Street scenes, Boswell brought bands like The Folklords, Reign Ghost, and the Plastic Cloud into recording engineer Bill Bessey's home studio, Spectra Sound in Richmond Hill, Ontario, and occasionally the Yorkville-based Eastern Sound. These attempts to make an impact in the lucrative and constantly shifting youth markets mostly floundered.[132]

Boswell's personal tastes, however, drew him towards country and bluegrass artists like Smiley Bates, Eddie Poirier, and Tommy Wade and the Country Rebels. These artists attained success on local radio, television, and in venues throughout Ontario. What's more, like the York Country Boys before them, they capitalized on and earned a substantial following among country and bluegrass fans in Newfoundland and the Maritime provinces. The Oshawa, Ontario-based Smiley Bates, in particular, became a Canadian country star with a prolific output that included bluegrass records like *5-String Banjo Bluegrass* (1968), *Fiddler's Dream* (1968), *Flat Top Guitar Instrumentals* (1969), *Dueling Banjos* (1973; recorded with Eddie Poirier), and *In the Mood for Pickin'* (1973). These albums were distinctly "traditional bluegrass" in sound and unapologetically preserved a commercial country visual aesthetic established in the 1950s, and, in Canada, often associated with artists like Hank Snow and Wilf Carter. Unlike the records on

[132] In subsequent decades, Boswell-produced albums by the Folklords, Reign Ghost, and the Plastic Cloud have become sought-after collectors' items and are repeatedly subject to reissue campaigns.

Boot and Woodshed, which often evoked "outlaw country" or mild hippy imagery, Paragon and Marathon album covers mostly depicted portraits of the strong looking, middle-aged male performer, usually posed in country-western attire, sometimes in a rural setting.[133] The albums appeared a decade or two removed from contemporary 1970s country music sensibilities. This was fitting since, while there was certainly crossover appeal, they seemed marketed towards a slightly older, rural (or rural migrant), and working-class audience invested in alternative experiences of pre-modern nostalgia.

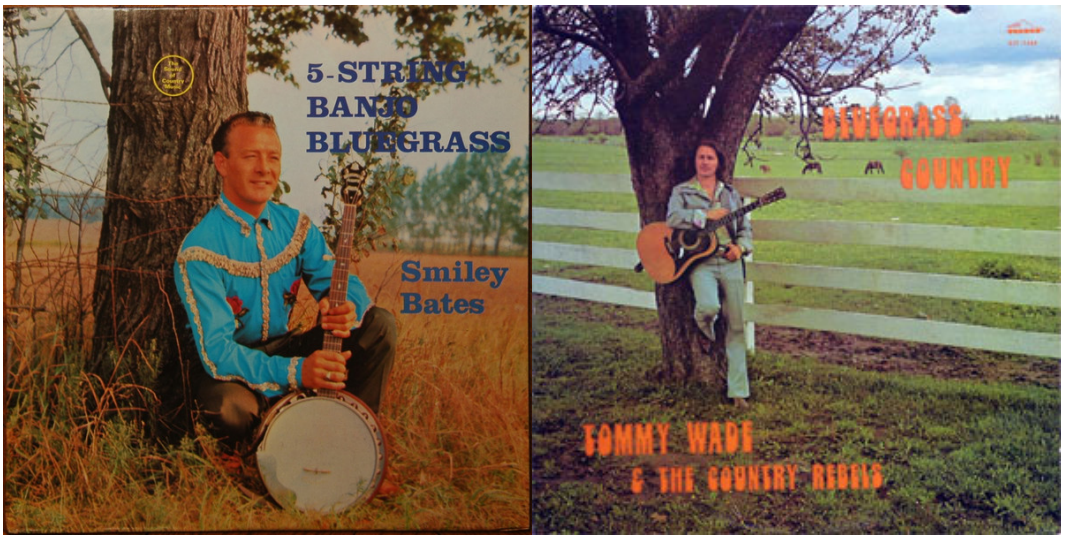


Figure 6.1 – Album covers by Smiley Bates and Tommy Wade and the Country Rebels

While some Paragon and Marathon artists had national-scale commercial success, their albums' low budgets were visually and audibly apparent. Equally low budget bluegrass albums were produced on small, home studio-oriented independent labels throughout Ontario. In 1975, Ralph Carlson, a veteran Canadian country music performer, established Carlsound Studio and Snocan Records from his home in Ottawa (Ottawa Valley Country Music Hall of Fame 2015).[134] The label focused almost exclusively on Ottawa Valley country artists, including the band Bytown Bluegrass, who recorded their debut, *Volume 1*, for Snocan in 1980 and were joined by

[133] Label-owner Jack Boswell was the photographer and layout designer for the majority of Paragon and Marathon albums (Boswell, personal communication July 13, 2013).

[134] Dave Dennison and Ron Sparling were Carlson's partners in this venture.

the label head on their sophomore effort, *Ralph Carlson and Bytown Bluegrass* (1985) (Bytown Bluegrass 2012). Exemplifying the expanding network of bluegrass artists, institutions, and enthusiasts, American bluegrass performer Jerry Douglas, as discussed above, also produced the Aurora/Toronto-based group Big Redd Ford's self-titled debut (1978) at Carlson's studio. These Snocan albums, despite their rather modest budgets, received a generous amount of exposure and some critical praise in the local bluegrass press and the bands were regularly featured in clubs and on the festival circuit.

Meanwhile, in Oshawa, Ontario, Paul and Linda Evans established Ambassador Records studio and label in 1977 (Evans 2015). The small, low-key studio, which is still in operation, hosted emerging bands in the Southern Ontario region, and was particularly popular with gospel, country, and bluegrass acts such as Collingwood's Easy Going, whose album *Traditional Bluegrass* (ca. 1981) was entirely overlooked in the Canadian bluegrass press. Despite having a comparable sound to some of the more successful albums on Paragon and Marathon, the record's jarringly low-budget cover art—a slightly askew, poorly lit portrait of the band in a living room surrounded by instruments and other "old-timey" props—was perhaps emblematic of the amateurism that many local enthusiasts were rejecting by the 1980s. Lorne Buck and Bluegrass Jam's two Ambassador releases, *Sing a Happy Song* (1980) and *Sharing the Joy* (1981), had better luck piquing local interest, perhaps owing in part to Buck's veteran status in Canadian country music, as well as the contributions of TABC members and Toronto scene insiders Bruce Dowd (banjo) and Tom McCreight (bass).

Figure 6.2 – Easy Going's *Traditional Bluegrass* album cover

With the support of these studios and labels—especially Boot and Woodshed—"Canadian bluegrass" was endowed with a sense of professional legitimacy. Ian Angus, one of the *TABC News'* primary reviewers, was particularly enthusiastic about the quality of a cluster of albums released by Cody, the Dixie Flyers, Humber River Valley Boys, and the Kent County Pickers in 1978. In a review feature titled "A Canadian Bluegrass Bonanza" (1978c) he comments on the professional trajectory in Canadian bluegrass:

> There was a time when you couldn't buy Canadian bluegrass records, because there weren't any. (That's an exaggeration—there were always one or two around, usually in the bargain racks at the back of the grocery store, with terrible covers and rotten sound.) Now suddenly we are deluged with high quality albums (1).

Acknowledging the murkiness of attempting to maintain a professional distance in a relatively small scene, he continues:

> Reviewing records by local bands is a dangerous business, especially if you know members of the bands, or their fans. But these records deserve to be listened to with the same exacting standards we try to apply to U.S. Albums, and reviewed in the same way (Ibid.).

Indeed, Angus rhapsodizes and critiques in equal measure. Under the direction of studio personnel Dave Essig and Bob Lanois, the Humber River Valley Boys' *Bar Room Daze*, he writes, is a "first rate" album exhibiting a "rich, full sound" (2). The Dixie Flyers' *Cheaper to Lease*, on the other hand, fails in this regard, with Burt Baumbach's voice overpowering the mix (3). The Kent County Pickers' apparently self-released debut is "pleasant […] but it isn't particularly exciting" (4). What's more, as a low-budget production, its liner notes provide very little information about the band. Meanwhile, the packaging and liners for Cody's *A Tale of Three Cities* exceeded the norm:

> This is certainly the best-looking record cover to come out of Canadian country music (of any kind) in many years—clean and clear. […] There are liner notes on each performer, the words to their original songs, and full information on the instrumentation and vocal arrangement of each song. This is an example to be emulated (2).

While Angus isn't impressed with the mix on the Dixie Flyer's *Cheaper to Lease*, the band's follow up, *Just Pickin'*, "restores [his] faith in them" (1979, 3). The band, he maintains, engage in some "absolutely incredible picking" on their instrumental record, which, he tells readers, is sure to "impress any of your non-bluegrass-fan friends […] with the brilliance of our music" (Ibid.). Furthermore, while Angus still finds the liner notes lacking, he commends Boot Records for financing such a polished presentation: "It's good to see a Canadian company breaking from the tradition of providing Canadian country bands with album covers that seem predestined for the supermarket bargain bins" (4).

Independent record labels and fledgling studios were crucial components to the developing art world for professional bluegrass in the Toronto area and beyond. For emerging bands, label affiliation not only provided support with manufacturing and distribution, but, the conspicuous, sometimes familiar label logos on an album jacket had a legitimizing effect on the music and the

band. What's more, for artists acquainted with the mythologies around notable American record-making hubs like Nashville, small studios such as Grant Avenue Studio, Carlsound, Spectra Sound, Eastern Sound, and Ambassador demystified the record-making process. Indeed, some of the personnel associated with these studios were performers in the scene and many were simultaneously establishing a business venture while building a knowledge of recording techniques and technologies.

With more professional bands making records during the 1970s, there was a growing interest in marketing bluegrass to a radio audience, an issue that had long been on the agenda of local enthusiasts. APinerids early as 1968, *Bluegrass Breakdown* contributor Joe Grondin advocated for more bluegrass on Canadian radio as a way to promote the music, declaring "The public must be made aware of bluegrass" (1968, 10). However, apart from an occasional song on local country stations and country/folk programs like Vic Mullen's *Country Roads* (CBC) and Ron Scott's *Country Style* on CBE-FM (Windsor, Ontario's local CBC affiliate), through much of the 1970s Toronto area enthusiasts could only hear bluegrass on the radio by tuning into spotty stateside broadcasts such as Bob Moore's bluegrass show on WXLR (Lancaster, New York) and Harold Libell's *Bluegrass Session* on WQLN (Erie, Pennsylvania) (*TABC News* Sept. 1974, 4).[135] In 1979, Pineridge member Bob Wood helped fill the gap with *Bluegrass Express* on CHOO (Ajax, Ontario). The show featured bluegrass exclusively, promoted events and organizations, and featured guests such as Pat and Jack Buttenham of *Canadian Bluegrass Review* (*TABC News* April 1979, 2). Wood also highlighted emerging Canadian acts. Perhaps responding to the recent Canadian content legislations mentioned above, he informed the *TABC News* that his personal album collection was quickly depleting and called on readers to mail in

[135] It should be noted that while they did not play much bluegrass, local country stations regularly promoted bluegrass events.

"Canadian traditional bluegrass records" to air on his show (May 1979, 2). What's more, focusing on local talent, he offered free promotion for any band within a 75-mile radius of Ajax (Ibid.).

Like *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, Wood's *Bluegrass Express* emerged from and maintained a relationship with the grassroots scene in Southern Ontario and, according to the *TABC News*, was tremendously popular among its membership (May 1979, 2). Still, for many there was a sense that Canadian radio programmers snubbed bluegrass, viewing the music as too niche, despite its growing audience. In the fall of 1979, these concerns surfaced in an open correspondence between *TABC News* contributor Ian Angus and Cam Finley, the general manager of Toronto's CJRT. Noting that CJRT, a publicly supported station, received a considerable number of bluegrass requests from listeners during the station's pledge drives, Angus rallied *TABC News* readers to petition for a weekly, hour-long bluegrass show (1979b, 1). Finley responded, arguing that country station CFGM would be a better fit for a bluegrass program. "We have a long standing commitment to folk music and the 'blues,'" Finley states, "but we have never felt that bluegrass music was a major responsibility of ours, particularly since CFGM offers a country music format" (Finlay in Angus 1979c, 3). Finley concludes, admitting that Angus' "editorial was the first indication to me that bluegrass fans are starved for their music on radio" (Ibid.). Angus, appreciating his response as an example of CJRT's goodwill towards its listeners maintains, "While I still think there is a place for bluegrass on CJRT, as a form of minority music, it isn't the only place." With this, he shifts the focus of his campaign towards private broadcaster CFGM, declaring:

> The commercial country stations have a responsibility to their listeners, too. They have to meet the standards of community service, and we are part of the community. Right now there will be a couple of bluegrass songs played on CFGM's 'Saturday Souvenirs' each week, but nothing more. I think we deserve more. (Ibid.)

The issue of bluegrass on Canadian radio was contentious. As mentioned above, the band Whiskey Jack received a significant amount of radio play on CFGM, as well as CBC. Of course, for many traditionalists, borderline progressive bands like Whiskey Jack did not necessarily represent the style of bluegrass they were interested in hearing on radio. Still, in a group interview for *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, the band challenged the notion that there was no place for bluegrass on commercial radio:

> There is this myth, ardently promoted in bluegrass circles that you can't hear bluegrass on the radio. Look, the [Dixie] Flyers, Foxglove, Bytown Bluegrass, Ladies Choice, Bluegrass Four, Station Road, and Whiskey Jack have all gotten good play on mainstream country radio. […] The number of bluegrass radio shows is growing rapidly (Bennett 1981, 7).

Despite their enthusiasm here, however, the band argue that within the flood of bluegrass recordings during this period, the generally poor quality of Canadian bluegrass creates an issue for radio programmers:

> Let's be realistic though. There are probably less than ten Canadian bluegrass bands currently putting out a quality product (records). Compare that with the hundreds of country bands with whom we're competing and you'll see why there is relatively little bluegrass on the radio (7-8).

Approaching the 1980s, some of the more refined Canadian bands were supported on folk and country music radio. Questions about whether or not Canadian radio stations were doing enough to promote the surge in domestic bluegrass, however, were imbued with long established binary constructs (i.e., commercial versus traditional) and perforated genre boundaries (e.g., "folk" and "country"). Aligned with and active in the grassroots scene—viewed as a distinctly purist facet of the bluegrass art world—radio host Bob Wood asked *Bluegrass Express* listeners to provide "Canadian *traditional* bluegrass albums" (*TABC News* May 1979, 2; my emphasis). Meanwhile, citing the success of polished, not staunchly "traditional" acts, the members of

Whiskey Jack imply that radio play demands a willingness to acknowledge the musical tastes of a broad, diverse audience. While there were many intersections between the grassroots and the professional, then, the debate over radio play underlines certain divisions and tensions in a multilayered art world. As I illustrate below, these same tensions also surfaced in the primary promotional avenue for professional bluegrass bands during this time, the festival circuit.

Bluegrass Canada and the Festival Boom in Ontario

In Chapter Four's discussion of early scene-building activity I included Joe Grondin's (1968) aspirational appeal to *Bluegrass Breakdown* readers, "Why not have a Canadian Bluegrass Festival? […] Why wait for someone else to put on a festival for us here?" (10). For him, a festival would be the pinnacle achievement of an organized network of Canadian bluegrass scenes. It's perhaps not surprising then that many enthusiasts viewed the spring 1973 announcement of the First Annual Ontario Bluegrass Festival as a momentous event—what organizer Don Bird (1977) would pinpoint, in somewhat overstated terms, as the "Birth of Canadian Bluegrass" (14).

