Music’s Social(ization) Goals:
The Emergence of Community Music Education in Toronto’s Settlement Houses, 1915 – 1946

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Community music schools in Canada were born at the intersection of elite music and urban poverty. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Toronto Conservatory of Music was widely regarded as the premier musical training and performing institute in English-speaking Canada. As the Toronto Conservatory solidified Toronto’s music reputation nationally and internationally, the city was at the same time experiencing intensified urban poverty, brought on by rising industrialization, as well as a substantial influx of non-British immigrants to Toronto, leading to what Irving, Parsons, and Bellamy (1995) describe as the “beginning of a multiculturalism that was perhaps the most significant new social phenomenon of the first decade of the century” (33). To address wide-spread deteriorating social conditions and an emerging cultural pluralism, concerned students and citizens established settlement houses within Toronto’s poorest neighbourhoods. Among their many objectives, these settlement houses provided educational and recreational programs to local residents in an effort to socialize immigrants into Canadian society, a project that the settlements variously referred to as ‘civic betterment,’1 ‘civic unity,’2 or ‘Canadianizing.’3

Music pervaded the programming of the settlements,4 from recreational activities to democratic training clubs. Out of these informal uses of music, and in conjunction with key teachers from the aforementioned Toronto Conservatory of Music, three Toronto settlement houses established Canada’s first community music schools, with the objective of providing high-quality, affordable music training to “encourage the love of music for its own sake, and to give those who otherwise would not have it, an opportunity to enjoy the beauty that music can

1 From University Settlement House goals of 1912, quoted in Wasteneys 1975, 19.
2 From Central Neighbourhood House goals of 1911, quoted in O’Connor 1986a, 5.
3 From St. Christopher House goals of 1911, quoted in O’Connor 1986b, 6.
4 Throughout this paper, the terms “settlement houses,” “social settlements,” and “settlements” are used interchangeably to refer to the individual organizations that operated as social settlement houses within particular neighbourhoods of Toronto. The term “settlement movement” refers more broadly to the collective philosophies, principles, structures, and processes that guided the work of all the social settlement houses collectively.
This paper considers the musical practices and attendant rationales of the community music schools established by three Toronto settlements in the early twentieth century: Central Neighbourhood House, University Settlement House, and St. Christopher House. The rationales and practices of the settlement music schools were framed as ‘community music,’ a term that reoriented music from an end in itself towards a tool used in the social development of local residents. Further, the musical work of the settlements was put in service of their overarching goal of civic betterment, and in so doing, musically constructed citizenship within a tension between affirming Western European cultural norms and fostering inter-cultural understanding.

This paper will examine the shifting rationales and practices within and outside of community music schools, but begins by considering the philosophical aims of Toronto’s settlement movement and the ways in which music’s role was articulated as a tool in social development.

Settlement Houses, Civic Betterment, and Music’s ‘Work’

University Settlement House (established in 1910), Central Neighbourhood House (established in 1911), and St. Christopher House (established in 1912) were three of six settlement houses established in Toronto in the early 1900s. Settlement houses were service organizations that operated as neighbourhood “houses” within cities’ poorest neighbourhoods, providing educational and recreational opportunities for local residents, many of whom were recent immigrants from non-Western European countries. These settlement houses were not unique to Toronto or to Canada, emerging from a world-wide settlement movement that began in England in 1884, spreading through the United States during the Progressive Era, before coming to Canada and other countries, with a dove-tailed focus on reforming broad social conditions to

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5 The University Settlement Music School Minutes 1940, Series 619 Subseries 2, File 23. City of Toronto Archives, Toronto, Canada (CTA).
6 For an in-depth discussion of the settlement movement in Toronto and throughout Canada, see Irving, Parsons, & Bellamy 1995 and James 2001.
improve lives of the indigent, as well as reforming individual residents so that they would fit better into society (James 1997; Irving, Parsons, and Bellamy 1995).

Toronto’s settlements focused on the civic betterment of local residents through social opportunities, an emphasis clearly made within the very objectives of the organizations, although in slightly different ways. University Settlement House, established by a group of University of Toronto students and professors, was initially modelled on British settlements by bringing university students in direct contact with Toronto’s disenfranchised residents for the dual (if not equal) aim of “broadening the one and elevating the other” (Irving, Parsons, and Bellamy 1995, 85). Shortly after, however, another goal was added: to establish “a permanent socializing agency for bringing about civic betterment” (88). Central Neighbourhood House, on the other hand, was modelled after Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago, established in 1911 as an adamantly non-religious settlement focusing on democracy training through group programs, and through clubs built around Canadian parliamentary procedure, such as the boys’ parliament. St. Christopher House was established in 1912 by the Presbyterian Church as a Christian settlement, initially aiming to “Christianize and Canadianize” (O’Connor 1986b, 6), largely through social programs offered at the house. The workers, predominantly female, also created an atmosphere in the house that was modelled on an Anglo-Protestant middle-class family home, in which the workers themselves modelled hard work and self-sacrifice (James 1997).

