

French-Canadian Culture

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Gerald R. Ford once said, “Music education opens doors that help children pass from school into the world around them - a world of work, culture, intellectual activity, and human involvement. The future of our nation depends on providing our children with a complete education that includes music.” One can see the truth behind this statement because music helps connect people and cultures. It helps students to learn about the math, science, and humanities that are behind each song, and individuals to feel so many different kinds of emotion. The French-Canadian culture will be discussed in terms of three important instruments: the guitar, fiddle, and accordian. These three instruments have had a positive influence on French-Canadian music and the cultural impact on different generations through dance, tempos, and styles of music.

The guitar: a stringed musical instrument with six or twelve strings, and is played by plucking or strumming with the fingers or a plectrum. Today, individuals hear guitar in all sorts of music across the globe, and that is thanks to those who have opened the eyes of different cultures and places to that instrument. Strutt, King, & Macsween (2013) stated that “European immigrants first brought the guitar to Canada in the mid 17th Century” (n.p.), which is what makes French-Canadian music what it is today. Montreal, Canada became the most popular city and the centerpoint of guitar playing. Ontario and Quebec, both located in Canada, were known to have “lessons” or instructions on how to play this instrument, and they were mostly offered to young girls, (Strutt, King, & Macsween, 2013, n.p.). After World War I in Canada, there was little mention of the guitar itself as well as people who played it, until 1945 when it grew to be much more popular, (Strutt, King, & Macsween, 2013, n.p.). Nowadays, it is well known in folk music as well as being used in jazz by an electric guitar, rock, and even Hawaiian music to

accompany the main singer. The real question is, how do people hear what is interpreted as music and how can that music get louder? The guitar relates to science because of sound. By way of music, it has to do with mechanical waves and intensity. There are two types of mechanical waves, transverse and longitudinal. A transverse wave is a physical disturbance in an elastic medium such as a gas, solid, or liquid. A longitudinal wave is a compression wave that creates sound, it starts with a vibration of the individual particles that are parallel to the direction of wave propagation. This type of mechanical wave can be known as a compression wave because it has two things happening to it, condensations and rarefactions. This is where the density and pressure hit a maximum, and it's minimum. A visual of this could be compared to a slinky. As the sound wave travels, energy is transferred from one molecule to the next. The rate at which that energy is being transferred through an elastic medium is called the intensity of the wave. Intensity, another important part of sound, is when the amplitude is higher, meaning the amount of energy it carries is stronger. Frequency is how high or low someone perceives the vibration or pitch, and individuals are physically able to hear it because sound waves pass through the outer ear and are amplified by the middle ear, then the brain receives that information and transfers it into something people can actually hear. The strumming of a guitar produces vibrations that travel through the air, and the science behind all of it makes it possible for people to receive those vibrations and interpret it as sound, a soothing song, or beautiful music.

The fiddle can be considered to be a part of the string instruments group, it is known particularly as a violin. The fiddle was first dated back in 1645, where two fiddles were played at a wedding. Over the next 100 years, fiddles were not much heard of in Canada. Although, there was mention of violins at balls and dances in Europe, and it is believed that when comparing

French-speaking countries like France and Canada, the instrument was used in very similar ways and around the same time. Fiddles are most often heard in folk music. Lederman & Smith (2013) states, “By virtue of its continuous history, dating from the 17th century, the extent of its past and current practice, and the manner in which it has mirrored the cultural development of Canada since the beginning of European habitation, it is our premier instrumental folk tradition,” (n.p.). Throughout Northern Ontario, fiddling became one of the main forms of musical expression. Gallops, clog dancing and waltzes go with the music because it has an upbeat sound and tempo to it, and the dances can match it. In the early 20th century, recordings of fiddles became popular and had an appeal to new media. Lederman & Smith (2013) said, “During the latter quarter of the 20th century up to the present day, virtually every area of the country produced ensembles rooted in their own regional traditions, some leaning more towards acoustic sounds, some towards the electronic instrumentation of rock bands, and some combining folk and classical styles” (n.p.). Imagine this, the sound of music bouncing in a person’s ear, the feel of fingers intertwined by two dance partners, the sour smell from all the sweaty bodies waltzing around on the dance floor, and the sight of all the girls’ dresses spinning in circles. Biologically, all of those things are possible due to sensation and perception. AllPsych (n.d.) puts the terms into a great definition, “Sensation refers to the process of sensing our environment through touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell. This information is sent to our brains in raw form where perception comes into play. Perception is the way we interpret these sensations and therefore make sense of everything around us” (n.p.). It works because sound waves travel through our outer ear where they are collected and directed by the ear canal to the eardrum. Then, it goes into the middle ear where sound is amplified, to the inner ear which contain sensory receptors. The hair cells in the

