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## ENTERTAINMENT LOCAL

### CULTURE MATTERS

# Music on the South Shore: Peterborough columnist's summer in Nova Scotia



By Michael Peterman  
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SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER Columnist Michael Peterman's summer of East Coast music kicked off with The Celtic Mass for the Sea, directed by Halifax composer Scott Macmillan (pictured) at St. John's Church in Lunenburg.

The days after Canada Day have been a musical bonanza for those of us living near Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Recovering from a full day of small-scale sesquicentennial celebrations, we were delighted to take in two fine musical happenings on Sunday. At 4 p.m. we attended The Celtic Mass for the Sea under the direction of Halifax composer Scott Macmillan at St. John's Church in Lunenburg.

Then we adjourned to the Ovens Natural Park for dinner at the Ol' Miners Diner and an evening of Steve Chapin playing and singing some of Cole Porter's great songs. Finally on the fourth we were treated to a large German band from south of Munich; they came by bus to Lunenburg direct from the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo in Halifax and played a free noon-hour concert on the lawn in front of St. John's Church. Add the sunshine and what's not to like?

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I am always amazed at the varieties and the quality of music available to us Canadians either here in

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Nova Scotia or in Peterborough and the Kawarthas. We live in an abundant and golden age in which talented musicians of all stripes offer up performances to us if only we are prepared to look about and choose among our many opportunities. Sometimes the players charge a fee--sometimes not. But the cost is neither here nor there, for two reasons -- the ticket price is seldom high and the experiential value far outweighs the dollars requested.

What matters is the experience of listening to live music performed well. It can open up many new territories in our minds and awaken us to outlooks and experiences we once knew. When I think back, as I often do, to audiences in the mid-nineteenth century - that is, long before recorded sound had been invented--live music was all most people knew and public performances were fairly rare. Probably the greatest musical moments experienced back then involved family and friends gathered around a piano in the parlour, singing old favorites together. And that could be great fun. Guitars were little known in those days while opera and old-world ballads were the popular music of the day.

Once again on the South Shore this summer there are a great many musical pleasures to be explored. I have counted several series in various locations. We had a concert version of Rigoletto earlier. Then, of course, there is the very busy Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival in early August. Musique Royale will be holding classical concerts all summer in local churches and at Barbara Butler's Mahone Bay home. Our Feltzen South friend, Jim Lindner, who owns a deconsecrated church called St. Mark's Place on the Le Have River, is also staging a series of musical events into October. And on it goes.

Back to the pleasures of the past few days --first, The Celtic Mass for the Sea. Scott Macmillan wrote The Celtic Mass for the Sea for CBC Maritimes in 1988. It has been performed often since in Europe and North America, including two separate occasions at Carnegie Hall in New York. This time it was performed in honour of Canada's sesquicentennial at the behest of Musique Royale.

The elaborate and complicated piece is a collaboration between Scott Macmillan and his wife Jennyfer Brickenden, the librettist, who researched and edited the text. In the Lunenburg performance Jennifer sang and read two short 'lessons' in prose while the energetic Scott (himself a very fine jazz and folk guitarist) charmingly conducted both the 58 choristers and the 11-person orchestra. To my eye the precise entrances and exits required of the musicians and singers were executed splendidly and the entire cast responded keenly to Macmillan's lively and good-humoured conducting.

Blending Catholic liturgy and both English and the Celtic language (with hints of Druid and pagan imagery), the mass offered a powerful tribute to the power and bounty of the ocean, so important to coastal people around the world.

It was enlightening to follow both the sounds and the words (either English or Gaelic) as laid out in a helpful program that led the listener through each section of the mass. Celebrating "the reverence of the ancient peoples for the sea's majesty, ferocity and vitality," the music includes echoes of pipe and fiddle tunes, sea songs, incantations, funeral chants and labour songs.

Here's a brief sample from the Introit (opening). It invites the listener to "lay thine ear against this golden sand, / And thou shall hear the music of the sea." Then comes a spirited and amusing reel-like passage:

*"East and by North*

*Send thine eyes forth*

*Over waves with great whales foaming*

*Where sportive seals*

*Dance their wild reels*

*Through mighty floodtides roaming."*

Later that evening at the Ovens we heard Steve Chapin for the first of what will be many times this summer. The Ol' Miners Diner is a small intimate restaurant on the ocean's edge; it seats about 40. Having Steve perform Cole Porter songs at such close quarters is a very special treat because he brings so much of himself and his own family history to bear in both his piano playing and his singing. His love of Porter's amusing lyrics and memorable melodies is evident in the joy he brings to his renditions; moreover, he knows almost the entire Porter songbook and can take you into the lyrical intricacies, wit, and fun that was vintage Porter.

If, for instance, he sings "Let's do it (let's fall in Love), he loves to throw in some of the lesser known but crazy verses that follow from the well-known first stanza - "Birds do it, / Bees do it, / Even educated fleas do it, Let's do it, let's fall in love." My own favorite is the rollicking Get Out of Town which Porter wrote for a 1938 musical called Leave It to Me. But there is so much joy in hearing such classics as You Do Something to Me, Night and Day, Easy to Love, Anything Goes, and De-Lovely that two hours pass in a flash. Then one steps outside to see the moon rising over the ocean as clouds race across a still luminous sky. Ireland is just over the horizon.

Every year for at least the last 15 years, a German Band in Halifax to play at the week-long Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo journeys down to Lunenburg to play a concert commemorating the long-standing connection between Germany and the Nova Scotia town. This year it was the 40-piece Herresmusikkorps Koblenz. A talented touring ensemble with alpine roots, they play a variety of pieces from stirring military marches to wistful gypsy tunes to a Phil Collins medley. Near the end of their sunshine-dappled concert four band members brought out alpine horns (which must be more than twelve feet in length) to contribute to a final German-Swiss number.

Such a range of musical experiences is a pleasure I have come to attend and enjoy each year. From the awe of the sea to Cole Porter's wit to bracing military marches, I am enriched and refreshed. Thanks to Canada Day, the Ovens, and the annual Tattoo for providing such splendid opportunities.

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