The First Annual Ontario Bluegrass Festival—which was soon after renamed Bluegrass Canada and colloquially referred to as "Carlisle"—took place from August 3-5, 1973 at Courtcliffe Park in Carlisle, Ontario, a township just outside of Hamilton and only 65 kilometres west of Toronto. The festival was a cross-border collaboration between American promoter Jim Clark, Jim Hale, a Toronto-based draft resister who was teaching banjo at the Toronto Folklore Centre, and the park's owners, Court and Shirley Weaver. Hale, who was scouting potential sites on behalf of Clark, initially contacted the Weavers and presented them with the idea of bringing

"the 'Bluegrass Package' to Canada" (Buttenham 1979a, 10).[136] At first, the Weavers were hesitant. During this time, outdoor music festivals were mostly associated with the perceived countercultural debauchery of rock concert events like Woodstock and the infamous Altamont Speedway Free Festival. They eventually agreed, however, under the conditions that the organizers employ Canadians to staff the event, and that the festival "be presented as a 'family affair' with camping, music and pickin combined into one great weekend of fellowship among bluegrass fans" (Ibid.). In keeping with this vision, the first festival was sponsored by the innocuously genial Ontario Folk Art Music Society and alcohol was not permitted in the main concert area.

The organizers faced a number of challenges in their first attempt at managing a music festival.[137] While they were able to bring in star headliners such as the Dillards, the Osborne Brothers, and the Country Gentlemen, among others, the small stage—two adjacent flatbed tractor trailers, powered by generators that required occasional refuelling—was awkward (Buttenham 1979a, 10). What's more, the festival was not adequately promoted. Pat Buttenham (1979a), who wrote a feature on Bluegrass Canada's origins for *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, estimates that approximately 1,500 people attended the first festival, most of who were Americans (11).[138] Not surprisingly, the strong American presence fed into romantic narratives of bluegrass' imagined heartland. Buttenham describes the scene:

> It has been estimated that there were approximately 500 Canadians and 1,000 Americans (500 of whom literally came out of the Ozarks). They came with their tents, trailers, pick-ups; their hound-dogs, kids and flour-sack dresses. Each camper claimed to have a 'picker' with them (11).

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[136] In addition to first-hand accounts and coverage in the *TABC News*, much of the historical details regarding Bluegrass Canada are drawn from Pat Buttenham's (1979 a and b) two-part feature called "The Bluegrass Canada Story," published in the December/January and February/March issues of *Canadian Bluegrass Review.*

[137] Only Jim Clark had prior experience with concert promotion.

[138] The festival was apparently promoted more successfully in the United States. Don Bird, one of the weekend's MCs, told Buttenham that he first read about the festival in *Playboy Magazine* (Buttenham 1979a, 12).

Needless to say, given the relatively low turnout and a bill mostly populated with high profile/high priced American acts, the first festival in Carlisle was not a financial success. Like the American festivals that preceded it, however, it was a rallying site for local bluegrass enthusiasts, who, Buttenham maintains, were "obviously cultured in bluegrass and […] appreciative of the champagne assortment of artists presented before them" (11). Indeed, for many, the weekend event delivered the American festival experience to Canadian soil. Like the Bean Blossom festival in Indiana, which, according to Don Bird served as a model for Carlisle (personal communication, June 4, 2013), audience members, many equipped with their own instruments, were able to casually observe, and sometimes jam with headliners on the festival grounds (Adler 2011, 65). In this sense, the festival was viewed as a triumph by many fans: "You can gauge the success of a bluegrass festival by the number of uninhibited 'yahoos' emanating from the audience. Canada's first national bluegrass event was an unqualified success" (Buttenham 1979a, 11).

In subsequent years, attendance at the rebranded "Bluegrass Canada" festival rapidly surged and the event's financial success began to equal its critical acclaim. The 1974 festival attracted over 5,000 attendees, approximately 11,000 attended in 1975, and 14,000 in 1976 (Buttenham 1979a, 11-14; Buttenham 1979b, 10). Eventually Bluegrass Canada would become one of the biggest festivals in North America with Don Bird, the festival's artistic director and MC, estimating around 40,000 attendees at its peak (personal communication, June 4, 2013).[139] As the festival grew the Weavers continued to bring in top American bluegrass talent such as Newgrass Revival (1974), Jimmy Martin (1976), and perhaps most notably, Bill Monroe (1975).

[139] The highest attendance number in Buttenham's history of the festival from 1974-1978 is 17,000 (1977), and she notes that attendance was down to around 15,000 at the 1978 festival.

The festival also became increasingly professionalized. The Weavers installed a proper stage for the 1974 festival, and employed a volunteer cleanup team, as well as, two police officers for security, which, Buttenham maintains, "weren't needed" (1979a, 14). The 1975 festival, which was even more "polished and commercial" (15), introduced merchandise kiosks, a separate parking compound for noisy motorcycles, and employed even more Ontario Provincial Police officers, as well as members of the Hamilton Karate Club, for security (15). Despite this growth, which did present genuine crowd control challenges, Buttenham emphasizes standout moments of "mutual kinship" such as a "Will the Circle be Unbroken" sing-along led by Bryan Bowers (Ibid.). The professionalizing trend continued in 1976 when separate entrances for performers, press, and audience members were incorporated into the festival grounds (Buttenham 1979b, 10).

In the festival's second year, the organizers introduced bluegrass workshops, instrument competitions, and band contests. These kinds of features were central components of American bluegrass and folk festivals and, in the Canadian context, fostered bluegrass musicianship and provided a venue for emerging local talent. While semiprofessional American acts took away the top prize at Carlisle's first bluegrass band competition in 1974, a little-known Canadian band, the Yates Family (Sudbury, Ontario), took third prize and the Mississauga Rattlers from the "Toronto area"[140] earned an honourable mention (Buttenham 1979a, 12). Such contests became a main attraction at Bluegrass Canada and overtime an increasing number of Canadian bands and instrumentalists competed, sometimes taking the top prizes. Capitalizing on this, in 1976 the Weaver family organized a second summer event called the World's Championship 5-String Banjo Contest and Festival, focusing on Canadian bluegrass artists (*TABC News*, June 1975, 3). This weekend festival placed top American acts like J.D. Crowe and the New South and Bill

[140] In the 1970s, Mississauga was a developing suburb just outside of Toronto. Now it is one of the most populous cities in Canada.

Keith on the same bill as emerging Canadian talent like the Bluegrass Revival, the Humber River Valley Boys, and the Dixie Flyers. In addition to workshops and performance sets, the main thrust of the weekend was a banjo contest, which was organized into various categories (i.e., junior, bluegrass, and old-time divisions) with about $3000 in prize money at stake (Buttenham 1979b, 11-12). Canadians dominated the standings: David Talbot (Callander, ON) and Kenny Groomes (Huntsville, ON) took first and second prize respectively in the junior division; Brian Pickell of Toronto's the Humber River Valley Boys came first in the old-time division; and Denis LePage of the Dixie Flyer's topped the bluegrass division, a category mostly populated with American musicians (Ibid.).

Reflecting the shifting attitudes towards "Canadian bluegrass," with each successive event in Carlisle, there was a growing emphasis on not only including Canadian bands, but also providing them with prime slots on the bill (e.g., Saturday night as opposed to Saturday afternoon). The Canadian presence at festivals often came from dialogue and advocacy occurring at a grassroots level. In his *TABC News* report on Bluegrass Canada '76, for instance, Ian Angus (1976b) applauds local groups and appeals to the festival's organizers to not "just use the Canadians as fillers in the early afternoon. Give each one at least one evening slot—they deserve it, and they are equal to the challenge" (2). While he frames festival performance as a "challenge" for Canadian groups, Angus' conviction implies that the baggage around local musicians' cultural distance from the American roots of bluegrass was lessening. Such statements were more common in the years following as the sense of embarrassment surrounding Canadian bluegrass groups encountered a nationalistic pride. Reporting on Bluegrass Canada '77, John Jackson (1977) expresses his satisfaction at seeing four "Ontario-based" groups on the bill. Alluding to the caveats that would normally accompany Canadian bluegrass acts, he adds "Less and less is it

necessary to introduce these bands as locals" (7). And, in her piece on the 1978 Carlisle festival, Pat Buttenham (1979b) explicitly articulates her reverence for emerging Canadian bands:

> Topping off an almost perfect weekend were the talents of five excellent Canadian groups: Dixie Flyers, Humber River Valley Boys, CODY, Big Redd Ford, and Station Road. Each one of these groups has its own particular unique style, and if we were to view them at any of the hundreds of festivals in the States we would be PROUD to say 'they are Canadian' (16).

By including more Canadian bands, the Bluegrass Canada organizers were not simply responding to grassroots demand. They too seemed invested in celebrating homegrown talent and promoting the genre domestically. In 1977 they introduced the "Gold Award," which was presented not only to the most improved Canadian band of the year, but those considered exceptional in promoting the music in Canada (Buttenham 1979b, 13). The inaugural award went to London, Ontario's Dixie Flyers.

Through the 1970s, Bluegrass Canada became arguably the most visible and influential annual bluegrass event in Canada, and certainly in Southern Ontario. As the festival grew, however, not everyone was pleased with its direction and, at times, disorderly atmosphere. While it was initially envisioned as a family-oriented event, it seems that by the mid-1970s Carlisle had come to resemble the kind of rambunctious outdoor rock festivals that the Weaver family sought to avoid.[141] Adrian Bevis recalls how the first Bluegrass Canada events succeeded in recreating some of the intimacy of early American festivals—characterized mainly by casual interactions between performers and audience members—but failed in subsequent years (personal communication May 25, 2013). This, he maintains, was mostly due to increased crowd control measures introduced to manage excessive partying and the conglomeration of disruptive and

[141] In his chapter on bluegrass festivals, Neil Rosenberg discusses how concerns over the direction and presumed degradation of festivals were widespread among bluegrass enthusiasts across North America. Depending on the perspective, the "deterioration" of festivals was attributed to the presence of liberal hippies, conservative racists, and obnoxious drunks, as well as progressive, bluegrass-rock experimentations (see Rosenberg 2005, 280-300).

intimidating bikers. Commenting on the festival in the later-1970s, Steve Pritchard, a regular member of the Carlisle's volunteer team echoes these sentiments:

> Carlisle was a bluegrass festival in a rock style. People went in there and they drank and did all sorts of crap. The guy who ran it ended up knowing that it made money, so this was their premise...to make money on it. They brought in great bluegrass acts. […] There were incredible people there, but the atmosphere was not like a folk-bluegrass atmosphere. They were attracting kids who were finished school, and once they were finished school they'd go up in this place where they could camp and drink. And it happened to have bluegrass. And they were out there dancing around. None of them knew anything about bluegrass, except for the staff and a few people who came because of the bluegrass (Pritchard, personal communication May 22, 2013).

Alan Gayda, a Toronto-area musician and *TABC News* contributor was also critical of Carlisle's growing party atmosphere. In his report on the Smokey Greene's Festival in Fort Ann, New York he compares the two events stating, "A shaded entertainment area, good sound facilities, and an absence of pot and acid freaks made this festival much more enjoyable than Carlisle" (1975, 1).

For some, the disruptive behaviour at Carlisle was directly tied to the festival's musical direction and notions of "real" bluegrass. Above, Steve Pritchard states "Carlisle was a bluegrass festival in a rock style." While most accounts applaud the quality of talent at Bluegrass Canada, Pritchard observes a shift when Don Bird took over as artistic director in the mid-1970s and brought in bands like the Good Brothers, an extremely popular rock-country-bluegrass fusion, or "newgrass" group from Richmond Hill, Ontario, just north of Toronto. "Don booked [the Good Brothers]," Pritchard surmises, "to bring in the younger rowdy drinking crowd. They did, and technically that is what helped give the festival a bad reputation. Don liked bands like the Eagles. Not real bluegrass, but good…but not bluegrass" (personal communication, May 28, 2013).

Eventually, Pritchard maintains, the festival alienated and deflected many local bluegrass musicians and enthusiasts. "After around five years into the event," he says, "some bluegrass

artists did not want to play there. It was known for rowdiness. Lots of true bluegrassers refused to go as well. At that point a number of other smaller [festivals] started in Ontario almost as a response to Carlisle" (Ibid.). Indeed, through the second half of the 1970s, a multitude of bluegrass festivals and competitions materialized in small towns throughout Ontario, such as the Skyway Bluegrass Campout (also in Carlisle), the Waterford Bluegrass Festival (Waterford), the Canadian Open Banjo Competition (Durham), the Trout Creek Community Bluegrass Festival (North Bay), the Upper Chalet Bluegrass Festival (Ashburn), the Collingwood Bluegrass Festival (Collingwood), and the Tottenham Bluegrass Festival (Tottenham).[142]

It's unclear the extent to which these festivals were a direct response to Carlisle as opposed to the result of coordinated, localized activity inspired by a growing festival trend in North America and a concerted effort to expand the bluegrass festival circuit. Pritchard's comments, however, allude to the divergent ideas about bluegrass festival ideals and values. Don Bird's artistic direction strayed from Pritchard's vision of a festival that would appeal to "true bluegrassers." On the other hand, when Bird left Carlisle to help direct the Waterford Bluegrass Festival in the late 1970s, he had his own critiques with how liberally the term "bluegrass" was applied to music festivals. In a 1977 article he maintains that many of the festivals that have emerged in the wake of Carlisle have struggled because of a "total lack of knowledge and respect for Bluegrass on the promoter's part. Many [promoters] thought all they had to do was say 'Bluegrass' and they would have another Carlisle on their hands" (14). When I interviewed Bird a few decades after he made these comments, he elaborated on his reasons for leaving Carlisle in a way that sustained the above arguments and further illuminated his own views about the bluegrass festival boom:

[142] I refer back to the *TABC News* festival listings above in Figures 5.4 and 5.5.

> When I left Carlisle…well I didn't agree with what the owner of the park was trying to do. [He] wanted to have bluegrass all the time. Almost every weekend. And he wanted to have a religious component to it. And I always did a gospel show on Sunday morning and got people up there.[143] […] But, it just got a little tired for me. […] It got to the point where it became so popular that everybody had a bluegrass festival around Ontario. And they would call it a bluegrass festival if there was a banjo in the band. You know, they weren't doing authentic bluegrass music […] they were doing country that you'd see in a bar at a Legion on a Friday night and if there's a 5-string banjo in it, or a mandolin…oh, that was a 'bluegrass band!' […] I went [to Carlisle] for a couple years after [I stepped down as artistic director], just to hang around and see what I was missing […] and I was disappointed in the changes that they had made. Plus, Waterford [Bluegrass Festival] was going strong in those days and there were other bluegrass festivals that were legitimate (personal communication, June 4, 2013).

To further complicate the discourse surrounding "authentic" bluegrass music and festivals, Bird also helped organize the 1977 Collingwood Bluegrass Festival, which was established by the Good Brothers. That band's autoharpist, Bruce Good (1977), explained how the idea for their own festival surfaced when the Good Brothers were not invited to perform at Carlisle after appearing four years in a row because, he suspected, the band was becoming increasingly "contemporary" (Breakdown 1977, 7). In an intriguing counter to Pritchard's suggestion that "true bluegrassers" were seeking alternatives to Carlisle and the Good Brothers, the Collingwood Bluegrass Festival was, in some ways, a response to Bluegrass Canada's perceived purism. "It would still be nice to do something bluegrass," Bruce Good comments on the festival, "but it doesn't have to be really bluegrass if we do one of our own" (Ibid.).

