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[See table of contents](#)

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NÉCROLOGIE / OBITUARY

KENNETH HOWARD PEACOCK **1922-2000**

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Composer and folk music researcher Kenneth Peacock passed away on November 22, 2000 in Ottawa as a result of pneumonia, after a long illness. A native of Toronto, Peacock had two distinct but complementary careers: as a musician, teacher and composer, and as a researcher and collector of folk music for the then National Museum of Canada (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization).

Musically, Peacock was somewhat of a child prodigy. By the age of 15, he had achieved the highest standing at the Royal Conservatory of Music, becoming an Associate. His family expected him to become a concert pianist, and in 1941 he enrolled at the University of Toronto School of Music, completing a bachelor's degree in 1943. In addition to his interest in classical music, he developed a particular love of swing and jazz through recorded music and radio. He also made several treks across the border to the Buffalo area to listen to Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and others play jazz and bebop. These interests led him to do a dissertation on "Negro Folk Music" (1943), a topic which at the time fell well outside the academic scope of the largely British-oriented School of Music.

In 1944, Peacock decided to broaden his horizons, registering in the Arts program at University College at the University of Toronto, concentrating on English and Philosophy. He also turned towards composition, and from 1944 to 1950, he studied privately with John Weinzwieg, Reginald Godden, Michele Hirvy and Francis Judd Cooke. He once told me that his music corpus was not significant and that he was "not a great composer" (see Guigné forthcoming). His output was nevertheless sizeable. One of his best-known works was "Bridal Suite," composed in 1947 and published by BMI in 1948.

Reginald Godden premiered it at Hart House in Toronto and recorded it in 1949 on English Decca (London T-5697). The *Ottawa Journal* (June 3, 1950) noted it as the “first recording of Canadian classical music made in another country”.

Peacock’s musical career peaked in the 1950s. His last public performance was at a Canadian League of Composers concert at Casa Loma, Toronto, in 1958 for which he composed “Toccatà” for piano. With no supportive Canadian infrastructure for young musicians — before the establishment of the Canada Council — he struggled to have his works performed, and only “Bridal Suite” was published. By the 1950s, Peacock began to move into the collection and transcription of folksongs for the Museum.

He had first been introduced to field recordings of aboriginal peoples through a chance encounter with former School of Music classmate Margaret Sargent (McTaggart) in 1949. She invited Peacock to the Museum to hear the renowned Canadian folklorist Marius Barbeau’s (1883-1969) cylinder recordings of native materials from 1916. Peacock was fascinated, and with Barbeau’s blessing began to compose a series of “Idioms” based on the music.

Peacock took over the Museum’s Newfoundland folksong research in 1951 and 1952 from Sargent who had initiated it in 1950. Many of the areas he visited were unelectrified, so he could not use the tape recorder provided by the Museum. Undaunted, Peacock took down a substantial number of songs by hand.

Between 1953 and 1954, as the Museum’s musicologist, he traveled to various reserves in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, eventually collecting several hundred songs and dances mainly from the Cree, Blood, and Blackfoot peoples. At the end of 1954, re-activating his musical career as a composer and pianist, Peacock resigned from the Museum. As the Canadian folk revival movement began to take shape, he used his Newfoundland and native material in a series of radio programs for the CBC. Encouraged by Samuel Gesser, Folkways Records of New York’s Canadian representative, he also compiled two recordings, *Indian Music of the Canadian Plains* (1955) and *Songs and Ballads of Newfoundland* (1956). He also collaborated with Alan Mills, providing both songs and piano arrangements for *Favorite Songs of Newfoundland* (1958), a publication which is still in print today.

As a musician, Peacock could quickly convert folksongs he had collected into useable transcripts. Materials from his Newfoundland collection were

incorporated into such publications as Gerald S. Doyle's (1955) *Old Time Songs of Newfoundland*, and Edith Fowke and Richard Johnston's *Folksongs of Canada* (1954). Similarly, professional singers such as Tom Kines and Joyce Sullivan drew upon his Newfoundland collection for their own musical representations of Canada's folk music.

At first, Peacock was reluctant to be pulled toward folk music research, but each summer between 1958 and 1961, he returned to Newfoundland to expand his folksong collection. By 1961, he had collected almost 800. His three volume *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (1965) was the largest single folksong publication pertaining to one province. Several Canadian composers, including Harry Somers, Violet Archer, John Beckwith and Keith Bissell, drew upon this material for their own arrangements of Newfoundland folksongs.

In 1961, Peacock's last major musical composition, "Essay on Newfoundland Themes," was commissioned by Sir Ernest MacMillan for the opening celebration concert for the International Folk Music Council Conference, held for the first time in Canada, and hosted by the newly organized Canadian Folk Music Society. Woven throughout the piece was one of his favorite songs, "The Green Shores of Fogo" (Pea MS-47), which he had collected in 1952.

