

Come and I Will Sing You: An Interview with Newfoundland Singer, Storyteller, and Archivist Anita Best

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Anita Best is one of the most prominent traditional singers in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. She is also an educator, archivist, folklorist, broadcaster and author. Her musical interests are deeply rooted in oral history—songs and stories passed down orally from one generation to the next. She has travelled to small towns and rural communities across the island of Newfoundland recording hundreds of local tunes and stories that she has performed herself and that have since been archived at Memorial University of Newfoundland, published as song collections.

While Best has produced six albums, and is a contributing voice on many others, she is most well-known for her albums *The Colour of Amber*, a collaboration with Pamela Morgan, released in 1993; *Crosshanded*, a solo collection released a few years later; and the more recent album *Some Songs*, a collaboration with guitarist Sandy Morris released in 2018. She is the co-author of a collection of Newfoundland songs, *Come and I Will Sing You: A Newfoundland Songbook*, and a collection of folktales, *Clever Maids, Fearless Jacks, and a Cat: Fairy Tales from a Living Oral Tradition*.

In 2009, Best was granted the degree of doctor of letters (*honoris causa*) from Memorial University, and, during her convocation, the university orator referred to Best as “a modern-day skald” for her work in “collecting and performing the songs and tales of her ancestors, ensuring this priceless cultural legacy is not lost to future generations” (Hestekin, Oration). In 2011, Best was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada, and in 2015 the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Arts Society awarded her their Lifetime Achievement Award.

The songs and stories of Newfoundland that caught the interest of Anita Best were those that had been passed down through generations, like secrets from one person to the next. Fishers, farmers, wood-cutters, craftspeople, and children carried narratives and lyricism from house to house, community to community, person to person, but they were rarely written down or recorded. They were preserved almost entirely in the oral tradition. These songs described normal everyday life, as well as hardships and disasters, in rural Newfoundland. They cap-

tured and preserved a distinct Newfoundland identity. This identity was shaped by colonization and independence and was later threatened by Newfoundland's entry into confederation with Canada in 1949 and the modern influences of the mainland. It is thanks to a steadfast oral tradition, and people like Anita Best who actively sought out and collected these songs, that Newfoundland culture is as rich and diverse as it is today.

The current Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador consists of an island portion, referred to as Newfoundland, and a mainland portion, Labrador. Each area has a unique geography, history, culture and identity, and, for the purpose of this interview, I will focus exclusively on the island of Newfoundland. Before Newfoundland became a British colony in 1825, it was used strictly as a European fishing outpost. One third larger than Ireland and situated off the northeastern coast of North America, Newfoundland cuts off the mouth of the Saint Lawrence creating the Gulf Stream, the world's largest estuary and one of the world's largest fish reserves. In the early 20th century, Newfoundland became an independent Dominion of Britain, but the economy collapsed in the Great Depression of the 1930s: the people of Newfoundland subsequently and voluntarily relinquished their independence to become a British colony once again. Prosperity and self-confidence returned briefly during the Second World War, but, after intense debate, Newfoundlanders voted to join Canada in 1949 by a narrow margin of only two percent.¹

Confederation accelerated the processes of modernization and urbanization that were already underway on the island (Overton, 223). New roads connected once-isolated communities to larger centres; modern hospitals and schools were developed; Memorial College became Memorial University; and access to the Canadian social security net improved material standards of living. However, resettlement programs were introduced that relocated many small and isolated communities to designated growth centers, and the industrialization of the fishery ended a way of life that had endured for generations. The growing exposure to North American mass media and consumer culture also threatened Newfoundland's unique culture and identity.²

During the late 1960s and 1970s, Newfoundland experienced what has been called a cultural renaissance. It was a period of sustained creative activity spurred on and maintained by local artists working in a wide range of disciplines, such as the literary, performing, and visual arts. This movement celebrated the traditions and culture of rural Newfoundland and outport life. Local artists and academics at Memorial University wanted to show Newfoundlanders, as well as people outside of Newfoundland, that, although they had always been considered poor, economically dependent, and living in isolated communities, Newfoundlanders had a distinct cultural heritage that most other provinces in Canada did not have.

