

## “THE COLD NEVER BOTHERED ME ANYWAY”: A CASE FOR THE ARCTIC AS A NEW ORIENT\*

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### Abstract

Just as the Orient has a “special place in European Western experience” (Said 1978: 1), the North provides an imagined locus for the Western imagination, from Pierre de Lancre’s northern witches to Disney’s 2013 blockbuster, *Frozen*. The North is “always a shifting idea, always relative, always away from us ... always out of reach” (Dickinson 2005: 8). Building explicitly on Said’s concept of Orientalism, Ryall et al. present the term ‘Arcticism’ to refer to treatments of the North by southerners. In Canada, self-perpetuating tropes of North present this region as an isolated paradise, or as an icy hell. While most Canadians will know neither the North, nor its people, Canada promotes the “Idea of North” as a central aspect of its identity through the diffusion of Inuit cultural artifacts, such as the Inuksuk and throat singing, and through rhetoric around arctic sovereignty. Music helps to “preform” our knowledge of other places (Stokes 1994: 4), and the borrowed Inuit music present in the southern Canadian concert halls falls directly into this model of pre-forming our knowledge of the North. This paper considers musical implications and representations of the North in the context of contemporary Canadian culture to test the limits of the idea of Arcticism. Canadian musical works from its centennial year of 1967 to the present, represented in this paper by Murray Adaskin’s *Qalala and Nilaula of the North*, illustrate the use of Inuit themes which contribute to a homogenizing narrative of the Canadian North and its role in promoting Canada’s identity as “the true north, strong and free.”

### Orientalism

Having presented this paper in Istanbul, the city that served as one of original sources of “Oriental” thought in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe (and earlier), it seems appropriate to remind ourselves that Orientalism in music goes beyond simply making things sound like they come from afar, from a homogenous ‘Orient’ that is marked musically by arabesque ornaments and sultry reed instruments. The concept of Orientalism, as developed by Edward Said, speaks to:

A distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; ... an *elaboration* not only of basic geographic distinction... but also a whole series of ‘interests’ which, by means as scholarly discovery, philological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will or intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world (Said 1979: 12).

This may come from a genuine desire to understand a foreign culture, but in reality, leads to the reifying of difference and political imbalance – a project which continues today, as only the

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\*- This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

shortest of glances at American media reminds us. Said makes direct links between this and the imperial projects of Europe in the long-nineteenth century, telling his reader that this project of Oriental exploration has “less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (ibid.).

Shifting these ideas from the East to the North, there are many very strong connections to be made, that can be done using Said’s own language.

### The Literary and Popular North<sup>1</sup>

Early literary references to the North are frequently tinged with suggestions, or outright association, with witchcraft or with evil. Going back as far as the Old Testament, the books of Jeremiah and Isaiah both reference the north as a source of evil. Jeremiah 1:14 states, “out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.” In Isaiah 14:13-14, Lucifer speaks, “I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north...”<sup>2</sup>

Moving forward to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, one of the best known, and perhaps most successful witch hunts in Europe was led by Pierre de l’Ancre during the Spanish Inquisition. He believed “Sorcerers... dwelt at remote places; in the mountains, in deserts or in the Northern lands...” and accordingly drew upon his hatred of all things Basque to lead the hunt in his North. Likewise, Jean Bodin, and objectively considerably further north Jean Bodin wrote, “Most witches and sorcerers are to be found in the Northern lands” (Donecker 2010). Even when moving to areas generally considered to be in Northern Europe, witchcraft remains beyond, in “The North.” Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Snow Queen* (1845) providing a key example, wherein Gerda and her reindeer travel north, passing through the homes of Lapp and Finnish women.

These European models of Northerness tend to focus on the magical and fantastic elements of the North. North America, of course, inherits this intellectual tradition. In America, however, the North is not occupied by “like” people who are Othered by virtue of their actions, such as witchcraft, but rather by indigenous populations. Despite this, the European intellectual tradition is strong, as demonstrated in recent film, television, and gaming productions, which largely remain set in European contexts.