Conclusion

In Chapters 5 and 6, I have examined how, through the 1970s, the Toronto area bluegrass scene was situated within a broad network of local scenes that became part of an infrastructure for professional bluegrass. On the surface, the professionalizing art world can appear as a cohesive institutionalized field of cultural production. Certainly, the infrastructural network was

[143] Sunday morning gospel sets are a longstanding tradition at bluegrass festivals.

becoming increasingly firm and coordinated. Observing the shifting and, at times, competing discourses, however, serves as a reminder that, like a grassroots scene, the art world is a dynamic social field that encompasses and is ultimately shaped by historical tensions and conflicting views. What's more, it becomes evident that the professionally oriented art world did not entirely replace the tangly grassroots cultural scene(s). Rather, the two coalesced as an imprecise, but ultimately discernible whole (we can, after all, speak of a "Canadian bluegrass scene" or "boom period" in the 1970s).

Within this complex, the sub-, super-, and intercultural components described by Slobin (1992) variously intersected. On a local level, scene participants engaged in small-scale, but socially rich activities and initiatives (e.g., jamming, practicing, listening, organizing, sharing ideas, mingling in other scenes). They also contributed to and/or engaged with an emerging professional infrastructure, which itself was a part of a domestic cultural industry shaped by private stakeholders, state policy, and a pervasive national discussion about Canadian culture. At all levels, these activities were imbued with, influenced by, and adjacent to a robust American bluegrass infrastructure and mythology that was positioned within a potent commercial country music industry.

Because of the fuzzy boundaries between local scene activity and more expansive, conspicuous professional activity, it's difficult to trace a clean transition towards an art world. Therefore, adding to the terms discussed thus far—"community," "scene," "art world"—it is helpful introduce Gilles Deleuze's "assemblage theory" as a final conceptual recourse (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; DeLanda 2006).[144] Put most simply, an assemblage is a classic part-to-whole

[144] While the notion of an assemblage first appears in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), it is most associated with the former author. Deleuze's approach to the subject, however, is fragmented, often indirect, and dispersed over various writings and interviews. Manuel DeLanda's (2006) book-length exploration of

configuration that encompasses people, networks, institutions, places, structures, environmental conditions and occurrences, as well as more intangible, "expressive" components like ideas or discourses (DeLanda 2006, 12). In this case, assemblage theory enables us to transcend a strict linear progression and consider how the scene and art world do not simply co-exist, but are co-produced. Within the assemblage participants flow between, on the one hand, the grassroots collective activity and sense of community associated with scene-building and, on the other hand, the professionalized art world, which directs collective activity towards navigating conventions while reaching out to broader markets. In the next chapter, I outline this notion in greater detail while considering how assemblage theory can help account for fragmentation within the Toronto area bluegrass scene-cum-art world.

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assemblage theory gathers and expounds Deleuze's threads and is widely viewed as a refinement of the concept. My understanding of assemblage is largely informed by DeLanda's work.

Chapter Seven

Picking Apart Bluegrass in Toronto: Parallel Scenes and Divergent Movements

> "Music is at once an everyday activity, an industrial commodity, a flag of resistance, a personal world, and a deeply symbolic, emotional grounding for people in every class and cranny the superculture offers. [Pierre] Bourdieu offers a reason: music 'says nothing and has nothing to say...music represents the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially the social world, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art' (1984:19). Ethnomusicology argues otherwise: it is not that music has nothing to say, but that it allows everyone to say what they want. It is not because it negates the world, but because it embodies any number of imagined worlds that people turn to music as a core form of expression." (Slobin 1992, 57)

Over the course of the last few chapters, I have outlined a gradual build in bluegrass-related activity that extended beyond the Toronto area and eventually produced an intensive, coordinated infrastructure for bluegrass in Ontario. Drawing on Becker (1982) and Brinner's (2009) characterizations of an "art world," I examined the intersections between grassroots and professional activity. On the one hand, this narrative structure seems to depict an increasingly cohesive and organized, if not quite homogenous body of steadfast bluegrass enthusiasts. At the same time, throughout this period, tensions surfaced around issues such as bluegrass ideals, genre boundaries, career trajectories, commercialism, and professionalism. These kinds of debates often point to various domains coexisting within a broader socio-cultural field, and indeed, approaching the 1980s, scene fragmentation along generational, class, cultural, and geographical lines became increasingly salient.

This is perhaps not surprising since, as discussed in earlier chapters, the Toronto area bluegrass scene brought together working-class rural migrants, middle-class youth, and American draft-resisters, among others, all of who represented a broad spectrum of occasionally incompatible political values. Certainly, during the latter half of the 1970s, there was a

pronounced sense of scene segregation characterized by distinct meeting spaces, events, and audiences. Nevertheless, mutual appreciation of bluegrass and, to echo Slobin's statements above, the ability to employ music as a way of engaging with various, divergent world views, also provided numerous sites of and opportunities for encounter—both harmonious and strained. Furthermore, during a period of rapid urban development in and around Toronto, debates among bluegrass enthusiasts were imbued with ideas about the changing city and the dynamics of scene fragmentation were shaped by the topographical transformation of what would soon become known as the Greater Toronto Area.

This chapter expands on my examination of a bluegrass art world and reconnects with earlier chapters by highlighting how once isolated clusters evolved into parallel scenes and/or became involved in divergent movements characterized along economic, geographic, and political lines. To be sure, I am not suggesting that these scenes and movements were entirely divorced. To the contrary, they often intersected in ways that required a certain degree of social dexterity whereby participants exercised tolerance, maintained a commitment to accessibility, and strategically—at times physically—distanced themselves from incongruent world views and/or lifestyles. I begin by building on the previous chapter's brief discussion of assemblage theory, a theoretical approach well-suited to examining the dynamic relationships between various components within a discernible whole (e.g., a scene or an art world). Then, I consider the notions of bluegrass as simultaneously "straight" and "countercultural," highlighting two prominent discursive/ideological threads that defined the fault lines between parallel scenes and influenced the trajectories of and encounters between bluegrass enthusiasts. This discussion contextualizes the two related sections that follow, which consider scene fragmentation in terms of trajectories leading into and out of the city. First, focusing on the Country Music Store, a predominant

meeting space for rural and Maritime migrants, I consider how mostly working-class enthusiasts were drawn into the city from the developing suburbs to participate in regular jam sessions that included bluegrass as part of a broader "Maritime country" genre world. Second, I examine mid-century Toronto's rapid development and consider how an emerging urbanist discourse informed scene participants' views of their changing city. In this section I also observe how some participants fled the city, opting for what they viewed as a simpler, more virtuous lifestyle in rural Ontario. This countercultural "back-to-the-land" movement was distinctly anti-urban and in tune with the pre-modern folk romanticism associated with bluegrass and old-time musics. Teasing out and examining these parallel scenes and movements provides a more nuanced understanding of bluegrass-related activity in and around Toronto during the 1970s. Focusing on scene fragmentation, this chapter also points toward an unraveling grassroots network approaching the 1980s.

Assemblage Theory: Making Sense of Scene Fragmentation

Before moving on to a more detailed look at fragmentation in the Toronto area bluegrass scene, it is beneficial to expand upon the notion of an "assemblage" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; DeLanda 2006). At first, the part-to-whole configuration described by Deleuze, and later by DeLanda, does not appear all that distinct from idle structural functionalist approaches which seek to neatly identify the components that contribute to larger, more complex social structures. Within assemblage theory, however, the parts do not merely constitute the totalistic whole and are not represented as a rigid configuration of static institutions, discourses, actors, and conventions. Rather, much like the focus of Slobin's (1992) analysis of sub-, super-, and intercultures, assemblages are dynamic forms in which the whole's "properties emerge from the

interactions between parts" (DeLanda 2006, 5). As the parts—themselves subject to change—interact in various ways, the whole is continuously shaped and reshaped. Assemblage theory, then, enables us to deal with the complexity and fuzziness of terms like scene, art world, and network as they grow, transform, fragment, and become increasingly elaborate fields of interaction.

In his overview and interpretation of Deleuze's work, Manuel DeLanda traces three axes or parameters that ultimately shape an assemblage. First, component parts can take on "material" and/or "expressive" roles. While the former refers to infrastructural elements such as the TABC, Fiddler's Green, or *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, as well as human resources like prominent enthusiasts and organizers, the latter describes more symbolic elements such as sounds, aesthetic markers, and discursive signifiers or threads that serve to establish and put forward particular identity constructs (DeLanda 2006, 12). Second, these components are subject to processes of "territorialization" and "deterritorialization" (DeLanda 2006, 12-13). *Territorialization* refers to processes that stabilize an assemblage, creating a sense of geographic boundedness, group identity, and even homogeneity. This could be, for instance, the establishment of regional bluegrass committees or regular localized jam sessions. Conversely, *deterritorializing* processes (e.g., transregional distribution of newsletters and magazines; mass media, etc.) are destabilizing in how they challenge an assemblage's boundaries and increase or accent "internal heterogeneity" (13). Building on Deleuze's notions of territorialization and deterritorialization, as a final axis, DeLanda introduces corresponding processes of "coding" and "decoding," which apply specifically to expressive components and determine the coherence of an assemblage's identity (15, 19). On the one hand, processes of coding work to "consolidate and rigidify the identity of the assemblage" (19). In the Toronto area scene, this could be the discursive emphasis

on and privileging of "traditional bluegrass" as a defining set of aesthetic and cultural values. At the same time, decoding processes destabilize an assemblage's overall identity, "[allowing…] a certain latitude for more flexible operation" (Ibid.). If "traditional bluegrass" serves as a stabilizing force, then, in this case, progressive bluegrass experimentation, marketing to a broader audience, projecting "citybilly" identities, countercultural radicalism, and even embracing the notion of "Canadian bluegrass," become decoding processes that have the potential to unsettle any sense of a coherent group identity.

DeLanda emphasizes that these components and processes should not be viewed as binary opposites. An assemblage, for instance, is not either territorialized *or* deterritorialized. Rather, these forces recurrently determine the contours and character of the whole. "One and the same assemblage," he argues, "can have components working to stabilize its identity as well as components forcing it to change or even transforming it into a different assemblage" (DeLanda 2006, 12).

This points to another significant piece of assemblage theory. Unlike functionalist parts-to-whole configurations in which the components exist only in as much as they are part of a larger whole, within an assemblage, parts can exist independently and engage in "relations of exteriority" (DeLanda 2006, 10). Component parts can be extracted from one assemblage—perhaps altering it in the moment—and interact with the parts of another assemblage where it might engage in characteristically different interactions and processes. When analyzing parallel scenes and movements, then, we not only witness how individuals and other components flow between different wholes, but also how macro-assemblages come together through the interaction of micro-assemblages (16-17). As an example of this, I concluded the previous chapter by arguing that the grassroots scene and professionalized art world variously intersect as

parts of and to produce a dynamic whole. While this interpretation is certainly helpful in making sense of the different levels of bluegrass-related activity happening in Ontario through the 1970s, it admittedly offers only a superficial and overly simplified account of the range of actors and interactions taking place during this time. With Deleuze-cum-DeLanda's assemblage theory in mind, in the remainder of this chapter I further dissect grassroots and professional activity by focusing on the interactions between other long-standing and emerging subsets shaped by class, generation, and geography.

"Hip" Bluegrass Encounters "Straight" Bluegrass

One of the dominant dividing lines that has surfaced throughout this thesis relates to the notion of bluegrass as, on the one hand, "hip" or "countercultural" and, on the other hand, "straight" or "square." These two broad categories—sites of decoding—are imbued with and can be mapped on to other forms of segmentation related to class, labour, political ideology, age, genre boundaries (e.g., country versus folk), and geography (i.e., urban versus rural). In arguing this, however, I am not suggesting that participants in the Toronto area bluegrass scene were sharply divided along these lines. Indeed, as we have seen, learning bluegrass, building a scene, and developing a professional infrastructure involved collaboration between a diverse group of enthusiasts. Nevertheless, navigating such a heterogeneous social milieu required tact and engendered a certain degree of self-consciousness, especially among educated, middle-class youth, many of whom believed they were engaging with an unpretentious, working-class cultural practice. Doug Benson, who attained a liberal arts degree from McGill University in Montreal, describes the kinds of social negotiations that permeated the scene:

> I think we had to walk a bit of a fine line, the guys with the degrees who were really country music fans. We had to try to avoid acting like intellectual snobs to

> the country guys, who didn't have the same education as us, but liked the same music and were just as smart as us, but just didn't have the degree. So, how did that all play out? I mean, we were trying to be sort of apolitical, sort of non-intellectually exclusive, and trying to be…I guess 'accessible' is maybe the word. But, then, we would come out with some literate reference and people would roll their eyes. We probably gave ourselves away as intellectual snobs more than we thought (personal communication August 6, 2013).

Benson elaborates, offering an example that reflects his own internal sense of identity conflict rooted in tensions around balancing "appropriate" approaches to bluegrass music:

> [We were] the guys who had the degrees and the liberal arts orientation and a certain level of intelligence, but felt like we were 'of the people' in our musical tastes. It's a delicate little area […] it seems to me that there might be a little bit of ambiguity there. Ok, so we're trying to make this [bluegrass] recording appear to be a structural example of classical composition when really it's just a nice fiddle break and a good Dobro lick and a good singer, you know? Where does the emotion stop and the intellect start, and vice versa? Like there's those two areas of involvement, right. The emotional involvement, which was sort of the gut part that was visceral, as opposed to educated and the analytical/intellectual appreciation: historical context and backgrounds…sociology (Ibid.).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Benson felt his university education established a point of disconnect from some of his friends and contemporaries in the Toronto area scene. At the same time, while he might have been characterized as a younger, middle-class urban "folkie," he maintains that he didn't necessarily fit into the "hip" crowd either. Identifying further social categories, he felt distanced from the countercultural "political element," which, in his case, did not necessarily articulate with the "intellectual/pseudo-intellectual element" (Ibid.):

> I was on the establishment side as a school teacher at the time, I suppose you could say. I had gone from adolescence to young adulthood, and I had gone from being a student to being an employee. So, I think maybe I was less political than a guy like [Steve] Pritchard, who is only a year or two younger than me. Eric [Nagler] was a politically motivated guy, by definition. I mean, his being here [as a draft resister] was a statement. I guess, there was the political element and there was the intellectual/pseudo-intellectual element. I think a guy like me, with a classical studies orientation and an intellectual pursuit of a degree and so on, might have had a little bit of a chip on the shoulder when it came to self-identifying as a hillbilly. So, we sort of turned it into a nudge-nudge, wink-wink, chuckle-chuckle joke thing. Like, 'yeah, we're hillbillies' (Ibid.).