All three houses engaged in the civic development of poor, working class, and immigrant residents through explicit ‘citizenship training’ but also through socially-oriented activities and programs. Arts from the outset were a part of this work, which were widely lauded throughout the settlement movement as an effective way to bridge and transcend neighbourhood differences

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7 For more about Hull House and its influence on the American settlement movement and the Progressive Era, see Davis 1967. For an analysis of the uses of music by reform activists in Chicago, see Vaillant 2003.
in religion, ethnicity, and language (Gilchrist 2001; James 1998). Settlement workers found music to be a particularly effective tool in fostering social development. In the first two decades of operations, music was informally integrated into most social and educational activities. At University Settlement House, for example, the “Marigold Club” for young girls and the Royal Young Canadians’ Club of boys sang their club songs after saluting the flag at each meeting. Two houses held annual Spring Festivals that celebrated the music, dance, and traditional dress of the residents’ cultures. Music was so pervasive that the Toronto Federation of Settlements had a standing committee for “musical work” that reported regularly to meetings (Parsons 1976), further emphasizing music less as an activity in and of itself, and more as a tool that could ‘work’ towards social development. These musical activities were soon formalized through the establishment of community music schools.

The music schools were in many ways a logical extension of the cultural work already underway in the settlement houses, and three of Toronto’s settlements established Canada’s first community music schools. Central Neighbourhood House opened its music school in 1915, followed by University Settlement House in 1921 and St. Christopher House in 1928. All three schools developed partnerships with the staff of the Toronto Conservatory of Music to offer private and group lessons in piano, violin, and voice. Demand for music lessons grew steadily through the 1920s and 1930s: Central Neighbourhood House and St. Christopher House each taught 75 students annually, and University Settlement House boasted over 100 students per year. Courses and programs expanded and shifted depending on the resources, interests, and skills of teachers and students associated with each school. University Settlement House, for example, offered classes in Eurythmics and solfège, operated children and adult choirs, and set

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8 University Settlement House History – CA. 1960. Fonds 1024, series 613, file 4. CTA.
9 The music schools at St. Christopher House and University Settlement House still operate at the time of this writing. Central Neighbourhood House still operates but its music school was closed in 1946 due to lack of funds.
up an orchestra (Dorricott 1950). Central Neighbourhood House established a rhythm band, a mouth organ group, and a singing club (O’Connor 1986a). St. Christopher House did not offer much outside of singing, violin, and piano during this period, but they had several pianos within the house that students could use for practice (O’Connor 1986b).

The settlements used the term ‘community music school’ partly because the schools were located within their local neighbourhoods rather than in educational institutions or conservatories. However, the term also pointed to the social objectives of the schools: these new community music schools aimed to provide access to what they called high-quality or ‘good’ music towards social development. As University Settlement Music School articulated in 1938: “Compared with a Conservatory the purpose of a Music School in a Settlement is highly social; i.e. it lays emphasis on the all-round development of the pupil, rather than on training for vocational purposes.”

The ‘civic betterment’ work of community music in this context tended to be articulated less as an overt exercise in citizenship development as other programs within the settlements; instead, while the civic goal was kept in sight, music was most frequently articulated as an effective mechanism for social and human development.

**Community Music Education as a Tool for Social Development and Socialization**

The establishment of these music schools shifted the music practices of the settlements by formalizing community music as a form of education. Music activities prior to the establishment of the schools tended to focus on intercultural exchange, such as the cultural spring festivals and international folk dance clubs. The music schools, on the other hand, through their partnerships with musicians from the Toronto Conservatory, focused predominantly on Western European art music repertoire and training, which, in light of their social development

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10 The University Settlement Music School Minutes 1940, Series 619 Subseries 2, File 23. CTA.
focus, had significantly different implications within the overarching civic betterment work of the settlements.