A small sampling of works from the period of 2005 to 2014 illustrate the presence of the northern archetype in popular culture. 2005’s *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* brings the Snow Queen trope from Anderson, placing the action at times in a snow-covered world with reindeer-pulled carriages and ice castles and thrones. *How to Train Your Dragon* (2010) and its sequel (2014) take place in an imagined Norse community, with the great battle sequence of the latter taking place on a ice-covered island, generally far from human centres. One of the most critically successful television shows in recent years is *Game of Thrones*, whose first season focuses on the development of Eddard Stark, “Warden of the North.” Finally, Disney’s 2013 blockbuster, *Frozen*, again harkens back to Anderson’s Snow Queen while infusing a Northern mythology throughout the film, including mythical creatures in trolls, and an enhanced sense of magic which townspeople interpret as witchcraft (and thus evil). Each of these example sees generally fair-skinned, light-haired Europeans living, playing, and fighting in their “native,”

1- I would like to acknowledge the work of Stefan Donecker, of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, whose presentation “Wicked Witches of the North: The Medieval and Early Modern Roots of a Literary Archetype,” at the 2012 American Comparative Literature Association heavily informs this section.

2- These verses come from the King James Bible.

northern lands. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005) provides a counter-examples, coming closer to the actual American North experience, despite its “Asiatic” setting (and animation style), the Water tribe lives in an ice-filled world which strongly resembles the Inuit of North America, while elegantly combining Oriental and Arctic tropes.

### Arcticism

Turning to the Canadian example, exoticism, or the “manifestations of an awareness” of Others in sound (Taylor 2007: 2), can exist in multiple ways, including stylizing aspects of a particular ethnicity (i.e. the style *hongrois* as studied by Bellman 1993), or in a broader paradigm that considers not only musical elements but also narrative and textual elements (Locke 2007). Canadian composers engage in both sides, including stylized versions of throat singing, for example, as a marker of Canada’s own exotic North and using titles and text-based works to further place their work within the specific geographic space of that North.

Such exoticism is often politicized, as questions emerge about who has the right to represent whom (Taylor 2007). For Said’s Orientalism this is “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (Said 1979: 1), and therefore a way to create and control a “manifestly different world” (1979: 12). Other scholars such as John MacKenzie (1995), Daniel Martin Varisco (2007), and Ian Richard Netton (2013), revisit these concepts in the context of the arts, highlighting the widely shared notion of the homogeneity of the Orient as it is imagined, portrayed, and voiced by Europeans. What remains most important to exoticism and Orientalism as it relates to the North is that the Other becomes a homogenous group, and often the product of the imagination. In the case of the Canadian North today, photographs, radio, film, and television programming support imaginary settings. Borrowing of Inuit music in the southern concert hall, or placing Inuit musicians in ceremonial contexts, such as at the Olympics, falls directly into this model of pre-forming our knowledge of the Canadian North.

Building explicitly on the concept of Orientalism, Anka Ryall, Johan Schimanski, and Henning Howlid Waerp introduce the term *Arcticism* to refer to such treatments of the North by southerners (Ryall, et al 2010: x). Their book, *Arctic Discourses*, brings together North American and European scholars who consider both the discovery of the arctic by Westerners in the nineteenth-century and the imagined and reimagined arctic that followed this discovery in the art worlds (Ryall, et al 2010). The entire volume considers self-perpetuating tropes of the North, representing the North either as an isolated paradise or as an icy hell.

The North is “always a shifting idea, always relative, always away from us” and “always out of reach” (Dickinson 2005: 8). Like Ryall, et al., Peter Dickinson considers the history of the North alongside imaginations of the North from European, Asian, and North American perspectives in his book *The Idea of North* (with a title inspired by Glenn Gould’s radio’s documentary). Sherrill Grace takes a more specific look at Canada in *Canada and the Idea of North* (2002), and broadens the attention to “Canada-as-North” (Grace 2002: 6) beyond the scope of poets, artists, and filmmakers, beyond the “romantic myth” and idealized interest to consider the Canadian government’s interest in casting this view (Grace 2002: 8). In the final section of her book, Grace turns the gaze away from southern concepts to Northern ideas of the North and how the North is re-presenting itself.

One remaining factor present in Canada’s idea of North is lost in other North American contexts is the existence of an indigenous people who retain an (often imagined) identity as being

connected to their land. The Inuit population becomes privileged, particularly by the Anglo-Canadian population, in part to share part of aboriginal claims as “original” Canadians, in opposition to the Franco-Canadian role as first colonizers of the land. The government history with Inuit, while not innocent, is not as fractured as many First Nations groups, and Inuit remain geographically distant from the mainstream Canadian population. Francis writes “no matter how tarnished the image of the modern Inuit, the image of the noble primitive persists, probably because it represents an idealized image that Canadians have of themselves as a northern people (1997: 167).

