DRAMA IN NEWFOUNDLAND SOCIETY: THE COMMUNITY CONCERT

By

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ABSTRACT

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This study focuses upon the Newfoundland community concert, a theatrical production utilizing the variety and revue style of presentation with programmes consisting of dialogues, songs, recitations and readings, and produced by the various communities as a primary means of raising money to support church, school and other essential services. It was the one dramatic event common to all parts of this province of Canada, and until the 1950s was a major form of entertainment which contributed positively to the self-sufficiency and the cohesiveness of each community.

The primary source of information was the collection of audio tapes and their transcripts housed at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archives (MUNFLA) in St. John's, Newfoundland. These were supplemented by a questionnaire designed specifically to

gather information about concert traditions and further assisted by interviews conducted in various parts of Newfoundland with people who had, at one time, been instrumental in organizing and performing in the theatrical events.

The process by which these events were produced and presented is examined here within the historical and sociological context in which the practices developed, and discussed under the headings Organization, Content, Presentation, Acting Style and Audience Reaction.

The material gathered from the different sources attests to the widespread popularity of the concerts as major celebrations within the framework of the communities utilizing the available resources. It was theatrical, and for the most part was presented in the comic mode. It drew on the rich folklore of Newfoundland in that it presented the songs and recitations which recorded important happenings and situations; it allowed the dialogues to be changed to fit the tastes of the group, and contributed to the lore by introducing items from the outside thereby enriching and sustaining the oral tradition.

To
Betty,
Daniel and Christopher;
their love and support have made this
project possible.

And to
my parents.

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To the members of my committee I owe a special thanks for their counsel and friendly assistance; especially to my advisor, Dr. John Baldwin, his patience and professional criticism have been invaluable.

I wish to thank the faculty of the Department of Folklore of Memorial University for their advise and for accommodating my requests for materials and for administering the questionnaire. In particular, I am grateful to Dr. Herbert Halpert and Dr. Neil Rosenberg for their expert suggestions, and to Philip Hiscock, Assistant Archivist at the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, who was always so prompt in locating and sending materials and was constantly on the lookout for new references to the subject of this dissertation.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

Newfoundland culture shows evidence of certain characteristics which identify its European roots and which reflect the forging of these Old World elements with things unique to this island-arrested society. This uniqueness is most apparent in the folklore and customs which have developed reflecting the society's prominent motifs and beliefs. Foremost among these is a major preoccupation with celebration and entertainment as shown by the extensive canon of songs and stories, and by the community initiated traditions involving drama, dancing and mummering.

During the past two decades much research and study has been conducted into Newfoundland's lore and language, particularly with regard to the mummering practices. So too, the songs and stories have been collected, classified, and analyzed according to the various presentational styles and

subjects.[1] However, except for cursory acknowledgments, the presence of drama in Newfoundland culture remains unexplored and unresearched. The purpose of this study is to investigate that aspect by examining the one dramatic event which was common to all areas of the province: the community concert.

The community concert was a theatrical event which employed the variety and revue style of presentation in that its program consisted of songs, recitations, dialogues and, in some cases, readings. The organizational and production aspects of the programs, including casting and rehearsing, were done by groups within the community using local people as performers. Some of the materials which were presented were written especially the events, but in most cases came from published sources.

Initially this study was formulated as a personal effort to examine a dramatic event which had been an important part

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[1] For example see; H. Halpert and G. M. Story, eds., Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), and Kenneth Peacock, ed. Songs of The Newfoundland Outports, National Museum of Canada Bulletin, 3 Volumes. (Ottawa: Secretary of State, 1965).

of my growing up in Newfoundland. This desire to find out more about concerts before the old practices had died out altogether was reinforced while a student at Memorial University of Newfoundland where the examination of the lore and language of Newfoundland instilled in me an intense appreciation for those aspects of my cultural heritage and a strong motivation to understand them within a wider context. Finally, and most importantly, this research was undertaken to examine the community concert as a theatrical event and to ascertain how it was produced and presented within the context of Newfoundland's unique sociological and historical milieu.

1.2 Justification of Study

The community concert by virtue of its widespread popularity was a major entertainment force within Newfoundland society. It provided a forum for their songs and stories and an opportunity for those with the desire and talent to present them in a theatrical setting. Until now no attempt has been made to examine this event with regard to its nature and the overall purposes it served. This study will be the first endeavor at researching and synthesizing the available information on this dramatic event.

The study will also contribute to the recent attempts to understand the uniqueness of Newfoundland by studying one of the entertainment modes which developed as an integral part of the culture.

Prior to Confederation with Canada in 1949 there was very little financial aid available to the communities to support essential services, so in order to maintain some degree of self-sufficiency money had to be raised at the local level. Chief among those fund-raising enterprises was the concert. When more money became available after Confederation the need for the community to contribute was minimized, consequently the concert was not produced as frequently. However, now that external funding may be declining the community has once again turned to its theatrical and dramatic traditions to aid in raising money for local projects. To that cause this study will provide community groups and producers with an accurate and detailed account of how the concerts used to be presented and therefore aid in re-establishing it as the significant form of entertainment it used to be.

1.3 Definition of Terms

Mummering

This Christmastime activity has it roots in Medieval Europe and is still practiced in Newfoundland. Today the custom takes the form of disguising oneself by dressing in an array of odd clothes and going from house to house in the community requesting permission to enter. This informal house-visit requires that the hosts identify the mummer and when so done the disguise is removed. During their stay in a home the mummers may dance, sing, partake of food and drink, or just answer, in a disguised voice, the questions of the inquiring host.

In some parts of Newfoundland mummers are referred to as Jannies. The two words are defined as being the same in the Dictionary of Newfoundland English:

> Mummer: One who takes part in a mummering, . . . An elaborately costumed and disguised person who participates in various group activities at Christmas; FOOL, JANNY.[2]

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[2] G. M. Story, W. J. Kirwin, J. D. A. Widdowson, eds., Dictionary of Newfoundland English (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), s.v. "mummer," "mummering." For a detailed discussion on Mummering see: Herbert Halpert, "A Typology of Mumming," in Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland, pp. 34 - 61.

Time

In Newfoundland a Time is a Soiree; an organized community event usually sponsored by some organization and held in the school, lodge, or a parish hall. The expressed purpose of such a gathering is almost always to assist some cause deemed important for the group. The Time includes dancing, sale of food and crafts, and, in some cases, a concert. The Dictionary of Newfoundland English defines a Time as:

> . . . A party or celebration, especially a communal gathering with dancing, entertainment, etc. . . . In the smaller places during the fall and winter months almost every night there would be a time on, as any social function is called.[3]

Dialogues

A dialogue is a short dramatic script requiring a minimum of two actors and usually relies on slapstick techniques for the desired comic results. In some cases in Newfoundland they were written locally, but more often than not they were obtained from published dialogue books. The Dictionary of Newfoundland English defines dialogue as:

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[3] Dictionary of Newfoundland English, s.v. "Time."

> Part of a play to be acted. A play or act performed or spoken as a part of a concert. The chairman then announced that those members of the entertainment committee who had parts in the dialogue not perfected may come back to the Hall to practice. . . . A staged production, in a Christmas concert for example, would be called a dialogue.[4]

1.4 Methodology

The first two chapters of this study will present a sociological and historical perspective of the context in which the concert tradition developed, as well as a discussion on the major entertainment forms which co-existed with it.

Findings relating specifically to the community concert are presented here under the headings: Organization, Content, Presentation, Acting Style and Audience Reaction. These allow for a detailed examination of the production process such as the selection of program pieces, the casting procedures, directing, scenic conventions, and the performance of the various pieces before an audience.

Preliminary research for this study examined the printed

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[4] Dictionary of Newfoundland English, s.v. "Dialogue."

references to the Newfoundland concerts. Except for a few remarks made in diaries about the attendance or that it was well received, nothing of consequence was found. The St. John's newspapers carried advertisements for the amateur theatre productions, but the concerts were usually unannounced.

Except for a weekly published from 1859 to 1893 at Harbour Grace, Harbour Grace Standard and Conception BaY Advertiser, the only other Nineteenth Century newspaper outside the Capital was published at Twillingate on the northeast coast, The Twillingate Sun. The latter was a fortunate discovery which contributed immensely towards defining the concerts traditions from 1880 to 1894, for in each weekly issue it carried reports on the entertainment scene in Northeastern Newfoundland. These reports include descriptions of concerts, what was included in the programs, as well as the names of those who participated; they are quoted extensively in the following chapters.

The main source of information for this study of the community concert was the audio tapes and transcripts housed in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA), a facility officially established in 1968 as a "regional archive which concentrates upon

folklore, folklife, language and oral history of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador."[5] A large proportion of the collections were deposited by folklore students and faculty and cover a wide range of topics which the Archive has classified under eighteen separate headings.[6]

Most of the tapes consulted contained references to more than one of the subject headings with the most common being stories, songs, and anecdotal material about life and work in the Newfoundland communities. Many of the tapes are conversational in nature with the student interviewers allowing their subjects to reminisce about those things they felt most comfortable with. However, many of the earlier taped interviews were conducted by faculty and deal with a particular topic such as mummering or folksongs.

Accompanying most of the tapes used in this study were

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5 "A Guide For Users of The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive," Rev 10/79, p. 1. (Mimeographed.)

6 These major areas include: Childlore, Custom, Documents and Printed Materials, Folk Beliefs, Folk Dance, Folk Language, Folk Legend, Folk Music, Folk Poetry, Folksong, Folktale, Foodways, Material Culture and Work Techniques, Miscellaneous, Oral History, Personal Experience Narrative, Proverbs, Riddles and Conundrums.

manuscripts which had been transcribed to reflect the accents and speech patterns of the informants. (In all cases the tapes were checked to verify what appeared in type.) In instances where no transcripts exist those quotations used herein were taken from the tape making no effort to edit or otherwise correct the sentence structure.

Although the time spent at MUNFLA was enlightening in terms of the oral history of Newfoundland and the unique and colorful folk customs, it was, however, somewhat frustrating because "concerts" was not a major heading and no indexing had been done according to that subject. Only a few projects had been deposited which were devoted solely to this dramatic event. Much of what was uncovered was found inserted in the mummer materials having been volunteered by the informants as a kind of aftermath. Fortunately enough references to "dem wonderful concerts we used to have," were discovered to suggest that the practice had been widespread and regarded as significant happenings in the life of the communities.

Although the Archive served as the primary source for information the study was not restricted to it. In areas where it was found lacking, other avenues were sought out and examined. To this end, a questionnaire was designed in

the summer of 1979 and later administered by some of the faculty in the Department of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland to their students (see appendix D). The aim was to gather as much data as possible on the subject and as a result asked a lot of questions arranged under specific headings.

The student responses to the Traditional Community Concert survey were disappointingly terse, usually answered with a simple "yes" or "no" without accompanying commentary. Consequently other subjects had to be found, so a number of questionnaires were sent to selected people in Newfoundland who were known personally or who were recommended by friends and other informants.

The responses of the non-student group provided fresh insight into the nature of the dramatic event in question, due, most likely, to the fact that many of the informants were older and had at one time been participants in the community produced concerts.

The archival materials relating to concerts were further supplemented by field research personally conducted for this study. No particular pattern was established; in whatever area I happened to visit resource persons were sought out and interviewed. The interviews were conducted informally in

homes. In cases where a tape recorder was not used notes were made immediately following the sessions.

The tape recordings of interviews conducted specifically for this study from 1979 to 1982, as well as the Traditional Community Concerts Questionnaire responses have all been deposited in the Archive and have, therefore, been assigned a master accession number identified in this text by the prefix MUNFLA. Tapes and transcripts carry the letter "C"; i.e., MUNFLA C4858 80 - 15. Responses to the questionnaire which was administered through the Centre all carry the designation Q80B and appear in the citations as follows: MUNFLA Q80B-1, Q80B-2, etc.

Throughout this study certain interviews are relied upon quite extensively, simply because they provided the most significant and useful information. This is especially true with regard to the sessions spent with Mr. John Osmond, Mr. Rueben DeGruchy, and Mr. Wilfred Skinner (no relation). All three gentlemen had been instrumental in the production and/or presentation of concerts at some time in their lives. They are not unlike many of the other informants whose songs, stories, and reminiscences made up the collections in MUNFLA. As an attempt to provide some indication of the context in which this phase of the research was conducted, I

present short biographical notes on these three major contributors.

John C. Osmond

Mr. Osmond was born in 1909 in the small community of Margaree on the south west corner of the island about five miles from Port aux Basques. He attended a one-room school which was sponsored by the Anglican Church and left after finishing the Intermediate level examination and was subsequently employed in the fishery. When in his early twenties he moved to Ontario where he worked at various jobs until he returned home and once again became a fisherman. He continued in that line of work until 1939 when he moved with his family to Port aux Basques and worked as a carpenter until his retirement.

It was while he lived in Margaree that he performed in concerts as well as organized and directed them.

Mr. Osmond was interviewed in his home in Port aux Basques, 16 April 1979; the tape and transcript of that session have been assigned the designation C 4858 80 - 153.

Rueben DeGruchy

Mr DeGruchy was born in 1899 in the small community of

Rencontre West. He was fortunate in that he was able to attain a respectable education and at one time considered becoming a teacher but chose instead to work in the fishery. He worked on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, and at one time was employed in the whaling industry. At the age of forty-eight a hunting accident cost him the use of one eye; after that he was employed as a clerk in the local store and continued in that capacity until the whole community of Rencontre West was moved in the late 1960s under the Newfoundland Government's Centralization Programme. Mr. DeGruchy moved with his daughter and her family to the town of Fortune on the southeast coast. He has an extensive repertoire of folksongs and stories and during the interview he shared many of them and recounted incidents about performing them in concerts in Rencontre West.

Mr. DeGruchy was interviewed at his daughter's home in Fortune, 20 August 1979. The tape and transcript have been assigned the designation C4857 80 - 152.

Wilfred Skinner

Mr. Skinner was born in 1920 in the small, isolated community of Richard's Harbour. Despite being employed in the fishery with his father at the age of twelve he managed

to attain a basic education . During the interview he related how he was prepared to write the Intermediate Level Examinations but his family was not able to supply the two dollar registration fee. He spent a number of years fishing on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland until he returned home and worked as a clerk in the local store. Like Mr. Degruchy, he and his family were moved under the Centralization programme in the 1960s. Mr. Skinner moved to Port aux Basques where he has been employed as a janitor in a high school ever since. Before moving from Richard's Harbour he served on the Select Vestry of the Anglican Church and was therefore responsible for raising money to maintain its upkeep; the primary means of doing that was via concerts and Times which he organized and performed in.

Mr. Skinner was interviewed at his home in Port aux Basques 27 June 1982. The tape of of that session carries the designation C6193 83 -134.

Chapter 2

AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Newfoundland community concert conventions, like other aspects of the culture, reflect the historical milieu in which they were developed. The prohibition against settlement by the British authorities, the various streams of immigration, the unstable economy, and the subsequent cultures which evolved in the isolated communities, all relate to the entertainment modes which, in many respects, are unique to this island society. This chapter will present an historical perspective on Newfoundland with particular emphasis on how the community concert was shaped by the political and economical forces at work there since the time when settlements were established.

2.1 Background

Newfoundland's recorded history dates back to the Fifteenth Century beginning with the voyage of John Cabot in 1497 and the subsequent explorers searching for the New World. In 1583 Newfoundland was formally claimed as a possession of Great Britain by the envoy of Queen Elizabeth I, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, thus giving it claim to the title of "Britain's Oldest Colony." The arrival of the Europeans may have been precipitated by the search for the East but the discovery of the abundance of codfish made it one of the more significant New World discoveries of that period. Newfoundland became like "a great ship moored off the Grand Banks, during the fishing season, for the convenience of English fisherman".[7]

Despite the laws issued by the British parliament and the authority invested in the West Country merchants who virtually had a monopoly on the Newfoundland fishery, people did settle on the island finding refuge in the myriad of

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7 Reported before the House of commons by an Under Secretary of State in the American Department in 1793. Quoted by D. W. Prowse, A History of Newfoundland (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), p. xix.

coves, harbours, and bays along the coast. The initial settling was a slow and clandestine process, but nevertheless the new found land came to be populated "behind the backs" of those who sought to prevent the colony from becoming anything but a fishing station under the absolute control of Britain.

The Nursery for Seamen, as Newfoundland was considered, was given legal expression in the Western Charter in 1634 thus condoning and sanctioning the traditional practices of the West country merchants. The Privy Council had proclaimed "that according to ancient custom every ship or fisher that first entereth a harbour in behalf of every ship, be Admiral of said harbour."[8] These surrogate governors, or Fishing Admirals as they were known, had absolute control over the harbour and its inhabitants with the direct order from the British House of Commons. The ultimate expression of the British government to "ensure the sovereignty of the West Country merchants was to forbid the settlers from living within six miles of the shoreline. For people whose

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[8] Quoted by Gordon O. Rothney, Newfoundland: A History (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1964), p. 7.

livelihood depended on fishing and therefore access to the ocean, this was disastrous. The West Country merchants were so protective of their gift from the king that in enforcing the order in Council they destroyed all houses from Cape Ray on the southwest corner of the island all the way to Cape Bonavista on the northeast section. Officially Newfoundland became "simply the English fleet moving west across the ocean in the spring ,and returning back home to England again in the autumn."[9]

It wasn't until 1699 that the first sign of hope came for the unfortunate inhabitants living in " feare, and danger of violent death."[10] A small number of Newfoundland settlers including John Downing and Thomas Oxford were so angered at having been attacked and at having their property destroyed by the admirals, that they went to London and presented the case for the settlers. Subsequent to their presentation, the first Western Charter, a gift from the Stuart king, was

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9 Ibid., p. 11.

10 Newfoundland historian G. O. Rothney refers to these words of Thomas Hobbes describing men living in a "state of nature". Rothney, p.15.

replaced by an act of parliament recognizing the inhabitants.

> . . . Provided always that all such persons [inhabitants] as since the 25th of March 1685 have built houses and stages that did not belong to fishing ships since 1685 shall peaceably enjoy the same without disturbance from any person whatever.[11]

The new statute became known as King William's Act and remained as the fundamental constitutional document throughout the Eighteenth Century.

The King William's Act recognized that there were settlers living in Newfoundland who were not directly connected with the West Country merchants and the fishery. It was a positive indication to those who decided to make their homes there. With settlement having been given legal status and some protection from the whims of the fishing admirals the community existed in relative peace. It is at this stage that the various traditions of the Old World began to merge and give the communities their distinctive Newfoundland

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[11] Act of William III, An Act to Encourage Trade to Newfoundland. Quoted in Prowse, A History of Newfoundland, p. 233.

character as expressed in the entertainment forms such as the concert which incorporated their songs, stories, and oral literature.

2.2 The People - Origins and Roots

In an attempt to understand the community concert as a major entertainment practice which brought together the traditional songs and stories in a theatrical setting it is necessary to understand something of the people who produced them. The culture which evolved as distinctly Newfoundland is inextricably tied to the traditions which were transported from Europe. The religious differences and the folklore of Ireland and Britain continued as viable forces in the lives of the immigrants, and in a place where oral traditions were strongly at work these aspects of culture survived.

The concerts were most often produced under the auspices of the community churches, and as a result reflect religious differences more than any other form of entertainment; there were Catholic concerts which relied heavily on Irish songs and sketches and concerts produced by the various protestant groups whose programmes, according to reports in the Twillingate Sun, often included English folksongs as well as hymns and dialogues with a didactic intent.

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It is estimated that by 1775 there were 12,000 European-descended people in Newfoundland. For a place so rich in resources and having been known for nearly two hundred years this is an astonishingly small number. Who were these people who came to this part of the New World where climate and geography did not work to provide a totally hospitable environment? The romantic myth about the hardy and ever-suffering ancestors must be shelved in order to discern some aspect of the truth about the beginning immigration to Newfoundland. One study from Memorial University of Newfoundland has attempted to present the facts regarding those who came in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries; and with the assistance of statistics and information gleened from the diaries of wandering scholars and dilettantes of the period, a picture of the early settlers becomes discernible.[12]

Over-populated Ireland provided the West Country merchants with a continual supply of young men ripe for recruitment for the Newfoundland fishing industry. They came bringing

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12 John J. Mannion, Ed., The Peopling of Newfoundland (Memorial University of Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1977.)

with them their Irish traditions and customs and religion and apart from the intermingling with the English on board ship during the Atlantic crossing they remained distinctly Irish as the protestants remained distinctly English. In many parts of Newfoundland this distinction is still evident today. Only a few communities grew up in Newfoundland which contained the two religious groups; in such places the Catholic families settled on one side of the harbour and the Protestants on the other.

> In the 17th century the English had occupied almost all the main harbours from Trepassey to Bonavista Bay, and in the following century the Irish also dispersed along this shore From the beginning, however, the Irish tended to concentrate on the Avalon ,particularly from St. John's to Placentia, and were also prominent in some of the more populous centers of summer settlement in the bays north of St. John's to Fogo Island; elsewhere the English dominated. The pattern is clearly discernible today.[13]

The English who settled in Newfoundland came primarily from Dorset, Devon, Somerset, and Hampshire.[14] At first the

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13 Ibid., p. 8.