In November of 2019, I sat down with Anita Best at her home where she currently resides in Norris Point, a small rural community on the north-west coast of Newfoundland, to talk to her about how traditional music has played an important role in reviving and preserving our Newfoundland culture and identity.

SK: Anita, can you begin by telling me a little bit about your musical beginnings and your interest in traditional Newfoundland music? How did it all start?

AB: I was born in Merasheen, an island in Placentia bay, when it was still a thriving fishing community. My father was a fisherman and also a singer. My father and his brothers were all great singers. My father's people, the Bests, came from Somerset, England in the 1700s. I guess singing was an English tradition, and they brought it with them.

There was a singing tradition in Merasheen, as in many rural Newfoundland communities. There were not many instrumental players, but people sang. This was a public tradition, mostly among the men. Women sang, too, but it was more of a domestic undertaking. My family and I moved to St. John's in the late fifties, but I still spent summers visiting Merasheen until that community was resettled in 1968.

After my father died in 1973, I realized I never recorded him and I never recorded my uncles or any of their songs in Merasheen—a community that was no more. As a teenager, I had been more interested in rock and roll and that kind of stuff; it never occurred to me to record any of our local music traditions.

When my father died in the early seventies, it was around the same time that trad rock was becoming popular. Trad rock, or folk rock, was traditional folk songs put to rock and roll. It was a big thing in England. There were a couple of friends, musicians in St. John's, who had an interest in the folk music of England: Noel Dinn and Neil Murray. They were certainly a big influence during this time. When trad rock made its way to Newfoundland, we found it familiar. We recognized it. We would listen to it, this new and popular genre, and say, "My God, this sounds just like Newfoundland songs. Really!" This was the spark that got me excited about traditional Newfoundland songs. Other musicians were excited, too. There was a cultural revival happening in Newfoundland, and people were interested in this kind of thing. Why not put some Newfoundland songs to rock music? This led to the formation of Figgy Duff, which I think may have been the first trad rock band in Canada.

That was really the beginning, but I am more of a soloist. I love the freedom of being a soloist. I didn't stay with Figgy Duff for long. I went back to my career as a teacher.

SK: For our readers, I want to take a moment to explain that Anita Best was one of the original members of Figgy Duff, a Newfoundland folk-rock band co-founded in 1975 by Noel Dinn and Pamela Morgan. At the time, Dinn was already considered a veteran of the St. John's rock scene, and Morgan a well-known singer/song-writer. The band has been credited with being a significant part of the Newfoundland cultural renaissance of the 1970s (Fitzpatrick, Heritage). Figgy Duff produced a number of albums and has since had several reunions, the most recent being in 2016 for the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival in St. John's. Best left the band early on to pursue her teaching career but continued to share her newly discovered songs with them and continued to work in close collaboration with a number of the members, such as Pamela Morgan and Sandy Morris.

Anita, you've had incredible success as a soloist, but also as a collector of traditional songs and stories. You are celebrated as much for your work as a collector and archivist as a singer. Why was collecting and recording traditional songs important to you?

AB: Few of these songs were written down initially—they were sung. They were passed down from generation to generation through singing. Stories, too, were all passed down through the oral tradition. Traditional Newfoundland songs and stories came from an era before entertainment could be purchased. I mean, you could probably purchase it once a year when you went to a concert or something like that, but, most of the time, people had to entertain each other, or not be entertained at all. There was no electricity, not much radio or tv, so there was more of a collective entertainment. Everyone contributed towards it—you told a story or you told a joke or you sang a song. And that was your part. It was like bringing cookies to a pot-luck supper. Everybody would bring something so that everybody could have a bit of fun.