While music education within the Toronto Conservatory focused on training students in musical excellence, the community music schools were careful to assert that their goals were not to create professional musicians but to develop the individual through music to fit better into society. The community music schools’ curricula and training for the most part followed the developing Conservatory syllabi for voice, piano, and violin, but put in service of social and human development, “where the aim is not to teach music as a subject; but to develop the individual through music.” Further, community school organizers linked music’s social development function to settlements’ overall work in citizenship training and civic betterment. University Settlement Music School articulated their musical training as a “mental discipline” that could better equip individuals “to meet the obligation and need of society as an active citizen, a responsible adult and a directed human being.” Individual lessons and group lessons were framed as a way not just to train minds and bodies not just in Western European musical techniques, but also how to fit into society more generally by training bodies and voices to be disciplined and hardworking.

All three music schools emphasized access as a cornerstone of this social development, arguing that the schools could provide access to what they called the beauty of music for those who could not afford it, or as William Dorricott argued in 1950, “bringing good music closer to the people” (Dorricott 1950, 48). The schools endeavoured to increase access to Western European art music, normatively referred to as ‘good music,’ in a number of ways: first, the community schools provided opportunities to listen to Western European art music (WEAM),

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12 University Settlement Music School Short History, 1946. Fonds 1024, Series 619, Subseries 2, File 23 CTA.
which in the early twentieth century was not possible for most low-income residents.\textsuperscript{13} The schools each hosted regular WEAM concerts for all residents, which by most accounts were well-attended. Central Neighbourhood House held large monthly concerts that had crowds of 300 or more and University Settlement House hosted smaller weekly concerts that featured Toronto Conservatory teachers and performers, such as violinist Eli Spivak and pianist Norman Wilks. The music schools also provided free tickets to concerts at Massey Hall and other Toronto performance venues.

In terms of music training, the schools also offered access by removing financial barriers through offering full scholarships or grants-in-aid so that no student would be denied music lessons for lack of funds. That being said, access was tempered with an expectation of personal responsibility in that students were expected to contribute financially to lessons or to instrument rentals where possible. A St. Christopher House Music School Report of 1937 explains “if a child really wants to study music, but can't afford to, we try to help them. We always encourage the pupil to contribute something, no matter how small, to the cost of the lesson.”\textsuperscript{14} This policy was in line with the settlement philosophy of encouraging responsibility rather than charity (Irving, Parsons, & Bellamy 1995, 47). Social development was articulated as shared responsibility in which the schools provided the access and the students themselves contributed to their own access of musical training.

The community music school organizers emphasized social development not just as a kind of social cohesion developed through music—that is, fostering personal responsibility and social opportunities among residents through music listening and training—but also as an effective tool in socialization. The schools frequently accepted new pupils not for their talent but

\textsuperscript{13} Access to Western European art music, along with many other musics, became more possible in the decades following the development of recording technologies and radio in the 1920s (Vaillant 2003).
\textsuperscript{14} St. Christopher House Music School Report, March 1937, Fonds 1484, Series 1675, File 2, CTA.
because they were “refered [sic] to the school from other social agencies” for whom music might assist in “socializing” the child:

Pupils have been received in order of application but special arrangements have been made regarding certain children refered to the school from other social agencies.

Consultations with the Neighborhood Workers, Jewish Big Brothers, the Principal of Ogden School, and other interested individuals have resulted in plans being made for music as a special interest for a problem child and a socializing influence in his home.  

This socializing rationale underpinning the musical training of the schools is significant given their musical training drew predominantly from Western European art music. The settlements’ overall focus on civic betterment or citizenship training suggests that the schools’ use of Toronto Conservatory repertoire and practices, however innocent in intention, normatively assumed Western European culture as the end goal for social development. James (1998) argues that the settlements were largely focused on building a shared culture in an effort to develop socially cohesive communities, although with a specific ideal of that shared culture:

For most champions of the settlement movement in Canada, a shared culture was essential to the development of a truly cohesive community. It should be emphasized, however, that the sharing most settlers had in mind was almost entirely the endowment of Anglo-Canadian cultural icons on immigrants. (297)

Following James’ argument, this cultural work had the effect of confirming the culture of Anglo-Canadian middle and upper classes as the norm for a unified vision of citizenship. While the dominant social class of Toronto had British roots, most music school pupils were non-British

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15 University Settlement Music School Annual Report 1937-38, Fonds 1024, Series 619, Subseries 2, File 23. CTA.
16 Up until the turn of the twentieth century, most of the immigrants coming to Canada were settlers from the British Isles. Schabas (2005) notes that the 1890-91 census reported that 91 percent of Torontonians were first or second-generation British, and “their traditions and values clearly prevailed in education and the arts” (14).
immigrants, or as organizers articulated, the “foreign born population.”\textsuperscript{17} Each music school trained pupils whose families immigrated from an astonishing variety of countries year after year. A 1934-35 Annual Report for University Settlement Music School listed 28 “nationalities” served that year, including Jewish, Hungarian, “Czecho-Slovak,” Finnish, “Ukranian,” and “coloured.”\textsuperscript{18} The discursive effects of using Western European cultural practices within a broader rationale of civic betterment normalized WEAM as ‘good music’ in ways that subtly yet powerfully constructed what it meant to be and act as a citizen, predicated as it was on social relationships.