Caroline Traube’s 2013 psychoacoustic study of the connection between the aural perception and thermal reception adds a new layer to synesthesia studies and provides a starting point for a discussion of the musical language used by composers to represent the musical north. Through the use of those sounds listeners identify as cold in isolated, non-musical contexts; metallic instruments, piercing harmonics from stringed instruments, high pitches, the avoidance of “warming” vibrato, and in the inclusion of synthetic instruments, composers can create a cold environment in their work (Traube 2013: 10). She further associates the cold with bright sounds over dark and with hollow over full, while program notes have the capability of enhancing and changing perceptions (Traube 2013: 14). Murray Adaskin’s musical setting of the Canadian -Inuit-North, from just after the centennial, bridges the use of Inuit source material with the musical language identified as cold in Traube’s work, providing an early example of Arcticism in action in Canadian music.

### **Murray Adaskin, *Qalala and Nilaula of the North*, 1969<sup>3</sup>**

Murray Adaskin’s *Qalala and Nilaula of the North* results directly from the composer’s invitation to visit his colleague from the University of Saskatchewan, anthropologist Robert Williamson, at his field site in 1965 and to record what Williamson accurately observed as a disappearing song repertoire – that of the *pisiit*, or orally-transmitted drum dance songs, from Rankin Inlet. Completed in 1969 and premiered on Canada Day, July 1, by the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Winnipeg Orchestra, Jeremy Strachan describes this orchestral work as “composed in the Canadian centenary zeitgeist of nationalism and optimism” (Strachan 2014: 49). Unlike many earlier composers who drew on ethnological work as source material (such as Amy Beach’s use of Franz Boas tunes from *The Central Eskimo* for her string quartet), Adaskin uses his own field recordings, providing an early Canadian example of the re-situating of such material (Strachan 2014: 48).

The title page of Adaskin’s score quotes a poem by Robert Williamson: “The brown and quiet-eyed people of the north are silent in this noisy world” (Adaskin 1993). This sentiment speaks to the growing realization of the importance of the North and its importance in Canadian society – a realization that the 1967 centennial celebrations brought to the forefront: “Canadian began both to realize the economic potential of the arctic region and to consider the role of the Eskimos [sic] in the greater Canadian society” (VanStone 1976: 157).

Musically, *Qalala and Nilaula* blends many of Adaskin’s primary compositional techniques with the elements that emerge as describing northern works. His common placement of two melodies in counterpoint spans over three octaves creating vast space in the opening of the

3- *Qalala and Nilaula of the North* can be heard via streaming at the Canadian Music Centre website, with a free account. <http://www.musiccentre.ca/node/19331>

work; while Adaskin's familiar rhythmic activity provides both sparse textures, and later in the work, interplay that the composer relates to the "throat rhythm" game, or throat singing. The two melodies Adaskin presents are the song of Qalala and of Nilaula, two elders the composer met and recorded while visiting Rankin Inlet, and who passed away before the composition's 1969 Canada Day premiere.

The first theme played by the bassoon in the first measure (Figure 1), suggests an F major pentatonic scale (presented in a jumping order of F-C-D-A-G) in a syncopated, legato rhythm which is followed by the oboe and flute playing a major seventh apart, creating dissonance and space in the three-plus octaves between the oboe and bassoon. Meanwhile, the bass drum hearkens to the sound of the Inuit *qilaut*. The entry of strings in measure 8 also illustrate cold technique; the violins and viola, all muted, play high in their respective ranges, including the first violins playing harmonics sounding at the pitch B7 (where middle C is C4). The string entry also coincides with the first (albeit short) entry of the metallic glockenspiel. The opening section continues with the theme sometimes presented in full, and other times fragmented throughout the orchestra. String harmonics alternate with pizzicato sections which foreshadow the second, more playful theme. In measure 40, the vibraphone enters, with instructions not to use the oscillators, creating another straight metallic tone adding to the glockenspiel. This opening section comes to a climax at measures 52-54 with a passage of rhythmic and melodic unison across the orchestra which provides a very exoticist pan-Indian sounding flourish before returning to fragments of the first theme (Figure 2). Measure 57 marks the first full statement of the second theme (Figure 3). Alternating slurs, staccato, and legato notes in the flute and oboe, and accompanied by pizzicato strings, Adaskin presents a much more playful mood in this second section.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the first four measures of Murray Adaskin's piece. The score is arranged in a system with the following parts from top to bottom:

- FLUTE**: Starts with a whole rest in the first measure, then plays a melodic line in the second and third measures, marked *pp*.
- OBOE**: Starts with a whole rest in the first measure, then plays a melodic line in the second and third measures, marked *pp legato*.
- CLAR. IN B $\flat$** : Starts with a whole rest in the first measure, then plays a melodic line in the second and third measures, marked *pp*.
- B $\flat$ SN.**: Starts with a whole rest in the first measure, then plays a melodic line in the second and third measures, marked *solo pp legato*.
- HORN IN F**: Starts with a whole rest in the first measure, then plays a melodic line in the second and third measures, marked *pp legato*.
- PERC.**: Labeled **BASS DRUM**, it plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the second and third measures, marked *pp*.
- I** and **II** (Violins): Both staves are empty, marked *pp*.
- VIOLA**: The staff is empty.
- CELLO**: The staff is empty.
- BASS**: The staff is empty.

**Figure 1:** Murray Adaskin, *Qalala and Nilaula of the North*, mm. 1-4.

Source: Copyright 1993 Murray Adaskin/Canadian Music Centre

The image displays a handwritten musical score for a symphony orchestra. The score is organized into systems. The first system includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (OB.), Clarinet in B-flat (CLAR. in Bp), Bassoon (BSN.), and Horn in F (HN. in F). The second system is for the Piano (PNO.). The third system includes staves for Violin I (I. vln.), Violin II (II. vln.), Viola (vln.), Violoncello (cello), and Bass. The score is written in 3/4 time and features various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *pp*, *loco*, and *PIZ.* (Pizzicato). The manuscript shows signs of being a working draft, with some ink bleed-through and handwritten annotations.

Figure 2: Adaskin, *Qalala and Nilaula of the North*, mm. 52-54.

Source: Copyright 1993 Murray Adaskin/Canadian Music Centre

**A TEMPO**

FL. *p* SEMPLICE

OB. *p* SEMPLICE

CLAR IN B $\flat$  *p*

BSO. *p*

HN IN F

**A TEMPO**

PERC. *SN. DR. (M)*

**A TEMPO**

I *pizz.* *arco*

II *div.* *arco*

VLA *div.* *arco*

CELLO *arco*

BASS *arco*

Figure 3: Adaskin, *Qalala and Nilaula of the North*, mm. 57-59.

Source: Copyright 1993 Murray Adaskin/Canadian Music Centre

Adaskin prepares his audience for the third section of *Qilaula and Nilaula* at measure 145 with the note “bleakly cold & cheerless” at the bottom of the score. Following ten measures of slow movement and mood-setting reminiscent of Sibelius’s *klangfarben*, Adaskin begins to present rhythmic figures throughout the orchestra that re-create throat singing in the orchestral medium. Beginning with the strings in measure 157, legato but separated quarter notes begin the rhythmic interplay that marks throat singing (Figure 4). In his own program notes, Adaskin writes,

the third element in the composition comes from an ancient game which Eskimo women like to play to amuse themselves, which one might call “throat rhythms” – nonsense words which have no meaning, just guttural sounds, constantly and obstinately repeated as in an ostinato figure (in Lazarevich and Cathcart 2003: 58).

As this third, and longest, section develops, so do the rhythms Adaskin creates. From the initial quarter notes which resemble some of the simplest throat song tunes to more hocket-like figures, triplets, and sixteenth notes. Between measures 206 and 220, Adaskin plays with time signatures, shifting between quarter-note and eight-note meters.

\* (SEPARATE EACH NOTE SLIGHTLY)

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**Figure 4:** Adaskin, *Qalala and Nilaula of the North*, mm. 157-159, strings.