While Benson was able to playfully ironize his passion for bluegrass music and culture, his more conspicuous hip or "hippy" counterparts evoke encounters that were more discomfiting, if only on a surface level informed by stereotypes and a media fixation on the tensions between straight and counterculture during this period. Steve Pritchard, for instance, recalls his apprehension when approaching a factory worker for directions to an American bluegrass festival:

> I hitchhiked[145] to a bluegrass festival in upper state New York. I didn't know where it was. I hitchhiked all the way down and I was totally and completely lost. I had long hair and I walked into this factory and these guys come up. They were straight as an arrow. This guy walks up to me and he was really…I was thinking he was going to give me shit: 'Here's this kid coming along who's not doing anything at all, and he's not going to help me. He's not going to give me a damned thing.' I looked at him and I said, 'I'm trying to find a bluegrass festival that's not too far from here.' He looks back at me, I look down, and he's got a bluegrass belt buckle on. And then he starts questioning me. He says, 'Ok, who are you going to see?' And I rhymed off a bunch of people. It was instant. He gave me a ride! It was really neat (Pritchard personal communication May 25, 2013).

Here, Pritchard puts forward a common narrative of bluegrass music as a kind of leveller between disparate groups. This notion appeared earlier in Benson and Pritchard's comments on Fiddler's Green proprietor Tam Kearney's openness to hosting any and all people who were interested in the music (see thesis pg. 133). Likewise, such discourse was often extended to the festival grounds. Neil Rosenberg (2005), for instance, points to a *Newsweek* magazine report on the 1970 Bean Blossom Bluegrass Festival, which depicts an environment of mutual appreciation and respect among attendees (287). He quotes the article:

> There was a good fellowship among leather-faced men in western garb, teen-age groupies posturing around musicians, long-haired hippies with their no-bra chicks and

[145] Linda Mahood (2014) notes that for many young people in the 1970s hitchhiking was a highly symbolic, romanticized subcultural act that was made possible by the increasing presence of automobiles and auto-infrastructure in North America. While parents and governments were concerned with the growing "transient youth subculture" (207), many young people viewed "authentic" hitchhiking experiences and encounters as analogous to a "hallucinogenic drug trip" or a "happening" (207-208).

> red-neck farmers with their wives sprawled in lawn chairs in print dresses ('Pickin' and Singin" in Rosenberg 2005, 287).

This report and others like it in national and local press, Rosenberg states, ignored any indications of even superficial cultural conflict and instead "portrayed bluegrass festivals as benign, democratic, pleasant experiences" (287).

To be sure, bluegrass festivals were, if not exactly harmonious, characteristically "pleasant" events. In order to make sense of this presumably "neutral ground" for cross-cultural encounters, Rosenberg draws on the work of folklorist Roger Abrahams, highlighting how "neighbourly names" such as "redneck" or "hippy" become one of the primary discursive tools for both establishing and transcending lines of social/cultural distinction (Abrahams in Rosenberg 2005, 275). Employed strategically, such names embody undeniable social tensions while facilitating a certain measure of "cultural pluralism" (Ibid.). In this respect then, Rosenberg notes that bluegrass festivals, especially as they attracted larger, more diverse audiences, became sites of "[combined] hostility and rapprochement" (285).

The rapid growth of festival audiences, however, also produced very real crowd control issues underpinned by the potential provocation of cultural differences (287). In the Ontario festival circuit, this mostly manifested in concerns with the presence of noisy and disruptive bikers, partiers, and "yahoos" (Crawford 1977b, 4). As discussed in the previous chapter, this unsavoury element, distinguished from "true bluegrass fans," were viewed as a particular nuisance at the extremely popular Bluegrass Canada festivals and occupied much of the discussion at the First Canadian Bluegrass Conference. Beyond more generalized complaints about rowdy behaviour, excessive drinking, and disruptiveness, however, lay deeper, anxiety-ridden cultural tensions. For some, the early-hour clamour of bikers and partiers disturbed weekend family getaways. For others, however, their presence was utterly menacing. Adrian

Bevis, recalling his long-haired hippy image as a youth, describes one encounter at the Shelburne Fiddle Convention:[146]

> It was in the early seventies, and they had a washroom in a building. So, I walked in and as I was leaving there were these two thugs who were standing, just putting in time, and they made some derogatory comments about my appearance. It was anti-hippy, you know? This was in the period where long hair was not accepted, and it was a little scary because they were real thugs. And that was in Ontario (personal communication June 4, 2013).

Perhaps roused by media images of violent protests or depictions of cross-cultural altercations in films like *Easy Rider* (Hopper 1969), Bevis viewed similar encounters in the United States as even more perilous:

> I remember when we went to Bean Blossom in the early '70s and you'd walk around and it was an entirely different vibe because the American vibe is totally different. Like it is a gun culture. And even though the festival was free of that sort of thing, this was a totally different culture. And it scared the hell out of me sometimes. You'd walk by a group of really rough looking characters and the breeze would bring the whiskey fumes, and you'd wonder, 'what the hell are they doing there? They're not playing. They just look like thugs' (personal communication June 4, 2013).

While "thugs" and "bikers," like long-haired "hippies," can be considered "countercultural" in their own right, Bevis roots the kinds of conflicts described above in the cultural divisions between urban and rural, as well as folk and country audiences. He continues:

> I have to say that when you're in a solid rural country setting, as opposed to a folk setting, and I don't want to sound alarmist, but there's an undercurrent of potential violence that's all pervasive. Because there isn't the intellectual barrier when you get a folk audience, which may be filled with educated people with university education (Ibid.).

While the popularity of festivals flourished during this period as they were promoted and often received positive reviews in the bluegrass press, Bevis and Pritchard's anecdotes provide telling details about the kinds of lived experiences and anxieties that contextualize discussions

[146] The Shelburne Fiddle Convention is not exclusively devoted to bluegrass music, but incorporates a range of fiddle styles. During the 1970s it was a popular festival among bluegrass enthusiasts and was reported on in the *TABC News*.

about rowdy, disruptive behaviour in the *TABC News*, *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, and at the First Canadian Bluegrass Conference. And, while cross-cultural encounters were, for the most part, positive and respectful, given the manifold impressions of cultural distinction within the heterogeneous scene, it's certainly not surprising that adjacent groups began to form among individuals with presumably shared or more reconcilable values, perspectives, and lifestyles. In the following sections I take a closer look at some of the more prominent sub-groupings within the broader bluegrass scene, observing processes of territorialization and deterritorialization as participants' move into and away from Toronto. Examining these divergent trajectories illuminates how the scene was shaped by and within a developing city, while at the same time providing some historical continuity by linking parallel scenes to the migratory patterns discussed in Chapter two.

The Country Music Store and a Rural Migrant Scene

In the mid-twentieth century, people from the Atlantic provinces, as well as rural Ontario and Quebec, were drawn to the economic opportunities in Toronto and the developing area. As discussed earlier, a certain segment of this population congregated in community halls to play and listen to country music while socializing with their rural migrant peers (Marquis 1988, 292; Rosenberg 1986, 152). Through the 1950s and 1960s, country music clubs became a hub of activity, where a number of local bands formed and country artists from eastern Canada found a sympathetic audience. These clubs also served as sites of encounter between the small numbers of bluegrass-oriented country music enthusiasts, like the members of the York County Boys.

The arrival of working- and middle-class rural migrants in Toronto continued to have an impact on the city's demographic landscape through the 1960s and 1970s and, as interest in

bluegrass music was growing in the Toronto area, a parallel country-bluegrass-"Maritime" music scene began to form made up of rural and largely eastern Canadian migrants. Many participants in this scene could be found making music at community halls and attending country music shows in small clubs on Toronto's periphery and surrounding suburbs. Label owner Jack Boswell, who worked with well known artists in this scene like Smiley Bates and Eddie Poirier, speaks to the sense of a parallel scene by distinguishing what he calls a "club circuit"—described above—from the more downtown-oriented "bar circuit," which revolved around places like the Horseshoe Tavern, the Silver Dollar Room, and Egerton's Pub (personal communication July 5, 2013). He highlights how the working-class concerns of performers and audience members shaped the "club circuit," noting that the "dive hotel bar" venues were located near the developing residential areas throughout metropolitan Toronto, where many were settling during this time. The circuit did not extend too far beyond the greater region since many participants had day job commitments.

One of the major gathering sites for participants in this scene was a record shop called the Country Music Store. The business was established in late 1976 by Ossie Branscombe (from Moncton, New Brunswick), Charlie Larade (from Cheticamp, Nova Scotia), and Joe King (also from Cheticamp, Nova Scotia).[147] The three Maritime Canadian migrants first met at the monthly Fiddler's Green bluegrass jam session where they began to consider the possibility of opening a record store that specialized in country music, including Canadian artists, and especially those from the Atlantic provinces. Pooling their resources, the partners set up shop on Danforth Avenue in Toronto's east end, an area removed from the hip culture and chic sophistication

[147] In addition to a feature in the *TABC News*, details about the Country Music Store were acquired from an interview with Ossie Branscombe, who was the shop's proprietor for twenty-seven years until its closure in 2003. Charlie Larade and Joe King were deceased prior to this research.

associated with the city's central-west neighbourhoods and shopping districts.[148] This location, situated conveniently near Branscombe and King's working-class neighbourhoods, as well as the Woodbine subway station, was accessible by transit for those living in the city. Perhaps more importantly, however, people living in metropolitan Toronto and the surrounding areas could drive to the store relatively easily via the Don Valley Parkway, which exits on to Danforth Avenue and was part of Southern Ontario's rapidly developing highway system. Knowing that a lot of their fellow eastern Canadian migrants had settled in the "outskirts of Toronto," the partners invested heavily in advertising on local country music radio stations (Branscombe, personal communication June 1, 2013). This marketing strategy helped attract regular customers from nearby cities like Mississauga, Scarborough, Brampton, Oshawa, Hamilton, as well as the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve, who, over time, became part of a scene that was beginning to form around the Country Music Store (Ibid.).

Many customers were drawn to the Country Music Store's merchandise, which, unlike some of the bigger record stores, included albums by hometown country stars from across Canada. It was the weekly Saturday afternoon jam sessions, however, that made the shop a social hub. Joe King, who Branscombe describes as the "ideas guy,"[149] was inspired to organize the in-store jam sessions after attending a similar gathering at the Ernest Tubb Record Shop in Nashville, Tennessee (Branscombe, personal communication June 1, 2013). King, who was an active performer on the local country circuit, hosted the sessions, which quickly began to draw his

[148] Distinction and competition between east and west Toronto has long been a subject of local debate, with the former viewed as a more relaxed, slower-paced area of the city and the latter as a bustling, hip region. Of course, these distinctions are often simplified, excluding the far metropolitan reaches of the city. What's more, since these debates largely deal with an imagined cartography, there is no precise boundary between east and west Toronto, though Yonge Street or the Don Valley Parkway are most commonly cited as the dividing line.

[149] Indeed, according to Branscombe, the Country Music Store itself was King's idea.

friends, fans, and others from his musical network, including Toronto area bluegrass players, who Branscombe recalls were usually the "best musicians" in attendance (Ibid.).

While the Country Music Store jam was not specifically bluegrass-oriented in the same way as sessions at Fiddler's Green or Egerton's, the shop and its owners, especially Branscombe and King, were plugged-in to local bluegrass activity. King had participated in the TABC's first Sunday sessions since its very early days and, in the mid-1970s, was a member of a band called York County Bluegrass. Meanwhile, Branscombe, who wasn't a musician, joined the TABC executive in 1976, where he handled the Committee's mailing list and other records. It's not surprising, then, that the *TABC News* supported the Country Music Store. Upon opening for business, a flyer was included in the newsletter, inviting readers to the Saturday jam sessions to "meet the top Canadian Stars in person on our stage" (*TABC News* Feb. 1977).[150]

The following year, Adrian Bevis wrote a *TABC News* feature on the Country Music Store in which he lauded the shop's independent approach to record retail. For him, this kind of store, unlike more well known stores in Toronto, was better equipped to meet the needs of bluegrass fans because the owners were not as concerned with profit margins or commercial viability. What's more, he was impressed by Branscombe, Larade, and King's grassroots connection and commitment to Canadian artists. "Canadian country performers," Bevis states, "bring their records to the store, thus making available material which otherwise would be unobtainable in the 'big' stores" (1978, 2). He continues, recalling an encounter with Toronto's most famous record retailer, Sam Sniderman:

> I got a grin from Sam (the Record Man) himself one day in his store, when I asked him if he was going to stock Canadian Country singles. 'Only if they were million sellers,' smiled Sam. […] I'll take the old fashioned Country Music Store smile; thank you! (Ibid.).

[150] The Country Music Store incorporated an open stage into their jam format, where willing artists and bands could perform for the Saturday afternoon crowd.

Here, Bevis' fondness for the Country Music Store, and in particular its "old fashioned" appeal, align with some of the conventional narratives around "Martimer" culture discussed in Chapter two. For him, the owners—"three friendly Maritimers"—represented a kind of working-class, unpretentious authenticity that offered a counterpoint to the increasingly commercial 1970s record industry (Ibid.). Events like the jam session, where patrons gathered for a Saturday afternoon—not necessarily purchasing albums—only added to the sense of community that set the Country Music Store apart from larger, and in Bevis' words, more "mainstream" retailers like Sam the Record Man and A&A Records (Ibid.).

The jam session, by most accounts, was also in some ways less musically demanding than bluegrass sessions at Fiddler's Green or Egerton's Pub. To be sure, these long-standing jams still maintained a welcoming atmosphere and were open to pickers of varying skill levels. By the late 1970s, however, with several professional acts emerging from and continuing to attend these sessions, the level of performance was certainly heightened. The Country Music Store jam, on the other hand, featured semiprofessional and amateur performers—some with cult status in the Canadian country and Maritime music scene—appearing alongside casual, novice, or intermediate players. What's more, the music was not limited to bluegrass. Rather, traditional country and western, as well as Maritime country music featured prominently at the session. Indeed, only a minority of the participants were involved in the city's bluegrass scene. TABC members Bruce Dowd and Lionel Pelletier were Country Music Store regulars, with Pelletier, who identifies more as a traditional country singer, bringing along some of his do-it-yourself cassettes (and later CDs) to sell or give away to friends.[151] Adrian Bevis and Chuck Crawford

[151] The home recordings, packaged in hand-drawn and labeled sleeves, were also stocked on the Country Music Store's shelves. As a testament to Pelletier's cult popularity in this parallel scene, Branscombe estimates that he sold about 100 of his albums (personal communication June 1, 2013). Joe King also sold similar do-it-yourself cassette albums at the store.

also attended the jam occasionally, though the latter notes, "Generally, when I went, there was not any of the bluegrass people that I was playing with going out there" (personal communication, May 13, 2013). The Country Music Store jam, then, occupied a complex position within the local bluegrass scene. "That continuity of the Saturday afternoons at the Country Music Store was critical," Doug Benson explains, "but it wasn't a bluegrass thing. Bluegrass was part of it, but it wasn't 'a *bluegrass* [thing]'" (personal communication June 4, 2013).

Perhaps the most well-known bluegrass act associated with the Country Music Store scene were the Bailey Brothers, not to be confused with the Tennessee duo of the 1940s and 1950s. Ossie Branscombe met the band's core unit, brothers Ed (mandolin), Charlie (guitar), and Ron (guitar), along with a group of fellow Nova Scotia migrants, at the Egerton's Pub jam session in 1977. "I went over and introduced myself," Branscombe recalls. "[I] told them I was from New Brunswick and mentioned the [Country Music Store]. After that all the guys started coming out […] every week" (personal communication Dec. 1, 2015).