The predominant use of WEAM repertoire and instruction should not suggest that the music school teachers and organizers perniciously intended to indoctrinate or dominate students. To the contrary, teachers and board members worked tirelessly, and frequently without pay, in the sincere hope that pupils would have personally enriching experiences through music. Further, the simple fact that the schools all had many pupils volunteering their time and contributing money for lessons suggests that the pupils themselves experienced benefit in participating in musical training. Further, and perhaps more importantly, the Western European ideal underpinning the goal of social development was not a stable ideal in all instances, and across time. While Western European art music largely formed the music education of the community schools, some small and large ruptures in these practices suggest that the notion of social development was at moments recast as citizenship built upon intercultural exchange, particularly during World War II.

\textsuperscript{17} Fonds 1024, Series 619, Subseries 2, File 23. \textit{CTA}.
Musical Practices as Intercultural Exchange

Western European art music was pervasive, but not exclusively practiced at the settlement houses or their community music schools, suggesting that what constituted civic betterment was not determined or constantly stable. While St. Christopher House Music School stayed largely focused on classical training in piano, voice, and violin, Central Neighbourhood House Music School also offered a mouth organ band, a rhythm band, and a singing club in addition to its conservatory-style training offerings. Further, it bears reiterating that the settlement musical activities outside of the schools tended to use music and dance as kinds of intercultural exchange rather focusing on training or skills building with Western European art music. University Settlement House offered space to Chinese, Finnish, and Communist organizations for festivals and musical gatherings, further suggesting that settlement workers integrated the cultures of residents through music in other kinds of programming during this time period. Nonetheless, the community music schools themselves largely did not articulate their musical training as any kind of intercultural work until World War II. At this point, however, the social development rationales of community music education shifted dramatically to include intercultural notions of civic betterment, demonstrated clearly through the launch of a new music program in 1943.

The University Settlement House Music School piloted a music appreciation class for several elementary schools during World War II. Within the documentation for this course, the school dropped the normative term ‘good music’ along with the singular focus on WEAM in favour of educating students in several non-Western European cultures through music. Developing a kind of intercultural education, the course aimed to present “music on a broader basis,” focusing on music outside of the Western European musical canon. The curriculum of the
course contextualized music lessons by introducing the music and culture of each region, and connecting each lesson to current events and lived experiences. The lessons focused on what the school called ‘folk music traditions,’ drawing repertoire from many countries. Further, each folk music tradition was taught by a musician of that tradition in an effort to present music as “a living culture rather than an abstract art.”¹⁹ In this way, the non-Western musics, and the musicians who demonstrated the musics, were “taken for granted”²⁰ within the curriculum not by being erased or ignored but by normalizing the authority of the musics and the musicians.

The curricular shift was mirrored with a significant shift in rationale for the course related to racial and ethnic tensions within the local community that intensified throughout World War II. Mary Donaldson, the Headworker of University Settlement House, describes the cultural value of the course in the context of the many nationalities and cultures within the local area:

The community surrounding the Settlement represents some 38 different nationalities and so we are particularly conscious of the problems of minority groups. Ogden School and Hester How School have for the last five years allowed the Music School to teach a course in Music Appreciation to the children of Grade 5 and 6. This course for the most part has been built up around the music of minority groups, such as Negro, Chinese, Japanese and many European countries. This helps to give the children of minority groups a sense of pride in their own culture and the feeling that the traditions of their parents may have real value.²¹

Through Mary Donaldson’s words, the social purpose of music in this case was to value the various cultures within the community, with a particular focus on ‘minority groups’ rather than

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¹⁹ Course in Music Appreciation, p.2. St. Christopher House Fonds 1675-30, CTA.
²⁰ Course in Music Appreciation, p.2.
focusing exclusively on Western European art music. The school specifically describes the purpose of the music appreciation course as two-fold: first, it would bridge a generation gap by encouraging children of immigrants to value the music—and therefore the cultures—of their parents. Second, course proponents argued that the dominant “Anglo-Saxon” culture unfairly devalued other “National Groups,” and the course aimed to ameliorate “the wider problem of the recognition of these groups by the Anglo-Saxon groups in terms of equality and appreciation.” These purposes form a combined rationale that uses music to redress, rather than reinforce, the dominant “Anglo-Saxon groups.” This shift in curriculum and purpose still positions music as a tool in the social development of a community, but does so with a focus on multiple cultures through music. The course recasts music education as a kind of inter-cultural learning, perhaps even presaging multicultural music education.

