

Sounds Canadian: Music, History, and Music History in *Taptoo!*  
Chancellor Jackman Symposium on *Taptoo!* – Saturday, March 8, 2003 – Robin Elliott

*Taptoo!* is set during the unstable period between the American Revolution and the War of 1812. As a music student growing up in Kingston I was well acquainted with some of the military and musical consequences of the European and North American wars of 1812. For many years I was a member of the Kingston Symphony, and took part in an annual summer pops concert at Fort Henry. The crowning moment of this event is a rendition of the *1812 Overture* by Tchaikovsky, complete with a mobilization of the Fort Henry Guard and the firing of the Fort's impressive cannons. As Margaret Atwood pointed out recently in *The Globe and Mail*,<sup>1</sup> the *1812 Overture* is a history lesson brought to life: the Russian cannons bomb the 'Marseillaise' into submission in the coda, and a rousing treatment of the imperial anthem 'God Save the Tsar' brings the work to a triumphant close. The performance at Fort Henry is an appropriate matching of music and location, for the fort was built in 1812 in response to fears that Kingston was a prime target in the recently declared war between Britain and the United States. The Fort Henry concert thus invites us to reflect upon the geopolitical connections between the two Wars of 1812. Tchaikovsky's Russian cannons that bomb the French into submission become, in Kingston, the Canadian/British cannons that routed the U.S. forces in the War of 1812. The musician in me used to thrill to the spectacle of it all. But the historian in me is obliged to add that 'God Save the Tsar' was actually written 20 years after Napoleon's retreat from Moscow and, come to think of it, that the Fort Henry cannons never fired a single shot at U.S. forces in warfare. All this is by way of a quick introduction to the fact

---

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Atwood, 'Bonaparte to Bush: you'll be sorry,' *The Globe and Mail* (1 March 2003): A17.

that music plus history may equal music history, but this is not always the same thing as the history that historians profess.

Beethoven's *Wellington's Victory* was another Fort Henry pops concert favorite. It was written in 1813 to commemorate the victory of the Duke of Wellington over Napoleon at the Battle of Vitoria in Spain that year. *Wellington's Victory* is dedicated to George Augustus Frederick, the Prince Regent of Britain, who was ruling in place of his father, mad King George III, who is tarred and feathered in effigy at the start of *Taptoo!*. At the beginning of *Wellington's Victory* the opposing armies are introduced by means of drum and trumpet signals and borrowed themes: Thomas Arne's 'Rule Britannia' for the English and the folksong 'Malbrook s'en va-t-en guerre' for the French. Drum and trumpet signals and 'Rule Britannia' feature prominently in *Taptoo!* as is seen in the appendix, the former in Act I, [50] and [105] and elsewhere, and 'Rule Britannia' in Act 2, [126] for Simcoe's proclamation of the founding of Toronto (or rather York).

The *1812 Overture* and *Wellington's Victory* are grandiose if rather late blooming additions to a genre of descriptive programmatic works known as 'battle music.' *Taptoo!* shares several traits in common with such works, including the use of musical quotations ranging from folksongs to religious music, the programmatic depiction of military engagements, and the musical evocation of national allegiances. Battle music pieces began to be written in the 16th-century, but a marked resurgence of interest in the genre occurred between the years 1780 and 1810, the very time period in which *Taptoo!* is set.

*The Battle of Prague* by Francis Kotzwara was one of the most popular pieces in this genre; it was published in Dublin ca. 1788 and quickly gained enormous popularity on both sides of the Atlantic. The *New Grove* states that Kotzwara was 'accidentally

hanged while conducting an experiment in a house of ill repute' and the details of that are best left to one's imagination. But at the time of his notorious death he was working on a follow-up piece to cash in on the success of *The Battle of Prague*. This piece, titled *The Siege of Quebec*, was completed by an otherwise obscure musician named de Kriff. The sonata (as the publisher rather grandiosely labelled it) is a musical potpourri depicting the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. Trumpets, drums, artillery fire, cannon shots and so forth are depicted in the score. The work includes quotations of an air by Purcell (to evoke the British side) and of a folksong which was said to be one of General Wolfe's favorite airs. *The Siege of Quebec* was found to be 'splendid and grand' on the occasion of what was likely its first performance in Canada at Quebec City in 1806. The work was revived in Toronto in 1962 under the auspices of the Ten Centuries concert series in an arrangement by Murray Schafer, Helmut Kallmann, and John Beckwith. Wolfe's 'favorite air,' as quoted by Kotzewara at the beginning of *The Siege of Quebec*, is 'How stands the glass around,' which appears in *Taptoo!* at the end of Act 1, at [146]. Beckwith has written that his source for this air was an 18th-century U.S. manuscript in the Library of Congress,<sup>2</sup> but the version is virtually identical with that found in *The Siege of Quebec*, with which he was involved some 30 years before he began work on *Taptoo!*.