The Bailey brothers moved to Toronto in the late 1960s from LeQuille, a small, rural Nova Scotian community. Like many other rural Canadians, they were drawn to Toronto's economic opportunities. As Ed Bailey remarks in a 1987 interview with Neil Rosenberg, his reasons for moving to Ontario were straightforward: "Work and money."[152] Elaborating, he relates a common experience for many young Atlantic Canadians during this period:

> You really had to scramble for work [back home] and if you got a steady job you were lucky if you'd get a job for a year round. Most of the times you just got a job just long enough to collect [food] stamps and that was it. […] So you had to work like crazy to try to get enough stamps together to put you through the winter. And I got to work in a

[152] All three Bailey brothers were deceased prior to this research. Apart from comments and recollections from their friends in the scene, the only significant source of information about the group comes from a public interview that Neil Rosenberg conducted with Ed Bailey in 1987. Rosenberg provided his transcript of the interview for this research.

> lumber mill, which was steady and I got tired of it and I wanted to head for the big city lights […]. You know, where the money was better. So I packed up […] in my old car and I headed for the city. […] I left by myself (Bailey in Rosenberg 1987).

While Ed had some experience singing country music and gospel with his family and at house parties in his community, he only began learning bluegrass after arriving in Toronto. Interestingly, unlike many other Toronto area enthusiasts whose interest in bluegrass was sparked by American artists and recordings, Ed's gateway into the genre was a record by Tommy Wade and the Country Rebels, a group that gained some popularity in local country music clubs. From this introduction, Ed discovered the music of the Osborne Brothers, Flatt and Scruggs, and Bill Monroe. What's more, he began to spend weekends picking and singing along to his bluegrass records on a cheap Framus mandolin that, he states, "looked like an old frying pan" (Ibid.). At first, he experimented with less technically demanding open tunings, but over time found this limiting, especially during jam sessions. His early learning experiences echo some of the experimental and informal techniques discussed in Chapter three:

> So I used to play that way and then […] I got tired of it I would get around and jam and […] as long as we stayed into a G or an A or a D everything was fine. […S]o then one night we got out into a jam session at the house and there was a whole bunch of musicians and they got playing and […] someone said […] 'let's go into a B flat,' you know and oh God I can't get into it, […] so I'm digging around[.] I had this old capo […] I used to throw on every now and then and I couldn't find it[.] I had lost it and so I had to sit there[.] [E]very time they did something in B or a B flat I was out of the picture and I just got mad and I said ['']oh the heck with this I'm going to learn [in standard tuning.''] [S]o I went home and I watched, I seen somebody else, I seen them playing and I watched 'em very closely, how their fingers were going, where they were going, and I said to my brother[, '']damn it […] I'm going to learn to play that thing the other way. […] I went home and I tuned it up and I give myself about two weeks and somebody says[, '']hey you know, gee whiz you're coming a long way[.''] [B]ut I had an idea where I was going so it made it a little easier on me, so I went back to the original way [i.e., standard tuning] and I stayed that way and I still got a long ways to go (Bailey in Rosenberg 1987).

In these comments, Ed is forthright about his technical limitations on the mandolin. Still, partnering with his brothers on guitar and Country Music Store regulars like Alan Gayda (banjo),

Dave Harbin (fiddle), and Sandy Akeman (Dobro), the Bailey Brothers became a revered semiprofessional bluegrass band in Toronto. Speaking to their appeal, Branscombe recalls that some of the more advanced players in the city could "out pick [the Bailey Brothers] like crazy. But, it was the singing, the harmonies, and the feel of the music" (personal communication June 1, 2013). For Branscombe, the Bailey's "feel," unlike the "pop-folky" sound of many late 1970s acts, was rooted in the traditional country and bluegrass vocal aesthetic (Ibid.). "The Baileys," Branscombe admires, "are pure" (Ibid.).

Over time, the Bailey Brothers evolved into what Ed tentatively called a "full-time band" (Bailey in Rosenberg 1987). To be sure, this is not to suggest that they were a professional band in the same sense as the Dixie Flyers or Whiskey Jack. Nor did they receive the kind of recognition or exposure as the comparable semiprofessional band Cross Country Grass. However, while the Baileys never recorded in a studio and never toured—mostly playing evenings and weekends during the summer months—they garnered a dedicated following among local country music fans and fellow rural migrants. Their home-recorded tapes and, later CDs, circulated among peers in the bluegrass and country music/Maritime scene. They also appeared at clubs like the Tranzac and at the Tottenham Bluegrass Festival, held just north of Toronto. For the most part, however, the Bailey Brothers were a highly regarded fixture in the Country Music Store scene, where they frequently appeared at the Saturday jams and performed on the shop's small stage. Reflecting the extent to which the brothers were immersed in this scene, at points throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Ron and Charlie Bailey were both employed by Branscombe to help run the store and operate record booths around Ontario during the summer festival season.

Rural migrants, like the Baileys, of course, were not the only Country Music Store regulars. But, for many people who came to Toronto from the Atlantic provinces, as well as rural Ontario,

this scene encompassed more than music-making and listening opportunities. It also provided social and, sometimes, economic opportunities to network within a supportive diasporic community that maintained concrete connections and imagined affinities to "back home." As Neil Rosenberg notes in his interview with Ed Bailey:

> It seems like every musician in the Maritimes knows Ossie […] and every musician from down east [living in Toronto] knows the [Country Music Store]. So that the store is a kind of conduit, a sort of cultural watering place, if you will, for people interested in this kind of music (1987).

In 1987, Branscombe's business partner, Charlie Larade, retired from the Country Music Store and moved back to Cheticamp, Nova Scotia.[153] In some ways, his departure strengthened ties between the Toronto record shop and Canada's east coast music scene. Soon after returning home, Larade established his own sister shop called Charlie's Country Music Store and the two business owners coordinated to provide each other with the latest releases available in each region. Branscombe recalls how he would supply Larade with Canadian and American bluegrass albums, which were much sought after in the vibrant Maritime bluegrass scene. Meanwhile, Larade sent records by emerging Cape Breton and French Canadian artists to Branscombe. Through the 1990s, this kind of exchange was particularly advantageous in marketing the Toronto store. During this time, a niche market was developing for east coast and Celtic-oriented artists while, at the same time, a burgeoning "new" country industry was charting domestically and abroad (Hennessy 2008, 80-93). Deciding to avoid "new" country all together, since "every store was carrying it," the steady flow of music from Charlie Larade helped to further distinguish the Country Music Store from other Toronto record retailers (Branscombe, personal communication June 1, 2013). Instead, Branscombe focused exclusively on traditional country and folk music, which, among other folk genres, included a wealth of east coast music and

[153] Joe King left the business in its very early years, but continued to participate in the Saturday jam sessions.

bluegrass (Ibid.). Branscombe's ability to both corner a market and help cultivate a local community served his business well. The Country Music Store was in operation for twenty-seven years, continually drawing its Saturday afternoon crowd into the city's east end, until Branscombe retired and closed the shop in 2003.

Urban Development, New Urbanism, and the "Back-to-the-Land" Movement

The rapid development of Southern Ontario's highway system enabled bluegrass enthusiasts living outside of Toronto's core to attend concerts, workshops, and jams in the city. For many residing within Toronto, however, this kind of development, along with other urban renewal projects were viewed as threats to their neighbourhoods, quality of life, and the character of their city. As former Toronto mayor and community activist John Sewell (1993) outlines, the city's anti-urban development plan during the mid-twentieth century sought to demolish existing structures—including buildings that would become heritage sites—and build anew in ways that undermined the existing street layout and had "little relationship to the actual environment" (110).[154] While Toronto contained an array of vibrant, mature neighbourhoods, many did not view the city's core as a residential area, but rather, an economic driver for the developing suburbs and metropolitan region. From the 1950s through to the 1970s, then, city planners, councilors, and developers proposed and enacted plans aimed at transforming Toronto into a commuter city.

The cornerstone of these development plans was a network of expressways surrounding and traversing Toronto. The Gardiner Expressway (completed in 1966) spread west-east along the city's southern border and intersected with the Don Valley Parkway (DVP, also completed in

[154] Examples of this kind of development in Toronto include the Regent Park public housing project, the Don Mills suburb, and the Mackenzie Building in the city's downtown core.

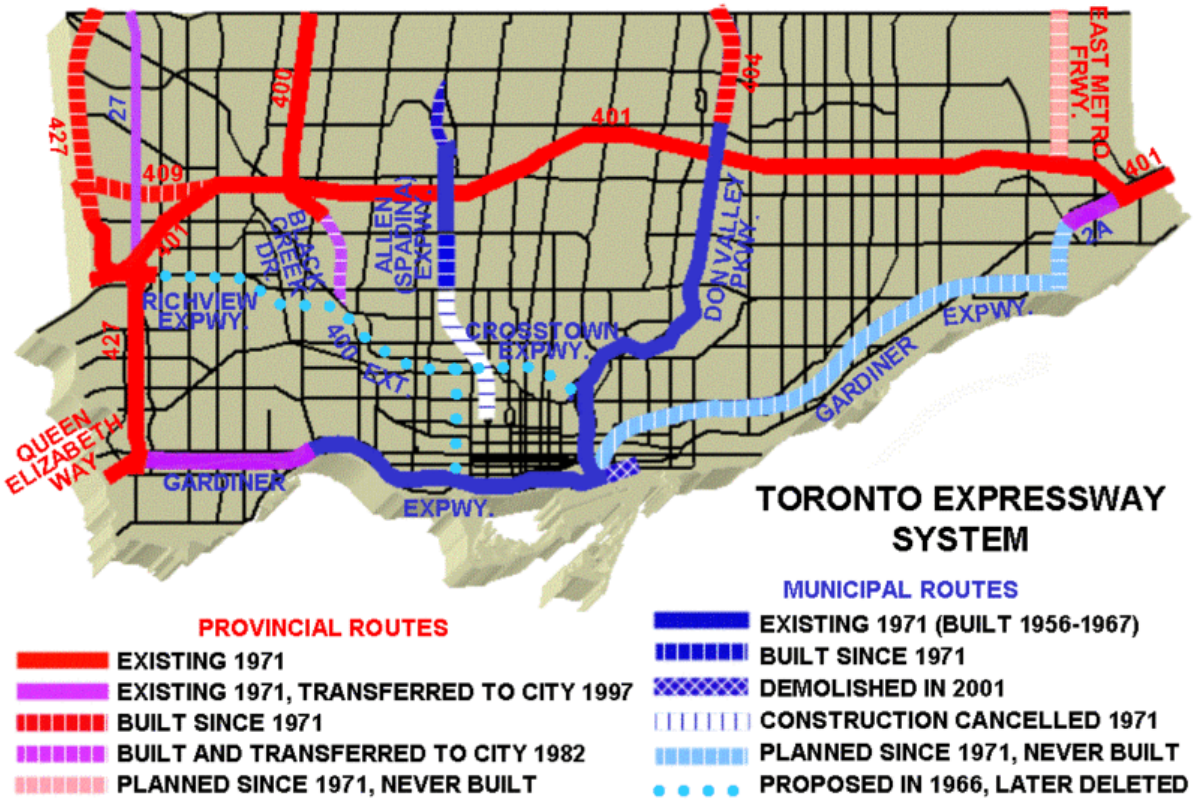
1966).[155] These new expressways supplemented a pre-existing and/or developing network of regional/provincial highways like the Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW), 401, 427, and 400, connecting Toronto to its metropolitan area, as well as towns and cities throughout much of the province.[156]

For the most part, both the Gardiner and the DVP were welcome projects aimed at alleviating traffic congestion at the city's access points. Indeed, the expressway plans were responding to the growing presence of automobiles in the daily lives of many urban/suburban North Americans. What's more, their impact on the city's neighbourhoods and lived spaces were relatively minimal. The Gardiner paralleled a rail bed that followed the edge of Lake Ontario, while the DVP traced the Don River Valley, which bisected the city (Sewell 1993, 177). Both of these projects, however, were just the beginning of a larger network that would see expressways cutting across and demolishing major residential and commercial areas in the city (see Figure 7.1). These expansion plans were met by vigorous opposition from community groups, sparking a tension between urban and suburban residents that has shaped the Toronto area in the decades following. While the former were concerned with their homes, public spaces, and quality of life, favouring instead the development of public transit, the latter, according to Sewell, "had difficulty understanding why anyone would want to save older neighbourhoods" (178). "Suburbanites," he continues, "thought it entirely reasonable that the existing city be demolished to make way for the new city, including building roadways necessary to join the downtown office towers where people worked to the suburban houses where they lived" (Ibid.). These tensions were also shaped by the shifting political structure in Toronto and its surrounding area. Toronto City Council represented the inner city constituencies and its elected members were

[155] Completion dates represent when construction finished. Parts of the expressways, however, were open to commuters as early as 1955 (Gardiner) and 1961 (DVP).

[156] The 401 spans the entirety of the province's southern border.

often at odds with proposals that would demolish downtown residential areas. Meanwhile, the new Metro Council, formed in 1953, represented the developing metropolitan area and suburbs and were strong advocates for crosstown expressways and urban renewal projects geared toward modernizing Toronto's business spaces.[157]



(Figure 7.1 - Map depicting built, planned, cancelled, and demolished expressway projects in the city of Toronto. Source: James Alcock, 2006, public domain.)

Events surrounding the controversial Spadina Expressway provide the most notable example of the kinds of tensions that emerged in relation to Toronto's development during this period. The proposed expressway would cut directly through the downtown core via Spadina Road, connecting with the 401 highway in the north. This plan, Sewell (1993) argues, "promised the

[157] A more in-depth discussion of these political dynamics can be found in John Sewell's *The Shape of the City: Toronto Struggles with Modern Planning* (1993) and *The Shape of the Suburbs: Understanding Toronto's Sprawl* (2009).

demolition of close to one thousand houses, and total disruption of the community patterns in the west central part of the city" (178). Because of this, unlike the Gardiner and DVP, the Spadina Expressway drew fervent opposition from community groups, activists, and some downtown city councillors.

The most vocal opponent to the Spadina Expressway plan was a grassroots coalition called the Stop Spadina Save Our City Coordinating Committee (SSSOCCC). Comprised of academics like Alan Powell, community activists like Jane Jacobs, wealthy downtown residents and business people, and a larger body of student activists, SSSOCCC represented a relatively diverse cross-section of Toronto's electorate (Sewell 1993, 178-179). Consequently, and with relentless organized social action, the coalition was able to force their concerns into the political and public spotlight, and the Spadina Expressway, along with a handful of other proposed expressways, became key electoral issues in the late 1960s (179). "The line seemed to run between supporters of the old city and the new," Sewell recalls. "Where local politicians stood on the Spadina Expressway was the defining issue of the day. Two opposing visions of the city had rarely been presented in such a powerful, volatile, and bitter way" (Ibid.).

Through all of this, SSSOCCC members were ubiquitous on the streets and in council meetings; their critiques well investigated, substantiated, and representing contemporary currents in urban studies (Ibid.). By the early 1970s they had won over much of the Toronto City Council and, while the Metro Council were still rallying hard to complete the expressway, it was ultimately scrapped in 1971 when the Ontario provincial government, a major stakeholder in the project, pulled its funding. Announcing the decision, premier William Davis famously declared, "If we are building a transportation system to serve the automobile, the Spadina Expressway would be a good place to start. But if we are building a transportation system to serve people, the

Spadina Expressway is a good place to stop" (Davis in Sewell 1993, 179-180). The project was indeed stopped mid-construction, leaving only a small, awkward stretch of highway—renamed Allen Road—that intersects marginally north and south of the 401. The decision to abandon the Spadina Expressway represented something of a sea change in the municipal government's approach to development and led to a larger victory for SSSOCCC and its allies. As Figure 7.1 shows, following the 1971 decision, a number of other proposed expressways, some, like the Crosstown Expressway, that would have an even more devastating impact on the city's lived and public spaces, were cancelled.