14 Ibid., p. 7.

immigration was seasonal in that the men left their homes in the spring and returned to England in the fall. However, with the Newfoundland fishery on the increase it became necessary that some people stay the winter to protect the fishing stage, flakes, and other building belonging to the company. The initial practice of staying one winter naturally led to two or three, thus, creating a permanent mode of migration.

"Ye common people go to Newfoundland"[15] was the message of those recruiting labourers for the fishery on the other side of the Atlantic. The common people went despite the adversity of the climate and the authorities under which they worked and, by staying on and persevering, complicated the plans of the West Country merchants. Since the original settlers in Newfoundland were the "common people" the entertainment practices which developed did not include such formal arts as theatre or opera. The only theatrical event produced was the concert and perhaps its popularity is related to the fact that it was able to accommodate aspects of their oral literature such as songs and monologues.

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15 C. Grant Head, Eighteenth Century Newfoundland (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976), p. 86.

In a time when the sole Newfoundland resource was being exploited at all costs the merchants in their entrepreneurial zeal soon saw an advantage to having a resident population in the colony. Newfoundland was not self sufficient; it could provide most necessities but the lack of an agricultural component left the residents dependent on the importation of grain products. The Nineteenth Century saw a rapid increase in the population of Newfoundland particularly with regard to the Irish numbers. The movement was away from the Avalon thus increasing the population of other parts of the island. Until now the Avalon had received the majority of the immigrants, especially those from Ireland, and as a result of having to bear the brunt of the poor economy for such a long time it was necessary that newer fishing grounds be sought out. The concentration, heretofore, of the population on one part of the island had left most of the coastal areas uninhabited and unexploited.

> By 1800, the permanent population was still largely confine d to the Avalon Peninsula and the northeast coast to Notre Dame Bay, with only a scattering of settlements in the remaining areas of the island to the north and west, and in Labrador. A century later this vast area was settled, with twelve times as many people; the Newfoundland

maritime frontier was finally closed.[16]

The result of this migration away from the Avalon was to spread the population over a large area. There was a rapid growth of population at this time and significant changes occurred within the traditional structure. Foremost among these changes was the disappearance of the class of indentured servants and the emergence of the colonist as an ordinary fisherman. With the population spread over such a large area and with communications between the different centers nearly non-existent the communities tended to develop their own unique character as a result of the isolation. It was at this stage that the community concerts became a significant part of the community, both as an entertainment vehicle and as a money raising enterprise.

St. John's became more and more the centre of trade and commerce and the only contact with the international fishery trade. The rest of Newfoundland became more and more isolated and removed from the commercial activities as the power of the local merchants declined. It became absolutely necessary that the communities become self-sufficient.

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16 Mannion, The Peopling of Newfoundland, p.1

> With this fundamental social change, the basic structure of modern outport society began to emerge, socially more egalitarian and occupationally less specialized than in the previous century. Labor and production were now almost completely organized around the family household unit which aimed towards a greater degree of self-sufficiency and engaged in a wide 17range of self-supporting domestic activities.

It was during the Nineteenth Century that the many communities away from the Avalon Peninsula were settled and a concerted effort made on the part of their inhabitants towards some degree of self-sufficiency. The lack of communication with the outside world and even with St. John's caused a dependency within the community groups which forged the various Old World backgrounds into traditions which became common to a particular harbour, cove, or bay. The isolation factor, according to Mannion, is the greatest single factor contributing to the uniqueness of the Newfoundland character.

> Newfoundland's cultural landscape is unique in contemporary North America, not just because the population is predominantly restricted to a necklace of communities around the coast but because of its

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17 Ibid., p. 11.

> historic isolation from the mainland; the landscape and the technology that helped create it have preserved until recently an Old World character.[18]

An integral part of the community cultures which evolved from the Old world traditions was the entertainment modes. These were adapted to fit in with the seasonal occupational aspect of the community and as a result were most evident during Christmas and the winter months. The activities of the isolated communities included jannying, mummering, singing, story-telling, and dancing, as well as the use of drama in the form of concerts.

2.3 Church and School

As if the problems caused by the international fishery trade and those brought on by the natural disasters were not enough Newfoundland was also not immune from violence and dissension caused by differences in religion. The Nineteenth Century was a time when Roman Catholic and Protestant differences were very much a concern of the whole population often causing physical violence to persons and to property.

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[18] Ibid., p. 15.

The influx of over 24,000 Irish immigrants between 1811 and 1830 sharply increased one particular ethnic group and religion. This was a time when Representative Government was being established and the political superiority of one religious group over another was very much feared. The fears and traditions brought over from the Old World surfaced on this side of the Atlantic and manifested themselves in a number of grisly episodes such as as the one in 1835 when the editor of the Public Ledger was attacked by masked men and had his ears cut off.[19]

The religious dissension in the 1830s aggravated distrust of one denomination for another which resulted in communities being split, separate schools built, and enormous amounts of money and energy spent ensuring that co-operation remained at a minimum. These divisions were reflected in the community concert traditions in that they were referred to as belonging to a particular religious denomination such

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19 From an account of the event by the victim printed in the Public Ledger, June 9, 1835, discussed by G. M. Story, "Newfoundland: Fishermen, Hunters, Planters, and Merchants," in Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland, ed. Herbert Halpert and G. M. Story. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969.)

as the Methodist or Church of England concert.[20] The most significant consequence of the re-awakening of these Old World rivalries was the establishment of schools along denominational lines with the Churches having the power over personnel and curriculum, as well as being responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the buildings. This resulted in too much time and money being spent to sustain a rather clumsy educational system which, after the introduction of various protestant denominations, demanded that one community have a school for each group. It was not unusual to find a small community in Newfoundland with three or four schools and churches. Until 1950 it was the responsibility of the communities and the churches to maintain its school facilities. There was a minimum of financial assistance from the government so money for this purpose had to raised locally, usually through such events as concerts.

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20 Some informants for this study attributed the disappearance of the concert tradition in some communities to the establishment of of a number of newer religious groups in the 1940s and 1950s such as the Pentecostal Assemblies. Dramatic events and other traditional entertainment were often disapproved of by these evengelical organizations.

Despite the attempts by the churches at establishing and maintaining schools there was a paucity of educational opportunities in Newfoundland prior to Confederation with Canada. In 1949 the province had one of the highest rates of illiteracy in North America. No where is this more evident than in the journals of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel missionaries such as Archdeacon Edward Wix.

> Assembled twenty-four persons to full service. As not one in this settlement could read, I was requested to read a letter containing intelligence of the most interesting kind, of which the family had been in ignorance, although they had had it by them for weeks.I many similar settlements, I was engaged in writing letters for the people to relatives who had been settled, some ten, some twenty years, in other parts of the island, and with whom they had been unable to hold any communication since their original settlement in the country, or, at least, since their dispersion.[21]

Similarly, the Reverend Julien Moreton recorded in his diary his observation regarding the lack of education in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland; he disclosed that "of the 334 persons married in seven years only forth-nine could

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21 Edward Wix, Six Months of a Newfoundland Missionary's Journal, from February to August, 1835, (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1836), p. 24.

write their names".[22] For this study of the popular culture vis a vis the community concerts, these journals and missionary reports have proven to be extremely useful in that they provide a detailed picture of the social milieu of the last century when the practice became widespread. They present a vivid picture of a society where oral tradition is relied upon for the preservation of its songs and stories, as well as the day to day events. The concerts which began in such an environment utilized these items of the folklore in a theatrical setting.

Along with their observations regarding the lack of education these early missionaries also recorded facts about the quality of life in Newfoundland during their sojourns there. The influx of people to Newfoundland and the subsequent settling of the many isolated coves and harbours around its coast had begun to show its effects by the middle of the Nineteenth Century and continued to do so until the Twentieth.

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22 Rev. Julien Moreton, Life and work in Newfoundland. Reminiscences of 13 Years Spent There (London: Rivingtons, 1863), p. 23.

As well as establishing the Church of England in Newfoundland the Society for the Propagation of Gospel laid the foundation for education as well. The people whom they referred to in their 1790 report as "a barbarous, perfidious and cruel people" were in need of schools and the rudiments of education.

Order was slowing being established; not through the efforts of the government but through the churches. The lawlessness which had threatened the existence of the population was slowly being eliminated as the clergy took responsibility for the educational as well as the spiritual needs. The church had become the prime motivating force for the people of Newfoundland and was to have a distinct presence in all levels of government as they developed. By the mid Nineteenth Century, as a result of men like Archdeacon Wix, most of the island's population adhered to one religious denomination or another, and as a consequent the churches made a more concerted effort to staff the various parishes. As the churches were established in the many small communities throughout the island it became necessary that these places organize to support them. The clergy and teacher arrived and with them brought ideas as to how to maintain the new services; at this stage the concert

became a regular event produced under the auspices of the church and school.

2.4 Economic and Social Conditions

Among the factors which were inherent in shaping the concerts traditions in Newfoundland perhaps the most significant were those related to the social and economic conditions, for apart from the entertainment and celebration aspect these events were produced out of necessity. The community dramatic events attempted to provide some semblance of a welfare programme for the needy as well as to maintain certain community services.

Prominent in the Nineteenth Century Newfoundland picture is tragedy, poverty, and disaster. The fragile economy was dependent on one single resource leaving the whole population at the mercy of the elements and the success or failure of the inshore fishery. Newfoundlanders, although isolated, were not immune from the effects of the changes in world politics. In 1815 France and America barred Newfoundland fish from domestic markets by demanding extremely high duty taxes. The action had a devastating effect, so much so, that it brought on a commercial crash at the close of 1815. In 1817, just two years after the crash, the inshore fishery

failed and 1818 was one of the coldest winters on record freezing the waters around St. John's thus cutting off shipping. To complete the picture St. John's experienced the first of a number of major fires in February 1816 destroying most of the town. Other fires added to the misery of the capital and therefore the rest of the island in 1817, 1846, and 1892.[23]

In 1860 there was widespread pauperism due to the failure of the fisheries and nearly one third of the colony's total revenue was required for the relief of the poor. Consequently there was little money left in the government's coffers for services such as education.(The complete picture of education in Newfoundland during most of the nineteenth century is to found in the annals of the Benevolent Irish Association, the St. John's Society, the Newfoundland society and those groups who worked under the auspices of the Wesleyan Church.)

As mentioned at the beginning of this section it was the

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23 A detailed account of the early history of St. John's including discussion on the major fires is shown in R. G. Moyles, "Complaints is Many and Various, but the Odd Devil Likes it" (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1975).

presence of so many poor and distressed people in Newfoundland that prompted organizations to raise money to alleviate their suffering. Quite often the fund-raising endeavors involved dramatics as was the case in 1770 when the Gentlemen of the Navy performed Nicholas Rowe's The Fair Penitent in St. John's . An account of a similar event was reported in the Harbour Grace Standard in 1864 when some gentlemen of the town endeavored to raise money for the poor in their community. Louise Whiteway in her detailed analysis of life in Newfoundland in 1867 states that, "concerts were given under the auspices of the Poor Relief Association since poor relief in some form or other was ever a pressing necessity".[24] The Twillingate Sun carried a number of reports from 1880 to 1900 of concerts which were produced to assist the poor; one case in particular was to alleviate the suffering of someone who had lost her house in the St. John's fire. As the island came to be populated and communities took on their separate identities, organizations were established such as the Society of United Fishermen and

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24 Louise Whiteway, "Newfoundland in 1867."Dalhouise Review 46 (1966 - 67): 57.

the Loyal Orange Society. Both of these groups prospered in Newfoundland, thus they were established in nearly every Protestant community.[25] Around the same time as the fraternities were set up the women began to establish societies under the auspices of the various churches and devoted their time almost exclusively to assisting the poor through fund raising or by other means.

Economic conditions improved slowly after 1939 with the establishment of military bases in Newfoundland by Canada and the U.S.A. A new era of prosperity dawned; Newfoundlanders, in the thousands, were employed by the Americans[26] and cash was available in unaccustomed amounts. The prosperity continued somewhat after the war with politicians like Joseph R. Smallwood preaching Confederation with Canada and the promise of a better standard of living.

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25 The Society of United Fishermen (S.U.F) was founded at Heart's Content, Newfoundland in 1862; the Loyal Orange Society (L.O.A) was founded in 1863 and quickly spread to all parts of the island. Both groups figure strongly in the production of dramatic concerts and will be dealt with at in length in subsequent chapters.

26 David Alexander, "Development and dependence in Newfoundland 1880 - 1970," Acadiensis 4 (Autumn 1974): 3 - 31.

In 1949 the "Nursery for Seamen" became the tenth province of Canada.

2.5 Post Confederation - Centralization

The community concert tradition grew out of a necessity. It provided a forum whereby the people could bring together their songs, and stories, and with assistance from published scripts were able to support important services as well as provide a home grown entertainment. With Confederation major changes were introduced into the Newfoundland society, none were more significant than the government's attempt to reverse the Nineteenth Century migration patterns by enforcing a centralization programme.

Compared to the rest of Canada Newfoundland was far behind in terms of living standards and educational opportunities. Isolation was still the chief obstacle to the establishing of facilities and supplying services. For the most part communication in 1949 was still restricted to coastal steamer and the telegraph. Although there was a railroad connecting the east coast with the west access to it was obtained by first travelling by boat or overland on foot. In 1949 there were 1,500 rural communities most of which had fewer than three hundred inhabitants. In an attempt to

remove the major obstacle to providing the essential services the government of Newfoundland with assistance from the Government of Canada undertook to centralize many of the smaller communities. It was the expressed intention of the government to assist the populations of the isolated settlements to move to larger towns where the essential services already existed. As a result, the number of smaller communities was reduced by moving the people, and oftentimes their homes, to what was labelled "growth centers." For example:

> In 1965 a revised version of the [resettlement] programme was inaugurated under joint federal-provincial sponsorship. This time the specific goal was declared to be the complete evacuation of 600 communities and the relocation of 70,000 people in selected "growth centers". In its first five years the revised programme had closed 119 communities and relocated 16,114 occupations.[27]

The spread of the population in the Nineteenth Century to make room for the immigration increase was responsible for the peopling of the "isolated" communities.In his reminis-

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27 Ralph Matthews, "There's No Better Place Than Here" (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1976), p. 2.

cences gathered in The Winds Softly Sigh R. G. Sparkes, who grew up in one of these out of the way places, recalls a visitor saying, "Dear God! I can understand a man coming here to die; but to live? I just don't believe it."[28] To the exclusion of everything but the need to harvest the sea, and with very little contact outside the immediate area, the villages grew and attained their individual characters hallmarked by a dependency on one natural resource and tempered by the human resourcefulness which persisted despite the difficult and trying times. That resourcefulness is reflected in how these people chose to give form to their capacity for celebration; investigating one aspect of that is the focus of this study.

With centralization the sense of community was disrupted and the identity which had been forged out of the unique background of its people and the geography of the area was soon lost in the larger growth centers. In these centers the people found that church and school responsibilities were different as were the employment opportunities. The benefits

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28 R. F. Sparkes, The Winds Softly Sigh, (St. John's, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books Ltd., 1981), p. vi.

and amenities the centralization programme brought were no doubt welcomed but that which was lost in the move must be remembered. The concert which had been a community effort organized to ensure a degree of financial independence required a sense community in order to succeed. In the larger centers that sense no longer existed and the one dramatic event which had helped sustain the isolated villages was no longer possible nor necessary.

2.6 Summary

This background to the study has concentrated on the economic history, the people and the settlement patterns in an attempt to provide an explanation of the the unique character of the Newfoundland society. It has dealt too heavily perhaps on the written historical record which tends to be a bit myopic for in the lateral vision the answer to why people stayed and survived can be discerned from their their folk song, stories, dancing, their traditions which touch ancient mystery via mummering, their use of drama and performance, and their belief in the Church and in each other. These cultural items must be accorded credit when dealing with the intriguing question of survival in the "great ship moored off the Grand Banks"; along with, what David Alexander describes as:

> its [Newfoundland's] enormous capacity to absorb hardship without sinking into despair, and the deep conservatism which assures survival but may indicate an inclination to absorb change rather than to initiate reform.[29]

The people with the "inclination to absorb" created a rich legacy of oral culture, music and song, at the same time as they battled the elements, the hostility of government, and the lack of co-operation from geography and the climate. With the fishery being the primary and sole occupation the winter months became the time,not only for restoration and repair of equipment, but one which left time for relaxation and leisure. It was during this time of the year, particularly at Christmas, that the capacity for celebration was attended to, in some part because of religious dictates but mainly because it was a time when "the work was all done" and through the auspices of the church, school, and lodge, the communities entertained by song, dance, mummer-

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29 David Alexander, "Literacy and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland," Acadiensis 9 (Autumn 1980):7

ing, times, and concerts.[30]

The people who settled the island of Newfoundland "behind the backs of the west country merchants and the British authorities" persisted in a pre-industrial society by becoming master craftsmen, fishermen, hunters, and nurtured a folklore rich in Old World and New World Cultures. They

> were, above all, communities on a human scale and societies with a consciousness, or an illusion, of mastery over their environment.[31]

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30 The newspapers consulted for this study of the concert invariably mentioned entertainment events in the December and January issues. Some publications carried similar notices in February and March but seldom anything of this nature between March and November, except for one newspaper, the Grand Falls Advertiser which served a non-fishing community.

31 Story, "Newfoundland: Fishermen, Hunters, Planters, and Merchants, " p. 33.

Chapter 3

FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT: THE WRITTEN RECORD

In the preceding chapter references were made to the Newfoundland culture generally which evolved from the combination of Old world traditions and the geographical isolation exacerbated by the economic of the area. This section will discuss the entertainment modes which identify this culture; namely, mummering, theatre, and the Soiree or Time, with emphasis on their relationship to the community concert.

Information used in this chapter, besides coming from more traditional sources, was also found in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive.[32] No attempt will be made to draw conclusion with regard to the entertainment modes except to present the research that

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[32] All subsequent references to the Archive and its holdings will be in the abbreviated form: MUNFLA.

provides a more comprehensive picture of the Newfoundland society and assist in placing within its proper context the community concerts which are the focus of this study.

3.1 Mummering

Any discussion of traditional entertainment practices in Newfoundland must focus first on the age-old tradition of mummering. In the Newfoundland context this practice is identified by disguising oneself both physically and vocally, and seeking admittance to homes within the community.[33]

The first printed reference to mummering in Newfoundland, according to Story, was by the Reverend Anspach, a missionary with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.). In his account of life in Newfoundland The Reverend Anspach wrote the following regarding the Christmas practice.

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[33] In recent years, since the establishment of MUNFLA the traditions of mummering have been surveyed, examined, and subjected to varying degrees of analysis by anthropologists, folklorists, and journalists with the result being a considerable number of publications on its various aspects. Chief among the studies is a collection edited by Herbert Halpert and G. M. Story, Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

> Another custom, which is said to be still observed in the North of England, prevails in some parts of Newfoundland, though not with general approbation: it is called mummering; men and women exchange clothes with each other, and go from house to house singing and dancing, on which occasion Christmas boxes are expected, and generally granted previous to the performance, in order to get rid of them. The author must, in justice to the native inhabitants of Conception Bay, observe, that frequent attempts have been made to introduce this practice among them, but they have been generally resisted and publicly reprobated.[34]

References to mummering in printed sources are scant. There may be a number of reasons for this but paramount among them is certainly the scarcity of printed sources in general. Those people with the ability and the time to write and who produced what documents there are about Newfoundland's past, usually visited the island during the summer months when the fishery was in full swing, during which times any type of organized celebration would have been difficult to find. Besides, mummering was a Christmas

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34 Rev. Lewis Amadeus Anspach, A History of Newfoundland (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1819), p. 475.

activity and relegated solely to that particular season.[35] One of the more thorough pictures of the practice, however, is given by a British geologist J.B.Jukes who was retained by the Newfoundland government in 1839 and 1840 to conduct a geological survey.

> The lower orders ceased work; and during Christmas, they amused themselves by what seemed the relics of am old English custom, which, I believe, was imported from the West of England, where it still lingers. Men, dressed in all kinds of fantastic disguises, and some in women's clothes, with gaudy colors and painted faces, and generally armed with a bladder full of pebbles tied to a kind of whip, paraded the streets, playing practical jokes on each other and on the passers by, performing rude dances, and soliciting money or grog. They called themselves Fools and Mummers.[36]

Like J. B. Jukes, the other reference to the mummering practices in Nineteenth Century describes the traditions as they were carried out in St.John's. In this case Sir Richard

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35 For a detailed discussion of the European mummering traditions see E. K. Chambers, The English Folk-Play (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964, reprint of 1933 edition.)

36 J. B. Jukes, Excursions in and about Newfoundland, During the Years 1839 and 1840, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1842), 1:220.

Bonnycastle who visited Newfoundland a few years after Jukes provides information on a different aspect of the mummering tradition: the mummer play. The most common expression of this practise was the informal house visit with the participants disguised after the manner described by Anspach and Jukes. However, the visiting tradition where people variously disguised come into a house intent on not having their identities revealed was, in some parts of the island, overshadowed by a version of the Medieval mummer play of St. George and the Dragon. Although the practice of performing this play has long since died out, it was, according to Bonnycastle, a part of the Christmas celebrations held in St. John's in 1842.