The battle music genre, for all its theatricality, is an instrumental genre, whereas *Taptoo!* is a work of music theatre, and has been labelled a documentary ballad opera.<sup>3</sup> The *New Grove Dictionary of Music* article on ballad opera defines the genre as 'A distinctively English form in which spoken dialogue alternates with songs set to

---

<sup>2</sup> John Beckwith, 'Musical quotations in *Taptoo!*,' *Sonneck Society Bulletin* 21.3 (Fall 1995): 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase 'documentary ballad opera' is from Beckwith, 'Musical quotations,' 5.

traditional or popular melodies.’<sup>4</sup> The article goes on to note that the genre flourished briefly up until the mid-1730s, and that only *The Beggar’s Opera* has retained its popularity since that time. Well, yes and no. Perhaps in England the ballad opera died out in the mid-1730s, but in North America its popularity endured until well into the 19th century. A small but significant repertoire of indigenous ballad operas began with a work titled *The Disappointment* or *The Force of Credulity*, created by Andrew Barton in Philadelphia in 1767. Beckwith has written that doing the research for a concert which included some excerpts from *The Disappointment* was one of the first inspirations that led to *Taptoo!*<sup>5</sup> Indeed, *Taptoo!* and *The Disappointment* share a borrowed tune in common, namely ‘Yankee Doodle,’ but more about that shortly.

There are some important differences between *Taptoo!* and the earlier ballad opera tradition. *Taptoo!* is sung throughout, whereas ballad operas traditionally include a large amount of spoken dialogue. The point of the 18th-century ballad opera was to cobble together a piece of music theatre by using tunes that were well known to the audience. In *Taptoo!* on the other hand, some of the quoted tunes may indeed be well known, while others are vaguely familiar, and still others are quite obscure to most members of a modern audience. But the musical quotations in *Taptoo!* serve at least four purposes that have nothing to do with the familiarity of the tunes.

1) the quotations align *Taptoo!* with the ballad opera tradition, which was the prevailing music-theatre form in North America during the period in which *Taptoo!* is set

2) the quotations serve as miniature time machines, transporting the performers and the audience back to the time of *Taptoo!*

---

<sup>4</sup> Curtis Price and Robert D. Hume, ‘Ballad opera,’ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online* ed. L. Macy (accessed 1 March 2003), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

<sup>5</sup> Beckwith, ‘Musical quotations,’ p. 5.

3) the quoted source material provides a rich tapestry of associative references which at times provide an ironic and/or satirical running commentary on the action

4) the tunes serve as the musical equivalent of the documentary sources that Reaney drew upon to create the libretto.

I would like to elaborate slightly upon this last point. Reaney includes in his libretto quotations from 18th-century broadsides, the writings of John Graves Simcoe and his wife Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe, and so. His cast of characters includes both historical figures (such as Mad Anthony Wayne and the Simcoes), and fictional characters, who are nonetheless based on historical research. Seth Harple's wife, Atahentsic, for instance, is a fictional character, but she is described in Act II, scene ii by Seth as 'a Maumee, and the daughter of Chief Turtle.' The Maumee, or Miami, Chief Little Turtle is an historical character (1752-1812) who frequently led Native Americans in battle against Mad Anthony Wayne. Little Turtle did have several children, including at least two daughters. One of his daughters, named Sweet Breeze, was married to a man named William Wells, who seems to have been closer to Ebenezer Hatchway than Seth Harple, however; he was adopted and raised by Little Turtle, but later switched sides and became a captain in Mad Anthony Wayne's army.