Opposition to the Spadina Expressway represented one prominent facet of a larger new urbanist movement emerging in Toronto during this time. Intersecting with SSSOCCC's focus on the expressway network, community activist groups like "Friends of the Old City Hall" and "Time and Place" worked to protect and preserve the city's historical buildings from demolition under the guise of progress (Sewell 1993, 140; Kilbourn 1993, 121). Meanwhile neighbourhood associations were raising concerns about how urban renewal projects, and especially the development of apartment towers, would impact mature, active residential areas (Sewell 1993, 181). All of this grassroots social action ran counter to the principles of Modern City Planning that informed development in mid-century Toronto and, as discussed in Chapter two, presented cities as substandard living spaces. Instead, many Toronto residents were championing the history and sense of community in their downtown neighbourhoods. In a letter to the *Globe and Mail*, for instance, one reader comments on the fond personal associations of a life spent in her vibrant, culturally diverse, and "beautiful" Toronto neighbourhood. "It makes my blood boil," she remarks, "every time I pick up a paper to see that somebody thinks she'll just waltz in here with her bulldozer and blow my whole little system to smithereens" (Richardson [1960] in

Sewell 1993, 151). She concludes, pleading with the "'experts'" behind the city's urban renewal plans, "Just please, please don't disturb my warm and darling 'slum'" (154). Over the course of the 1960s, as mostly educated, middle-class residents formed neighbourhood advocacy associations and encountered a new urbanist discourse informed by prominent activists like Jane Jacobs,[158] many Torontonians were pulled into stronger, more appreciative relationships with their urban environment.

It would be a mistake to overstate the explicit impacts of urban renewal projects or the prevalence of new urbanist discourse in the Toronto area bluegrass scene. Many participants, especially those living outside of the urban core and/or ensconced in a working-class/blue-collar lifestyle, were not necessarily interested in the minutiae of development proposals, emerging urban planning theory, or grassroots collective action. There is, however, some evidence that young, educated middle-class bluegrass enthusiasts living in Toronto were among those invested in the discourses, dialogues, and political disputes shaping their city. TABC members Chuck and Pleasance Crawford, for instance, were drawn to the community-oriented, pedestrian-friendly atmosphere found in urban neighbourhoods. They were both familiar with Jane Jacob's new urbanist companion, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and recall participating in SSSOCCC meetings, when they first arrived in the city in 1970 (Chuck Crawford, personal communication May 13, 2013).[159] When they purchased 39 Macpherson, the home that would become the TABC's administrative headquarters, access to public transit, as opposed to expressways, was a priority. Located in the now affluent Summerhill neighbourhood, and just

[158] Jane Jacobs was an American-born activist. Her widely-acclaimed book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) had tremendous influence in the field of urban studies and on an emerging new urbanist discourse. Jacobs and her family migrated to Toronto in 1968 in opposition to the Vietnam war, where she became a prominent opponent of the Spadina Expressway. She remained in Toronto and was a sustained voice in Canadian urban politics until her death in 2006.

[159] Chuck Crawford notes, however, that "we weren't really involved in [the SSSOCCC] and [the Expressway] got stopped shortly after we got [to Toronto]" (Ibid.).

north of Yorkville's hip countercultural enclave, Chuck recalls the general dissuasion he encountered towards raising a family in the city and the murmuring about the decline of his neighbourhood (Ibid.). Indeed, the Crawfords were moving into the city just as middle-class, white families were purchasing newly constructed homes in the developing suburbs. For them, living in the city, in close proximity to neighbours and friends, near public spaces like Ramsden Park and Fiddler's Green Folk Club, provided community and family-oriented social opportunities such as those organized by the TABC.[160]

TABC News contributor Jack Guest Jr. was likewise drawn to the fortuitous social/musical encounters that accompany everyday urban life. In a feature on "street singing," which he notes is "prevalent […] in many great cities of the world," he profiles several Toronto-based musicians, who charmingly disrupt the regular hastened flow of pedestrian traffic (1978, 6). For the passersby who "clap," "jig," "hop about" or simply "pause […] their journeys," street singers, many of whom participate in local bluegrass activities, are a welcome contribution to the urban soundscape (5-6). "If you happen to come across a couple of wandering minstrels […]," Guest asks readers, "stop a moment, give them a smile, request your favourite song and don't forget the open instrument case" (6).

While Guest's piece, for the most part, celebrates what he views as a delightful urban phenomenon, he also provides a more complex picture of contested public space, describing how street singers have to deal with police and security guards pushing them along. The following year, in an impassioned letter to *TABC News* readers, Guest opposes the Toronto Transit Commission's (TTC) decision to audition and authorize street singers on their properties. Interestingly, his challenge is largely rooted in disparate cultural values:

[160] Crawford recalls going with his family to Fiddler's Green Folk Club every Sunday via subway.

> [T]he TTC will allow some of the musicians to perform, but first they have to be auditioned by the same people who equate the singing of blues and folk music with the playing of canned pre-recorded Christmas carols in the cars where the patrons have no choice but to listen. Personally, there is nothing I detest more than the playing of those humdrum mediocre arrangements, over and over again (Guest 1979c, 4).

Guest complicates what initially comes across as conventional folk revivalist disparagement of commercial music by introducing a populist angle to his critique that creates a distance from the elitist tone of his comments:

> It is interesting that the TTC will spend thousands and thousands of dollars—dollars paid by little people like you and I—in the form of taxes, to purchase and hang weird looking sculptures and paintings that are only understood by a few, but when it comes to something real and genuine that is understood and enjoyed by the majority of subway patrons, all of the transit officials sit in their ivory towers and smugly try to strangle the little bit of life and beauty there is in our subways (Ibid.).

What is perhaps most telling about Guest's comments is the extent to which they demonstrate a spirited civic engagement. Whereas in earlier decades there seemed to be a sense that the idea of Toronto was an unfortunate reality that bluegrass enthusiasts resigned to, by the 1970s many politically engaged citizens were attempting to shape their city at a grassroots level. Even TABC co-founder Adrian Bevis, who once viewed Toronto as a square cultural "desert," observed the changing attitudes (personal communication May 25, 2013). He recalls Toronto's shifting reputation during an era when American cities were experiencing a veritable decay related to suburban white flight:

> [In the 1960s, Toronto] was looked upon as being straight-laced and conservative and stodgy and business-oriented. Gradually that changed because the counterculture upset the apple cart and there started to be this huge movement like the banning of the Spadina Expressway…the liquor laws were relaxed…the whole image of Toronto…Toronto gradually became known as one of the examples of a big city that would escape the American decay (Ibid).

While, on the one hand, individuals like the Crawfords, Guest, and Bevis responded to Toronto's rapid development by becoming more invested in their urban environment, other

counterculturally active Torontonians decided to withdraw from the presumed values associated with urban life by leaving the city to settle in rural areas throughout Ontario and the rest of Canada. Indeed, just as a young rural population were moving to cities for work, young urban "back-to-the-landers" were "dropping out" of the perceived artificiality and increasing cost of city life (Weaver 2010, 14). Toronto Folklore Centre proprietors Eric Nagler and Martha Beers, for instance, moved north to Killaloe, Ontario. And, as noted previously, the Toronto band the Humber River Valley Boys all moved to the small town of Lindsay, Ontario as a way of saving money upon going professional in 1975. For all intents and purposes, back-to-the-land settlers emerged from 1960s hippy culture, retaining, in many cases, the long-haired, free-spirit appearance and countercultural values while striving for a deeper, more simplified relationship with the earth, rooted in hard physical labour, knowledge of the surrounding natural world, and self-sufficiency (3). As Nagler recalls about his experience of going back-to-the land, "I loved going to Killaloe and living in the middle of the woods and learning the name of every tree on the hundred acres that we owned. It was real powerful for me" (personal communication July 24, 2013).

The published journals of Nathaniel Cowl, who moved from Toronto to Bancroft, Ontario (about 250 kilometres north-east of the city) in 1973 offers a telling glimpse into some of the prevailing ideas about cities and urban living among this segment of the counterculture. Initially drawn to the economic accessibility of living in the country, upon arriving in Bancroft, Cowl observes the region's untouched vastness and calculates: "[I] find that there are 40 acres of land for every person in Ontario. Everyone can have his own country property and, for a few hundred dollars, build a cabin and have no rent to pay for life" (1994 [1973], 5). Influenced by the naturalist writings of Henry David Thoreau, he elaborates on the virtues of such a dramatic shift,

stating "I have given up luxuries. I do what I have to do to survive, but not much more. I get pleasure from my mind and body and from the forest around me" (Ibid.). For Cowl, letting go of luxuries also enabled him to detach from what he views as the vacuous artificiality of cities, which he compares to "laboratory boxes in which people are trained to run mazes and press levers for rewards" (1994 [1974], 7). What's more, he views living off of the land and providing for himself as an utter rejection of modern cities. "By building my own house," he declares, "I destroy city apartment blocks. They crumble in my bare hands!" (1994 [1974], 12).

Despite Cowl's impassioned anti-urbanism, many back-to-the-landers, like young rural migrants, relied on Toronto's economic opportunities and maintained a connection to the city. Throughout his near decade living in Bancroft, Cowl periodically took jobs in Toronto when he ran out of money. By 1981 he took a permanent position assisting a University of Toronto botanist, though he remained uncertain about the possibility of "getting caught up in the machine, of becoming an 'organization man'" (1994 [1981], 109). In addition to his own excursions into the city, Cowl also documents visits from his friends in Toronto, who would drive north to his Bancroft settlement for weekend getaways. The continuous flow of traffic between Toronto and rural Ontario challenges rigid dissociations between urban and rural regions, as well as unidirectional migration patterns. Indeed, despite a conceptual distance, during the 1970s, the city and the country were tightly bound through the transience of rural migrants and back-to-the-land settlers.[161]

Eric Nagler also maintained a connection to the city. When he moved to Killaloe in 1972, he retained ownership of the Toronto Folklore Centre, putting together a team of teachers, repair

[161] Of course, the development of highway systems during this time was central in producing this kind of transregionalism. Also, it should be noted that geographic distance imposed limits on the flows between urban and rural. East coast migrants, for instance, were less likely to spontaneously travel home for a brief visit, and some back-to-the-landers made more complete breaks with the city by settling in places like Cape Breton Island (Nova Scotia) or Lasqueti Island (British Columbia) (Weaver 2010).

people, and managers to run the store. For him, the urge to move to the country had little to do with anti-urban politics. "I grew up in Brooklyn," he reiterates, "I loved the country and I also got along well in the city" (personal communication July 24, 2013). Instead, as a business owner, he fell out of step with the "steal this book era" counterculture that was suspicious of private enterprise and capital exchange. Witnessing his malaise, Nagler recalls guitar luthier Jean Larrivée telling him, "You gotta get out of here. You're not enjoying life anymore. Don't save up, just go. Your manager will run the store" (Ibid.).

Nagler also connects his dissatisfaction around this time to broader shifts in his socio-musical network, which he attributes to the emergence of individualistic singer-songwriters. "The '60s had kind of degenerated into the '70s," he asserts, "and, in a lot of ways, I blame Bob Dylan, because he was writing songs." Nagler elaborates:

> People just started to write [their own] songs and they would play whatever chords they wanted. And so, you couldn't actually play with them. Until then, I could walk into any place that was playing folk music, and I would look at their guitar and I'd start playing. I didn't have to know the song. It had three chords […] and it had a recognizable and repetitive form, and we could all play together, you know. And it was not like we needed to know what the words to the song were. We needed to know what the message was. When you sang or when you picked up your guitar and played, your heart was coming out through your instrument. […] The songs and the music—bluegrass music especially—is just a medium. People sit around in a circle and play bluegrass music. When there isn't an audience, we're just all playing together and we're sharing our hearts together. And that kind of started to degenerate when people just needed to write their songs and send these ideas out, and you couldn't follow along with them, and I found it really disinteresting (Ibid.).

Moving out to Killaloe, four hours northeast of Toronto, distanced Nagler from the everyday tensions of being a private enterprise entrepreneur with countercultural affinities. It would also provide opportunities to reconnect with the kind of noncommercial, social music-making that drew him to folk and bluegrass, and that initially inspired the Folklore Centre.

In her work on the back-to-the-land movement, Sharon Weaver (2010) observes how urban settlers, many of whom, like Nagler, were "drawn from a counterculture that included elements of folk and blue-grass [*sic*] revivalism," were often attuned to rural music cultures (11). As a genre, bluegrass was linked to the early commercial country and hillbilly music that had a dedicated radio audience in rural communities throughout Canada. Moreover, many bluegrass musicians were familiar with fiddle tunes that crossed various dance and regional old-time repertoires, and were comfortable making music in an informal, party atmosphere.

For urban bluegrass enthusiasts, a rural atmosphere also had a romantic pull and complemented some of the traditional bluegrass ideals discussed in previous chapters. Adrian Bevis, who often visited friends in rural Ontario, elaborates:

> It wasn't so much that Toronto was that bad. It's just that then, the rural lifestyle was held up to be far superior and honest. […] It was romantic and also financially feasible. Low overhead, great location…beautiful countryside! Gorgeous […] there are spots that were just idyllic. It's not hard to see why at that time it was a magnet (Personal communication May 25, 2013).

Noting that many back-to-the-land settlers were musicians, Bevis recalls driving out to weekend corn-roast parties where the music was ubiquitous. Again, he speaks with a romantic sense of wonder describing how in the country, "you can play outside, in the open air. Open air picking…wow!" (Ibid). While open air sessions in places like High Park and the Fiddler's Green parking lot were frequent in Toronto during this time, he maintains, "You can't [pick outside] in the city because there was noise restrictions and traffic" (Ibid.).

As Weaver observes, many of the young, long-haired urbanites that moved to the country "did not blend into the background of their new locations" and often relied on the knowledge of "the older generation" in order to establish a self-sufficient rural life (2010, 6, 8). Furthermore, since it wasn't necessarily clear what land was available—much of it apparently abandoned by

rural families that had migrated to the city—back-to-the-landers turned to local residents who were sometimes reluctant to welcome more young hippies into the community (9). "One soon learned," Weaver states, "that a little sleuthing was sometimes necessary, even if it was just locating the neighbouring farmer for a chat. This was the best way to learn what land or nearby farm might be available" (Ibid.). In these situations, interest in local culture and a familiarity with local music practices could help break the ice with long-time rural residents (11-12). This was precisely Eric Nagler's experience when he and Martha Beers first went to Killaloe to find a plot of land in winter 1972. It's worth reproducing what Nagler calls his "old-timey story" at length, since it sheds some light on the process of migrating back-to-the-land and the kinds of social encounters that took place between newcomers and long-time residents:[162]

> We went from hippies' farms to hippies' farms. People that we knew who had moved on to the land. Who had bought something from an old farmer, or who were renting. They all said, 'we don't know of any place left. There's no place left.'
>
> We found out about our place from Emmett O'Brien. He was the [Killaloe] local who would tell [back-to-the-landers] about places. So, before we go home, we go to visit Emmett, and we get to his farm. I'm on the road, and then the long driveway down an icy hill, and then get to his house and there's nobody home. We turn around, we head back, we get to the icy hill and I can't get the van up. I mean, I've got summer tires […]. So, I try pushing…I try rocking…we're stuck there. And I'm freezing. My toes are freezing in these stupid cowboy boots. And Emmett O'Brien shows up with a buddy of his and they help push us out. Then he comes to the window of the van, and I say, 'we're looking for a place to stay.'
>
> He says, 'I know of no places, I know of no places at all.'
>
> 'I heard that you have a fiddle,' I say.
>
> 'It's not my fiddle. I don't play the fiddle.'
>
> 'Well, I play the fiddle,' I respond.
>
> 'You play the fiddle?' he asks. 'Do you play the violin or do you play the *fiddle*?'