inner ear are bent by the ripples of vibrations which stimulate the auditory nerve which in turn, transmits neural messages to the auditory cortex so people can hear sounds such as the fiddle. In our brain, there are four different lobes that interpret our senses. The frontal lobe; concentrates on emotions, judgement, body movement and self awareness. The parietal lobe; focuses on the senses of touch and taste. The occipital lobe; interprets vision such as color and light, and the temporal lobe; perceives hearing and is related to taste and smell. The brain stem then connects the brain to the spinal cord, and the midbrain allows the brain to interact with the rest of the nervous system so that people can react to senses. The music created for part of this project to go along with this research paper was made based off of French- Canadian culture. It incorporates instruments from the geography of Canada and what is popular and most often used in folk music. Sometimes, music doesn't have a meaning to those in the world other than to tune out the deadly silence while people are busy spending time doing other things. What can be overlooked is how music can change a mood in a split second. The sound, rhythm, and tempo were all made so that people would receive a happy and bouncy feeling from it.

People may recognize the accordion as looking similar to a miniature, portable piano. It is a musical instrument and has metal reeds on it, the accordion is played by pushing buttons and keys to produce sound. Macerollo stated (2007) stated, "The stradella accordion is the most widely played and traditionally has been associated with ethnic, folk, and pop music" (n.p.). Accordion playing has been a major part of traditional music in Newfoundland, which is located right next to Quebec. During the mid 1930s, there were schools built in Toronto and Montreal that were known for having teachers to demonstrate and explain how to play the accordion (Macerollo, 2007, n.p.). Throughout time, accordion players have become leaders to look up to

for those in different music fields. There have been times in history where the accordion was slowly declining in popularity, but in the 1990s and early 2000s, it started to bloom in taste once again. In the 20th century, major recordings of accordionists started taking place. Often accompanied by the fiddle, the two instruments follow the beat to a harmonica. The accordion may not carry the beat, but it follows the beat, which is the pattern in music that stays consistent throughout a song. Patterns in music strongly relate back to math and they share a closer relationship than most people would first believe. Patterns and relationships are fundamental in everyday math, as well as music. It is what helps things to make sense and continue to flow. Tempo is how fast the beat is and can be expressed in “BPM,” beats per minute. That is the base of how music is created. Rhythm is the repeating sequences of beats, and most songs may contain repeating bars of choruses that follow a certain set beat. The beat helps tie all aspects of the music together and stays regular through all the different tunes and instruments. There is something called a sine wave which is basically a visual of music production. In the sine waves there are cycles happening which is one repetition of the wave pattern that is taking place. The frequency is how many times the number of cycles pass per a fixed amount of time, and it is most commonly measured in hertz. The amplitude is the measure of how high a wave’s height can be, which will affect the pitch that people hear. Overall, there are so many things that go into music. Not just putting some different instruments together, but all of the time, thought, and math that is also involved in producing an even simple song.

Music has such an impactful influence on life itself, let alone French-Canadian culture. One thing is for certain: music is everlasting. Sometimes, music can better put into words how someone might feel than they themselves can. Thus indicating why one might listen to music

more than another. It is important because it can affect someone's emotions. Music makes people feel sad, happy, energetic, calm, or at peace. It can change a mood in a matter of minutes; however the purpose of listening to music varies. It can be for fun, to cancel out the silence, to party, to have as a background noise in an empty conversation, or something much more. The meaning can go deeper than one even realizes. Music can be apart of culture. Whether someone realizes it or not, so much goes into it. The way songs are designed on one side of the country compared to the opposite can be unbelievable. On a larger scale, from one side of the world in comparison to the other, the way that music is portrayed can be completely different. Music and culture have an impact on each other, and in life people have learned how it is possible to hear, interpret, and understand music. The beat, rhythm, and tempo allow those to perceive music in different ways. For example, it can make someone happy, pumped up, or even sad. Sound waves travel through the air, booming when a person is closer to the producing sound, and fading as someone is farther away from the source. Then, those waves travel through the three parts of the human ear, and the body takes in the vibrations to interpret it as music. Listened to in order to impact a culture, designed by math, understood by science, and perceived by humanities. Music brings people together, developing bonds between those who have nothing else in common. One thing is for certain: music is everlasting.

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