> There was, and still is a sort of saturnalia amongst the lower classes, in St. John's particularly, which lasts three days, commencing at Christmas, with boys only.
>
> The mummers prepare, before the New Year, dresses of all possible shapes and hues, most of which are something like those of harlequin and the clown in pantomimes, but the general color is white, with sundry bedaubments of tinsel and paint.A huge paper cocked hat is one favorite headpiece, and everyone, among the gentlemen, excepting the captain or leader, and his two or three assistants, is masked. The ladies are represented by young fishermen, who are painted, but not masked. Some of the masks are very grotesque, and the fools or clowns are furnished with thongs and bladders, with which they belabour the exterior mob. Much ingenuity is observable in the style of the cocked hats, which are

> surmounted with all sorts of things, feathers in profusion, paper models of ships, etc.
>
> They perform, at those houses which permit them, a sort of play,[Mummer Play] in which the unmasked characters only take a part, and which is very long and tiresome after once hearing. It is a dialogue between the captain and a sailor, and commences with Alexander the Great, and continues down to Nelson and Wellington. They are both armed with swords, and mock battle goes on all the while, till one supposed to be slain, when the doctor is called in to bring him to life again.[37]

Participation in the Newfoundland mummer play was restricted to a small group of people who had been taught the lines and the business.[38] Unlike the informal house visit where anyone could be a mummer; with the play, people had to be selected to become a part of the fraternity. Those who became participants in this ancient drama were most likely entrusted with the verses and dialogues by someone passing them down by word of mouth. With the play being

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37 Sir Richard Bonnycastle, Newfoundland in 1842 (London: Henry Colburn, 1842), p.138 - 40.

38 An intensive search was under taken in the early sixties by members of the Department of Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland to record the mummer play. Dr. Herbert Halpert and Dr. John Widdowson fortunately salvaged the final remnants of this tradition.

presented just a few times during the year at Christmas it would have been difficult for anyone to have learned the lines from watching the performances.

The Newfoundland mummer play was an organized affair; it was rehearsed as to who entered when and where and included a march around the community going from house to house to perform.

The formality and the fraternal aspect of the mummer play contrasts sharply with the community concert. The former was restricted to those who were admitted to the brotherhood - those who had been selected to participate in the mystery. The concert was open to anyone with the talent and the willingness to be a part of it, and instead of using people's homes as the performance space the concert was stationary, with the audience coming to it, thereby making it more of a community event.

Unlike the concert the Mummer Play uses neither song nor music but instead demands that the dialogue be performed according to the conventions it has always employed. There is very little room for improvisation or spontaneity. A significant difference is that the concert was viewed as a positive event filled with exciting entertainment; the mummer players were often regarded a mysterious characters

who elicited fear. One informant recalled that the mummer "soldiers" were extremely frightening, "particularly to the children".[39]

The practice which Bonnycastle reported in 1842 continued until the early Twentieth Century when it finally gave way to the more popular aspect of this Christmas activity - disguising or mummering.

> In no area have we yet found an explanation of why the traditional performances of the play died out, apparently shortly before the First World War. When we contrast this with the continuing vitality, in most areas, of Newfoundland's most popular form of mummering, the house-visit , we can only assume that the mumming of this latter kind has continued to live because it serves various useful functions. For some reason the mummer's play, perhaps because of it formal nature, did not take on a new functional significance, and was allowed to die out.[40]

Whether the formal nature sparked the demise of this custom or not, it is generally agreed that around the early

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39 From notes taken during an interview with Mr. Herbert Foley at Tilting, Newfoundland, August 1979.

40 Herbert Halpert, "Typology of Mumming," in Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland, ed. Herbert Halpert and G. M. Story (Toronto: University of Toronto for Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1969), p. 61.

part of this century the presentation of the play gave way to the informal house visit. References to this topic in the the MUNFLA mummer collections all agree on the time when the practice ceased. For example; "But 'tis [Mummer's Play] died out you know, its never been here since 1907."[41] A similar claim was made in an interview conducted in another part of the island; "I was no more than fifteen years of age when they stopped doing dat [Mummer Play], and I'm seventy-five now [1969].[42]

As previously mentioned, the practice of mummering remained after the play had died out. The house-visit type of mummering is still widespread in Newfoundland and is common to all geographical regions. (The Mummer Play was confined, somewhat, to the east and northeast coasts.) Mummering, or jannying as the activity is sometimes called, is practiced during the Christmas season by people of all ages. It consists primarily of disguising oneself with a

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41 John Widdowson interviewing Mrs. Lambert Foley at Tilting, March 13, 1962. MUNFLA C74 64 - 13, MS. p.8.

42 G. B. Wareham interviewing L. Lockyer, Alex Barrett, and Wilson Warren at Arnold's Cove, December 27, 1969, MUNFLA C 736 70 - 29, MS. p. 11.

mask and unfamiliar clothing and then visiting the various houses in the community. Two immediate aims of the mummer is to be allowed to enter a home and to be identified (or not) by the host. Once identified the mummer removes the facial disguise with the successful mummer being the one who fools the host and is able to leave unidentified.[43]

Mummers are frightening figures who wear homemade masks of cardboard, oakum, etc.; dress in overstuffed clothing and sometimes carry the grotesque hobby horse. The physical aspects when combined with the anonymity, give the mummer a certain respect because of his mysterious nature. Mummers speak very little except to answer the questions of the inquiring host, however, when they do it is with a disguised voice.[44]

The visit by a group of mummers involved dancing to accordion music, offers of food and drink (alcoholic for

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43 For an interesting discussion on this aspect of mummering see, Gerald M. Sider, "Christmas Mumming and the New Year in Outport Newfoundland," Past & Present, No. 71 (May, 1976).

44 This is done by changing the pitch and quite often speaking ingressively.

adults) and lasted for about twenty minutes. Those who were identified removed their disguise but those whose identities remained a mystery left without revealing them.[45]

Like the disguisers and mummers of England and Europe the Newfoundland participants in this "ancient pastime of the citizens" did not escape the ire of the authorities.[46] Particularly during the period of religious unrest in the Nineteenth Century did the mummering practice come under attack with laws being enacted to prevent the practise from taking place. Fights broke out in the streets in some east coast communities and in one place in Conception Bay a protestant was murdered by a group of Roman Catholic mummers. The Harbour Grace Standard issue of December 17, 1862 carried the following announcement proclaiming the police ban on mumming.

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45 An extremely accurate and detailed account of mummering in a southwest coast community both from the point of view of the host and the participant is to be found in Claire Mowat's The Outport people (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1983).

46 Cited by Violet Alford, Sword Dance and Drama (London: Merlin Press, 1962), p.52.

> Any person who shall be found at any season of the year, in any town or settlement in this colony dressed as a mummer masked or otherwise disguised, shall be deemed to be guilty of a public nuisance, and may be arrested by any peace officer with or without a warrant, and taken before a Justice of the Peace in the district of place where such person may be found, and, on conviction in a summary manner, before such justice, may be committed to gaol for a period not exceeding 7 days unless he shall pay a fine not exceeding 20 shillings. Police Office, Harbour Grace, December 17, 1862.[47]

The same announcement was carried in the St. John's papers of the time. The Harbour Grace publication carried it for a number of years, certainly from 1862 to 1865 and according to one entry the proclamation had produced the desired effect.

> Christmas passed without too many incidents - no larceny - people respected the law, due to the suppression of mumming seen as the best measure taken by Harbour Grace.[48]

The community concert required no such legislation: it was

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47 "Notice," The Harbour Grace Standard and Conception Bay Advertiser, 14 January 1863.

48 The Harbour Grace Standard, 11 January 1865.

a community affair, organized and produced to assist some particular cause, and compared to the mummering practice it was tightly controlled and formal.

The Mummer Play which dealt with death and resurrection and peopled with such diverse characters as St. George, St. Patrick, and a Turkish Knight, was dropped from the mumming activity in Newfoundland. There may be a number of reasons for this change in the practice: a gap may have occurred in the oral tradition process in that it was not passed on to another generation; or because a director or Captain of the Mummers could not be found; but most likely it was because the rehearsal and performance was too formal and required too much time from people who had very little to spare. The remnant of the "ancient mystery" manifested in the informal house visit required very little planning - anyone could participate regardless of skill. And it served to bring people together during the lull period. The establishment of such avenues of communication served to unite and to ensure the the continuing life of the rural community.

3.2 The Time

In this survey of the entertainment modes common to Newfoundland perhaps the most popular and, in some ways most important, is the Time. In the Newfoundland idiom this event means a soiree; a community social usually sponsored by an organization and held in the school, parish hall, or a lodge belonging to the Society for United Fishermen (SUF) or Loyal Orange Association (LOA).

The Time is somewhat similar to the concert. In fact it was generally the practice that a "Time" follow the presentation of the dialogues, songs, and recitations. Both brought the community together in a kind of participatory entertainment with the expressed aim of raising money for the good of the group.

Usually held during the Christmas season but not necessarily restricted to any one period of the year, the Time was the nucleus of the organized entertainment around which the local talent and skills were allowed to be shown. Like the concert it served to bring the whole community together and provided them with a forum in which to let loose by way of dancing and singing and generally having a good time. It accommodated all age groups from the very old to the very

young and in a fair-like environment provided something for everyone. Newfoundland essayist Ray Guy recalls the "Time" as it used to be conducted during his youth.

> I can mind, when I was small, being, lodged off down on the coats in the back of the school at dances.
>
> This is where they put you at about two O'clock in the night when you commenced to get groggy and wanted a nap. There was a row of desks shoved in tight to the wall for all hands to put their coats on. . . . First they had the Sale of Work. Second they had the First Table followed by a Second and Third Tables depending on how many was there. They might have a Guess Cake or Grab Bags and third they had the Dance. . . . By means of these affairs they built schools, churches and halls, assisted distressed persons, sent parcels overseas.[49]

Anecdotal writings about Newfoundland usually refer to specific "Times" such as the School Time, the Orangemen's Time (LOA), or the Fishermen's Time (SUF). Each organization had a particular day during the Christmas season when their event was held; for example, Boxing Day, January 26, was the

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[49] Ray Guy, You May Know Them as Sea Urchins, Ma'am, ed. Eric Norman (Portugal Cove, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books, Limited, 1975), p. 89.

day assigned to the Loyal Orange Association.[50]

One informant mentioned that Times were held to coincide with the opening of school but they were more like picnics and the "real Times" were held at Christmas when there was one nearly every night.[51]

In his account of Christmas in Deep Harbour Louis J. Chiaramonte explains that the Time was given throughout the Christmas holidays and describes it as, "any function given in the school or local Orangemen's Lodge; a card party, a dance, or a dance combined with a soup supper maybe given by any organization that wants to raise money".[52]

These events were extremely important to the life of the community for in these informal, yet structured, events the

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50 Sparkes, The Winds Softly Sigh, p. 120; and Aubrey M. Tizzard, On Sloping Ground: Reminiscences of Outport Life in Notre Dame Bay, Newfoundland (St. John's, Newfoundland: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore Publications, 1979), p. 228.

51 C. Skinner interviewing J. Osmond at Port aux Basques April 1980, MUNFLA C4858 80 - 153.

52 Louis J. Chiaramonte, "Mumming in Deep Harbour," in Christmas Mumming in Newfoundland, p. 81.

people were permitted a kind of revelry through dancing, singing, performing, not unlike the license provided by festivals everywhere. The serious, responsible working man was permitted to shelve that side of himself which he presented everyday throughout the year and was allowed to replace it with more carefree, lackadaisical, and almost Bacchic characteristics. During this period singers would emerge with both serious and comical songs of the folksong tradition sung in solo performance.[53] Of the few published references to the Time as an event in Newfoundland life perhaps the best descriptive account is given by the Rev. G. H. Earle in his essay on growing up in the outports. What he relates is typical of this social event of the year when people spent their time involved in these carnival-like activities.

> The women too had their meetings, the highlights for us being their two semi-annual "Times" in the Lodge. Here would be the big cooked scoff of saltwater birds or pork and cabbage with a grand assortment of vegetables of which everybody partook.

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53 George J. Casey, Neil V. Rosenberg and Wilfred W. Wareham, "Repertoire Categorization and performer - Audience Relationships: Some Newfoundland Folksong Examples," Ethnomusicology 16 (September 1972): 398.

> Crowds of children would congregate around the "fish-pond" and try their luck, others would be pushing their hands in the bran-tub and all gobbling homemade candy and ice cream. Later in the evening the hall would be prepared for dancing and sets formed wherever there was room. A fiddler would perch himself on a chair on top of a table in the center of the hall and for $5 play all night, beating time with his feet and bathed in perspiration. The instrument was not a fiddle but an accordeon [sic] but nevertheless he was called the fiddler. The "Time" would be the topic of discussion for[54]many days, especially the comical episodes.

Similarly the concert provided the topic of conversation for a period following its production. Some informants recalled that children picked up certain phrases from the dramatic event which then became part of the regional lore.[55] Particularly funny dialogues were discussed as were the antic of the actors, the new songs and other material. The "comical episodes" referred to above may have included practical jokes, slightly unabridged language, incidents

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54 Rev. G. H. Earle, "I Remember Life in the Outports," The Book of Newfoundland IV. Joseph R. Smallwood, editor, (St. John's, Newfoundland: Newfoundland Book Publishers Ltd., 1967), p. 236.

55 Simms, MUNFLA Q80B - 52.

involving dancing, and the varying degrees of inebriety some participants may have achieved.

In light of the history of Newfoundland as outlined in Chapter One with its harshness and the continual struggle against the elements, the economy, and the authorities, the "Time" was just that - a time out from the toil and routine of everyday life to experience a little of the pleasure of celebration. Perhaps not quite Dionysian but similar enough to be recognized as belonging to that particular facet of the human experience.

3.3 Theatre Tradition in Newfoundland

Of the three modes of entertainment discussed here the one most like the community concert in many respects is theatre. Ironically it is also the one with which the people of Newfoundland were most unfamiliar. There are a number of reasons for this. Theatre, as it is generally perceived and practiced demands certains things of those who participate in it. Foremost among these are the ability to read, a knowledge of the art form, and time to prepare the product. On all three accounts the Pre-Confederation Newfoundland society is found wanting.

There was a high degree of illiteracy in Newfoundland in

the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century. For example, in 1891 thirty-two percent of the population over ten years of age was totally illiterate.(The figures for Ontario and the Maritimes for the same period was only six percent and thirteen percent respectively and in the U. S. A. in 1900 eleven percent of the population over ten years of age was illiterate.)[56] The figure for Newfoundland strongly suggest that the ability to read a playscript and to memorize it, and then to submit to the plan of a director would have been a difficult undertaking for most people. One of the considerations in selecting dialogues for the concerts was that they be relatively simple since a number of the participants had very little education.

Some knowledge of theatre and its traditions, and accepted conventions are a major asset in attempting to produce a play for an audience. It is difficult to imagine a culture unfamiliar with this particular art form endeavoring to to present a play from the canon of dramatic literature without ever having seen a performance or, for that matter, ever

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56 David Alexander, "Literacy and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland," Acadiensis 1980, p. 8.

having read one. The field work for this study revealed over and over again that many people failed to recognize the word "theatre." In some instances the word drama was known and understood by some of the older informants, but to ensure that the interviews focused on the topic of inquiry the words "concert" or "dialogue", and in some cases, "play" had to be used.[57]

Perhaps the most significant reason as to why theatre and play production was not a major part of Newfoundland society is that the art demands a considerable amount of time from those who participate in it. As pointed out elsewhere the whole outport scene was one of a continual struggle for survival with only a short respite taken during the Christmas season. The time available for rehearsals was limited to preparing short dialogues, recitations, and songs. Patrick O'Flaherty writing about the Newfoundland outport life stresses that:

> The unforgettable fact of life in the pre-1949 outport was its burdensomeness, the need which the

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57 This does not apply to many Newfoundlanders today since most students have encountered travelling theatre shows by local and national companies.

> milieu imposed upon the inhabitants for endless, repetitive labor combined with thrift if existence was to be kept bearable. . . . A fisherman using trawls or hand-lines would probably spend as much energy just getting to the fishing grounds as most present-day salaried Canadians use during their full day's work.[58]

Certainly not the ideal environment for the production of an art so demanding as theatre. The expression of the pre-1949 Newfoundland society was more easily given in song as evidenced by the numerous collections of such.[59]

It is not germane to suggest that illiterate societies do not have the capacity for theatre or for the use of drama. Far from it. But the Newfoundland society was something of a potpourri of Old world values and traditions transferred to the isolated communities around the coast. Theatre as it had existed in England in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries most likely was not a part of the cultural background of the

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58 Patrick O'Flaherty, "Looking backwards: the Milieu of the Old Newfoundland Outports," Journal of Canadian Studies 10 (1975): 3.

59 See Kenneth Peacock, Songs of the Newfoundland Outports, 3 vols. (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada Bulletin, Secretary of State, 1965).

founding population. The ritual within that society was restricted very much to the church events with the special holidays like Christmas being times when the more distinguishable products of oral tradition were permitted to surface at events such as the concert. Given the industrial milieu, the cultural traditions which developed in Newfoundland reflected those things which had to do with fishing, hunting, and logging.

It is not surprising that the theatre tradition in Newfoundland's history is confined to St. John's along with a few amateur attempts at Harbour Grace and Grand Falls. In the case of Grand Falls the community organization was remarkably different from the rest of the island since it is a papermill town started at the turn of this century by the Anglo-Newfoundland Company. At Grand Falls people were not dependent on the fishery but were ensured a good wage and the security which went with it. Unlike the fishermen the factory worker had set hours and ample time for leisure and recreation. In Grand Falls and its satellite centers of Bishop's Falls and Windsor there were amateur drama groups,

choirs and other special interest organizations.[60]

Despite all the factors which mitigated against the establishment of a theatre tradition it did have a presence there, albeit, much stronger in the Capital. This section will outline the highlights of that presence attempting to present a survey of the printed references to the existence of theatre in Newfoundland. It will illustrate that, although similar in terms of conventions, the concerts tradition in Newfoundland did not develop as an offshoot of theatre. Except for those people who lived in St. John's the rest of the population was unfamiliar with the production and presentation of full length plays. However, the revue type theatre or concert was widespread. The study of the theatre does point out one similarity, however, with the concert; both were produced initially to raise money to assist the poor and needy.

The first reference in the early newspapers of a theatre event in St. John's was an advertisement carried in the Royal Gazette, March 18, 1817:

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60 The development of these Central Newfoundland towns is well documented in the Grand Falls newspaper, The Grand Falls Advertiser.

> For the Benefit of the Poor
> Theatre in St. John's At the Store lately occupied by Mr. William R. Row This Evening Will be performed the celebrated tragedy of The Fair Penitent. Doors to be opened at half past 6 o'clock and the performance to commence 1/2 past 7.
> Tickets - at 5s. each, to be had at this office, and the office of the Merc.[entile] Journal.[61]

The Fair Penitent, as were subsequent amateur production of that period, was undertaken to raise money for the poor. In a prologue written for the occasion by Mr. Wakeham of HMS Pike a rather grim picture is painted of the human condition complete with images of mothers mourning starving infants. The players in the drama were there, it said, to momentarily deliver the distressed from their plight and asked that such a noble objective might excuse their shortcomings with regard to skill. Mr. Wakeham, the writer of the prologue, was certainly no stranger to British drama of the early Nineteenth Century. The form and style used is not unlike that spoken by English actors and managers to introduce, excuse, apologize for the play, or to assist in setting the stage for the event. His references to the "buskin'd stage"

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[61] "Advertisement," The Royal Gazette [St. John's, Nfld.], 18 March 1817.

and the treading of same to "portray the growing passions which our bosums show," and to "shew fair virtue's native loveliness," distinctly show a familiarity with the sentiments and language of the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Centuries. It is safe to speculate that the navy and army personnel stationed in St. John's in 1817 who had had some previous experience with theatre initiated this significant project.

The Fair Penitent was successful in raising money for the poor and subsequent productions were mounted. April 15, just a month after their first show, the gentlemen of the navy and army presented The Point of Honour to a full house.[62] Like other newspaper reports of productions staged during this period the Royal gazette drew attention to the worthwhile nature of the cause they supported.

> Great praise is due to the young Gentlemen for their enterprise in bringing forward such performances, and it is but justice to say, that the Characters both Male and Female, were well supported, and that the discerning audience bestowed on

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62 Described as a "melo-drama" by the newspaper this play was one of many by Charles Kemble, 1775 - 1854. There are a number of publications of A Point of Honour the first being in 1800.

> them the applause which their merit so justly deserved. A considerable sum of Money has been raised in consequence, for the distressed objects of the Town. . .the community has been highly gratified and amused, and the Gentlemen who were the actors have given scope to their talents, which is of itself commendable. . .We feel not the least wish to criticize or point out the merits or demerits of one performer above another, because when their motive is considered, it would be palpable injustice-- Every encouragement should be given to such laudable undertakings. Several Gentlemen of the Town volunteered their services with their Musical instruments, which added much to the pleasure of the Evenings' Entertainments.[63]

The first, and one of the very few, references involving professional theatre in St. John's was in in 1806 when the Governor General wrote:

> Gentlemen - the four persons named in the margin, who are arrived here from Quebec, being players, have requested I will allow them to exhibit their theatrical representatives in St. John's. You are to do so, so long as they shall continue to conduct themselves in an orderly and decent manner.[64]

Note that the license was to perform in St. John's only.

