

Indigenous Peoples, Music, and Issues: Considerations for Orff Teachers

Begin by reading the introductory pages of Part 1 of *Kanata: Contemporary Indigenous Artists and their Music* teacher resource. Link: <https://www.musiccounts.ca/programs-overview/kanata/>

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Music

History

- It is important and integral to spend time learning the history of each distinct Indigenous group pre- and post-colonization before teaching any music. Understand where the people originated and how they lived.
- Residential schools and the sixties scoop impacts must be understood and acknowledged to understand how this impacts students and their families today.
- One cannot teach Indigenous music if they don't know anything about the specific group.

Diversity

- Distinctions must be made in identifying which group the music comes from (e.g., Inuit throat songs, Métis reels, First Nations powwow).
- Genres don't exist in traditional music, only contemporary Indigenous music (e.g., fiddle, folk, rock, electronic, opera, hip-hop, etc.).
- Not all traditional First Nations music sounds the same or has the same instrumentation.
- Some Indigenous music is for dancing, some for feasting, for working, for travelling, for playing community games, and so on.
- Some songs are shareable and some are not.
- Only use the term "Indigenous" when talking about all the people in general and the specific group is not named or identified.
- Use Métis when teaching Métis music. "Indigenous" no longer applies.
- Use "Cree" when you know the music or songmaker is Cree. "Indigenous" no longer applies.

Protocol

- Explaining protocol and how protocol works is difficult to explain.
- Protocol surrounds songs, dances, ceremonies, clothing, medicines, hunting, prayer, smudging, harvesting, feasts, teachings and storytelling.

- The only way to understand what protocols are required when inviting in a guest is to ASK. Never assume that all Indigenous people require protocol. This is mainly for First Nations or some Métis Elders or knowledge keepers.
- Offering protocol for teachings or knowledge is never a guarantee. Requests can be denied and that is OKAY. There is always a good reason.
- “Protocol” can be:
 1. a traditional medicine itself (sage, sweetgrass, tobacco, fungus, pine, cedar)
 2. a process or action (offering medicine to an Elder/knowledge keeper for a song/prayers/teaching/story; laying down tobacco by a tree or the animal after an animal is killed for food/clothing/tools).
 3. a way to act around the medicine (when medicines are burning or when a prayer or song is performed, everything stops and all is silent until it is ready to resume regular activity).
 4. a restriction (some females don’t play the drum due to gender roles in the community, some people cannot touch traditional medicines, certain stories cannot be shared if out of season or if the story is not yours to share, avoid seeing a deceased family member at a funeral if expecting a baby).
 5. the spiritual element of a respected or “high” Elder, a ceremony, a song or teaching, a medicine, or a way of life.
- Protocol can be difficult to understand exactly what it is and why it exists.

Songs

- If a song has not been created by an Indigenous person, it is never authentic.
- Some songs are never to be shared because they belong in families, in a specific sacred event, or simply because the song holder chooses not to share.
- What music is “authentic” is often disputed within Indigenous groups and individual people. Some traditional singers feel contemporary singers are not “Indigenous” or “authentic” because it doesn’t sound traditional.
- Songs can be vocable-based (chant syllables), language-based or both.
- Vocables cannot be made up or improvised. They are always considered to have come from spirit (ancestors), ceremony (heard in a sweat lodge for example) or from natural elements such as the wind.
- A traditional song has a sacredness that surrounds it. Traditional songs always have a sacred story or teaching with it. They are never separated.
- Songs need to be internalized and memorized before teaching orally. Keep with the tradition of oral tradition.
- Once a song is shared with you, you no longer need to request permission to use it again. Keep the song as is and don’t drastically change it.

Notation

- Traditional Indigenous songs are never written down and never will be because they are always shared in the oral tradition.
- Any song in notation is no longer traditional; it has become contemporary in nature.
- There are very few First Nations songs that are notated today. Notation is a western form of seeing and remembering.
- Notation restricts the “living” aspect of songs where they grow, move, change, and evolve from singer to singer and over time. Songs are not meant to always sound the same in the same key, tempo, dynamic, or timbre.
- Harmony doesn't exist in traditional music, just contemporary music. In some early recordings with some groups, 5ths can be heard but this is rare and only in specific songs and groups. Songs are sung in unison. Sometimes, if women are singing with men in certain songs and specific groups, they sing an octave higher and enter at a specific spot in the song.



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Program. Sherryl is a founder of the 2006 Juno-nominated Indigenous women’s trio Asani and released her solo album *Splashing the Water Loudly* in 2014.