The program ran for five years, expanding to Forest Hill Public School from Hester Howe and Ogden Public Schools, but ceased in 1947 due to lack of funds. While short-lived, the form and content of the Music Appreciation Course piloted by University Settlement House Music School offers a significant rupture in the discourses and musical practices of Toronto’s community music schools. Until these classes, University Settlement House, along with other community music schools, had trained students almost exclusively in Western European art music, normatively understood as ‘good music’ (Campbell 2000; Gilchrist 2001) that assumed Anglo-Saxon culture was the ideal model for developing immigrant and poor residents into citizens and active community members (James 1998). The Music Appreciation Course,

22 Course in Music Appreciation, p.2.
23 Course in Music Appreciation, p.2.
however, emphasized multiple cultures while de-emphasizing Anglo-Saxon culture, significantly shifting the very terms of civic betterment through music education.

More importantly, within the overarching settlement framework of ‘civic betterment’ and ‘Canadianizing,’ the Music Appreciation Course’s departure from WEAM through an emphasis on multiple cultures constitutes a markedly different ideal of the Canadian citizen as a national identity. While the WEAM-informed musical practices of the community music schools discursively constituted the ideal Canadian citizen as a British colonial subject, through what James (1997, 297) articulates as “the endowment of Anglo-Canadian cultural icons on immigrants,” this course constituted Canada’s national identity as a site constituted by multiple cultures. From the establishment of the music schools through to this mid-century course, it appears that musical practices and rationales in Toronto’s settlements shifted in a complex relationship with the citizenship-building goals of the settlement movement in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century.

**Conclusion**

The Community Music School holds to the philosophy that music is not the isolated experiences of an individual but also a group activity… It believes that music can be used as a tool to aid in one’s social development by serving as a beautiful and significant unifying factor in family life. By bringing together people of different ethnics, economic and intellectual groups to share a common experience, music can promote an understanding and appreciation for the spiritual values of all people. By actively participating in a field of interest as well as submitting to the mental discipline required in the study of music the individual is better equipped to meet the obligation and need of
society as an active citizen, a responsible adult and a directed human being. In short, music tends to bring out the best in people.  

In 1946, the above excerpt from the University Settlement Music School Short History clearly articulated the rationale between music and settlements’ broader goals of civic betterment through social development. The community music schools emphasized music’s potential to build personal discipline and responsibility towards making ‘active citizens,’ while also emphasizing how music could promote understanding across ethnic and cultural differences. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the schools consistently articulated music as a tool towards social development and civic betterment, even while the underlying vision of what exactly constituted that civic participation shifted.

The settlement house community music schools occupy a significant role in the historical development of community music in Canada. The overall musical practices within the settlement houses suggest a distinction between music as recreation and music as education. Within the framework of leisure activity, musical practices largely focused on the musical heritages and experiences of the members themselves. Music in a leisure context was approached and framed predominantly as an effective mechanism for intercultural exchange. In contrast, the musical practices that were framed as education, that is, located within the school and understood as a skills-building process, focused less on diverse cultures and more on introducing the ‘good music’ of the Western European art music tradition to their poor and immigrant pupils. The music appreciation course launched in the 1940s suggests that these distinctions between leisure and educational music practices were not fixed and that the cultural constructions of citizenship

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embedded in musical practices were also not stable or reified, either within or outside of the community music schools.

What perhaps is the most important epistemological shift through this period is the shift towards articulating music as a means towards social ends, with significant implications for how Canadian citizenship is constructed. Considering the citizenship development focus of the settlement houses, music offered a quotidian yet powerful site to rationalize and practice the notion of citizenship. The musical ‘work’ of Toronto’s settlements suggests that music offered a mechanism not just to engage in social development, but to offer a site that could play out cultural notions of Canadian citizenship, perhaps even engaging in cultural negotiations of Canadian identity through musical practices. In many instances, the musical constitution of Canadian citizen appeared to rest on an Anglo-Protestant ideal, practiced largely through Western European art music. However, in certain moments and through certain practices, the community music education constituted the Canadian citizen as a site of intercultural exchange.

In his review of the history of music in Canada, Kallman (1987) suggests that “musical nationalism… never developed into a strong stylistic element” (267). Whether Canada developed a strong musical style or not is another debate, nonetheless, the musical work of community music schools within the framework of the settlement movement suggests that music had an important relationship with the historic development of social imaginary of Canada as a nation.
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