The historical characters in *Taptoo!* are paralleled by the historical music quotations. But there is also a 'period march' in Act 2 ( 81 ) that accompanies the opening of the first legislature of Upper Canada. It sounds like an 18th-century march but in fact newly was written by Beckwith. This pseudo-period march thus parallels Reaney's fictional characters based on historical research. Beckwith is certainly an old hand at this type of recreation, having done much work of this sort for the Music at Sharon concert

series and also for his reconstruction of Joseph Quesnel's opera *Lucas et Cécile*,<sup>6</sup> which was originally written in Quebec and itself dates from the period of *Taptoo!*

The tunes Beckwith quotes are listed in the appendix, together with a musical incipit. With the exception of 'Rule Britannia,' the tunes are either identical with or else very close to the original source from which Beckwith obtained them, although the accompaniments to the tunes are not always quite so straightforward. One indication of the close connection between Beckwith's work as a music scholar and as a composer is the fact that the sources of the tunes are meticulously noted in the score of *Taptoo!*, and furthermore Beckwith wrote an informative article about the whole borrowing process<sup>7</sup> (a shorter version of the article is included in the *Taptoo!* program<sup>8</sup>). I would like now to consider some of the intertextual associations that a few of these tunes invite.

'Yankee Doodle' appears at the beginning of the opera after a brief instrumental introduction. It accompanies a chorus of Yankee revolutionaries singing 'We've tarr'd and feather'd Old King George III.' 'Yankee Doodle' is likely of North American origin and dates from the 1760s or possibly earlier. The first mention of the tune in print was in the ballad opera referred to above, *The Disappointment*. It was Reaney's idea to use 'Yankee Doodle' in *Taptoo!*; Beckwith at first thought the tune too obvious, but he was later persuaded to use it by finding the version by James Hewitt, with its quirky rest in the seventh bar of the introduction.<sup>9</sup> Hewitt was a U.S. composer of English birth; he also used 'Yankee Doodle' in *The Battle of Trenton* (1797), a keyboard work in the battle

---

<sup>6</sup> John Beckwith, ed. *Lucas et Cécile: Comédie mêlée d'ariettes. Musique et paroles de Joseph Quesnel*. Saint-Nicholas, Quebec: Doberman-Yppan, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Beckwith, 'Musical quotations'.

<sup>8</sup> John Beckwith, 'A note on the music,' *Taptoo! Program*, March 7, 8, 14, 15, 2003 (University of Toronto Faculty of Music Opera Division): [7].

<sup>9</sup> Beckwith, 'Musical quotations,' 5-6.

music genre which commemorates one of George Washington's most famous victories in the Revolutionary War (on Christmas Day, 1776).<sup>10</sup> 'Yankee Doodle' was the subject of a famous investigation by Oscar Sonneck, the founding father of American music studies.<sup>11</sup> It was Sonneck who virtually invented the scholarly study of 18th-century American music, and so in a sense he is the philosophical grandfather of *Taptoo!* In his 80-page discussion of 'Yankee Doodle,' Sonneck summarizes no less than 16 theories about the creation of the tune, only to discredit them all and conclude that its origins remain 'as mysterious as ever.' A persistent theme in Sonneck's account, though, is that 'Yankee Doodle' was sung by the British to mock the Americans, who responded by adopting it as a patriotic tune in the Revolutionary period. Perhaps Reaney and Beckwith, then, have brought the tune full circle – but that is for the listener to judge.

'Mad Anthony Wayne,' the third tune on the list, is an example of how a musical quotation can reinforce a textual one, for the tune appears in the orchestra to accompany Wayne as he sings the text of an actual recruiting poster of the era. The original tune for 'Mad Anthony Wayne,' which dates from Wayne's time and was a setting of words by one of his officers, is lost unfortunately, and has been replaced by the one that Beckwith quotes. This tune was composed by Albert G. Emerick for his compilation *Songs for the People* in 1852. This is the only time that Beckwith makes use of what might be called the Tchaikovsky dispensation, namely the use of an anachronistic tune simply because it makes good music historical sense, despite its lack of historical authenticity.

---

<sup>10</sup> A modern edition of the work is available: James Hewitt, *The Battle of Trenton: A Favorite Historical Military Sonata Dedicated to George Washington*, ed. Maurice Hinson (Miami: Belwin Mills, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> Oscar George Theodore Sonneck, *Report on "The Star-Spangled Banner" "Hail Columbia" "America" "Yankee Doodle"* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909.