From 1975 to 1983, myself and Genevieve Lehr³ travelled to small towns and outport communities across the province to record local songs. Each place had its own music, all oral, all passed down through singing. There were other collections of Newfoundland music already in existence that had been collected by visiting scholars from England or from mainland Canada: *Folksongs from Newfoundland*, by Maud Karples, for example, and *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*, by Kenneth Peacock. But we wanted to do our own collecting as Newfoundlanders. And we didn't reprint many of the songs that were already in these collections, and we certainly didn't need to. There were plenty of songs. Some songs were carried over from the old world—England and Ireland mostly, where people emigrated from originally, and others were locally composed. We put emphasis on those that were locally composed—songs that were made up by Newfoundlanders in the singing tradition and passed on.

There was a strong nationalistic spirit in Newfoundland at that time. We were proud of things that were distinctly Newfoundland, and there was an interest in music that was our own. We also wanted to dispel the mainland perception of the Newfoundlander. It seemed to us that the Newfoundland musicians who performed in mainland Canada were patronized. They were trotted out in their salt-and-pepper caps and their pipes and their sou'wester hats. I don't think these musicians did anything wrong, but there was more to Newfoundland music that the mainland didn't get to see. The ballads and folksongs of Newfoundland are beautiful and musically sophisticated.

SK: What are some of the common themes that you have come across in the music you have collected?

AB: Most of these songs were sung by working-class people. They don't belong to a classical tradition or anything like that. They were made up by regular working-class people, many of whom couldn't read or write, certainly couldn't write sheet music. Not like now. There's plenty of musicians around now with music degrees who are able to write these things down. A lot of the old traditional songs are about their ordinary, everyday lives. Songs are about love and death and jealousy, breaking up with your girlfriend or boyfriend, or murdering your wife—all that kind of stuff! Funny songs about girls tricking fellas or fellas tricking girls. There are songs about fishing and songs about logging.

Songs about shipwrecks are common. Shipwrecks were a regular occurrence and a constant source of worry for a lot of families. Songs often told stories about things that happened. For people who didn't read, this was really important. There are laments as well. Sorrow for things lost. There was a lot of that in Newfoundland—things lost.

SK: I came across one song called "The Water Witch." I believe you sing it on your album *Crosshanded*. The events as they are described in the song are different from the actual event. Why do you think that is?

AB: Yes, "The Water Witch." That is a locally composed song about the fishermen from Pouch Cove who saved the crew of the *Water Witch* from a watery death. The boat was in stormy seas off the coast of Newfoundland when it hit a reef in what was called Horrid Gulch. The Pouch Cove men, using ropes and lanterns, climbed down into the six-hundred-foot Horrid Gulch and carried up those who were on the ship.

There are discrepancies between the lyrics and what actually happened. In the song, the *Water Witch* ran into trouble on Christmas Eve, but the shipwreck actually happened in November. The song also mentions that women were rescued, but, according to a newspaper of the

time, there were no women saved. The four women who were aboard the boat were lost to the sea.⁴

It's like when you tell a story about something that happened. Sometimes you change a detail here and there, sometimes even unconsciously, to make the story better. It's the same with these traditional Newfoundland songs. The important thing that the creator of that song wanted you to get out of it was that the Pouch Cove men were heroes. The event was important—this disaster did occur. The boat was wrecked on the rocks in Horrid Gulch, but the emotional core, what the song is meant to make you feel, is heroism. The actual facts are incidental to the song, the message that was preserved and passed on. The heart of it is that the Pouch Cove boys are heroes, and that needs to be celebrated and remembered.

The Water Witch

Come all ye true-born fishermen and listen to my song
I hope you pay attention and I won't delay long
Concerning of those Pouch Cove men, those fishermen so brave
Who saved the crew of the Water Witch so near a watery grave.

On Christmas Eve this craft did leave and loud the wind did roar
Twas on a reef she came to grief not far from Pouch Cove shore;
In a place they called the Horrid Gulch this schooner headed on,
And in the twinkling of an eye three poor, dear souls were gone.