[162] I have taken some minor editorial liberties in order to clearly present the flow of dialogue in this oral account. All of the content is quoted directly from my interview with Nagler.

> ‘I play the fiddle.’
>
> ‘You play the long notes or the sharp notes?’
>
> I figured maybe he meant reels or waltzes, so I said, ‘I play the sharp notes.’
>
> ‘Well, name me a fiddle tune,’ he demands.
>
> ‘Hhhmmm, ‘Lord MacDonald’s Reel.’
>
> ‘By the lord Jesus,’ Emmett replies, ‘I’d like to hear ‘Lord MacDonald’s Reel!’
>
> ‘Well if you’d invite me in for a cup of tea and let us warm up,’ I proposed, ‘I’ll play ‘Lord MacDonald’s Reel’ for you.’
>
> So, we turned around and we went back up and he makes us a cup of tea and I play ‘Lord MacDonald’s Reel,’ and he says, ‘There’s no places left here in the country. There used to be places but there’s none [now].’
>
> And I played ‘St. Anne’s Reel,’ and he says, ‘Now, the Divines, they had a place but they’re not letting anybody have this place because the people who was in there, they didn’t use ‘em well. So, they’re not letting anybody….’
>
> And I, played ‘Liberty’ or something like that, and he says, ‘Costello’s place has got no windows in it.’
>
> And finally after about the eighth tune he says, ‘My sister has a place’ [Nagler laughs].
>
> And so he was really hesitant. But the fiddle playing […] I think that’s what convinced him to say my sister has a place. So, I call the sister and she says, ‘It’ll be $8 a month.’ So, that’s how we found our place…by playing the fiddle (personal communication July 24, 2013).

* * *

Back-to-the-landers and new urbanists were not dominant components of the Toronto area bluegrass scene. Nor did their values categorically define or represent the scene. Observing how some participants engaged with these movements, however, demonstrates the ways that scene activity intersected with other collective activities. On the one hand, as participants began to migrate to or occasionally congregate in areas of rural Ontario, the back-to-the-land movement contributed to the scene’s decentralization through the 1970s. It also complicated this

development, as many back-to-the-land settlers retained ties to the city's bluegrass scene and also hosted their urban friends for weekend jam sessions. On the other hand, those opposing urban renewal projects and striving to preserve and protect Toronto's cultural life became increasingly invested in the city. This helped to maintain the prominence of scenic sites like Fiddler's Green, Egerton's Pub, and Ramsden Park, mostly located in or near the west central areas of Toronto, which were associated with political progressiveness, vibrant middle-class neighbourhoods, student life,[163] and cultural/leisure activity. Indeed, during this decade, divergent social movements, migratory trajectories, and shifting views of the city, in addition to its physical development, were shaping the bluegrass scene.

Conclusion

Much of this thesis has described how individuals from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, came together to form a bluegrass scene in and around Toronto. Even in analyzing scene dispersal and decentralization in the mid-1970s, I emphasized the expansion of a connected network of bluegrass enthusiasts. Alternatively, drawing on Deleuze-cum-DeLanda's assemblage theory as an analytical framework, this chapter has provided an opportunity to pick apart the scene, observing how various groups were engaged in other collective activities, involved in parallel scenes, and set out on divergent trajectories that were not necessarily directly related to their interests in bluegrass music. While I did not focus on them until now, these kinds of adjacent activities were present through the scene's development and are prefigured by the migratory trends discussed in Chapter two. There, I described how rural Canadian migrants (many from the Atlantic provinces), young, middle-class suburbanites, and American draft resisters all converged on Toronto through the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to providing the

[163] The University of Toronto and Ryerson University are prominent institutions in west central Toronto.

three major demographic facets of the city's nascent bluegrass scene, in the 1970s these groups also fed into the parallel Maritime-country music scene, the wave of new urbanist activism, and the countercultural back-to-the-land movement.

Of course, while there are certainly prominent correlations, the links between these earlier migratory trends and the latter social phenomena cannot be traced so cleanly. Some suburban-urban youth maintained equally strong allegiances in both the Maritime-country scene and with their peers in the urban folk revival. Draft resisters were prevalent among back-to-the-land settlers in Canada (Weaver 2010, 23), but the movement also included young, middle-class Canadians seeking to escape and challenge the presumed values of urban/suburban society. And, some east coast migrants, like Rex Yetman (York County Boys), Charlie Larade, as well as Cross Country Grass' Eddie LeBlanc and Amon Savoie eventually left the Greater Toronto Area, returning to more rural settings in their home provinces.[164] Indeed, the three major demographic groups I have identified mixed and mingled, with participation in the bluegrass scene serving as one primary mode of encounter. In the late-1960s and through much of the 1970s, these component parts contributed to something resembling a holistic scene. As I've highlighted in this chapter, however, the parts could be removed from this scenic assemblage and be plugged into other parallel, though not always directly related, assemblages or collective activities.

Nevertheless, over time the lines of distinction between these groups were becoming increasingly salient and processes of deterritorialization and decoding more discernable. To be sure, on a professional level, during the late-1970s Canadian bluegrass was experiencing a boom period that included a steady flow of high-quality recordings, an ever-expanding festival circuit,

[164] It's interesting to note here that when Amon Savoie returned to New Brunswick, he, like many other Atlantic Canadians, travelled between his home and Alberta to work in the oil sector. Comparing this move to his Toronto migration in the 1960s, Savoie's friend Ossie Branscombe simply states, "People go where the work is" (personal communication June 1, 2013).

and a robust, if niche, mediascape to support all of the activity. Still, there were signs that the grassroots network was beginning to unravel as participants moved on to other interests, became occupied by other obligations, and involved in smaller, less connected clusters. What's more, approaching the 1980s, as bands like Whiskey Jack and the Dixie Flyers were receiving exposure throughout North America, there was a sense that the grassroots and professional networks, once entwined, were becoming uncoupled.

Chapter Eight

Conclusions

When do local scenes begin and when do they end? Just as tracing the geographic and social boundaries of a scene proves complicated, it is also difficult to precisely pin down a scene's historical boundaries. The Toronto area bluegrass scene that emerged in the late 1960s was the culmination of various practices, trajectories, social movements, and events that predated, imbued, and transcended its most active period in the 1970s. As a starting point, it has been helpful to tie the scene's origins and development to events surrounding the Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee. Certainly, the formation of this Committee marked the beginning of a more organized effort to promote bluegrass in the city. Tracing its rapidly growing socio-musical network in the early 1970s enabled an examination of the scene's evolution, expansion, and changing shape. Similarly, while bluegrass activity in Ontario extended well beyond the TABC approaching the 1980s, we can observe the Committee's dissolution as a marker of the scene's gradual decline.

In the late 1970s, despite the growth of a professional bluegrass infrastructure, there were signs that the TABC was experiencing a lull in grassroots activity. Acknowledging some of the changes that have occurred as members "moved and/or their interests shifted," in spring 1978 the executive suggested that rebranding the "Committee" as a "Club" and establishing more defined roles for members might bring "a new vigour and excitement to the club" (Anonymous 1978b, 6). A formal meeting to discuss the changes was scheduled for the following September, with the executive making a final plea:

> Democracy involves responsibility for everyone, and if the current membership is not interested in exercising their responsibilities—standing for office, voting, being <u>active</u> members, then the Club has no chance of success and there would either be no TABC or it would remain as it has been, a committee of a few

> individuals who try to promote Bluegrass and serve the interests of all fans as best they can (Ibid.; underline in original).

That September, just as the Committee were set to meet, the *Canadian Bluegrass Review* published a two-part anniversary feature celebrating the TABC's tenth anniversary authored by Doug Benson and Chuck Crawford. In his piece, Crawford echoes the sentiments that appear in the *TABC News,*[165] maintaining that now is the time to get organized if the Committee wants to persist:

> TABC has not had any real structure in the past. People see something that should be done, they get some more people interested; then do it. That kind of organization was fine when only a few people cared about bluegrass. Now many people are interested. There should be elected officers who speak for the TABC and are committed to getting certain jobs done (Crawford 1978, 9).

Indicating some of the pressures that go along with being the Committee's president and one of the primary organizing forces, Crawford concludes, "there should be regular elections so that the workload shifts around" (Ibid.).

Doug Benson also takes the opportunity to comment on the TABC's challenge to find direction in his piece, "The Ontario Bluegrass Scene - Then and Now" (1978). For him, the idea of renaming the Committee is merely a matter of semantics, noting that it's not the name that pushes the direction of an organization but rather "the orientation [that] comes from the initiative of the leadership…and from the support of the membership" (7). Considering if the *TABC News* has become increasingly irrelevant with the recent success of the *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, he suggests that the Committee strive to become more activity-oriented, organizing concerts, workshops, jams, and festival trips like it did in its early years and like nearby bluegrass associations such as the thriving Skyway and Pineridge clubs.

[165] It is likely, though not for certain, that Crawford wrote the May 1978 *TABC News* piece suggesting organizational changes and calling for more member input.

The September 1978 meeting attracted thirteen TABC members, and while it seemed to provide the organization with some much needed steam, no substantial changes were adopted. For the most part, the Committee continued on its regular course, focusing primarily on the newsletter and promoting the odd concert. They maintained strong connections with other bluegrass associations, the *Canadian Bluegrass Review*, and in the last years of the 1970s partnered with the Northern Bluegrass Committee to bring artists like the Bluegrass Cardinals, J.D. Crowe, and Mac Wiseman to Toronto. They also strongly encouraged *TABC News* readers to attend a new weekly bluegrass night at a venue called the Matador Club. Alluding to Toronto's declining significance in the decentralized late 1970s scene, a promotional piece for the new session states, "If the Matador takes off, then you won't have to go to Hamilton or Burlington or Kitchener to hear your favourites: they'll be right here" (Scott 1979, 2).

Apart from some of the organizational challenges discussed at the meeting, however, it appears the TABC were facing deeper issues related to a more general burnout among Toronto-based bluegrass enthusiasts. Despite bringing high profile artists and regional favourites to the city, attendance at these events was lacking. Attendance numbers were underwhelming at concerts by the Country Gentlemen and J.D. Crowe. A November 1979 Mac Wiseman show, which was advertised as the "bluegrass event of the year in Toronto," was a complete flop (*TABC News* Oct. 1979, 5). Finally, after just four months of lacklustre attendance and experimenting with different time slots, the Matador Club cancelled its weekly bluegrass series in February 1980. In the following months the Northern Bluegrass Committee reported that all of the TABC/NBC promoted concerts were financial losses, citing venue and sound problems as the main issue (Northern Bluegrass Committee 1980, 1). Still, commenting on the Matador Club's

failure, the author asked, "Where were all you bluegrassers? We just lost a good thing, both for fans and the musicians" (Ibid.).

This burnout also extended to the TABC executive, who was putting tremendous energy into promoting floundering concerts and publishing a newsletter that was becoming eclipsed by the more polished and substantial *Canadian Bluegrass Review*. Through 1979, the *TABC News* became increasingly slim and sparse as the executive decided to adopt a rotating publication team to distribute the effort. In February 1980 after serving as the *TABC News'* primary leading force, Chuck Crawford stepped away from the newsletter citing other obligations (Crawford 1980, 2). Three months later, in May 1980, the *TABC News* editors[166] informed their readers that they would suspend publishing until the fall because of a lack of funding, human resources, and ideas (1). Stating that they would eventually solicit help and content from the TABC membership, the editors alerted readers that "the future of the newsletter is literally in your hands" (Ibid.). The *TABC News* never resumed publication.

Former TABC members have difficulty identifying a precise date or occasion that formally marked the end of the Committee. Steve Pritchard and Adrian Bevis offer May 1980, when the last *TABC News* was distributed, as a possible conclusion. Meanwhile, Chuck Crawford cites the mismanaged Mac Wiseman concert in November 1979 as one of the final blows. "There was hardly anybody there," he recalls, "it was embarrassing" (Crawford, personal communication May 13, 2013). Pritchard agrees, adding that the show also depleted the Committee's finances. "That sort of drained everything and that was one of the financial reasons. It put the TABC in a situation where it was going to be difficult to continue" (Pritchard, personal communication June

[166] It's unclear who was on the editorial team at this point, though Crawford's farewell letter in the February 1980 issue noted that Steve Pritchard would take over the *TABC News*.

4, 2013). Pritchard elaborates, alluding to the burnout that was beginning to set in by the time of the concert:

> I think it had to do with people not being interested. […] Basically, at that point it was one of those situations where you're actually looking for some official excuse not to run it. And that Mac Wiseman concert gave you the official excuse, which was really unfortunate, but that's what happened (Ibid.).

Ultimately, the TABC fizzled out sometime in 1980. "It was an issue of no interest and no energy," Pritchard states. "It's like any organization just gets to a point where it fades out and goes" (Ibid.). Far removed from the kind of celebration and spirited determination that accompanied the TABC's formation in 1968, over a decade later the Committee quietly disbanded. "I wanted to sort of end with a bang," Pritchard laments, "'This is the end of the TABC, blah, blah, blah,' have a party and this sort of stuff and have an official thing. […] That didn't happen and I was really sad about that. There was no official end" (Ibid.).

Broader infrastructural shifts contributed to the TABC's internal struggles. As already discussed, other bluegrass organizations began to form throughout Ontario, creating smaller, activity-focused clusters in Hamilton, Brantford, and Ottawa, among other regions. At the same time, the *Canadian Bluegrass Review* replaced the *TABC News* as the primary source for bluegrass news, updates, and dialogue in Canada. Meanwhile, within Toronto some of the key scenic sites were uprooted and/or shut down. After periods of mismanagement and staff turmoil in the mid-1970s, Eric Nagler, who was often absent from the store due to his performance schedule, time in Bancroft, and an extended stay in the United States, sold the Toronto Folklore Centre circa 1976-77 (Nagler, personal communication July 24, 2013). In the fall of 1978, the store was moved from the Avenue Road location it had occupied for nearly a decade. The owners suggested that the new address' central location, near the Spadina-Dupont intersection and on the subway line, would be more accessible for patrons (*TABC News* Oct. 1978, 6). Nagler

adds, however, that the Folklore Centre was beginning to face competition from larger stores like Steve's Music, Long and McQuade, and, in particular, the Guitar Centre, which opened across the street from the niche folk instrument shop (Nagler, personal communication July 24, 2013). While it remained a hub for TABC activity throughout the late 1970s, the Folklore Centre, like the bluegrass Committee, simply "petered out" approaching the 1980s (Ibid.).[167]

Fiddler's Green Folk Club was also displaced during this time. In December 1978, after being informed that "the land had been sold for development," Fiddler's Green moved (Guest 1979b, 2). Now, Tam Kearney operated the club sporadically out of a rented space in the Tranzac, a multi-roomed, co-operatively owned downtown venue. While the *TABC News* reported that patrons were generally pleased with the new location (Ibid.), following the move, the club, after a decade, ceased to host the TABC's first Sunday picking session and subsequently lost its centrality as a hub for local bluegrass activity.[168] Perhaps indicative of this, Fiddler's Green hosted the sparsely-attended Mac Wiseman concert discussed above. Shortly after, in the winter of 1980, the long-running Egerton's Pub jam was terminated with no clear reason other than a change in management policy (*TABC News* Feb. 1980, 2). While the recently established session at the Country Music Store was drawing some bluegrass pickers and Bruce Dowd's regular Harbord Street house jam was still going strong, it appears that these infrastructural breakdowns contributed to a dwindling Toronto-based scene.