‘Over the Hills and Far Away’ (Act I, scene ii / 39) is another tune that was incorporated at Reaney’s suggestion. In *Taptoo!* it is first sung by the British soldiers, and then moves into the orchestral accompaniment as Simcoe reads out the British recruiting poster. This is a singularly appropriate quotation, as the first appearance of the tune in print was in George Farquhar’s comedy *The Recruiting Officer* which opened in London in 1706 and was the most popular English-language play of the 18th century. The tune turns up often in 18th-century broadsides and ballad operas, including Act 1 of *The Beggar’s Opera*.

The next tune, the ‘Canon 4 in 1’ by the Boston composer William Billings, is another example of a musical quotation matched to a textual one. The Billings piece, which appeared in his *New England Psalm-Singer* of 1770, is a setting of an Isaac Watts hymn (No. 87, 1710). In *Taptoo!* it is set to the words, ‘Walk cheerfully over the world,’ by the English religious leader George Fox (1624-1691), and it is sung by the Quaker Jesse Harple and his wife as they flee to Philadelphia after being roughed up by a rabble of Yankee revolutionaries. Fox was the founder of the Society of Friends and actually spent two years in the American colonies, over 100 years before the time of *Taptoo!*. William Billings, on the other hand, was alive during the *Taptoo!* era, or at least the first part of it (he died in 1800). Little is known about his religious beliefs; he is thought to have been a Congregationalist, and as far as I know he had no connection at all with the Quaker movement. Nevertheless Fox’s text and Billings’s tune match nicely. Billings, though, was no pacifist; indeed, he was an ardent Revolutionary, and his most famous tune, ‘Chester,’ became the Revolutionary hymn ‘Let tyrants shake their iron rod.’ His



music was understandably somewhat less popular in Loyalist Upper Canada, though it did circulate there as well.

‘The Girl I Left behind Me’ was published for the first time in Dublin in 1810, but circulated in manuscript in America as early as 1770. The Irish connection of the tune was strengthened when Thomas Moore included it in his famous *Selection of Irish Melodies* in 1818, though with different words. Samuel Lover (1797-1868), an Irish writer and composer known for his comic songs, published another popular version of the song in 1855.<sup>12</sup> It seems ‘The Girl I Left Behind Me’ must have been in Dan Emmett’s ear when he wrote ‘Dixie’ in 1859; the two tunes begin with the same distinctive rhythm and bear more than a passing resemblance to one another. Emmet, by the way, was a real-life descendant of Ebenezer Hatchway and Seth Harple; he played fife and drums in the U.S. army before his long career as a blackface entertainer in minstrel shows.

‘Wells’ is an English hymn tune which is quoted in Act II, scene vi [102] to accompany the Anglican parson who gives Seth and Atahentsic a ticket to the Governor’s Ball rather than perform a sham marriage ceremony. Israel Holdroyd’s tune was first published in his *The Spiritual Man’s Companion* and it became one of the most popular hymn tunes in North America up to the mid-19th century, but then inexplicably faded from use. It is one of 20 tunes preserved on the barrel organ built by Richard Coates for the Sharon Temple just north of Toronto. The Coates instrument is an early-19th century mechanical pipe organ, which has been restored by Geoffrey Payzant and Stewart Duncan. ‘Wells’ appears in *Canada Dash – Canada Dot* and also in Beckwith’s *Sharon Fragments* for choir, which is dedicated to James Reaney. It also appears in the volume

---

<sup>12</sup> Not 1756, as is stated in the score of *Tuptoo!*; see James J. Fuld, *The Book of World-Famous Music: Classical, Popular and Folk*, 4th edn. (New York: Dover, 1995): 243.

of hymn tunes that Beckwith edited in 1986 for the Canadian Musical Heritage Society.<sup>13</sup> ‘Windham’ and ‘Celestial Waterings,’ both quoted at the start of Act 2, also appear in the Beckwith hymn tune volume.<sup>14</sup> The Coates barrel organ, incidentally, has a prominent role in Act II, sc. v of the James Reaney/Harry Somers opera *SerINETTE*.