Three seamen from the Water Witch lept when they heard the shock,
The rest belong to that doomed craft were hurdled up on a rock;
To wait there hours in storms and showers and loud the sea did dash,
They see their schooner beaten up, all on the rocks did smash.

The Pouch Cove fishermen to a man came out that cruel night
For those who gazed on those poor souls, it was a doleful sight
And for to make the scene much worse, poor females numbed with cold
Stood waiting there to be relieved by those brave heroes bold.

Punts, ropes and lanterns soon were brought by kind and willing hands,
The shrieks of females in distress, those fishermen could not stand;
And for to face that Horrid Gulch, six hundred feet did go
To save those souls half dead with cold who waited down below.

Brave Alfred Moore, a Pouch Cove man, 'I'll take the lead,' he cried,
And around his waist strong hempen rope in double knots was tied;
And strong men waited on the top to lower him o'er the cliff,
To dash our hero down below in blinding snow and drift.

Three times they swung him in the dark in blinding drift and snow,
Before his foot could find a place to give him any hold;
At length he found a resting place close to a sheltered stone,
Where he could see those souls below and hear their dismal moan.

Oh! now to save this shipwrecked crew their hearts were filled with hope
Six more brave Pouch Cove fishermen like heroes man the rope;
And now some small hand-lines like Moore's, they managed for to lower,
Till all the Water Witch's crew were landed safe on shore.

Oh hark! another scream is heard, the people got a shock,
Another female left below to perish on the rock;

Brave Alfred made another dash, and loud the wind did roar,
He took this woman in his arms in safety to shore.

The news was soon in town next day about the Water Witch
The whole community was surprised, the poor as well as rich;
The Governor, he wrote home these words in letters bold and grand
To tell the pluck of those fishermen belong to Newfoundland.

And the Humane Society of Liverpool they very soon sent here
Gold medals to those fishermen who never knew no fear;
The Governor's Lady pinned them on, those medals rare and rich,
On the Pouch Cove boys who saved the lives aboard the Water Witch.

So here's success to those brave boys who risked in storm and breeze
Their precious lives to save those souls who ventured on the seas;
May peace and plenty be their lot, that gay and gallant man,
Brave Alfred Moore and all the rest belong to Newfoundland.
(Best, Crosshanded)

SK: One of the most well-known Newfoundland songs, and one of my personal favorites, is "Come and I will Sing You." Can you tell me what that song is about and how it might be important?

AB: People really love that song, and it has been passed along from generation to generation. University students have written thesis projects about that song. Folklorists who have studied that song are always at a loss. It's mysterious, kind of like "American Pie." The song is referring to things that everybody knew about at one time, but now we have forgotten like "the joker," in "American Pie," or "the coat he borrowed from James Dean." It was known to previous generations, but you hear it now and have no idea what the lyrics are referring to. It's something that is mysterious.

The song is also known as "The Ten Commandments," or "The Twelve Apostles." Some refer to it as a Christmas song because it's repetitive, similar to "The Twelve Days of Christmas," where you sing "and a Partridge in a Pear Tree" over and over. I'm not sure if it is necessarily a Christmas song, but it is certainly ritualistic. It is a song that harks back to a time when religion was more pagan, or the transition from pagan religion to Christian religion was happening, but that might be fanciful. I'm not really sure. There are both Christian and Pagan versions of the song, so there is some religious antiquity to it. There are different versions in England as well, in addition to the versions we have.

There has been so much written about that song, and there are varying interpretations of what the lyrics are referring to. "The nine," for example, could be the nine bright planets, "the three drivers" could be the three magi. Maybe it's a secret society song about the birth of Christianity, Jesus being "One, the one lives all alone." Whatever it means, it caught the imagination of the many people who heard it, and they passed it on. The version we collected was from the Carrolls. The

Carrolls were originally from Red Island in Placentia Bay and moved to Stephenville on Newfoundland's west coast in the 1930s. During the 1930s, the Commission of Government moved people to what they thought might be good agricultural grounds in an attempt to diversify Newfoundland's economy. People were moved from Placentia Bay to the Stephenville area. The Carrolls moved and brought that song to Stephenville with them.