On the completion of the Newfoundland research, at the suggestion of Carmen Roy, then head of the Museum's Folklore Division, he launched their first ethnic music survey. Traveling across central and western Canada that summer, he carried out a preliminary field investigation in rural areas as well as several cities between Ottawa and Vancouver. Drawing upon contacts who could serve as translators and/or as community informants, he successfully gathered materials from the Chinese, Croatian, Doukhobor, Dutch, Hungarian, Hutterite, Icelandic, Japanese, Lithuanian, Mennonite, African-Canadian, Norwegian, Polish, Sikh and Ukrainian communities, and documented preliminary information on an additional 15 groups.

This survey also provided Peacock with a research template. Between 1963 and 1971, working for the Museum on contract, he traveled across the country to capture some of the imagery of ethnic cultures through audio recordings and photography. Several landmark works came out of this research, including *Twenty Ethnic Songs from Western Canada* (1966), *Songs of the Doukhobors: An Introductory Outline* (1970) and *A Garland of Rue: Lithuanian Folksongs of Love and Betrothal* (1971).

As one of the first field researchers at the Museum with formal musical training, Peacock assisted colleagues involved in folksong collecting. Helen Creighton (1899-1989) hired him to transcribe most of her Nova Scotia collection. Over the years, they developed a close working relationship and he provided the musical transcriptions for several of her works including *Maritime Folksongs* (1961) and *Folk Songs From Southern New Brunswick* (1970). He also did musical transcriptions for Robert Klymasz's *The Ukrainian Winter Folksong Cycle* (1970) and *The Ukrainian Folk Ballad in Canada* (1989).

Like any collector, Peacock had personal preferences. He noted that he was not inclined to look for country and western music in Newfoundland, as he could find this in Alberta and it didn't really interest him. He preferred songs with modal tunes and had little time for musics with popular connections, but had a great appreciation for locally-composed songs. Though he thought them of lesser quality musically, he recognised their historic importance.

Peacock once referred to his collection as a "sort of Personal Encyclopedia of Canadian Cultures — ranging from Aborigines to Zealots — which inspired me to report on each one as accurately as possible" (1995, 33). He had an insatiable curiosity about the music of various cultures within Canada's borders. Consequently, his survey work with the Museum contributed greatly to the mapping of Canada's musical heritage: Newfoundland chin music, Scots fiddling from Cape Breton, Cree hand-game songs, Blood folktales, Doukhobor traditional choral singing, Ukrainian Christmas Carols, Mennonite folksongs, Okinawan-Japanese songs accompanied by shamisen, and Chinese vocal and instrumental music.

During his extensive career Peacock was variously called a folklorist, musicologist, folk music specialist, ethnomusicologist and multicultural folksong collector. He did not see himself as an ethnographer in the classic sense, saw no purpose for self-reflective fieldnotes and preferred to leave analysis and annotation to others. But Peacock was an excellent fieldworker. The Canadian Folk Music Society asked him to prepare a *Practical Guide for Field Collectors* (1966), which conveyed the importance of good field documentation, recordings, sources, relations with informants, and musical transcriptions. Though self-taught, he was methodical, organized and cost-efficient. His guidelines note: "It is my view that we should gather material from as many groups as possible, always keeping in mind the original environment of the informants and their length of stay in Canada" (3).

As a collector Peacock left a lasting impression on those he recorded. His Newfoundland informants spoke with warmth and affection of his work and interest in their lives, and showed me copies of *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*, which they had received with his personal note of thanks. These books showed the wear and tear of constant circulation. Since the late 1960s, "the Peacock Collection" as it is locally known, has provided a guide for Newfoundlanders interested in their own musical traditions.

By the end of his collecting career, Peacock had made over 3300 recordings on 560 tapes. Supplemented by his amazing photography, which includes hundreds of images of traditional singers from one side of the country to the other, his audio-recordings and transcriptions are an immense ethnographic encapsulation of the diversity of Canada's traditional folk music and folk culture. His research was undoubtedly shaped in part by romanticism and survivalism, threaded with an intense feeling of Canadian nationalism. Like many of his peers, he was influenced by the American and British folk revivals, but he also shaped the Canadian folk revival movement. He wanted to introduce Canadians to the wealth of music in their own country. Thus, he influenced the direction of folk music scholarship. Not satisfied to see his work languishing in archives, he wanted the songs and music to be in the public domain. To this end, he generously allowed others to record and publish them. Through both his survey work from coast to coast and his publications, he helped Canadians of many origins discover their musical roots. As a lasting legacy, he brought us all much closer to understanding both the cultural diversity and the commonalities of our country.

Some of Peacock's compositions are registered with the Canadian Music Centre in Toronto. His audio recordings, photographic collection and papers are housed at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. His personal papers, compositions, and other audio and visual materials are at the Saskatchewan Archives in Saskatoon. In 1984, in recognition of his life's work, Peacock was presented with the Order of Canada. In 1998, he was particularly pleased to have been awarded the Marius Barbeau Medal by the Folklore Studies Association of Canada, for his outstanding contributions to the field.

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