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63 "Theatre, St. John's," The Royal Gazette, 15 April 1817.

64 Colonial Records, 1806, quoted in O'Neill, The Oldest City, p.237.

Both Sir Richard Bonnycastle and J. B. Jukes, visitors to Newfoundland in the Nineteenth Century, make reference to amateur theatre in the capital. Jukes reported that in 1840, "there was an amateur theatre, the profits of which were devoted to charitable purposes and a performance took place once every fortnight in which several parts were well sustained by actors and the audience".[65] Bonnycastle made a similar observation and added a note regarding the make up of the audiences which attended these amateur affairs.

> A theatre has long been established by amateurs in which a company of players have been performing this winter; but the taste for this is not very great amongst the wealthy classes who do not mingle very frequently in public.[66]

The preceding account of theatre traditions in Newfoundland refers only to the the capital of Newfoundland, St. John's. As pointed out earlier in this section the rest of Newfoundland encountered very little along the lines of

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65 Jukes, Excursions in and about Newfoundland, During the Years 1839 and 1840, p. 221.

66 Bonnycastle, Newfoundland in 1842, p.100.

formal or professional theatre. Unlike St. John's the other communities did not have a non-fishing population with the time or skill to attempt this. Even in St. John's those actors who produced the first play, The Fair Penitent, were not citizens of the city; they were gentlemen of the navy and army, people who were educated and, being officers, no doubt had sufficient leisure time to attend to the art.

Apart from St. John's the only other center which supported an amateur drama group in the Nineteenth Century was Harbour Grace. As in St. John's the "young men" of this major center produced their plays for the benefit of the poor. What was presented was the archetype of the community concert consisting of a programme of songs, poetry readings, minstrel dialogues and the short play Box and Cox, plus a stump speech.[67] The newspaper, The Harbour Grace Standard, diligently reported the events of the evening, but as with

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67 Defined by Wilmeth as: "A comedy feature primarily in minstrel shows and vaudeville; a version of the traditional story-telling monologue. . . . the major part of the variety section, in which minstrels concentrated on the misuse of language, making the stump speech more an exercise in the infinite possibilities for malapropisms and nonsequiturs than a commentary on the subject of the lecture". Don B. Wilmeth, The Language of American Popular Entertainment (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), s.v. "Stump Speech."

the St. John's reports, the purpose overshadowed the artistic component.

> The relief of the poor being the highly laudable object had in view, we are sure that the corps will meet with continued encouragement, particularly, too, that as beginners the members have evinced a remarkably aptitude for their work.[68]

The first performance of the Harbour Grace theatre corps had no less than two reports in the next issue - one in the form of a letter to the editor and the other a column by the editor himself. As well, the corps published a list of their expenses along with the sum they had donated to their objective. It is of interest that included in the expenses was eleven shillings paid to the police constable!

Theatrical traditions play a considerably small role in the development of Newfoundland. This does not, however, imply a "all work and no play" mentality; far from it. The social history of Newfoundland when juxtaposed with the harsh economic history is a testament to what David Alexander calls "its enormous capacity to absorb hardship

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68 "Amateur Theatricals," The Harbour Grace Standard, 1 March 1865.

without sinking into despair and the deep conservatism which assures survival".[69]

3.4 Summary

Three important Newfoundland entertainment traditions which a whole community could participate in were mummering, the Time, and, to a lesser extent, theatre. Except for the mummering which was a small group activity, the other two were organized for the benefit of the needy and to raise money in support of the church and school. However, neither of the two fulfilled that function as well as the concert - the only dramatic event common to all parts of the island. How it was able to do this is the subject of the following chapters.

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69 Alexander, Literacy and Economic Development, p. 7.

Chapter 4

ORGANIZATION

As indicated in the preceding chapters, the community concert developed as a popular entertainment form in Newfoundland and persisted as such until the 1950s. Its widespread popularity was due, in part, to the fact that it fulfilled important needs in the community. It provided a safe environment for celebration as well as assisting in the running and maintenance of those institutions which were vital to the community. These events were produced on a regular basis without the aid of specific interest groups such as drama societies and without the expertise of someone familiar with theatrical conventions or possessing formal training in the art. This chapter will discuss how these concerts were organized, produced, and staged.

4.1 Purpose

The primary purpose[70] for producing a concert has always been something other than to provide entertainment. However, in all instances the informants for this study remembered quite vividly good times accorded them as a result of the entertainment event. From the first record of dramatic activity in Newfoundland in 1812 by the Gentlemen of the Navy when they "tread'd the buskin'd stage" in order to raise money for the poor, down through to the concerts of the late Nineteenth Century and to those of recent times, the proceeds have all gone to some charitable, civic or religious cause.

It was established in Chapter One that prior to becoming a province of Canada the Newfoundland communities were almost totally responsible for the building and maintenance of schools. The finances to ensure that the buildings were kept in usable condition and that there was fuel such as coal and wood to heat them, were almost all raised through community

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[70] Purpose is used here in reference to the community need the concerts were intended to finance or attend to.

efforts. Paramount among those efforts was the concert consisting of songs, recitations and dialogues. Early accounts in the Twillingate Sun attest to the needs of the communities being met via this entertainment event.

Sunday schools "worked up" concerts to raise money for church related causes and community groups "put off" dramatic entertainments to support more immediate and pressing needs as was the case in October, 1892 when members of the community of Twillingate "got up" a concert to raise money to assist a lady who had lost all of her possessions in the St. John's fire of that year. An advertisement for the event appeared thusly:

> The entertainment, in behalf of a fire sufferer, as announced in previous pages, will take place in the court house on Wednesday evening next to begin at seven o'clock. The programme for the occasion is likely to be a very interesting one and as the admission fee is only twenty cents it is hoped a large audience will greet the performers.[71]

A subsequent issue of the newspaper carried a description of the programme and some anecdotal material regarding the

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71 "Local and General," Twillingate Sun, 24 September 1892.

production of the concert. It apparently introduced a novelty - a Twillingate Minstrel troupe which took up the second half of the event. Significant too with regard to the particular concert was that one of the organizers was the then famous opera singer, Georgina Sterling.[72]

The lady for whom the concert raised the money expressed her gratitude in the same publication.

> Mr. Editor,- Miss Pride wishes through your columns to return her very sincere thanks to Misses Sterling and ladies and gentlemen who rendered them such hearty assistance in the late entertainment gotten up for her benefit, also to the general public who so liberally patronized the Festival, as the handsome amount realized testifies.
>
> She hopes that the future of all will be free of disaster, especially such as she was called to pass through.[73] Yours truly, Friend.

An interview conducted in 1972 by a Memorial University of

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72 Georgina Sterling was born at Twillingate, Newfoundland, studied voice at Toronto and became a prominent opera star of her time, even singing at La Scala. A number of references are made in the local press to her visits to Twillingate and of her contributions to the community such as singing in concerts and assisting with their organization.

73 "Card of Thanks," Twillingate Sun, 8 October 1892.

Newfoundland student revealed that, consistent with the majority of MUNFLA's contributors, concerts were a part of the informant's past. And, as with other such events, the financial side of the productions was an important aspect.

> Well I took part in most everything was goin' on, we used to get up plays. . . Christmas concerts [were] something that everybody looked forward to. . . . I've known Christmas concerts here in 1918 when we would take a hundred and thirty-five dollars to one hundred and forty dollars [from tickets at forty cents each.[74]

Again, like so many of the Newfoundland people who contributed to this study, this informant stresssed that although raising money was the primary motive in getting the concerts started it soon gave way to a greater and perhaps stronger one: the creating of an environment wherein people could enjoy themselves. "The main reason was for enjoyment. . . but we also used to raise quite a bit of money."[75]

The numerous reports on concerts published in the

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74 Lewis Cole interviewing Victor March at Green's Harbour, February, 1972. MS pp. 9-10, MUNFLA C1288 72 - 98.

75 Ibid., page 10.

Twillingate Sun from 1880 to 1898 all stress the purpose which the productions were intended to serve. Such was the case in 1894 when the small community of Herring Neck on the northeast coast reported the entertainment news to the regional newspaper.

> An entertainment which was to have been given in Green's Cove schoolroom of the 5th ult. (Shrove Tuesday) for the purpose of raising money towards getting new windows and otherwise repairing the School Chapel there, was postponed owing to the icy hand of death being laid upon a near and dear relative of one of its chief promoters. It was further postponed to Thursday 22nd ult., when it took place in St. Mary's schoolroom, Salt Harbour.[76]

Similarly a concert was held at Pilley's Island on St. Patrick's Day 1894 in "aid of the liquidation of the debt on the Church of England."[77]

Things seem not to have changed with regard to purpose of the concert as evidenced in a letter from an informant who had recently produced a number of these entertainment events

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[76] "Entertainment at Herring Neck," Twillingate Sun, 9 March 1894.

[77] "Pilley's Island Notes," Twillingate Sun, 28 April 1894.

to raise money for a community cause; "About seven years ago, we revived the custom of variety concerts to raise money for a proposed swimming pool for our town."[78] Recalling the concerts held in the 1920s an informant commented on the worthwhile nature of their purpose which he felt contributed to their box office success.

> In those days fifty cents was a lot of money, but at the same time people didn't worry too much about what they had to pay to get in because it was all for the church . . . and when you are doing it for that nobody questioned the price.[79]

Not all reports, however, emphasized the financial motive. Some such as the record of a concert held at Marshallville in 1894 stresses the pedagogical nature of the entertainment; not surprisingly, since it, like many of these community efforts, was sponsored by the Sunday School.

> Such entertainments in those places are calculated to improve the rising generation and lead to much good. The children in the outports generally

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78 Letter from Ruth Matthews to C. Skinner, 20 March 1982.

79 C. Skinner interviewing J. Osmond at Port Aux Basques, April 1982, MUNFLA C4858 80 - 153.

> are smart and intelligent and with the development of the faculties with which nature has endowed them, and capable of holding their own against children who are living in centres surrounded from their earliest childhood with all the educational advantages possible.[80]

Some of the Nineteenth Century reviewers were not as serious in stating the motive and purpose. In a number of instances the writers of the social events columns for the communities in Notre Dame Bay spoke of the reason for the event in more secular terms. One such event held in Laurencetown in 1894 was produced because "it was so dull all winter until the seals came . . . after[wards] we got up a concert."[81]

Those students who reponded to the questionnaire on concert production indicated that they were familiar with school concerts and that the purpose for their production was entirely for entertainment. The concerts organized by schools were produced by teachers and students usually for

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80 "Marshallville Sunday School Anniversary," Twillingate Sun, 28 April 1894.

81 "Laurencetown Concert," Twillingate Sun, 12 may 1894.

the benefits of family with very little attention paid to raising money. Such concerts were presented just before the Christmas and Easter vacations or sometimes before the end of the school year.[82]

The church-sponsored concerts were usually produced by the organizations of the various denominations. For example, the Anglican Church Women's Association was a popular producer of concerts.

The organizations which are most often associated with concerts were the Society of United Fishermen (SUF) and the Loyal Orange Association (LOA). These organizations usually had a lodge which provided a performance space for concerts and was large enough to accommodate most of the community.

The Twillingate Sun carried reports of the SUF and LOA annual meetings describing in detail the events which marked the respective day of each group. Along with descriptions of the parades, the church visit, and the banquets, were the contents of the concert programme and the names of those who

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82 The school concert is attended to in this study inasfar as it reflects the practices of the adult community concert. In many cases the teachers organized and directed both types of events, thereby ensuring a carry over from one to the other.

performed each item. As mentioned previously, these reports seldom commented on the quality of the performance except to mention that everyone did their parts well.

> According to custom, this Society (SUF) had its anniversary on Feb. 2nd . . . . In the evening later on, an entertainment was given in the name of the lodge, by the help of friends, who willingly assisted to make the anniversary a success. And certainly we have seldom attended an S. U. F. gathering which judging by the applause and the good order maintained throughout, has given greater satisfaction to all present. And much gratitude is due to those who worked up the dialogues, and practised the music.[83]

Similarly, the LOA ended their festivities with a concert.

> After doing our best to lighten the tables of their burdens, the Hall was cleared of tables and c., and seats placed for the concerts. Owing to the state of the weather lately, those getting up the Entertainment had short time at their disposal but I think nevertheless they are to be complimented on their success.[84]

Sometime in the Nineteenth Century the Temperance Movement

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83 "S. U. F." Twillingate Sun, 6 February 1892.

84 "Sermon to Orangemen," Twillingate Sun, 31 January 1891.

took hold in northeast Newfoundland. This particular organization was aligned with the Methodist and Congregationalist churches and spread their message of the destructivenss of alcohol both from the pulpit and the stage. In the case of the latter, reports of their concerts which occurred in the Twillingate Sun reflect a didactic purpose.

> On Tuesday, March 1st the members of "North Star" Division No. 15, and Central Stream Band of Hope assembled in the Hall at 1 o'clock to celebrate the 28th anniversary of the institution of the division. A (concert) was given in the evening at 7:30. A good programme of recitations, dialogues, songs, addresses etc. was well executed and duly appreciated. . . . We think the cause of Temperance is to have strong defense in the rising generation, and that as those older who drop from the ranks one by one, young strong hands and earnest will take up the work and carry it on towards completion.[85]

Items on that particular program included dialogues appropriate to the Temperance Movement such as The Young Teetotaller, Why They Smoke, interspersed with songs entitled "Dare to Say No" "Firmly Stand," and "The Temperance

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[85] "S of T," Twillingate Sun, 31 January 1892.

Light."[86]

Like the reports of SUF and LOA concerts, those detailing similar events of the Temperance group did not list a specific cause for which the money was raised. In fact, it would appear that in the 1890s in the Twillingate area of Newfoundland the fraternities produced some concerts for their annual celebrations solely for the entertainment of family and friends of the members. Except, of course, in the case of the Temperance-sponsored events which sought to edify as well as entertain; in a number of instances their programs carried the note that the various pieces were "interesting, but instructive."[87]

The Newfoundland society which emerged in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries gave form to the dramatic impulse through the variety concerts; always under the auspices of some community project. In the Pre-Confederation days when government grants were not in the least sufficient to support schools the only way a facsimile of a formal

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86 Ibid.

87 "Methodist Church" Twillingate Sun, 7 April 1887.

education could be assured was by the financial responsibility being met at the community level. The capacity for celebration served the society well: it found an outlet in the song and dance during the holidays and perhaps most distinctly in the form of the concert which provided an environment where the song and dance could be presented along with a program of dialogues and recitations.

The communities pooled their resources and after some preparation presented a product to the rest of their members which provided an outlet for the dramatic impulse thereby satisfying the fondness to "imitate and to observe imitation."

> People have always felt the need for some kind of entertainment, and if it's not been readily available in its traditional forms they have it in other forms.[88]

The production of the concerts was inextricably tied to fulfilling two important needs of the community. Although the financial component is given preference in the written

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88 Myron Matlow, ed. American Popular Entertainment (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 3.

accounts the entertainment aspect is remembered most vividly by the informants. The first was taken for granted - it was understood that someone would benefit from the money raised at the events; but the second, in many ways, was just as immediate and perhaps more significant in maintaining the society which had developed. It was at the concerts that they learned new songs and recitations and participated in the production of dialogues where they could "act the fool" and generally have a good time. Typical of the enthusiasm with which the events were remembered, is in this reply to one interviewer's question as to whether concerts were held in the community at one time: "Concerts! That's what we did. And good ones too!"[89] Or this response to a similar question: "We used to have wonderful concerts in dem days."[90]

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89 Sacrey, MUNFLA C594 69 - 23.

90 W. S. Abbott interviewing Raymond Fagan at Kelligrews, 16 March 1974, MUNFLA C1984 74 - 145.

4.2 Production

The "getting up" and the subsequent "putting off" of the concert paralleled, to a certain extent, the production process of any theatrical event. It involved the organizer, the person who "got it up" by asking people to take a part in the concert and then the arranging of the rehearsals and ensuring that the participants were ready for the audience.

All the sources contributing to this study, including the questionnaire and MUNFLA holdings, revealed that the organizer cum director was almost always the teacher.

> Well the person who was responsible would be the poor belaboured, tired-out school master. He had the job of organizing all this [concert] the deciding whether they should pay 10 cents or 15 cents for admission . . . . And he had to supervise the acts . . . .[91]

One respondent expressed his belief that "Concerts were the highlight of the year in Grole [south west coast]. I believe that a teacher's competency depended on the type of concerts

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91 William J. Gushue interviewing Ted Bugden at Corner Brook, 28 December 1966, MUNFLA C344 66 - 20.

he could produce."[92]

The practice of depending on the teacher to organize and produce the concert was in effect during the beginning of this century as revealed in a conversation with an eighty-four year old gentleman who related this about the entertainment event: "Concerts--them old things--lot of fun I tell you. I used to be in them all the time. Didn't have them every year--only when the teacher got them up."[93] The comment is virtually the same throughout the Province. The teacher was the person whom people looked to for leadership in arranging community events relating to church and school affairs, and especially in the production of the concerts. This is not surprising given the educational milieu of the first half of this century. As mentioned earlier, there were very few people who could read, and even fewer with the

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92 Jackman, MUNFLA Q80B - 43.

93 Marsden Interview, 26 June 1982.

knowledge to "put off" an event such as a concert.[94]

A report of a concert in the Twillingate Sun praises the teacher for his efforts in producing the event and then commends the school board chairman for hiring him." . . . is to be congratulated on his choice of a teacher for Tilt Cove as he could not have chosen one more suited to the place and community."[95]

The concerts which were organized by people other than teachers were usually produced during a time when the community had been unable to procure the services of one." In olden times it was always the teacher but later on (1950)

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94 The role of the teacher in Newfoundland schools until recently encompassed much more than attending to the learning process. In many cases the teacher was the only person in the community with more than a few years of formal schooling and was expected to write letters for the residents, petition government for assistance, and represent the clergy. In fact the teacher was much like a surrogate clergyman who in the absence of the minister conducted all the church services including baptisms and burials. References to the teacher's role in the community can be found in Rowe, Development of Education in Newfoundland. Many of the interviews conducted for this study attest to the importance of the teacher in Newfoundland community life.

95 "Tilt Cove Jottings." Twillingate Sun, 4 April 1894.

some people with a bit of learnin' got up the concerts."[96]

4.3 Directing

"Getting up" a concert entailed much the same in terms of responsibilities and duties as does producing any event for the stage. It is clear from information gleaned from the various sources that once the teacher had decided to produce the concert the next step was to procure dialogue books and other suitable material to include in the program. Inquiries as to where the scripts of dialogues and recitations were obtained revealed that the popular Newfoundland supplier was a St. John's stationery store, Dicks and Co. The other source for these sketches and concerts pieces was the T. S. Denison & Company of Chicago.

> It [the concert] was mostly dialogues. I used to send away to a publishing company in Chicago. I had their catalogue - they had some really good plays.[97]

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96 C. Skinner interviewing Wilfred Skinner at Port aux Basques, 27 June 1982.

97 "Profile," Newfoundland Herald TV Week, 8 November 1979, p. 4.

Another organizer related his experience regarding the dialogue books:

> The teachers had them [dialogue books]. I had a set come one time--one of the clergymen sent me a set of concert books. They was hard--wasn't good plays in them. All right I suppose if you had a good education to learn it--could put more to it.[98]

The accounts of concerts in the Twillingate Sun did not mention anything about the scripts; however, the published lists of the program items would suggest that there were many different sources since concerts seldom repeated a piece.[99] Very little was found regarding the directing process. Those who had participated in concerts at one time remembered the "good times they had at practice" but few could recall how the pieces were directed. One man who had "directed" the community events for a number of years volunteered that he did very little except get the dialogue books and get people interested. It seems from his comments

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98 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

99 A number of similar titles are included in Baker's Gay Nineties Scrapbook (Boston: Baker's Plays, 1941). See appendix D.

that the directing as we know it was arrived at by the group process and a lot of help from the stage directions.

4.4 Rehearsals

> We'd make up our minds we would have a concert--you'd send around the harbour get so many names--ask them if they wanted to take a piece in a concert. When you think you had enough [names] you'd all go to the school--everybody would write off their own pieces --take it home then and after a couple weeks or so when you'd have it learned you'd have practises - five or six.[100]

Apart from the school concerts most others followed a practice routine similar to that quoted above. The selection of the dialogue pieces appears to have been done by the whole group with the director making sure they followed the stage directions suggested in the script.

> We'd send to St. John's and get the dialogue books and we'd pick the dialogues that we liked. We'd all go through it and everybody would make suggestions--I like this one, or that one, or the other one, and so on . . . and don't you think some

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100 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

of them weren't "rough."[101]

The short rehearsal time was common to most of these theatrical events. People often referred to practising for just a few nights, or as in one case, a week for a three act play.

> We used to practice a week before the concert. We used to study at home--go around to one another's houses . . . . This [blocking] was all written in italics like As she stands there by the window.[102]

The reports of the concerts which were carried in the Twillingate Sun from 1880 - 1896 often prefaced their cautious criticism with references to how little time was available to the players for practice. One special concert held in August by the Masonic Lodge to celebrate the visit of the Worshipful Master was apparently put together at very short notice with apologies to that effect being made to the "respectable and intelligent audience."