Come and I will Sing You

- 1 Come and I will sing you
What will you sing me?
I will sing you one-o
What will the one be?
One the one lives all alone
And ever more shall be so.
- 2 Come and I will sing you
What will you sing me?
I will sing you two-o
What will the two be?
Two of them were lily white babes
Clothèd all in green-o
One the one lives all alone
Forever more shall be so.

[Continue adding lines up to ten]

- 10 Ten the ten commandments
Nine the bright-eyed shiners
Eight the Gabriel angels
Seven the seven stars under the sky
Six the six bol (bold/bowl?) wagers
Five the flem boys under the bush
Four the gospel creatures
Three of them were drivers
Two of them were lily-white babes
Clothèd all in green-o
One the one lives all alone
And ever more shall be so. (Come and I will Sing, 39-40)

SK: Are there other songs that are ritualistic in nature?

AB: Well, there are the alphabet songs. Alphabet songs are a way of remembering things: A is for this, B is for that, and so on. Jim Payne, for example, recently wrote an oil riggers' alphabet song, and all the things that are mentioned in it are things you would do on an oil rig. This is kind of a throwback to the old fisherman's alphabet song, or the sailor's song. [Jim Payne is a Newfoundland folk singer born in 1955. He is well known for performing and recording Newfoundland Sea Shanties, composing the popular song "Wave over Wave," and founding the record label SingSong Inc which supports other Newfoundland artists.]

Also, some of the old ballads may be considered ritualistic. They can put you into a more meditative frame of mind, like a chant will do, and the choruses are like chants in some ways.

Some Newfoundland songs were actually directions about how to get from one place to another. There's one song called "Wadham's Song" that tells you how to get to Fogo Island. Ritualistic or not, some of these songs had a practical purpose. For people who couldn't read charts, songs like these were relied upon. They told you what rocks to avoid and to steer in this direction for so long and then another direction for so long. I actually sang that song at a museum in the United States. The museum had a whole display of songs that were used for the purposes of navigation.

SK: I would like to include an example of "Wadham's Song" here for our readers. It was named after the man who composed it in the year 1756. After it was first composed, this song was on record at the Admiralty's Court in London and was considered the best coasting guide for the particular area of Newfoundland to which it refers.

Wadham's Song

From Bonavista Cape to the Stinking Isles
The course is North full 40 miles;
When you must steer away North East
'Til Cape Freels, Gull Island bear NNW

Then NNW 33 miles
Three leagues off shore lies Wadham's
Isles;
Where of a rock you must take care
Two miles SSE from Isles it bears.

Then NW by West, 12 miles or more
There lies Round Head on Fogo Shore;
But NNW seven or eight miles
Lies a sunken rock near the Barracks Isles

Therefore, my friend, I would you advise
Since all those rocks in danger lies;
That you may never amongst them fall
But keep your luff and weather them all

As you draw near to Fogo Land
You have fifteen fathoms in the sounding
sand;
From 15 to 18 never more
And you'll have close to the shore.

When you abreast of Round Head be
Then Joe Batt's Point you'll plainly see;
To Starboard then three or four miles
You'll see a parcel of damned rugged isles.

When Joe Batt's Arm you are abreast
Then Fogo Harbour bears due West
But unkind Fortune unluck laid
A sunken *rock*⁵ right in the trade

So NNW you are to steer
'Till Brimstones Head doth plain appear
Which over Pilley's Point you'll see
Then off that danger you are free.

And as you draw within a mile
You'll see a house on +⁶ Syme's Isle;
The mouth of the channel is not very wide,
But the deepest water is on the larboard
side.