All of this occurred, of course, just as the *Canadian Bluegrass Review* was coming into its own, the festival circuit was booming, and professional Canadian bluegrass was at a peak. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the growth of professional bluegrass was intertwined with grassroots activity. As such, despite healthy festival attendance and interest in things like the

[167] None of my research participants could provide an exact date for when the Toronto Folklore Centre finally shut down. The shop continued to surface in the pages of the *TABC News* and *CBR* up until 1979.

[168] In February 1979 the first Sunday sessions were relocated to the Toronto Folklore Centre.

Canadian National Bluegrass Awards, as the 1980s progressed, the professional sphere also began feeling the impact of a shrinking grassroots base. Asked if Canadian bluegrass has "reached peak" in a 1984 *CBR* interview, Northern Bluegrass Committee president and festival promoter Tony deBoer considers how big picture economic currents were changing the festival circuit:

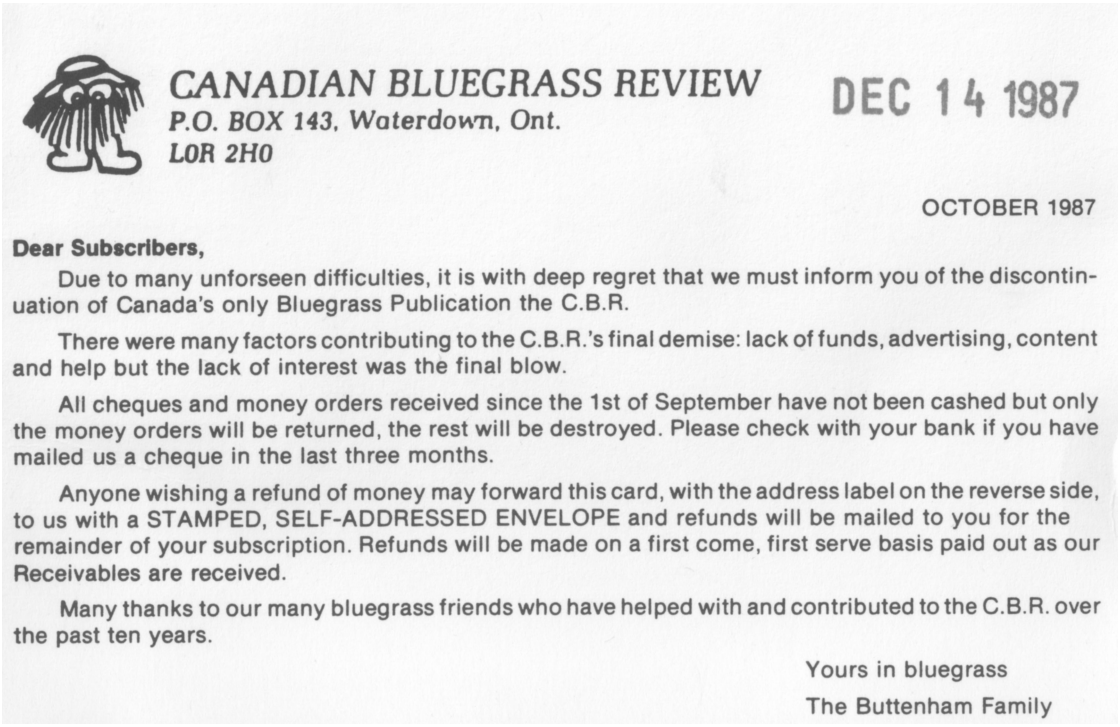
> It comes back to the economy of the country.[169] No one now has the money they had a few years ago, I don't think. People direct themselves just to one or two festivals and naturally they want to see as many big name groups as they can. The bigger festivals are keeping their crowds up. Some of the smaller ones, if they don't have big name draws, will have to depend on their own local area to draw from. People are just not going to travel hundreds of miles just for a little festival (deBoer in Chapman 1984, 10).

For DeBoer, by the mid-1980s, the bluegrass festival circuit that stretched across much of the eastern United States and Canada had reached a "saturation point" (Ibid.). "There are only so many bluegrass fans," he concludes (Ibid.). Indeed, eventually the festival promoters struggled with rising costs and declining attendance (Aikman 1986, 8). Around the same time, Whiskey Jack's Duncan Fremlin echoed the concern that Canada's bluegrass market had reached a point of diminishing returns. Speaking to *Bluegrass Unlimited* in 1984, he predicts that "there are only three full-time, established bluegrass bands left in Canada today, and it's a struggle to survive at times for them" (Fremlin in Michele 1984, 32).

The December 1987 issue of *Canadian Bluegrass Review* provided the most visible indicator that bluegrass was on the decline in Ontario and the rest of Canada. In it, Pat Buttenham includes a postcard informing readers that, "Due to many unforseen *[sic]* difficulties, it is with deep regret that we must inform you of the discontinuation of Canada's only Bluegrass Publication […]" (see Figure 8.1). After a decade promoting Canadian bluegrass artists and serving enthusiasts, the *CBR*, which had always relied on the support of its readership, finally folded due to a "lack of

[169] During the late 1970s and into the 1980s, Canada experienced high unemployment and inflation caused by shifts in the manufacturing sector and increasing oil prices.

funds, advertising, content, and help […].” Perhaps most telling, however, Buttenham maintains that “the lack of interest was the final blow” (Ibid.).



CANADIAN BLUEGRASS REVIEW
P.O. BOX 143, Waterdown, Ont.
L0R 2H0

DEC 14 1987

OCTOBER 1987

Dear Subscribers,

Due to many unforseen difficulties, it is with deep regret that we must inform you of the discontinuation of Canada's only Bluegrass Publication the C.B.R.

There were many factors contributing to the C.B.R.'s final demise: lack of funds, advertising, content and help but the lack of interest was the final blow.

All cheques and money orders received since the 1st of September have not been cashed but only the money orders will be returned, the rest will be destroyed. Please check with your bank if you have mailed us a cheque in the last three months.

Anyone wishing a refund of money may forward this card, with the address label on the reverse side, to us with a STAMPED, SELF-ADDRESSED ENVELOPE and refunds will be mailed to you for the remainder of your subscription. Refunds will be made on a first come, first serve basis paid out as our Receivables are received.

Many thanks to our many bluegrass friends who have helped with and contributed to the C.B.R. over the past ten years.

Yours in bluegrass
The Buttenham Family

Figure 8.1 - *Canadian Bluegrass Review* farewell postcard sent to subscribers in December 1987.

* * *

Cultural scenes always exist within a matrix of other cultural, economic, political, and geographic forces. Focusing on the bluegrass scene in mid-century Toronto, I have attempted to capture the complexity of these intersections by tracing the continuously shifting contours of a music scene that emerged within a rapidly developing city. The historical approach adopted in this study enhances our understanding of scenes, rooting the otherwise nebulous sociocultural configurations in various forms of scene-building work, personal trajectories, collective activity, institutions, and spaces that unfurl into a broader, multilayered network. What’s more, scenes are marked by encounter between various social and demographic groups (e.g., working-class rural

migrants; countercultural activists; young, educated folk revivalists) and can include different, but connected fields of activity (e.g., professional music-making, casual picking, grassroots organizing, extramusical participation, national discourses and policy). Because of this, perforated boundaries can appear between clusters within a scene, as well as between adjacent scenes. Overtime these boundaries can thicken or become entangled with other cultural waves, generating parallel scenes, divergent movements, and, in this case, eventually curtailing activity in the bluegrass scene. Here, we begin to see that scenes, which can seem conceptually unified and cohesive, are heterogenous and muddled. But, as I've attempted to illustrate throughout parts of this study, exploring points of detachment, incongruence, and conflict can prove just as valuable as observing shared appreciation and cultural affinities.

Dealing with the messiness of scenes demands a certain degree of theoretical flexibility. Rather than limiting myself to a rigid framework—namely the theoretical work around scenes (e.g., Blum 2001, O'Connor 2002, Olson 1998, Shank 1994, and particularly Straw 1991, 2002, and 2004)—throughout this study I switched between different analytical lenses/social configurations as a way to examine shifting dynamics, loose social and scenic boundaries, and the intersections between multiple fields of influence and activity. *Community* (in particular, communities of practice) enabled us to focus on the small pockets of collective activity and one-on-one interactions geared towards learning/learning about bluegrass, while *groupings* highlighted the boundaries and heterogeneity that always exist within a social formation. *Network* provided a way to identify and plot key players and spaces that contributed to a developing infrastructure for bluegrass in Toronto. As the network expanded, Becker's (1982) notion of an *art world* illuminated a more robust professional infrastructure geared towards supporting local bands and made up of recording studios, labels, awards ceremonies, media,

venues, and festivals. Here, Slobin's sub-, super-, and intercultures (1992) encouraged me to operate within different fields of activity, observing the intersections between local/grassroots, state or industry governed, and transnational cultural forces. Finally, drawing on *assemblage theory*, I examined pockets of peripheral activity and divergent movements (geographical and sociocultural) that were a part of and impacted the bluegrass scene, but also functioned independently. All of these social configurations are contained within the notion of a cultural scene.

Above all other factors that shape a scene, this study focuses on the urban context. Indeed, the history of bluegrass in mid-century Toronto provides an ideal opportunity to observe how urban development influences local cultural activity, and in this case, maps onto the development of an emerging scene. The growth and transformation of the Greater Toronto Area in the decades covered here directly and indirectly impacted the scene. Economic pull factors drew participants from rural areas into the city and newly developed suburban residential areas pushed working and middle-class individuals to the outlying communities. Flows between the suburbs, the city, and other urban/suburban hubs throughout Southern Ontario were facilitated by an expanding highway system, which also benefitted touring musicians (from the United States and Canada) and contributed to an emerging festival circuit.

Through all of these concrete developments, tightly coiled regional and cultural narratives were produced and employed as a way to make sense of the expanding city, urban life, and bluegrass music/culture. While dominant narratives certainly emerged (e.g., Toronto's cultural greyness; rural America's cultural purity; "country boys" and "citybillies," etc.), they were not rigid and not uniformly espoused. Over time, counter discourses emerged and built on or challenged, if not necessarily collapsing, the dominant narratives. This kind of conceptual work

permeated everything—one's approach to learning and performing bluegrass, evaluations of local music-making, trajectories into, through, and out of the city, as well as fragmentation and social encounters within both the scene and the broader bluegrass world. Perhaps above all then, this study illustrates the extent to which cultural activity and lived experience are entangled. Just as participation in the bluegrass scene helped to structure individuals' urban, suburban, and rural lives, dialogical regional narratives became a tool for engaging with and understanding bluegrass music.

This observation becomes even more potent in an analysis of contemporary cultural activity. With the shift towards a globalized economy in recent decades, cultural, economic, and migratory flows between nations have increased significantly. Meanwhile, widespread digital technologies have eroded geographic boundaries between individuals with shared cultural interests and further complicated the blurred boundaries between expanding regional scales. These same technologies have also subverted the traditional industrial models for circulating music. With relatively little expense and a trove of accessible educational resources, artists can now self-produce, distribute, and market music without the support of multinational or even small independent recording companies.

At the same time that borders and boundaries appear to become less relevant, increased urbanization is drawing people ever closer within often sprawling urban confines.[170] With this, new urbanist thinking has emerged once again as citizen's groups advocate for pedestrian-friendly design and celebrate the small-scale sociality and cultural opportunities found in urban environments. Not surprisingly, as discussed in my Master's research on contemporary bluegrass performers and audiences in Toronto, such concerns and developments continue to influence

[170] The United Nations reports accelerated urbanization in developing and developed countries since the 1950s. The latest findings state that 54% of the world's population reside in cities and estimate an increase to 66% by 2050 (United Nations 2014, xxi).

local bluegrass activity and discourse (Finch 2010). Governments, at all levels, have a conflicted response to these trends. On the one hand, some municipal leaders have acknowledged the economic potential of investing in a local cultural brand (Finch 2015; Krims 2007, xxxii; Straw 2004, 411). Informed by the work of economists like Richard Florida (2002), they seek to position their cities as major players in the emerging "creative economy" by investing in a cultural infrastructure/lifestyle image that will attract and retain talent from around the world. These initiatives usually contribute to processes of gentrification and economic homogenization in the urban core, displacing low-income and working-class citizens, including artists (Finch 2015, 313-314). Running counter to these branding efforts, recent years have also seen a disinvestment in culture as concrete infrastructural commitments and, to a greater degree, global economic priorities (e.g., resource extraction and circulation, finance capitalism, military expansion, etc.) have dictated governmental policy and budgets. These shifts are particularly conspicuous in Canada, where, since the early 1970s, public and private institutions had fostered a domestic music industry through regulation and financial endowments.

Building on some of the findings that emerged in this historical study, ethnographic research can help us understand the ways in which the developments described above shape contemporary scenes and impact participants. How, for instance, can scholars trace the contours of a scene that is unbound by digital technologies and in which participants can interact and engage in collaborations in the absence of a geographic or even temporal precondition? And, how might activity within these contexts intersect with localized activity and infrastructures (presuming they are present on a local level)? Surely, approaching these questions will further elaborate the terms of analysis that I have employed and prompt scholars to conceptualize more pertinent social configurations. Given my observations regarding the intersections between cultural activity,

urban life, migration and movement, labour, and socio-economic categorization, it seems essential that any future research on contemporary scenes be rooted in the lived experiences of participants. In particular, scholars need to consider how new modes of cultural labour consciousness, and associated mechanisms of compensation (or lack thereof), impact creative trajectories, network connections, the development of shared infrastructures, and social dynamics within an unbound scene.

As noted in Chapter Four, Will Straw maintains that a cultural scene "mobilizes local energies and moves these energies in multiple directions—onwards, to later reiterations of itself; outwards, to more formal sorts of social or entrepreneurial activity; upwards, to the broader coalescing of cultural energies within which collective identities take shape" (2004, 412). Exploring the development and various corners of mid-century Toronto's bluegrass scene, I have attempted to introduce a concrete human element to Straw's observations. My research participants' personal stories, memories, and comments link discursive constructs to musical practice, a scene infrastructure to collective cultural work, migratory patterns to future developments and "reiterations." And, perhaps most consequential, in a contemporary era where cultural endeavours are extolled while at the same time devalued and marginalized within the logics of late capitalism, they remind us that participating in a music scene is not a superfluous activity, but is instead a way in which we make sense of, make our way through, and position ourselves within the world around us.

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