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101 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C4858 80 - 153. BY "rough" the informant meant that the dialogues were comical, funny.

102 C. Skinner interviewing Jane DeGruchy at Fortune, 20 August 1979, MUNFLA C4857 80 - 152.

> Bro. Joseph expressed the pleasure it afforded him in appearing before a Twillingate audience for the first time and desired them to overlook the shortcomings of his Little Bay friends who took part in the evening's concert, as they had but little time for practice and were doing so under much inconvenience.[103]

The inconvenience to which the chairman referred was no doubt related to the fact that this event took place during the peak of the fishing season, therefore, requiring the performers to give up valuable time for rehearsals and preparations. In a society such as Nineteenth Century Newfoundland, where people depended entirely on the fishery, leisure time was a scarce commodity. It is not surprising that such short periods were given to the rehearsing of these entertainment events.

> The entertainment of which notice was given in our columns sometimes since, came off in the town hall on Wed. the 3rd inst. The programme, which was an elaborate one, was very well gone through, but owing to the shortness of time for preparation some parts were not rendered so well as they otherwise would have been. The proceeds amounted to 4 pounds

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103 "The Concert," Twillingate Sun, 29 August 1891.

12 shillings 3 pence, clear of expenses.[104]

Church and school-sponsored concerts were rehearsed in the school building with groups such as SUF, LOA and Masons using their respective lodges for that purpose. Only one reference was made to using space for practice in some place other than those mentioned. In 1894 a Mr. Herbert was thanked in the Twillingate Sun for "kindly placing his house at their disposal for practice."[105] Those who "worked up" the dialogues seem to have selected the pieces, learnt their lines and then did them in a specific order interspersed with songs and recitation. According to reports in the Twillingate Sun some attention was paid to costumes and setting. However, if parallels can be drawn between the traditional and the revivals it becomes apparent that suggestions for costumes such as beards, hats, fishermen outfits, were used rather than anything resembling the total dress. Nevertheless, one event did attend to details of costumes even claiming historical accuracy.

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104 "Entertainment," Twillingate Sun, 12 January 1882.

105 "Entertainment," Twillingate Sun, 28 April 1894.

> The Rev. Mr. Geddes prepared the dialogue by offering ideas and suggestions and assisting to furnish the paraphernalia in accordance with the custom of ancient times, which appeared to be imitated in good style, judging from the description of these warriors which history furnishes.[106]

During rehearsal time which ranged from a few weeks to just a few practices the cast "worked up" their pieces, as already indicated, according to the stage directions in the books and interspersed the scripted dialogue with words of their own. The material, when presented, lasted anywhere from one hour to three and usually was followed by a dance or Time.

4.5 Stage

All references to the presentational space vis a vis stage indicate that the proscenium arrangement was the only one used by the concert organizers.[107] Schools usually had a

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106 "Concert," Twillingate Sun, 14 April 1888.

107 In the Newfoundland idiom the word "stage" is quite common; however, its reference is to a fisherman's warehouse and wharf unit; consequently, questions dealing with this topic had to be prefaced with the definition in order to avoid confusion.

permanent stage at the end of one classroom. So too, did the Society of United Fishermen (SUF) and Loyal Orange Association (LOA) lodges, where the raised platform served as podium as well as a presentational area for fraternity rites, meetings,and concerts.

In schools where there was no permanent stage one had to be built for the event. In some cases this involved arranging student desks at one end of the room and with the aid of curtains creating a performance space about four feet off the ground with two dressing areas--one on each side.[108] A more detailed account was given in an interview with a man who, at one time used to organize and direct concerts in a small community on the southwest coast:

> Every time we had a concert we had to build a stage. We used to get loan of lumber from the trade [businesses] and everybody would have a little bit of their own . . . . School was only about 30 feet long by 15 feet. We'd build a stage with two rooms on each side--one for women and one for men.[109]

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108 A number of those who responded to the questionnaire referred to this practice; Simms, MUNFLA Q80B - 52; Jackman, MUNFLA Q80B - 43.

109 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

Similarly, another informant recalled the practise of constructing a temporary stage for the concerts during the 1920's.

> No dressing rooms at all--instead one person would be in charge of holding a big blanket in front of the person changing--you entered the stage from the school floor by way of a wooden box.[110]

Chairs used for the audience consisted of those used by students or provided by the lodge or hall (in many cases these were benches). However, one person remembered students being sent around the community to collect chairs for the event.

> A seating plan of the hall [school] was drawn up and tickets were sold in advance, door-to-door. The day of the concert the school pupils would go all over the place collecting chairs. Thus the seating for the audience was the kitchen and dining-room chairs of the community.[111]

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110 Margaret Perview interviewing Catherine Hartley at Cape Broyle, 6 July 1981, MUNFLA Q80B 37.

111 Letter to C. Skinner from Ruth Matthews, March 20, 1982.

Most communities did, however, have a building with a platform of some sort which was used as a presentational space for theatrical events. Apart from the lodges and the school the other community building which became a popular place for presenting concerts was the "parish hall." This structure belonged to a particular church and was used primarily for social functions and money raising affairs; since both could be fulfilled via the production of concerts, the result is that most parish halls have a permanently erected stage.

Today in Newfoundland the majority of the high schools have a stage equipped with a few lighting instruments and separated from an audience area by a curtain.[112] The curtain, or screen, as it was often referred to by the older informants and those who wrote for the Nineteenth Century Twillingate Sun, served much the same purpose as it does in any theatrical event: to conceal the actors and action until ready to begin, and to give focus to the individual parts of

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[112] Nearly all of the questionnaires completed by the Folklore 1000 students at Memorial University of Newfoundland describe a formal proscenium stage equipped with lighting and sound equipment.

the program. It was used in the conventional way for making set changes and at the same time providing a back drop for someone giving a recitation or singing a song.

Significant perhaps with regard to this topic is the size of the school room in which many of these events were held. Many of the schools consisted only of one classroom and were relatively small, generally no more that 20 feet by 30 feet, and with a stage built at one end the size was reduced to around 20 feet by 25 feet. Given those dimensions it may be safe to assume that the performance was intimate! Especially when you consider that during the two night run nearly everyone in the community saw the production.

4.6 Summary

This event was indeed a community undertaking in every aspect, perhaps providing the sole opportunity for its coming together in one place for the purpose of celebration. Here, songs and other material from the regional lore, along with items from published sources were presented by members of the community after their own style which emerged from a production process not unlike that demanded by any theatrical presentation. The next chapter will deal with the materials which the organizers selected, rehearsed, and eventually performed for the audience as the concert.

Chapter 5

CONTENT

With but one exception, the sources consulted for this study all dealt with community concerts made up primarily of dialogues, recitations, and songs.

In a few instances a program included dancing and readings but not frequently enough to suggest they were ever an essential part of the traditional format. Readings were close to recitations in their presentational style and will therefore be considered in this chapter under that category. Given the small dimensions of the stages on which many of the concerts were presented, dancing, the other minor component, would have been restricted to solo performances such as step and tap.

The one exception referred to above when a concert did not present a variety of materials was solely a musical event given in Twillingate in 1883; it was not a success. Perhaps its failure to draw a large audience might have determined

the program format of subsequent theatrical events in that area.

> . . . the taste of some of our Twillingate people is not sufficiently educated, to appreciate an entirely musical evening. It might perhaps have been more successful, therefore, in the matter of applause, laughter, &c., had the music been interspersed with humorous Readings, Dialogues &c.[113]

Similarly, Louise Whiteway refers to a musical concert given in St. John's in 1898 which included a dialogue among the items presented, and suggests that the variety concerts held since that time in the city resulted from the success of that event.

> The Easter Monday Concert of 1898, held in St. Patrick's Hall, ended unprecedentedly with the amusing farce "Freezing a Mother in Law" and in so doing perhaps set the pattern for many future St. John's concerts which would conclude their miscellaneous offerings typically with a "sketch"[114]

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113 "S. U. F." Twillingate Sun, 9 February 1883.

114 Louise Whiteway, "The Athenaeum Movement: St. John's Athenaeum (1861 - 1898)," The Dalhousie Review 50 (1970 - 1) :549.

Even in the few Newfoundland towns where three-act plays were performed the masque-like nature of the concerts was retained. The Grand Falls Advertiser carried notices and accounts of community drama productions from 1930 to 1950 always noting that "there were specialities consisting of songs, recitations, and dancing between the acts."[115] It is of interest to note that even though some communities began to produce full length plays they still retained the traditional concert format in that they provided songs and recitations during intermissions and between acts.

This chapter will review the three main types of material which are synonymous with the traditional community concert program: dialogue, recitation, and song.

5.1 Dialogues

Although the dialogue shared the bill with recitations and songs, it was, however, regarded by most informants as the part which generated the most excitement and in many ways that which made the event truly a concert.

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115 "Andopians," The Grand Falls Advertiser, 13 April 1940. The unique status of this community was discussed in Chapters One and Two.

> Two weeks before Christmas we started getting ready . . . we'd go around and ask the randy ones. Songs, recitations in between the dialogues which made up the main part.[116]

> I would have to say that the dialogues made up most of the concert. We used to have children before the dialogues; they would have short recitations. The chances are we'd have a song; but dialogues were the main part.[117]

From 1883 to 1894 the Twillingate Sun listed over eighty different dialogue titles in its reports of concerts presented in that part of Newfoundland. Very few titles were repeated. Unfortunately, the research for this study did not locate any copies of the dialogues listed in appendix D. The closest to the kind of material presented at the Nineteenth Century concerts held in Twillingate is the collection currently published by Baker Plays entitled Gay Nineties Scrapbook.[118] The interviews with persons who

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116 Marsden Interview, 26 June 1982.

117 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C4858 80 - 153.

118 John G. Fuller, ed. Baker's Gay Nineties Scrapbook (Boston: Baker's Plays, 1941).

remembered concerts produced from the beginning of century onward plus the few terse statements made about them in the written reports, all acknowledge to the comic nature of these dramatic presentations. Not one reply to the questionnaire stated that dialogues were anything but comic. Tape recordings of some recent revivals strongly reinforce the comic nature of the concert for whether laughing at the performers or situation or language the modern audiences found the whole programs "funny and hilarious from beginning to end with the exception of some of the songs".[119] The dialogues performed at the recent events held at Arnold's Cove and Burin were almost all locally written and dealt with topical issues of a regional and provincial nature. Those not about the immediate area included parodies of television shows such as the Beverly Hillbillies.

Minstrel dialogues were commonly produced in the 19th Century concerts and referred to in print as "Darkey

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119 "A. C. W. A. Concert at Arnold's Cove," 9 June 1976, Recorded by D. Kodish, MUNFLA C 2800 76 - 501.

Dialogues."[120] Dialogues about Sambo reoccur in the programs, particularly the title How Sambo Fooled the Dentist. One account of a similar piece recorded that; "'Uncle Sam' followed in his marvelous Nigger costume, electrifying the youngsters by his comical movements and peculiar manner of performance. He sang [a song entitled] 'Uncle Ned.'" The reporter goes on to say that Uncle Sam came on again and sang, "Nellie Gray," and "received so rapturous an encore that in spite of the heat he was compelled to add a little more to his intended performance."[121]

The minstrel show material must have been enthusiastically received because in 1892 Twillingate is reported to have a local "Darkey Troupe" and described as, "quite a novelty."[122]

Dialogues involving blacks appear to have been a part of

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120 Perhaps the fascination with the minstrel character is due in part to the fact that the majority of Newfoundlanders at that time had most likely never seen a black person.

121 "S. U. F."The Twillingate Sun, 5 February 1887.

122 "Entertainment," Twillingate Sun, 8 October 1892.

concert in other parts of the island and in the 1920s they were produced in one such event on the southwest coast.

> I was a black man- another fellow and I. The old man chased us out of his cornfield - he had a whip made of a cow's tail. We made ourselves black with burnt cork - some hard to get off.[123]

Three dialogues which were repeated in the Twillingate area were considered worthy of description by those who wrote to the newspaper. They were presented last on the programs in all cases and were important enough to warrant special scenery.

> The curtain was lowered, and the celebrated case of **Bardell vs. Pickwick** was gone through at length, while once again that clever counsel Serg't Busfuz, succeeded in throwing dust in the eyes of the jury in spite of **Sam Weller's** dogged determination not to say anything to his master's injury. Perhaps a little previous explanation might have made the trial even more interesting to those among the audience who had never had the advantage of making acquaintance with Mr. Pickwick.[124]

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123 Marsden Interview, 26 June 1982.

124 "S. U. F." Twillingate Sun, February 5, 1887.

A description of the stage setting and the dialogue involving a scene on board an icehunter (the Sunbeam) provides a rare look at the staging style and certainly of the audience's attitude towards the presentation.[125] Most of the titles listed suggest a wide range of topics and situations. Domestic scenes were popular if one can go by the title such as How She Managed Him, Matrimonial Advertisement, Courtship Under Difficulty, etc.[126] As stated earlier the Temperance Movement presented dialogues which were didactic in nature. The school concerts dealt with scenes involving young children, and the problems of learning. Few of these warranted much attention from the newspaper reporters, except to list the titles and in some cases who performed in them.

Although many dialogues were obtained from books the performers changed them considerably, either in rehearsal or during the presentation. Some informants drew attention to

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125 "S. U. F." Twillingate Sun, February 4, 1888. These episodes will be dealt with at length in Chapter Seven.

126 A complete list of dialogue titles is included in appendix D.

the fact that the difficult words were a problem in some cases and were substituted for something else which did not necessarily have to make sense.

> . . . We'd always get the dialogues out of books - little short things. We couldn't have it too long because a lot of the people [performers] didn't have much education . . . the harder [difficult] words - they used to put something else there - used to be some funny.[127]

Another informant referred to the changes as "helping the dialogues along" while another stressed that they were made during the rehearsal process and kept depending on whether it might bring a laugh when performed.

> No, we didn't write our own dialogues. The only thing that we did was add to it in some cases. Someone would say something - Devil knows what you'd come up with- but if you got a laugh you keep it. When we were practising there would be some players watching and if they laughed at what you'd say or do you'd be sure to keep it in the dialogue.[128]

And a contemporary of the previous informant recalled people

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127 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

128 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C4858 80 - 15.

writing dialogues after the style of Amos and Andy, ". . . two foolish people would get together and make up something and practice it and then add a little on and continue to practice until you had a dialogue."[129] He, like so many others, recalled the locally-embellished pieces as being the funniest.

> And they'd have dialogues, some they'd take from books. . . . There were people here smarter and more clever than the people that wrote those dialogue books. [They] could make up better and more comical [than those in dialogue books]. And people enjoyed it. Dey wasn't too modern den, dat was the kind of stuff they liked. Dere was people here could make up anything in the shape of dialogues and entertainment.[130]

None of the sources consulted contained actual scripts of the dialogues but fortunately one gave a detailed description. This exception was recorded in 1969 in which a one-time participant in concerts gave a synopsis of what he considered a funny dialogue which had been written locally.

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129 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C4855 80 - 152.

130 G. Casey interviewing Herbert E. Sullivan of Pouch Cove, 5 May 1969, MUNFLA, C1009 71 - 57.

> We didn't have many dialogue books like they have now. [We] made our own dialogues - set down and make the story and then play it, used to have real plays then.[131]

The example which he gives as a "real play" involves a scene in a barber shop with an apprentice barber using a pair of shears made out of two large pieces of tin, meat knives for razors and a saw for a comb. The scenario which he recalls having been acted in that setting involved, besides the barber, a Norwegian customer wearing a mask made by applying molasses and feathers to the face and head.

> When the door come open and in comes this big 'ead, full of feathers, now there was some laughing done. They took those big shears and they hauled the feathers off of 'em, and he talked Narweigan [Norwegian] to 'em, and they got the feathers off. That was the play.[132]

This treatment of the dialogues in terms of presentation is in keeping with an account of a concert from the east

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131 Z. Sacrey interviewing P. Decker, Woodstock, W. B., 31 January 1969, MUNFLA C594 69 - 23.

132 Ibid., p. 15-16.

coast in which the informant recalled a particular dialogue about a teacher and dunce where the strapping was for real and the actor almost cried. It shared the bill with a piece in which they used a real goat.[133]

The major component of the concert, the dialogue, whether from a book or embellished with local references, was the only part of the event that required rehearsal, and for the participants this was an added bonus. The camaraderie, and the cementing of relationships which occurred during the rehearsals certainly had a positive effect upon the day-to-day life of the community. The cohesiveness which a community requires in order to maintain its survival as a functioning group was sustained in part by events which required cooperation such as the concerts. The dialogues required more work and more commitment on the part of the performers (songs and recitations were already known) to learn the lines, to practise and eventually to perform in a form quite different from anything else on the program.

The major difference between the dialogue and the other

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133 W. Sandra Abbott interviewing Raymond Fagan at Kelligrews, 16 March 1974, MUNFLA C1984 74 - 145.

types of material used was that it required performers to be someone else in order to assume some facade of a character. Not a few informants recalled "having to be someone" such as a policeman, teacher, postman, or in one case a dunce! Interestingly, none of the persons contributing to this study could remember any lines or even phrases from the pieces they had performed in. They were, however, able to communicate the excitement of having been a part of these events and particularly in playing the role demanded by the dialogue script.

5.2 Recitations

The recitations, along with the songs filled out the program, often serving as afterpieces to the dialogues and thus enabling the performers to prepare for the next item. However, to suggest that this was the only function of the recitation is to denigrate the monodrama. It most certainly served other purposes as its popularity both in Newfoundland

and elsewhere must attest to.[134]

The recitations popular in the Newfoundland concerts were taken from published sources, passed along by oral tradition or, in a number of instances written by someone in the community for the occasion.[135] The Twillingate Sun's record of the concert program lists 150 different recitations, some performed by children and others by adults. The titles suggest that the recitations like dialogues dealt with a variety of situations including domestic scenes, special occasions, religious instruction and, in the case of the Temperance Movement, pieces which set forth its main objec-

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134 N. O. Ireland catalogues over fifty publications dealing with monologues, recitations and monodramas for special occasions and community events. N. O. Ireland, An Index to Monologs and Dialogs (Boston: The F. W. Faxon Company, 1949); An Index to Monologs and Dialogs, Supplement, (Boston: The F. W. Faxon Company, 1959). A list of the recitation titles encountered during this study is included in appendix F.

135 Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive recently was presented with an "old recitation book" by someone who used to be a participant in the concerts. The book contains many of the popular recitations. Herbert H. Taylor, ed. Taylor's Popular Recitations. (New York: (J. S. Ogilvie Publishing Company, 1903).

tive, as was no doubt the case with those entitled The Grogseller's Dream, Drunkard's Inventory, and I'm Teetotal.

The recitations which proved popular in Newfoundland were generally written in poetic form with many of the locally composed pieces written after the style of Robert Service. Those written in prose were usually classified as a monologue.[136]

Those pieces written locally were often done so for a concert program. People in the community who were noted for the repertoire of recitations and their ability to perform them were either a part of the rehearsal process of the concert or would be at the concert and wait to be invited. Mr. DeGruchy, quoted extensively in this study, was known as someone who could recite as well as sing, and his participation in the concert was via invitation from the master of ceremonies or from the audience during the performance. During my interview session with Mr. DeGruchy he recited The Face on the Barroom Floor, after which he added:

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136 W. Wareham found this to be true in his fieldwork on recitations and songs. W. W. Wareham, ed.,"The Monologue in Newfoundland," in The Blasty Bough (St. John's, Newfoundland: Breakwater Books Ltd.), pp. 196 - 199.

> I was known well enough for songs and recitations and people would say, "Sing a song or say a recitation." Whenever I was asked I would do it, if I could. Sometimes it'd be at a concert. Oh, yes, I recited at concerts.[137]

The person in the community known for his skill in this form often wrote recitations for and about specific events as they occurred. W. W. Wareham prefaced the recitation The New School Marm with this note:

> Composed about 1973 by Moses Ingram from Kingswell, Placentia Bay. Moses first said this monologue at a community concert which was being held to raise money for the building of a new church at Arnold's Cove.[138]

Similarly that practice was carried out at other parts of the island as suggested by this excerpt:

> Uncle Abe, now he was the boy for recitations. He'd sure to have a new one for every concert. Little Meg and I was one he used to do. . . . some he'd get from some place else but most of the times

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137 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C4855 80 - 152.

138 Rose, The Blasty Bough, p. 205.

he'd make them up himself.[139]

The composing of recitations about local events appears to have been quite common. One example was recorded in an interview conducted in 1970 of a rather humorous episode (at least in retrospection) involving a concert and a topical recitation. Apparently a Portuguese ship had arrived with a load of salt and while unloading it they found quantities of caster beans left over from a previous trip to the West Indies. A number of the local children discovered the beans and ate them - with serious results! For the next concert the minister wrote a recitation:

> Oh, boy, it was wonderful, I only wish I could remember it. I know it ended with "Tom Reid ate nineteen" because when he recited it everybody laughed and Tom's mother got up and walked out.[140]

"Saying recitations" was a specialty of certain people in

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139 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 134. The text of Little Meg and I is included in appendix F.