When within Syme's Point you have shot;
Then three fathoms water you have got
Port hard your helm and take care
In the mid channel for to steer

When Pilley's Point you are abreast,
Starboard haul and steer SS West
Till Pilley's Point covers Syme's stage,
Then you are clear, I will engage. (Doyle, *Old Time Songs*, 63)

AB: There were also songs that made fun of people in the community—usually for doing something that wasn't socially acceptable. "Peter Street," for example, an English broadside, is about a sailor who goes ashore and meets this girl who takes him for a dance. When they go to bed, she robs him of all his clothes and leaves him there with nothing to put on, so he ends up having to put on her clothes to go back to his ship. It's called "Barrack Street" in England and it's called "Patrick Street" in Ireland. In Newfoundland, it is "Peter Street." It's a familiar story. And a lot of these songs describe common experiences for many people.

Some folk tunes have been taken by classical musicians and turned into classical music. The songs were just great tunes that composers liked the sound of and thought they could add on to or run them together to make another piece of music. I think the songs just appeal to the human ear, and music can strike you so directly. You don't have to think about music; you just feel it immediately. It evokes an emotion in you, and that's the power of music, and whether it is classical or jazz or blues or folk, there's something about it that can create a sense of nostalgia. The lyrics and what the song is about is one part of that, but the tune and the craft of the song, how it is sung, can all evoke a sense of belonging or a sense of home.

SK: Is there a difference between the traditional music you have collected and what some may call popular Newfoundland music, the jigs and reels, if you will?

AB: For people like myself and other folksingers, like Pamela Morgan and maybe Noel Dinn and Neil Murray, the less commonly heard music was more precious to us. We were looking for the rare thing, rather than what was common or more well-known. I don't [usually] sing the

type of music you would hear in a Newfoundland bar, and neither would bar bands play the kind of music I sing. One isn't better or worse than the other—there's room for us all. It's just different. And it appeals to different people.

SK: To an outsider, the importance of traditional Newfoundland music may appear to be waning in the face of the onslaught of media and the introduction of mainland musical forms. Why is it important to preserve them as they are?

AB: You don't ever preserve them as they are. The music changes with each generation. The tunes become faster or slower. Or they are performed with more instrumentation, for example when there were new instruments appearing on the scene like the bodhran, the hammered dulcimer, and the drum kits. Musicians have been innovative, too, adding jazz bits to the songs or doing them like blues songs.

Songs change all the time, but it's important to have your own source of stuff so you're not always repeating someone else's music. It's important, and meaningful, to have your own ancestral music to work with. That was the foundation of all the music that we performed and all the music we collected. We wanted to make sure that successive generations of Newfoundlanders knew there were songs that came out of Newfoundland. The songs were crafted here, not written down, because a lot of these song makers were illiterate, but they were made like you make any form of art. There are the songs that were made here, and, then, there are songs that were brought to Newfoundland very early on. We have a very rich musical culture that means a lot to our identity as Newfoundlanders and also serves as a repository that Newfoundland musicians can tap into.

And it's not fading. Not at all. There are new groups even now, like Shanneyganock or Matthew Byrne and the Dardanelles, that use these songs and are still bringing them out of obscurity.

SK: Yes, Matthew Byrne is a good example. He is a traditional Newfoundland singer and guitarist who recently won the Canadian Folk Music Award's 2018 Traditional Recording of the Year for his album *Horizon Lines*. He is also quite popular with a younger audience, as are the Dardanelles. Shanneyganock is also quite popular—a band that has been around for over twenty-five years and still going strong.

Do you consider our traditional Newfoundland songs artifacts, in any way, of British imperialism?

AB: I suppose so, in a way. They're artifacts of a previous way of life, old Newfoundland, if you will. We're a proud people, and there is still a nostalgia for Newfoundland as an independent country on the world

stage. The songs that came from Britain and Ireland tell of experiences our ancestors had and link our lives in the New World to theirs.