‘General Burgoyne’s Minuet’ is played (Act II, scene vi, 110) during Governor Simcoe’s ball at the request of Mrs. Jarvis, and accompanies some mean spirited gossip by the Simcoes and the Jarvises about each other. We learn from Edith Firth’s *The Town of York 1793-1815*, that such petty gossip was all too common in York pioneer days.<sup>15</sup> There is a fine satirical twist to Beckwith’s use of this tune. The minuet was written by Thomas Erskine, 6th Earl of Kelly, who was a violinist and the leading Scottish composer of the 18th century. Kelly named the minuet in honour of General John Burgoyne, whom he met at a wedding in Surrey in 1774.<sup>16</sup> In 1775 Burgoyne sailed to America to fight in the Revolutionary War, and the next year he became second-in-command to Guy Carleton, the Governor-in-Chief of British North America. In 1777 Burgoyne took command of a force of 9000 soldiers in Canada and invaded New York, with a view to cutting New England off from the southern colonies. But his surrender to General Horatio Gates at Saratoga, NY later that year handed the American forces their first significant military victory in the Revolutionary War. While his troops marched into captivity, Burgoyne returned safely home to England, and for this he was vilified by his own government and stripped of his commissions. If ‘Yankee Doodle’ at the start of *Taptoo!*

---

<sup>13</sup> John Beckwith, ed. *The Canadian Musical Heritage, vol. 5: Hymn Tunes* (Ottawa: Canadian Musical Heritage Society, 1986): tune 16.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, tunes 98 and 96 respectively.

<sup>15</sup> Edith G. Firth, ed. *The Town of York 1793-1815: A Collection of Documents of Early Toronto* (Toronto: The Champlain Society for the Government of Ontario / University of Toronto Press, 1962); see especially ‘H. Life in York,’ lxxv-lxxxv.

<sup>16</sup> See David Johnson, *Scottish Fiddle Music in the 18th Century: A Music Collection and Historical Study* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1984): 159-60.

can be read as an ironic thumbing of the nose at the American revolutionaries, then ‘General Burgoyne’s Minuet’ towards the close of it is no less a satirical jab at the foibles of the upper levels of the social hierarchy in Upper Canada.

I have suggested the battle piece and the ballad opera as possible frameworks for considering *Taptoo!* and more particularly the use of musical quotations in that work. But the opera can also be seen in the context of the larger creative output of Beckwith, and also of Reaney. *Taptoo!* is the prequel to the James Reaney and Harry Somers opera *Serinette*, which was premiered at the Sharon Temple in 1990 and was recorded in 2001.<sup>17</sup> Whereas *Taptoo!* ends on the eve of the War of 1812, *Serinette* begins just as the troops are returning to Fort York at the end of that war. Both operas are partly set in York and both include a mix of historical and fictional characters and incidents. Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis, who make a cameo appearance in *Taptoo!* at the Governor’s Ball, become two of the major characters in *Serinette*. Similarly, the conflict between pacifist Quakers and belligerent Americans which opens *Taptoo!* becomes a major theme in *Serinette*, though in the latter work it is played out as a contrast between The Children of Peace, a breakaway sect of the Quaker movement, and the hard nosed residents of York.

Beckwith and Reaney share many artistic techniques and aesthetic principles in common. Catherine Ross, in writing of Reaney’s work as a writer, notes that ‘[he] has combined archival research, poetry, elements of romance and melodrama, mime and myth to tell the central stories and legends of Ontario’.<sup>18</sup> A similar blend of scholarship and creativity informs John Beckwith’s work. You never have to travel far in Canadian music scholarship – or indeed in Canada – before you run into the work of Beckwith. A

---

<sup>17</sup> Centrediscs CMCCD 76/7701 (a 2-CD set), conducted by Victor Feldbrill.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine Ross, ‘James Crerar Reaney,’ *The Canadian Encyclopedia Online*, ed. James H. Marsh (accessed 1 March 2003), <<http://www.canadianencyclopedia.ca>>.

stone's throw from where this paper was delivered (the Munk Centre at the University of Toronto), for instance, is the John W. Graham Library of Trinity College. Beckwith was commissioned to write a short choral work for the opening ceremonies of the library in 2000. The resulting composition, *Lady Wisdom*, includes a pertinent quotation from Canada's musical past: it is based on a work for piano solo by George W. Strathy, the first professor of music at Trinity. But the noteworthy thing is, that if I were giving this paper in Montreal or Halifax, Regina or Charlottetown, Victoria or Iqaluit – indeed, just about anywhere else in Canada – I could draw upon a similar example from John Beckwith's work to show how he has made us aware of the sounds and significance of that part of the country. In his career, as in James Reaney's, research and creativity have combined to unearth the music, the history, and the music history of Canada and, as in *Taptoo!*, bring it all vividly to life for modern audiences.