140 W. Wareham interviewing Sam Butler at Arnold's Cove, July 1969(no day given), MUNFLA C680 70 - 8.

the community and recently, through the effort of Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore Department and the interest in revival of folk arts many of them have performed at festivals and have had some of their work recorded. One such person, Mr. Francis Colbert, sometimes referred to as "the man of a thousand monologues" was, as previously stated, a concert organizer and performer.[141] He discussed his repertoire of recitations and how he came by them in a 1978 interview.

> I learned them from people who used to recite, and I learned some from books. "St. Peter at the Gate," I believe, was one of the first I learned. Then I got a book of Robert Service poems and I learned a few of them like "Bill McCoy," "Sam McGee," and "Old Pious Bill." And I wrote some of me own poems too, you know. They'd be about local people.[142]

Mr. Colbert's mention of Robert Service serves to point out the popularity of the poet's works with those who "said recitations". The Face on the Barroom floor occurred frequently during this study, particular in answer to the

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141 Rose, The Blasty Bough, p. 207.

142 "Profile," Newfoundland Herald TV Week, 8 November 1978, p. 4.

question on what were the more popular recitations.[143] Service's poems also served as models for local compositions especially so in the case of Mr. Colbert.[144] Mr. Colbert recites a number of recitations from his repertoire among which are some of his own compositions, all in rhymed form much like "The Face on the Barroom Floor."

Another piece which vies for attention as a popular recitation is Little Dickie Melbourne which was recorded a number of times during this study and always prefaced by the older informants as a "favorite" and that "it was some good acted out."[145] It was by the process of oral tradition that

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143 Although commonly attributed to Robert Service, The Face on the Barroom Floor was, in fact, written by H. Antoine D'Arcy in 1877 and was used as a model by Robert Service for The Shooting of Dan McGrew. Its widespread popularity in Newfoundland may be due in part to the fact that it was included in Taylor's Popular Recitations.

144 Deborah Kodish interviewing Mr. Francis Colbert at Job's Cove, September 11, 1976, C2795 76-501.

145 Marsden Interview, 26 June 1982. Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore fieldworkers have recorded a number of versions of this piece throughout the island which attest to its popularity as well as the effectiveness of oral tradition.

recitations spread through all parts of the island. Men who worked for most of the year on fishing schooners learnt recitations and songs thus sharing the popular culture of their communities with that of others.

The folklore fieldworker intent on placing his findings within their social and cultural context will ask the informants where they first heard a piece; generally the answer from the older persons was; "from other people who used to recite." These two examples point out two major aspects of the oral tradition with regard to recitations and other such items. The traditions are perpetuated by the informed teaching the craft to the uninitiated, and new practices are introduced by those who visit the region or by those who return from having worked in another area.

A prominent factor in the spread of the culture of one area of Newfoundland to another was the teacher who as organizer of community concerts brought with him/her the pieces used in previous entertainments in other parts of the island. One gentleman at the age of eighty-four recited a piece known as the "Victory Song," a mildly anti-Temperance piece where one word in each line is spelled out as in V - I - C - T - O - R - Y. He recalled that he had learnt the

piece from a teacher many years ago.[146] As was the case with Mr. Marsden so it was with Mr. Colbert who credits his teacher with sparking his interest in concerts and particularly recitations about fifty years ago.[147]

The performance of recitation was stylized utilizing wide and sweeping gestures. While Mr. DeGruchy shared his recitations during the interview conducted for this study, he maintained eye contact with the members of his audience and often used his pipe to point certain words and accentuated others by tapping those close to him on the shoulder or hand. Performing the same recitation for a larger audience would have demanded even more prominent gestures embellished with facial expressions to match the mood of the stanza. The taped interviews revealed a performance style tending towards the homiletic with the volume dropped at the end of each line and a pause intended to allow the tone to take

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146 Marsden Interview, 26 June 1982. The same song was recorded by H. Halpert and J. Widdowson in an interview with Charles and Martha Hutchings at Cow Head, February 3, 1973. MUNFLA C246 66-24.

147 Rose, The Blasty Bough, p. 212.

effect. "He maintains a literal interpretation of the material and assumes a voice that is at least slightly more assertive than ordinary conversational tone."[148]

Wilfred Wareham in his study of the recitation found:

> . . . very little dramatization and projection of self. The monologist on the other hand usually stands back and performs in a theatrically-mannered way. This is done in a number of styles. For example, if the content is serious, the message is generally not communicated literally. The performer may use a wide range of vocal characterizations, grimaces and gestures to undercut the seriousness . . . the humor is not so much in what is said as in how it is said.[149]

Mr. Wareham's research deals primarily with the performer in an informal situation such as a gathering at someone's home. The recitation performed at concerts was oftentimes embellished with costumes and properties. It would appear that in the case of a rehearsed piece for a concert the

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148 Debra G. Kodish, When is a Recitation not a Recitation? Questions and Considerations on the study of the Recitation in Newfoundland. 16 December 1976, MS p. 17, MUNFLA 76 - 501. Similar observations are made by Kodish based on a taped interview with Mr. Power, MUNFLA C2794 76 - 501.

149 Rose, The Blasty Bough, p. 212.

visual aspect was given some thought. A performer in an 1894 concert was costumed to deliver his recitations. "A. Luff in the disguise of Jimmy Brine appeared exceedingly ludicrous . . . a burst of applause always greeted him."[150]

Many informants prefaced their recitations performed for this study with, "Tis no good sitting down, you wants to get up and act it out." Mr. Colbert demonstrated the difference between a recitation said sitting down and one performed standing up--the latter being the way to do it, to act it out.[151] Performing the recitation while sitting down restricted the performer's movement to hand gestures and some facial grimacing whereas when performing the monologue while standing he was able to use his whole body and had the freedom to punctuate certain phrases and sentiments by touching members of the audience and by affecting his posture and stance. When performed as it should be the recitation was embellished with costumes and simple set pieces.

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150 "S. U. F." Twillingate Sun, 24 February 1894.

151 Kodish, MUNFLA C2795 76 - 501.

Although not the major part of the concert the recitation held a prominent place in the community's entertainment forms. They required a special skill to perform and those who possessed it were in demand to "say their recitations." Such a request was not restricted to the formal setting such as a concert but could be made at a party or an informal gathering at someone's house. Often they were funny, but just as often they were of a serious nature as they romanticized about a mother's love, or recounted the courageous efforts to save shipwrecked sailors.

As indicated earlier, Reading' sometimes shared the bill with dialogues, recitations, and songs. However, the only evidence of this practice is what is reported in the Twillingate Sun, none of the questionnaires nor interviews referred to Reading' as being a part of the concert program. They appear to have been a minor part of the Nineteenth Century presentations in that they were listed by title but seldom warranted any other mention. Frequently the clergyman was the reader and it was usually placed at the beginning of the program. However, unlike the other items the Readings were repeated year after year. The piece entitled Darby's Visit to Quebec was presented a number of times and once

drew the remark that it "had brought the house down."[152] Another piece, Darby and The Ram was a favorite as was Victim of the Toothache, and Miss Claude's Curtain Lecture on Shirt Buttons, the last two performed twice by the minister,[153] and the first by a doctor. It might be safe to suggest that the presentational style of the the readings was similar to that of the recitation. Both are monologues and would depend on the embellishment the performer was able to bring to it.

5.3 Songs

All concerts contained songs and the sources surveyed show that they ranged from the operatic pieces performed in Twillingate in the late Nineteenth Century through traditional folksongs to Country and Western and other contemporary types. (See appendix E.) In some cases the songs were included in the program but, like recitations, they

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152 "Entertainment at Pilley's Island," Twillingate Sun 28 April 1894.

153 "Entertainment at Herring Neck," Twillingate Sun 9 March 1894. "S. U. F." Twillingate Sun 4 February 1888.

were often performed by invitation from the stage or from members of the audience.

> We asked if someone in the crowd [audience] would like to come up on the stage to sing a song - some of the old folks you know, they'd come up and sing a song we'd never heard before.[154]

A number of informants referred to the practice of saving a place in the program for the good singer[s] in the community. This meant that some time during the performance a call would be made for a particular singer and one of his songs. R. F. Sparkes recalls this as being a part of the concert event during his youth.

> The M. C. would call for quiet. "Order, order, ladies and gentlemen, I am now going to ask Uncle Tom Wicks if he will be kind enough to sing a song for us." Loud applause and shouts of "Hooray! Come on, Tom, get up there boy." Tom would be trying to make himself invisible, saying at the same time, "Nay, boys. I can't sing. Lord save us, what he want ask me fer?" His reluctance would be easily overcome and he would allow himself to be pushed to the steps, encouraged by shouts of "Now, Tom. Up there, boy, and heaveit out o' ee." Other performers would follow the same pattern of self-depreciation, assumed reluctance, and final graceful

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154 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

yielding to popular demands.[155]

Similar behavior was exhibited during interviews when "good singers" would have to be coaxed into performing a favorite recitation or song. Mr. DeGruchy said that he couldn't remember the lines nor could he sing anymore. The request was withdrawn until the subject of introductions of various pieces was discussed at which point the interviewer interjected with "What if I were to say, 'The next thing on the program would be Rueben DeGruchy reciting Face on the Barroom Floor?'" He quietly replied, "Well, you'd get it," and proceeded to share his repertoire of recitations and songs stopping only a few times to re-word something. This reluctance it seems was also exhibited at community concerts on the part of those invited to perform during the event.

Of all the arts, singing seems to have held the most prominent position by virtue of its popularity as manifested in the volumes of Newfoundland songs which have been

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155 Sparkes, Winds Softly Sigh, p. 101.

collected, studied and published.[156]

The songs about Newfoundland life documented the hard times as well as the good, immortalized local heroes, commemorated tragic events and often reflected a character which persevered throughout the tumultuous history. Songs such as these were, of course, locally written and oftentimes held interest for those within the region. On the other hand a large part of the Newfoundland song collection is made up of songs from elsewhere such as traditional English and American folksongs and those commercial pieces disseminated via radio, phonograph and the printed media. In fact it is from the latter group that the concert pieces were taken. The traditional folk songs of Newfoundland are glaringly absent from the list of those performed. Certainly none of those from the Gerald S. Doyle books or the tourist booklet, Historic Newfoundland, such as "The Squid Jigging Ground," "Ise the B'y," or "Fellow from Fortune,"

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156 Doyle, Gerald S., Old-Time Songs of Newfoundland, St. John's: Gerald S. Doyle, ed., 1966. Karpeles, Maud. Folk Songs from Newfoundland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934). Kenneth Peacock, Songs of the Newfound land Outports (Ottawa: National Museum),Bulletin No. 197, Anthropological Series No. 65. 3 Volumes.

would have been performed by a singer either in a concert or in the informal setting of someone's home simply because they were "too common."[157]

The list of songs performed in concerts in the Twillingate area in the late Nineteenth Century include traditional folksongs, lovesongs, religious and Temperance songs. Informants discussing concerts from 1920 to the 1950s seldom referred to Newfoundland songs. One person listed "Put My Money on a Bob Tail Nag" as a favorite.[158]

In recalling the concert traditions one informant contributed the following with regard to the song component:

> There always opening and closing choruses in addition to the "Ode to Newfoundland" and "God Save the King." Frequently, "Rule, Britannia" was one of the choruses. Somehow "Newfoundland" songs were never considered "proper" or "good enough" for a concert; rather the Stephen Foster type was fre-

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157 Similar point is made by George J. Casey, Neil V. Rosenberg, and Wilfred Wareham. Repertoire Categorization and Performance-Audience Relationship: Some Newfoundland Examples in Ethnomusicology, Canadian Issue #3, Vol. XVI, September 1972, pp. 397-403.

158 MUNFLA C4858 80 153.

quently sung.[159]

Although the "Newfoundland Song" as popularized by the tourist booklets were not usually on a program the locally written pieces were extremely popular both at the concert and at informal gatherings such as parties. Many of the informants recorded by MUNFLA in the 1960s and 1970s referred to composing the songs.

> They'd sing the closing chorus, and the closing chorus is generally made up by a local poet. They'd make up all sorts of songs; one about a vessel that was lost, another one about a schooner that went to Sydney for a load of coal and she got lost; all these formed part of the concert. . . . You'd hear the announcement, "We're going to have a concert and Joey Baffitt is going to sing a new song he got wrote."[160]

In one interview a local songwriter referred to composing for concerts and saw the event as one which made him try a

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159 Letter from Ruth Matthews to C. Skinner, 20 March 1982. A check on the titles included in Appendix E reveals that the majority of the concert songs were of English, Irish, Scottish, and American origin.

160 William J. Gushue interviewing Ted Bugden at Corner Brook, 28 December 1966, MUNFLA C344 66-20.

little harder, therefore, causing him to write some of his better pieces.

> Through the years we have [had] a song about every little old thing that occurred, the latest being back in 1964 when a Panamanian freighter went ashore just outside Renews Harbor with a lot of liquor on board! Yes it's happened with some of our concerts whereby some of the people [organizers] have come up and said "I'm out of material, I'd like something new, how about writing a song?".[161]

In many ways the concert became the forum to present the work of local writers and to share the songs and recitation picked up during the year from radio or from co-workers; "Someone was bound to have a new song".[162]

In their quest for original material it was often the practice to rewrite some of the more familiar ones simply by localizing them and changing names to those of people in the community. Such was the practice of one organizer:

> [She] localized many of the old Newfoundland songs for various performances. She changed them to

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161 Zita Johnson interviewing Loyaola Hearne of Renews, 3 February 1969, MUNFLA C553 69 - 33.

162 Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

> refer to people in St. Lawrence such as the time you changed "Great Big Sea Hove in Long Beach" to "Lawn Beach," and included the names of people [performers] in the concert.[163]

The local compositions and those produced for concerts as well as those new to the community soon became a part of the repertoire of the community's singers and was requested at informal gatherings thereafter. For many people in the days before radio it was the concert which gave people the opportunity to hear new songs; consequently, the singers often acknowledge it as their source. "The first time I heard it was in a concert."[164]

According to the responses to the questionnaire the type of song popular at today's concerts varies from contemporary pieces taken from the hit parades to the traditional

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163 Margaret M. Lacey, Concerts in St. Lawrence and the Part Played by Isabel Farrel, December 1, 1978. MUNFLA 79-318. MS p. 34. The community of "Lawn" is just a few miles from St. Lawrence; the song is widely popular and the change would have been easily spotted by those in the audience.

164 A. L. Etchegory interviewing Sylvester Slaney, et al. at St. Lawrence, January 4, 1969. MS p. 15. MUNFLA 572 69-12.

Newfoundland pieces. In the case of the latter, they usually serve as something to be acted. Generally the Roman Catholic communities performed mostly Irish songs, especially during the St. Patrick's Day concert. These too were performed as a pantomime. A number of responses mentioned songs like Finnigan's Wake being acted out with setting and appropriate properties and costumes.

Whatever the type or genre of song, whether locally written or improvised, it was an important part of the concert program. Usually the songs were placed after a dialogue and duly introduced by the Master of Ceremonies showcasing the talents of those in the community whose forte it was to perform in that capacity. The song was sung "just standing up," as one person said, with the performer utilizing gesture and movement, as was his/her individual style. More often than not the songs were presented by a group with one person singing while the others "acted it out" accordingly with an appropriate mise en scene. For example, the popular piece "The Squid Jiggin' Ground"[165] was

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165 A popular Newfoundland folksong by Arthur R. Scammell included in a number of anthologies. See Edith F. Fowke, ed., Folk Songs of Canada Waterloo, Ontario: Waterloo Music Company Limited, 1954), p. 51.

frequently performed simply because it was considered to be theatrically exciting to stage.

> They used to act out songs--old-time songs like "Masah's in the Cold, Cold Ground"--those old songs from the old Golden Book of Songs. I remember 'em takin' somebody by the collar and takin' him off for "O Boys Carry Me Along Till I Die." . . . And the "Squid Jigging Ground"--we used to act that out with the dory on stage and all.[166]

Contemporary concert organizers treat the Newfoundland song in a similar fashion presenting it not so much as a work of a sole performer but more as a dialogue or skit, thereby playing it for the humor and often parodying its intent by taking license with its content and meaning.

Many of the younger informants referred to the "Newfoundland song" as old fisherman or old-time songs, and commented frequently that the performers dressed in fisherman clothes and performed it in pantomime while someone sang it. It seems that those Newfoundland songs popularized by the songbooks are most often performed as scenarios for dialogues and pantomime.

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166 C. Skinner interviewing Jane DeGruchy, 20 August 1979, MUNFLA C4855 80 - 152.

5.4 Summary

Of the three major types of materials presented at community concerts the dialogue produced the most excitement from performers and audience alike. It also required more work to prepare than did the other two since these were solo acts and utilized materials already known. The scripted pieces had to be obtained from elsewhere thereby introducing some element of the world outside the community. These comic pieces were selected and rehearsed, augmented with improvisations, and finally performed by community members in-character.

Recitations and songs complemented the dialogues, often including familiar and traditional, but at the same time introducing local compositions as well as new pieces from outside the region.

The next chapter will present information on how the three varieties were presented at these community initiated dramatic events.

Chapter 6

PRESENTATION

This chapter will describe the methods of presentation used in concert production including the opening and closing practices, the stage and scenic conventions as well as a discussion on the type of costuming employed. Conclusions are drawn from information gleaned from all sources: The Twillingate Sun, The Harbour Grace Standard, the questionnaire, MUNFLA interviews, and and field work carried out especially for this study. In each case the commentary provided was rather sparse but enough signals remain to give a picture of how the Newfoundland communities presented the variety of dramatic pieces in their attempt to provide a popular type of entertainment as well as to ensure the maintenance of the religious and civic services vital to their well being.

6.1 The Opening

From the earliest reports in the Twillingate Sun to the most recent revivals, the concert has always had a special opening piece. The SUF and LOA concerts were opened with a song or musical number followed by a special address by the lodge grand master or the clergyman.

> The Worthy Master presided, and his speeches were brief but interesting, and appreciated.[167]

> The [concert] was very successful, and had been most carefully prepared, especially the dialogues, about which great pains must have been taken.
> The Chaplain having been requested to take charge, said he felt himself more in the position of the skipper of the craft, as he was there to discharge the cargo.[168]

The "cargo" he discharged at that performance began with an overture performed by the Society of United Fishermen band.

There does not appear to have been a rule with regard to the opening procedures. In many cases a song or musical

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167 "SUF Anniversary," Twillingate Sun, 10 February 1894.

168 "SUF Anniversary," Twillingate Sun, 7 February 1891.

number was the first item on the program followed immediately by the opening speech; but in some instances it was the other way around.

> [It] began with a few words from the chairman of the Anniversary Committee who in a few well chosen words asked for order from the younger portion of the audience and introduced the program.[169]

The numbers which opened the Nineteenth Century concerts in northeastern Newfoundland were often of a patriotic nature praising Queen and country such as a glee entitled "England and Her Queen", or "the favourite old song, `Ye Gentlemen of England,' sung by the entire group."[170]

The prevailing theme of the opening addresses and speeches was patriotism with particular emphasis on the British connection. The fraternal organization such as the Society of United Fishermen and the Loyal Orange Lodge stressed loyalty to their founding principles and outlined the duties of the membership in speech and song. Parenthetic to the

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169 SUF, Twillingate Sun, February 6, 1886.

170 "SUF" Twillingate Sun, 4 February 1887.

main theme expressed in the opening addresses (as reported in the Twillingate Sun), were apologies for having taken time off from working to provide this exercise in frivolity. One chairman opened the concert "with a few remarks on the advisability of not keeping the sheet too taut; but allowing Jack a little play."[171]

The church-sponsored concerts began with an appropriate address given by the clergyman, who in many cases contributed to the program by singing a song or doing a dramatic reading. It appears that the resident clergymen were called upon to perform the duties of the master of ceremonies more often than anyone else in the community. This was no doubt due to the fact that the church played a prominent part in the community and that ultimately it was the church that benefited from these events. The questionnaires revealed that the clergy continue to perform as chairmen of concerts and similar community affairs. A number of such events, especially those presented under the auspices of the Methodist Church and the Temperance Movement were opened by a prayer followed by a hymn.

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171 "SUF," Twillingate Sun, 4 February 1887.

Similarly, the closing of the concerts was accorded a special focus by the organizers of the earlier concert. The chairman concluded the event with an address followed by a recitation, or a song performed by the "group all on the platform", and finally closed with the singing of "God Save the Queen."[172]

6.2 The Role of the Chairman

Reference to the chairman or master of ceremonies was found in all sources dealing with this subject. It was filled, it seems, by someone with a good education, usually the priest, the teacher, the doctor, or the local merchant. In nearly all cases the chairman was not the director of the concert, but was usually invited by the group to fill the role because, as one questionnaire respondent said, "He always did it and was considered good at it." By "good at it" the observer was referring to the master of ceremonies' ability to tell jokes and to keep everything running on time, and perhaps most important, to maintain order and quiet among the audience. The Twillingate Sun reports attest

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172 Ibid.

to the disciplinarian aspect of the chairman's role by making references to them having to ask certain portions of the audience to be quiet. A tape of a recent concert would indicate that, now as then, the need for someone respected by the community to demand silence and cooperation on the part of the audience is of the utmost importance. During that concert the din which the performers had to contend with was alarmingly high and obviously created problems for all concerned. With that particular responsibility to deal with the master of ceremonies would have to have been someone with authority in the community in order to diplomatically keep the audience in a cooperative state.