SK: There is a lot of pride of place here in Newfoundland, and an independent spirit. Newfoundland was a British Dominion from 1907 to 1934, and many believed we were well on our way to becoming an independent island country. Instead, the financial crisis of the Great Depression led to a voluntary relinquishing of self-government in exchange for British Royal Commission rule as a crown colony. After two separate referendums, Newfoundland reluctantly joined Canada with a final vote of 52 percent in 1949. Newfoundland was the last province to join Canada, and we did so very late, almost half-way through the twentieth century. From what you have observed, how has traditional Newfoundland music changed since Confederation and in recent years?

AB: Well, there were the confederation songs and the anti-confederate songs. That was a big thing at the time, and Newfoundlanders were really divided over the issue. Even families were divided, with some in favour of Confederation and some vehemently opposed. Newfoundland was a bit like Northern Ireland in a way because there was a mixture of Protestant English and Irish Catholic and French Catholic, but somehow we all managed to live together and get along. I know where I grew up, in Placentia Bay, people didn't really have any falling out based on where they were from. It didn't matter because we were all from somewhere else and had to figure out a way to get along. I suppose life was such that we were dependent on each other, and we learned how to avoid confrontation. Even with the vote for Confederation being so close—a 48 to 52-percent split—there was no big riot or revolution. People just hunkered down and went on about their daily lives. They needed each other.

That's not to say people stopped feeling strongly about Confederation. They did feel strongly about it. A lot of us still do. And many of us consider ourselves Newfoundlanders first and Canadian second. But I think music did change after Confederation. In many ways, Confederation was the fuel that sent us in search of our own distinctly Newfoundland culture and music. A sense of nostalgia grew for an independent Newfoundland, or a strong and distinct Newfoundland identity. Music was just one way of expressing this. Music is always changing. As times change, artistic expression also changes and it changes to reflect the times. As with all art.

Sometimes when you hear a song so often, over and over, you stop hearing the lyrics. When you make a change to a song, like if you change the temp of it or sing it differently, people pause and listen to the words again. They are reminded of the story, or what the song is actually about. That's the beauty of each generation changing it be-

cause each generation has a different look, or a different perspective. When you hear a song over and over, it sounds very ordinary, and the lyrics, the story, can sound very ordinary. But these songs tell stories, and when you are reminded to listen to the words, you realize what the song is about, be it a shipwreck or a loss, and you are struck by how extraordinary some of these stories actually were.

SK: Now that we have an archive of traditional music, thanks to you and your work, what would you like to become of it? How would you like to see it used?

AB: I want people to be interested in them, learn them, and sing them. That's why I collected them—to use them and sing them. It was a very selfish motive, actually. That's why I set out looking for these songs in the first place, but, then, I thought that other people, other Newfoundlanders, might be interested in this, too.

There's something about the oral tradition—the songs and stories that were not always written down but passed on through the generations in an oral tradition, either through re-telling or singing. There's something about that. It captures an identity, a culture, and a way of life that goes back to a time when we didn't have electricity or radios or TV for entertainment. When we had to get together, sit down close to one another, and share pieces of ourselves.

SK: I want to thank you for inviting me into your home and for taking the time to talk with me, sharing your experiences and thoughts and opinions.

AB: It was a pleasure. Thank you.

Notes

Shelly Kawaja is a writer, cultural historian and community radio host living in Norris Point, Newfoundland. She has a Master of Arts in History from Memorial University of Newfoundland and is currently completing a Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing at Humber College in Ontario.

1. For an overview of Newfoundland history, I recommend *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*, by Sean T. Cadigan.

2. For a longer discussion of the influence of Canadian media on Newfoundland folk music, see Neil V. Rosenberg's "The Canadianization of Newfoundland Folksong."

3. Genevieve Lehr is a Newfoundland-born author and poet. She currently lives in Halifax and co-edited *Come and I will Sing You: A Newfoundland Songbook* with Anita Best.

4. The newspaper Best is referring to is *The Newfoundlander* (Dec 3, 1875.)

5. Deans Rock

6. Not now standing

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