Source: Copyright 1993 Murray Adaskin/Canadian Music Centre

This rhythmic play continues until measure 247, when Adaskin returns to the Adagio feel of the opening of the work. The first theme does not appear until measure 298 which marks a recapitulation of the opening material. In this closing section, all of major themes return in greatly truncated forms. The second, playful theme returns at measure 315, the “bleakly cold & cheerless” preparation for throat rhythms reappears at measure 335, and Adaskin restates the first “throat rhythm” in quarter notes at measure 347. These brief restatements of the major themes of the work lead to a sustained pianissimo final chord across measures 361 through 365, in which the winds and upper strings play high in their ranges, reiterating parts of the musical language of the cold as identified in the acoustic perception work of Caroline Traube (2013).

Adaskin re-uses the material from *Qalala and Nilaula* twice in later works, creating a four-hand piano piece titled *Rankin Inlet* in 1978 and an arrangement for a single player called *Eskimo Melodies* in 1980. What Adaskin accomplishes with these works is the extension of northern musical characteristics as used by northern European composers such as Jean Sibelius and Eduard Tubin. Adaskin adds Inuit musical content to his musical language, confirming, in the years immediately following the centennial, what many composers such as Talivaldis Kenins did in explicit centennial commissions: compose Canada as the north through musical language and content that draws on a specifically on the indigenous, meaning Inuit, context. Adaskin uses not only *pisiiit* heard by Rankin Inlet elders, but also includes a representation of throat singing in his composition, marking a shift away from the generally pentatonic Inuit melodies and toward a more distinctive element of Inuit culture that pushes beyond context as in the symbolic representations of the music dramas discussed above.

Murray Adaskin is neither the first, nor last, Canadian composer to draw on Inuit music while searching for a Canadian voice in contemporary Art Music. Table 1 lists a sampling of compositions from the Centennial year of 1967 through the present which follow this trend. Earlier works, such as Adaskin's *Qalala and Nilaula of the North* see Inuit melody as raw source material for the composer to work with, while more recently Inuit musicians become involved in the creative process and performance of the work, such as in T. Patrick Carrabr e's *Inuit Games* from 2003. From the small sample provided in Table 1, the trend can be traced across the decades, with no gaps in the use of Inuit-inspired material. The problem with such a trend is, of course, that the experience of the North for southern Canadians is limited and vastly different from that of the Inuit from which this body of repertoire derives. Further, Inuit hear very little of this music - what art music is broadcast by the CBC forms part of late night programming. This raises questions of appropriation of Inuit music and who benefits from the music, while Inuit remain geographically distant and a safe source for the musical extension of the Canadian Myth of the North.

**Table 1: Selected List of Works by Canadian Composers Drawing on Inuit Sources**

Composer	Title	Year
Adaskin, Murray	<i>Qalala and Nilaula of the North</i>	1969
	<i>Eskimo Melodies</i>	1980
	<i>Rankin Inlet (Eskimo Song)</i>	1978
Applebaum, Louis	"Inunit" from <i>The Eskimo</i>	1977
Archer, Violet	<i>Ikpakhuaq</i>	1984
Beckwith, John	<i>Arctic Dances</i>	1984
Carrabre, T. Patrick	<i>Inuit Games</i>	2003
Charke, Derek	<i>22 Inuit Throat Song Games</i>	2002/2005
	<i>Cercle du nord I</i>	2003
	<i>13 Inuit Throatsong Games</i>	2010
Colgrass, Michael	<i>Arctic Dreams</i>	1997
Freedman, Harry	<i>Anerca</i>	1992
Glick, Srul Irving	3 Eskimo Songs	1981
Hatzis, Christos	String Quartet No. 1, "The Awakening"	1994
Henderson, Ruth Watson	<i>Clear Sky and Thunder: Inuit song battle cantata</i>	1983
Ho, Vincent	<i>Arctic Symphony</i>	2010
Kenins, Tivaldis	<i>Fantasy-Variations on an Eskimo Lullaby</i>	1967
Luedeke, Raymond	<i>Tales of the Netsilik</i>	1988
McIntosh, Diana	<i>Kiviug: An Inuit Legend</i>	1985/1997
	<i>Nanuk</i>	1991
Morel, François	<i>likkii</i>	1971
Somers, Harry	<i>Shaman's Song</i>	1983
Weinzweig, John	<i>Edge of the World</i>	1962
Williamson, Gordon	<i>Two Inuit Folk Songs</i>	2006

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