Although quite different in many ways the role of the chairman of the early English music halls bore some semblance to his concert counterpart. In his own words, recorded by a writer in 1870, one music hall chairman focussed on the policing aspect.

> I commence the evening with a few raps, and then announce the first singer thus: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. _____ will appear and sing the first song." It's sometimes very hard work on my part to get the audience to listen to a second, and

harder still to a third.[173]

The master of ceremonies introduced each piece with some remark about the performers or performance, usually beginning with "The next thing on the program is." One informant referred to the master of ceremonies as introducing each piece in the concert by saying, "Now let's put another herring on the griddle."[174] However, all the responses to the questionnaire indicate that the the most commonly used expression was the first one.

The master of ceremonies contributed more to the event than merely introducing the various pieces with, "the next thing on the program". He provided commentary on the performances and often made references to, "unusual events that had occurred during the past year involving the

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173 McKechnie, Samuel. Popular Entertainment Through the Ages (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., Ltd.), pp. 134 - 135, N/D.

174 C. Skinner interviewing Mrs. H. Priddle at Port aux Basques, 20 May 1980. Mrs. Priddle was seventy-five years old and was referring to concerts held during her youth at the small southwest community of Richard's Harbour.

performers and members of the audience."[175]

Perhaps the most important role of the master of ceremonies was to fill up the "dead air" as the next item was made ready for presentation.[176] Here he could tell jokes and stories, single out certain performers and members of the audience, make special announcements, remind the spectators of the amount of work invested in the production by all concerned and to make mention of the dialogue, recitation, or song just finished. In reviewing the community concert which R. Matthews produced and wrote about in her letter, 20 March 1982, The Evening Telegram singled out the chairman and emphasized the important role he played in the production.

> Jim Reddy was an excellent Master of Ceremonies, and his light touch drew the audience into the spirit of things and enhanced the sense of a

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175 Simms, MUNFLA Q80B - 52.

176 Frequent references to this function were made in questionnaire responses: Pittman, MUNFLA Q80B - 11; Pieroway, MUNFLA Q80B - 10; Mullaly, MUNFLA Q80B - 28.

close-knit and affectionate community.[177]

6.3 The Stage - Mise en Scene

Features of the physical stage on which these dramatic events were performed were discussed in a previous chapter. This section will deal with the setting and the scenery used to enhance the presentation of the various pieces which made up the community concerts.

The Nineteenth Century concerts were held in halls that had been decorated to celebrate the annual meeting of the SUF or LOA lodges, but seldom do the reporters make mention of the stage or platform on which the dramatic performances took place. (Incidently, the SUF and LOA lodges were permanently decorated with symbols and pictures pertinent to their respective traditions.) However, the few instances in the Twillingate Sun where scenery is highlighted serves to indicate that, despite the small size of the performance space, some consideration was given to this production aspect.

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177 Anne West, "Crowds Turn Out for Annual Revue." St. John's (NFLD.) Evening Telegram, 11 March 1981.

It is evident from the various reports of concerts held in northeastern Newfoundland in the late Nineteenth Century that the recitations and songs warranted neither scenery pieces nor properties; and only in rare cases were some dialogues staged with scenic pieces and appropriate paraphernalia. To have used an individual set for each item on the program would have been an encumbrance rather than an enhancement. The halls in which these concerts were produced were small and seldom provided backstage or wing space. Consequently, scenery pieces would have infringed on the already too limited performance area. The few references to the tastefully decorated platforms may simply mean that the upstage wall was dressed to match the occasion with table and chairs set out to accommodate those pieces which required a localized environment.

One of the few reporters to the Twillingate Sun who gave more than passing notice to the scenery informs the reader that the organizers were aware of the use of that dramatic element and for one particular dialogue took the time to construct scenery. The fact that this was a community of fishermen and that the piece mentioned took place onboard ship would have made it easy and inexpensive to construct. Perhaps most indicative of the effect they tried to attempt

is that they used "live seals" and that the whole hall was included in the mise en scene.

> A mast was erected at the end of the hall fully rigged with ropes, yards and sails, an imaginary vessel was manned by a crew of hardy fishermen, who seemed to be prepared to battle with the Jack Frost of the North Pole himself. Great excitement prevailed on board on getting the vessel along through the ice until the lookout aloft (on the topsail yard) sent down the welcome news to the captain that the men who had gone out to search the ice were coming back. The sails were then drawn up, and soon the seals (real ones--young ones taken this winter) were on the deck of the Sunbeam. The crew reported having seen another vessel, and ere long her Captain (Kelly) was alongside and renewed his acquaintance with Captain Murphy (of the Sunbeam).
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> Capt. Kelly brought Old Neptune with him whose purpose it was to shave the youngsters. A great confusion ensued, and when that was past harmony again prevailed.[178]

A number of theatrical conventions were utilized in the production of The Crew of the Sunbeam. The set which represented a ship included practical sails and ropes that extended into the auditorium, thus serving to incorporate the total space within the design. The mast, which was equipped with block and tackle, served a functional purpose

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178 "SUF," Twillingate Sun, 4 February 1888.

and therefore had to have been sturdily constructed to allow actors to climb it. The mast also provided the central element in the design, which, with ropes attached it, directed focus on to the deck of the Sunbeam where all the action took place. The acting space was not restricted to the stage floor, the mast allowed them access to the ceiling of the performance area. This convention utilized vertical space and provided an ideal platform from which to announce the entrances of new characters and to alter the locale slightly by hoisting and lowering the sails. The set pieces and equipment were workable items in order to allow for such things as changing sails. The mast had to accommodate people climbing it as well as the construction of a platform at the top of it.

The first part of this dialogue appears to have been fast-paced as it lead up to the arrival of the third party. At that moment in the play the stage was crowded with actors, equipment, and animals occupying various levels on the performance platform.

The Twillingate Sun account of the production of the Crew of the Sunbeam suggests that there was a degree of theatrical unity about it with the action being enhanced by the scenic devices used to create the deck of the ship.

The other description of scenery which appeared in the Twillingate Sun also deals with a ship. As did the dialogue, The Crew of the sunbeam, this one too was presented during the second half of the program and was singled out as been a novelty item.[179] The scene took five minutes to set up and when the curtain was raised "disclosed the deck of the Lively Polly with her crew busily at work.[180] Like The Deck of the Sunbeam the Lively Polly had distinct characters that needed to be identified by costumes and action.

> Neptune with his usual attendants, Mrs. Neptune (or Amphitrite),as she is usually called, the inevitable Baby, the Barber, Boreas, and others, came on board.[181]

The conflict centered around the custom of shaving those who were crossing the equator for the first time giving rise to

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179 This is the only reference to a concert being divided into two parts. All others appear not to have had intermissions.

180 "S. U. F.," Twillingate Sun, 6 February 1886.

181 Ibid.

a scrimmage which resulted in the Polly's men being victorious, "testifying that it is Britannia not Neptune who rules the waves."[182] Acting space was defined by the ship's deck, filled with mythical characters in conflict with Irishmen, Scotsmen, and Welshmen, who in the course of the action produced the "lance of his own country" and caused the conflict to be resolved in favor of Great Britain. The piece required costumes as well as specific properties; i. e., lances, and the reports suggest that they were identifiable as such.

In 1883 a single report of a concert produced by the Little Bay Music and Dramatic Club[183] bemoans the fact that the audience was made up almost entirely of junior members of the community and chastised the adults for not supporting the club's endeavors, "especially when we are informed that the expenses of new scenery and costumes cost something like

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182 Ibid.

183 No other reports on this club's activities were made in the Twillingate Sun.

$100.00."[184] The one hundred dollars provided scenery and costumes for three separate dialogues which included an Irish comedy, Every Inch a Gintleman [sic], and two minstrel pieces, Dars the Monkey and From Pumpkin Ridge or Belinda and Jonathan. Altogether fifteen men took part in the three dialogues. Except for policemen uniforms the list of characters would indicate that very little was required along the lines of special costumes. In the case of Belinda and Jonathan, the part of Belinda is played by two people, a man and a woman, leading one to conclude that the identical costumes were most likely used.

The instances when the scenery was given major consideration are few compared to large number of reports on concerts made to the Twillingate Sun in the late Nineteenth Century. There are, however, consistent references in the reports to those who "worked up" the various pieces, wherein the organizers are thanked and recognized for their efforts. One would surmise that if the setting had been a major element it too would have been included under some heading such as "those who prepared the platform."

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184 "To the Editor of the Twillingate Sun," Twillingate Sun,12 March 1883.

The scenic and staging conventions employed in concerts in other parts of Newfoundland during this period are not known as no reports such as those in the Twillingate Sun have been found. However, given the smallness of the stage and the fact that it was often built for the events and taken down afterwards, it is difficult to imagine it as being anything more than an unspecified space.

Twillingate was a major center during the late Nineteenth Century and would, therefore, have had more to offer than most parts of the Island. Being a major port of call would have ensured that stores were better stocked and transportation to St. John's more frequent, where vestiges of the popular North American culture could have been experienced.

One informant, commenting on concerts in the 1920s, alluded to the minstrel show variety and recalled having been "chased by an old man with a whip made of a cow's tail;"[185] and remembers how painful it was being hit with it. He also noted that he blacked himself with burnt cork for that particular piece. In the same interview Mr. Marsden recounted another episode which reveals something of the production methods utilized:

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[185] Marsden, 26 June 1982.

> Once I remember this man reading the paper and the paperboy sitting at his feet--I ran in and asked for his daughter's hand in marriage when all of a sudden the paper caught on fire. Never had that one again, people didn't like it.[186]

The use of properties was most certainly employed, but of interest is the fact that they were real and used as such, as was the case with the whip, and the one-time use of fire.

The use of the real everyday item was an integral part of the concerts as informants attest to with their zealously recounted stories of seeing a dory on stage or someone coming out dressed in his fishing apparel to sing a song or perform a recitation.

> Uncle Abe would be sure to have a new one [song/recitation] every year. He'd come out on the stage with his long rubber boots on carrying his jiggers and trawl lines.[187]

The same informant referred to a dialogue which involved a wedding and following local custom the people backstage

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186 Ibid.

187 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

fired guns out through the window. He also pointed out that the only set pieces used were a table and chairs. No attempt was made to paint backdrops or to hang things from the stage ceiling to assist in transforming the space to a different locale or environment. As previously cited, they did use a boat and fishing equipment to provide a setting for local songs that had to do with the sea but the pieces chosen from the dialogue books were produced with a minimum of stage devices or scenery.

The questionnaire, which provided information primarily about school concerts indicated that some attempts were made to create an environment, usually following the descriptions given in the playscripts. Cardboard cutouts for doors and windows were not uncommon, as were the popular dory and fishing scene for the Newfoundland songs and locally written dialogues.

> At one particular Newfie concert [we used] all Newfoundland material. A net was strung on the back of the stage complete with killicks [locally made anchors] and a dory in the corner sitting on waves made from blue paper.[188]

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188 Dohey, MUNFLA Q80B - 24

> I remember one concert when the stage was beautifully decorated with a fence and a trellis. Once there was a skit about a Newfoundland fishing scene complete with a dory on the stage.[189]

The style of scenery employed in community concerts today appears to be very similar to that used in the school sponsored events, and at the same time reflect a continuation of the traditional practices. R. Matthews, a concert organizer and director, wrote that the style of scenery is a reflection of the budget and that as a result everything is minimized.

> We keep costumes and scenery as simple as possible as there is no budget for this. We have made the profile of a boat out of cardboard, likewise the front of a car. A kitchen stove would be made out of a large carton, covered with black plastic garbage bags. We try to keep properties very much to the minimum improvising as much as possible. We don't change scenery, just props.[190]

Two photographs of her latest production show scenes from a locally written dialogue dealing with the discovery of

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189 Pervier, MUNFLA Q80B - 37.

190 Matthews, 20 March 1982.

Newfoundland by John Cabot in 1496. The central set item is a very modern rubber raft with pieces of blue carpet strewn around the stage to represent the sea. Costumes consist of Robin Hood type hats with a tunic-like outfit worn over shirts and tights. One character (not of the crew) is wearing an apron over a contemporary dress as well as eye glasses! Obviously, some attempt was made to give the actors something to help place the piece in another time. Certainly, the notion of a set design is as foreign to today's organizers as it was in the past; but its potpourri nature must contribute to the spontaneity and the hilarity synonymous with these events.

6.4 Costumes

The practice of dressing up as someone else and of disguising one's person by means of clothing and masks is not uncommon to Newfoundlanders since, as mentioned previously, it is part and parcel of the popular Christmas custom of mummering. This same practice was carried over to the concerts, for in a some of the interviews and the MUNFLA transcripts there is mention of what the participants wore during the dialogue, song, or recitation.

A 1969 interview focusing on mummering provides some

insight into the costuming practises employed in the concerts in Newfoundland. The informant describes a mummering episode when a group of people "rigged out" and visited the houses in the community.

> I was a clergyman with this big ledger. The others were dressed just the same as a bride and groom. I had on this hammertail coat and a high beaver hat. We was dressed up <u>just like a concert</u>[191] (emphasis added).

The phrase "just like a concert" suggests that these theatrical events were associated with dressing up, and as in this particular instance, it assisted the mummer in becoming someone else. The mummers used costumes as the primary means of disguising themselves and facilitating the transformation to a character such as the clergyman. In her book <u>The Outport People</u> Claire Mowatt relates her first encounter with this dressing up practice - just like a concert.

> So once they had unveiled they didn't say a word. In disguise they had been quite bold. We would see

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191 L. G. Small interviewing C. Small at Moreton's Harbour, 22 August 1969. MS p. 5. <u>MUNFLA</u> C848 71 - 73.

> this transformation again and again. People who were shy to the point of repression turned into clowns, dancers , actors and singers when they went out mummering.[192]

The costumes fulfilled a function similar to the one it serves in any theatrical undertaking. Moreover, in a dialogue, song, or recitation where character identification must be immediate, the costume is of paramount importance. In such short pieces there is no time for character development so the first impression is the critical one it that it identifies the actor and places him within the proper social group and occupation.

The Twillingate Sun reports simply listed the purpose of the concerts, who performed in them, and the titles of the various pieces, but very little with regards to descriptions of the costumes. However, enough signals exist to indicate that costuming was a considered aspect. For example, references such as this: "Two niggers appeared," or "As the scene opened the Captain was taking his bearing," or, "A. Luff in the the disguise of Jimmy Brine appeared

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192 Mowatt, The Outport People, p. 48.

ridiculous," suggest that the physical appearance had received attention.[193] Significant portions of the concert dialogues were minstrel pieces. One of the first mentions of this type of drama was in the Harbour Grace Standard in its report on the first theatrical and musical performance by the Amateur Dramatic Corps. This event, a precursor of the concert, used appropriate minstrel costumes which were described in some detail.

> The curtain is down, the audience is on the tip-toe of expectation, up it rises and low! there are the Ethiopians, sitting around in half circle, with their pompous dress of black clothes, and the "sensational" white chokers in strong contrast with their black faces.[194]

The same event included a stump speech "spoken in character" and performed according to the accepted style using an

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193 "Entertainment by the P. B. C. of Exploits," Twillingate Sun, 24 February 1894.

194 "The First Theatrical and Musical Performance," Harbour Grace Standard, 17 February 1864.

umbrella to accentuate and to emphasize.[195] In 1883 a concert held in Notre Dame Bay presented two minstrel sketches, Dar's the Monkey and From Pumpkin Ridge or Belinda and Jonathan. In the second piece the role of Belinda was played by two people - a man and a woman. In such a case identical costumes would have been required in order to present it successfully.[196]

Interviews with people who participated in concerts in the 1920s through to the 1950s revealed that costuming was a significant part of the presentations. One informant recalled coming onto the stage dressed in a policeman's uniform he had made himself "complete with cap and all."[197] Another participant related how the women made the costumes

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195 For a detailed account of the evolution of minstrelry in America and the costumes used, see Robert C. Toll, Blacking Up: the Minstrel Show in Nineteen-Century America, New York: Oxford University press, 1974.

196 "To the Editor of the Twillingate Sun," Twillingate Sun, 12 March 1883.

197 Skinner, MUNFLA C4858 80 - 153.

if anything special was needed.[198] You may recall that the actor who played a goat had a "big pair of horns stuck on his head,[199] and the account which described an actor playing a barber shop customer who sported a beard made from feathers adhered to his face with molasses.[200]

Mr. Francis Colbert, a onetime organizer of concerts and performer in dialogues and recitations, described an item which he wrote and produced during World War II. It was a patriotic piece involving a boxing match between Hitler and Chamberlain. In recounting the dialogue the author focuses on Hitler's "little fake moustache" which was arranged to fall off at a predetermined moment in the play; "When Chamberlain hit Hitler the moustache went flying across the stage."[201]

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198 Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

199 Abbott, MUNFLA C1984 74 - 145.

200 Sacrey, MUNFLA C594 69 - 23.

201 Kodish, When is a Recitation Not a Recitation,? MUNFLA 76 - 501.

Local and traditional songs were usually performed "in character" with the singer dressed appropriately as a fisherman or else a group of actors performed in pantomime while he sang. The questionnaire responses suggest that this was popular in the high school concerts as well as the community events.

Pictures of recent concert productions reveal that costumes are being used to give some indication of character but more importantly to enhance the the incongruity which this type of theatre demands.

6.5 Lighting

Until the introduction of electricity to the province the lighting was provided by candles, oil, and gas, with the use of gas being restricted to St. John's and a few major centers such as Harbour Grace and possibly Corner Brook. Until the 1950s, most schools were equipped with kerosene lamps which were used to light evening and night functions such as Times and concerts.

The questionnaire revealed that some informants had grown up during a time when lamps were used and the idea of using special lighting for concerts was foreign to them. Younger respondents who commented on concerts produced in high

schools were aware of lighting the stage and indicated that a few spotlights existed which were turned on and off. For recent productions the audience part of the hall was darkened but that practice was unknown to many of the older informants.

The traditional concerts produced by the community and held in the small school room provided no delineation between actor and performers. It would seem then that the practice of audience singing along with the actor and members called on to perform was encouraged by the setting itself.

6.6 Admission

Consistent with all concerts regardless of when they were produced was a cost of admission. Since one of the initial purposes of "getting up" the concerts was to raise money it follows that some attempt would be made to collect from the audience. Reports in the Twillingate Sun indicate that admission to the concerts in the Notre Dame Bay area between 1880 and 1899 ranged from five cents per person for school concerts to twenty-five cents for adult productions. Concerts held at Francois and Richard's Harbour on the south-west coast admitted people for twenty-five cents until the

1950s. However, the current prices for tickets to such events fall within the two to four-dollar range.

No concerts, regardless of when produced, whether in the 1890s by the Temperance Movement or today to raise money for civic causes, were advertised as being free. However, a number of people did indicate that if someone could not pay they would be allowed in. One organizer recalls that during the Depression when money was scarce patrons would "knit sock[s] or mitt[ens] to get in."[202] With inordinately low cost of admission the Newfoundland communities before Confederation were able to maintain church and school, assist the "poor overseas," and raise money for the war effort in the 1940s, and today where the community spirit is sufficient to do so, money is being raised to build swimming pools, town centers, youth clubs, and to facilitate senior citizen activities.

The concerts generally began around 7:30 in the evening and lasted from two to three hours. Following the dramatic presentation there would be a dance, during which, efforts

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202 Margaret Lacey interviewing Isabel Farrell at St. Lawrence, December 1, 1978. MS, p. 19. MUNFLA 79-318.

were made to raise money via the sale of food and crafts. In other words the concert was a part of a community time and consistent with the practice everywhere in Newfoundland it ensured a degree of self sufficiency within the community.

6.7 Summary

From the examination of the presentational methods used in concert production it is apparent that these events were loosely organized and controlled. The chairman or master of ceremonies was entrusted with the responsibility of seeing to it that the program was dispensed according to plan, and at the same time ensuring that there was some control on the audience.

Spectacle was a considered aspect and tended to be strongest when the setting required local items and materials. In most cases, however, it was present in the form of simple set and costume pieces.

Whatever the scenery or program the concerts are remembered (and recorded) as having been exciting events which brought the whole community together to celebrate and to generally have an enjoyable time. The next chapter will discuss specifically the reaction and attitude of audiences

towards these locally produced events, and attempt to discern something of the style of acting associated with them.

Chapter 7

ACTING STYLE AND AUDIENCE REACTION

Of all of the aspects of these community events which utilized dramatic performance, the nature of the acting style; and the audience reaction and attitude towards them are most difficult to ascertain. The task of attempting this discussion is made even more risky due to the fact that no detailed written critiques or Samuel Pepys-type diaries have been found leaving the penurious references to this subject in the Twillingate Sun the sole record of what happened. With regard to the newspaper reports the comments on acting and the total performance were of an encouraging nature rather than critical. This is typical:

> . . . it is unnecessary to comment as to the manner in which different pieces were rendered, suffice to say that though some may have excelled yet all did their parts.[203]

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203 "Entertainment Exploits," Twillingate Sun, 9 June 1894.

However, it is understandable that only terse mention would have been made of performance of an individual or of the troupe as a whole. These were, afterall, community affairs involving local people who gave of their time to provide the audience with a type of entertainment it enjoyed. They attempted to "cater to our [community] amusements and to relieve the wants of the suffering poor."[204]

With that as his preface the reporter for the Twillingate Sun wrote about the "harmless entertainment" in an encouraging manner always cautious not to make a critical remark. For example:

> They, without exception, went through their different parts with credit, notwithstanding the difficulties they had to contend against."[205]

No mention is made as to the nature of the "difficulties"--certainly it was not the lack of audience, since it ran two nights having had to turn people away at the first performance.

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204 "Amateur Theatricals," Harbour Grace Standard and Conception Bay Advertiser, 7 February 1864.

205 Ibid.

It is, however, very clear that what they produced was, like those presented throughout the island, welcomed by all those in the communities and "receive[d] the thanks of the community for their kindness in banding together for such a laudable object."[206] In every report carried in the Twillingate Sun and the references made to concerts in the MUNFLA transcripts the concerts are positive events and occurrences, and referred to in enthusiastic terms. Always the hall or school was filled to capacity. Nowhere in any of the sources were there references to concerts which were not well attended. Typical of the responses are the following.

> The Hall (O that it were made of India rubber!) was packed to overflowing by an appreciative audience and usually good order was kept throughout the entire evening.[207]

> The Entertainment began at 7:30 p.m., but long before that time the hall was filled with eager

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206 Ibid.

207 "S. U. F. Anniversary," Twillingate Sun 10 February 1894.

waiters[208]

> The spacious Hall was filled to the stage . . . I should say the audience was composed of three hundred persons, making it a pleasing fact to those who had the trouble of getting up this concert.[209]

> I suppose everybody and anybody'd come to the concert --if you could crawl you'd get there--young and old alike.[210]

7.1 The Style

The popularity of the concert is well documented in the various sources used for this study, so too is the content in terms of the variety of forms of which concerts were comprised. What is not so readily available is how the dialogues and other pieces were acted at these events. Who was considered a good actor and why, is a personal opinion

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208 "S. U. F. Anniversary," Twillingate Sun, 4 February 1888.

209 "Terra Nova/Billiard Cove Concert," Twillingate Sun, 16 May 1891.

210 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

at best, and with the filtering process which accompanies oral tradition the answers obtained from the interviews are perhaps closer to myth than to truth. Interestingly, the best actors had died long ago and were, in most cases, related to the informant or had been a good friend. One man recalled that his father was a "real actor," another referring to a close friend said, "Now, that's the boy who could act." When asked why they would assign that particular label to these people the informants were at a loss to explain, except to say that they could make you laugh. Indeed, it was an unfair question, but it served to point out one aspect common to all concerts: they were funny, and the person who could maintain that comedy by making people "laugh no matter what they did" was labelled a good actor. One elderly gentleman stressed that they would get the "randy ones" to take part in the concert. By that he meant those who did not care one way or another and were always looking for a good time.[211] Mr. DeGruchy referred to the actors as the "foolish ones," meaning they did not mind

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211 Marsden Interview, 26 June 1982.

making fools of themselves.[212] Mr. W. Skinner who organized and directed concerts until the 1950's, said that there were definitely some people in his community who were good actors, he referred to them as people who did not care what anyone thought about what they did, they would just jump in and have a good time.[213]

In the three instances cited above, there is a common thread with regard to the definition of "good actors". They were the people who could relatively easily break the pattern of their everyday role as serious worker and become someone else via the dialogues and concert pieces. They could, it seems, very quickly assume a role, character, or a different set of behavioral patterns whether it was to play Hitler in a dialogue or the "little boy who got it right in a eye" in a dramatization of "a Squid Jigging Ground." One such actor, according to the Twillingate Sun was a Mr. Crocker whose, "inimitable acting as Sambo in the Dialogues, "Telephone" and "Doctor," as well as his discourse on "Fun

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212 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C4855 80 - 152.

213 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134.

and Amusement" as the Rev. Tedekiah Squash were deservedly much appreciated."[214]

The Mr. Crocker types, despite the cautionary approach taken by the reporters, managed to get singled out with the few carefully selected phrases that made it to print. One example was a Mr. R. R. B. who delivered the Stump Speech which, "for real genuine humor, laughableness and originality it far excelled all other performances and the manner in which it was done places Mr. B. among the first on the list of the club."[215]

The Stump Speech requires a specific style of performance encompassing exaggeration of gesture, grimace and voice, all aided by a property such as an umbrella or a cane which was used to accentuate and emphasize.[216] It is interesting to note that in these early concerts the actors performing the Stump Speech and the minstrel dialogues garnered special

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214 "S. U. F.," Twillingate Sun, 4 February 1887.

215 "Amateur Theatricals," Harbour Grace Standard, 1 March 1865.

216 Don B. Wilmeth, The Language of American Popular Culture (Westport, Ct: Greenwood press, 1891).

notice, suggesting perhaps that audiences especially favored these items.

Why did audiences in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland find the minstrel show so appealing? The dialogues which included the blackface characters were somewhat ubiquitous judging from the references made to the "black" character in the interviews and newspaper reports. In a way, Newfoundland was not unlike the rest of North America in its interest in the minstrel entertainment and with the myriad of publications of dialogue books on this subject it is understandable that the concert organizers would have had access to them.

The popularity of the minstrel show was not a result of the local population having been exposed to professional troupes. For, as pointed out earlier, except in St. John's and surrounding communities the rest of Newfoundland was only accessible by boat, thus making travel slow and undependable--not a situation entertainment entrepreneurs would have exploited. However, the fascination which was present in Harbour Grace in 1865 was still present and given form to in this century as documented by John Mollay Byrnes.

> One of the best amateur productions ever given in St. John's was a performance of The Mikado in the old T. A. Hall . . . . The house was packed for two performances, and each character was played in

blackface, although dressed in regulation Japanese costumes.[217] (Emphasis added).

Although somewhat different from the fare performed at concerts, the Mikado production cashed in on a popular convention. The same fad was present in northeastern Newfoundland in the 1890s since the community of Twillingate had a minstrel troupe, and reports from its neighboring settlements attest to the popularity of what the paper called "darkey dialogues."

Apart from the worldwide interest in the minstrel show in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the availability of dialogues and stunt books there is perhaps another reason for the fascination with this particular form. It is tied in with the notion of acting and who was considered a good actor. Simply, acting involves the process and ability to assume behavioral patterns and general characteristics of someone else usually emphasizing speech and movement. In a short dramatic piece such as a dialogue there is generally

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217 J. M. Byrnes, The Path to Yesterday, Memoirs of Old St. John's Newfoundland (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1931), p. 56.

very little time to create a character so actors resort to employing caricature and conventions. Some sketches allow for this but there are others where the characters are not much different from the people who act in them. Such dialogues would not lend themselves to these dramatic events where everything was geared to comedy. Therefore, the minstrel dialogues with the blackface characters, the caricatured features, as well as highly stylized movements, speech and gesture would have been the kind of piece the organizers would have wanted. They were fast paced, had a joke which was easily understood, and an identifiable character with a "mask" to help the transformation and provided ample opportunity for the local "good" actors to improvise and get the laughs necessary for the success of these events. Those actors with the daring to black up their faces with cork, and the agility to perform some of the stunts required found the perfect vehicle in the minstrel drama. An example of this type of dialogue received special comment in a report of a concert given in 1894.

> As the curtain rose two niggers, Messrs. Ball and Sevior, appeared each carrying a jug containing respectively kerosene and whiskey. Unwittingly "Uncle Mose" imbibed too freely of Sam's kerosene

> and was therefore compelled to turn to the most amusing series of somersaults imaginable to the delight of all present.[218]

The titles published in the newspaper suggest that more minstrel pieces were included on the same program. Certainly the item which followed was of the same type since Mr. Ball and Sevior appear in it; "A character song 'Jubiloo' during which excitement ran masthead high."[219]

Reminiscing about concerts and acting in them prompted one informant to describe his father as a "real actor." He related one particular event where his father played a goat. "They had him tackled up just like a buck--could he ever bawl, just like a goat. They had a pair of horns stuck on his head."[220] Implicit in Mr. Fagan's account is the notion that good acting was inextricably connected to the man's ability to "bawl like a goat" and his willingness to be

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218 "Entertainment by the P. B. of Exploits," Twillingate Sun, 24 February 1894.

219 Ibid.

220 Abbott, MUNFLA C1984 74 - 145.

"tackled up" for the good of the show. The tape on which this interview was recorded reveals that a number of other people were present during the recording, a number of them conceded that Mr. Fagan was right in his critique of his father and they all laughed uproariously as the goat episode was related!

Another account by the same party of a dialogue with "good actors" in it had to do with a teacher and a dunce.

> Oh my God! I was up there [S. U. F. Hall] one time and Herbert was the school teacher and Tom was the dunce. They [class] were all lined up and the teacher asked each of them something but when he came to poor old Uncle Tom Pittman he didn't know a word--not a word. Herbert [teacher] had a big blackboard and bloody big long stick; (they was half drunk a lot of them). He put the stick on a word and say, "What's that?" Tom would stammer and say he didn't know--well, Herbert would up with the stick and come down. Poor Tom used to screech. He said afterwards that he had a mind to cry but he didn't want to spoil the concert. After the act was over Tom was some mad at Herbert.[221]

The account of the school teacher and the dunce points out two aspects of the acting style associated with the con-

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221 I have freely transcribed Mr. Fagan's story making no attempt to copy his accent. Abbott, MUNFLA C1984 74 145.

certs. One, no attempt was made to "act" the beating, instead the teacher actually hurt the man playing the student. He made him cry out and in his enthusiasm forgot to make believe. This same feature was apparent from other stories from other parts of the island. The dialogue about Hitler and Chamberlain was actually a boxing match performed by two actors trained in the sport. The unfortunate actor who played the dunce was remembered fondly by the informants as someone willing to put up with the indignity of being hit on the stage and although obviously suffering did not ruin the concerts by putting a halt to the action. Those points in the story which elicited laughter from the party indicate that the comedy resulted from the incongruity of having a respected man in the community subjecting himself to the business and action of the dialogue. What was said in the dialogue such as actual speech was passed over; it was the business which was remembered.

Similarly, another man recalled the concerts and the business which the dialogues required; he mentioned an incident when a prominent member in his community "dressed up on stage with blackened face" and rendered either a song or recitation he had written.

The second point regarding the acting style, as il-

lustrated by Mr. Fagan's story of the school teacher and the dunce, is that the "whole lot of them," meaning the actors, were half drunk. This is not to say that it was a common practice among those who performed in concerts everywhere, but the same remark, often made parenthetically, occurs in a number of accounts. Having "something to drink" for Christmas meant having a small cache of alcohol for the holidays which, it seems, served to enliven the festivities and ensure that the local singer and performers would be more than eager to share their repertoire.

Mr. Fagan recalls that the "teacher" was not aware of the force behind the blows mainly because he had a "good drop in." Interestingly, the party interviewed did not condemn the action but saw it as contributing to the hilarity of the event. One can only imagine that the effect of the alcohol served to "loosen the tongue and feet" of the performers by assisting in separating the role from the personality.[222] Mr. DeGruchy who sang a variety of songs and "gave" some recitations during an interview session commented on the correlation between a good Christmas and the availability of

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222 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C4855 80 - 152.

alcohol. By "good Christmas" he meant that the festivities would be maintained for the holiday season (twelve days) and a major part of which was the concerts, dances, and times plus the informal house visits by people within the community, at any of which, songs would be sung, stories told, and recitations performed. The relationship between the entertainment value of the concert and liquor was not restricted to the latter two parties; this comment indicates that the attitude was held in other areas.

> I met Uncle Bert and he said, "You goin' to have a good concert." I said, "Nah, not goin' to be no good." I said, "Sure there ne'er drop of stuff [alcohol] in the place [community]." "You in it," he said? "Yes," I said. "I'll see that you gets a drink," he said.[223]

The questionnaire asked who, if anyone, in the community was considered a good actor or actors. All responses indicated that there were such local actors but few made any attempt at expressing why these people were so considered. Generally very little insight is given into this phenomena

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223 Wilf Wareham interviewing Sam Butler at Arnold's Cove, July 1969, MUNFLA C680 70 - 8.

except to re-iterate over and over again the comic nature of the events, and the people who could produce the comedy were considered "good at acting." The question of why they were able to make people laugh was not dealt with specifically but comments such as, "someone who didn't act like themselves," serve to emphasize the importance of characterization to drama.[224] The reviewer for the St. John's Evening Telegram singled out a character named Aunt Jen as the high point of a concert at St. Lawrence.

> One of the high spots of the evening was a monologue by that well-known character Aunt Jen, who appeared year after year to regale the audience with her pithy humor. Aunt Jen, in slippers, print dress and ample pinafore, with a hairnet confining her new curly perm, sat rocking in her chair and told about her trip[225] to St. John's for removal of her gall bladder.

Such a person as the woman who played Aunt Jen is a paradigm of the good concert; dressed as the uninformed outport woman she plays a caricatured Newfoundland. Easily

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224 Chaffey MUNFLA Q80B - 23.

225 Anne West, "Crowds Turn Out for Annual Revue," St. John's (NFLD) Evening Telegram, 11 March 1981.

recognizable by everyone in the audience and in a speech using malapropism and such devices the Aunt Jen actor would be considered "comical" in any part of Newfoundland. Certainly, judging from the tapes of some recent concerts the same type of character was strongly present and greeted with uproarious laughter whenever she spoke.[226] In examining these tapes another aspect of the revived concert style becomes apparent: that of women playing men. This may have to do with the fact that a women's group produced them, but what is interesting is that laughter was not engendered by the incongruity of that convention but by the situation and the characters involved. For example, one locally-written piece about unemployment insurance centered around a domestic scene involving a husband and wife--both roles played by women. The husband-role was typical of the stereotyped Newfoundland character complete with affected accent (by an actor who already spoke with a distinct one) focused by the dropping of the "h" and adding to words beginning with vowels. The husband preferred getting the unemployment

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226 ACWA Concert at Arnold's Cove, recorded by Linda Slade for D. Kodish, 9 June 1976, MUNFLA C2800 76 - 501.

> cheque to working and when the "wife" won the lottery sweepstakes he tried to convince her not to accept it for if she did he wouldn't get his unemployment insurance benefits. The speeches were delivered inordinately loud (perhaps to cover the din in the audience) with punch lines, and those containing "good Newfoundland" euphemisms and figures of speech were given in a near-scream pitch. (No attempt was made by the woman playing the husband to disguise her voice.)[227]

Of the two ladies performing the "Unemployment Dialogue" the one playing the man, according to the questionnaire responses, would be considered the "good actor." She appears to have enjoyed the event and was able to work with the audience's reaction by pausing and often ad-libbing. The actress playing the wife sounded staid and somewhat uncomfortable making her speeches seem "read" or "recited." If one is permitted to assume that present practices are in some ways reflections of past traditions then the style of acting in the revived concerts connect in some ways with the conventions used in concert production and presentation of

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227 Kodish, MUNFLA C2800 76 - 501, C2801 76 - 501.

previous times. The comic actors of 19th Century Twillingate who were compelled to come back onto the stage for an encore were popular basically because they could make people laugh and provided a respite from the everyday realities of that time. The actors in today's community concert are singled out like their predecessors for their abilities to make people laugh and thus contribute to the facilitation and preservation of the community spirit via this single event.

7.2 Audience Attitude

The audience attitude towards the concerts is inexplicably related to the persistence on the part of the contributors to this study that these events were major happenings which brought considerable joy and celebration to the community.

A testament to the comic and celebratory nature of these entertainment events is the widespread Newfoundland expression, "as good as a concert." Fieldwork for this study revealed that all informants were familiar with the expression and used it when referring to a funny situation which they observed first hand. Normally it came after a funny joke in which the narrator got mixed up and began to tell it wrong and a number of people in the "audience" had to

correct him despite his adamant objection to their assistance; the consequence being a lot of talking and even more laughter. Another instance which sparked the "good as a concert remark" was when the husband began telling a joke while slightly inebriated, and the wife tried to stop him because it was "too dirty." Her efforts to that end included putting her hand over his mouth, threatening to tell something personal about him, with the result being a vocal and physical wrestling match and all the guests in a state of uproarious laughter. When the antics had ended and the laughter subsided, someone said as a kind of denouement, "My God, that was as good as a concert."

A study of the "good as a concert" expression reinforces the notion that these dramatic events were comic in nature and performed in an atmosphere where hilarity was expected and appreciated.

The concerts were for and of a community in that it was initiated to meet a need, organized and cast using the local population and eventually presented for the whole community. sometimes people in the community wrote dialogues, recitations, and songs, which dealt with local and regional concerns, as well as jokes, stories and actual happenings. Sometimes they "helped along" the scripted dialogues with

improvisation and interjections about performers and audience members. The concert was in every way a community event arranged to coincide with the only holiday period for fishermen in the year--Christmas.

The concerts were, in many ways, home-grown for the local communities and seem to have been produced solely for the local population with very little effort made towards sharing the event with people in nearby villages, since the concerts were generally presented at Christmastime, and certainly during the winter months the severity and unpredictability of the weather would have discouraged travelling.[228] Another reason why the concerts were not taken to neighboring communities was the expressed concern that the product may "be alright for us but not good enough for outsiders."[229] One report to the Twillingate Sun in 1894 points out that "the three hours entertainment given

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228 It was not until 1950 that automobiles replaced boats as the major method of travel in Newfoundland.

229 This comment was made a number of times during the interviews, and not one of those who responded to the questionnaire mentioned taking a concert to another community. MUNFLA C6193 83 - 134; C 4858 80 - 153; C4857 80 - 152.

would compare favorably with those given in the outports."[230] One organizer reported that he once had a good concert and wanted to take it to a neighboring community which was much larger but the participants refused thinking they were not good enough.[231] Since they were the creations of a community the productions reflected the skill and know-how of its people and to display the product for others would have added a competitive component to the undertaking. It was one thing to create this fun-filled event for themselves but quite something else to do it for another village and leave themselves open for comparison and even criticism.

The concert rehearsals were kept a secret from those not participating in them, thus ensuring that when the audience came they would have no idea as to what they would see. The secretive nature of the practices was widespread. Everyone consulted in conducting this survey replied affirmatively to

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230 "Entertainment at Herring Neck," Twillingate Sun, 3 March 1894.

231 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C4858 80 - 153.

the question of whether rehearsals were kept a secret. Some of the older informants added that the school windows were boarded up for the duration of the practices.

> We'd keep it [rehearsals] all secret. Nobody allowed who didn't have a part. And all windows barred up. Because we'd go and put up a concert and next thing you see some feller climbing up looking in through the window--and not a youngster either--so we'd bar up all the windows.[232]

The audience it seemed could expect each year's concert to be a surprise and, having been kept a secret, maybe even a little mysterious.

The bits and pieces presented at the concerts are well documented and discussed in preceding chapters, but apart from the general consensus that they were "all wonderful and funny" not much else is known of specific attitudes. It is obvious that they were enjoyed and that the players' and audiences' interests were protected by enforcing secrecy. However, one episode shows a particular audience's sensitivity to the performer as well as points out the informal atmosphere present at these events. Certain protocol was

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232 Ibid.

employed but the audience was really a part of the event and apart from singing along with the performers and sometimes insisting certain audience members go up onto the stage they could, as in this case, forgive someone for losing their lines and insist they try again.

> _____ was supposed to say a recitation. She came out on the stage, bowed, and she said the name of the recitation and went blank. She couldn't remember and she bowed and went off of the stage. They [audience] clapped. They thought [at first] that was what it was supposed to be. That was big on the stage. . . . started to cry and they clapped her back on the stage. They called out to her to come back on. They used to have good concerts then.[233]

On the one hand the audience was accepting of honest mistakes, yet on the other hand they could be intolerant of someone deliberately giving a poor performance.

> They asked him to say that [The Twelve Days of Christmas] on the stage one Christmas and he got up and he was makin' such a fool of himself. He wasn't sort of sayin' it properly--well something wasn't right about it--and Alfred [M. C.] went up and took

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233 J. Widdowson and John Hewson, MUNFLA C107 64-15. Names of informants omitted at the request of the collector.

him down off the stage.[234]

Unfortunately that interviewer terminated the questioning on concerts at that point without enquiring as to how the audience reacted to the episode or how the performer felt at having been interrupted and removed from the stage. Apart from the interpersonal implication this kind of action may have had, it does, however, point out a problem in inviting people from the audience to perform. In fact one present-day organizer responded to the question on that same practice by saying "Good heavens, no!, they might not be tasteful."[235] Another informant in discussing this practice emphasized that they would generally accept "almost anything as long as there wasn't any blackguardly dirty language."[236] Therefore, any singer with a repertoire of bawdy songs would have to be checked. In view of the fact that the audience was made up of everyone from the community--old and young

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234 Wareham, MUNFLA, C680 70 - 8.

235 Matthews, 20 March 1982.

236 C. Skinner, MUNFLA C4858 80 - 153.

alike--and that the church was often instrumental in organizing the event, it would be extremely important that the moral sensitivities of the people not be offended.

As already established, audiences looked forward to the concert as one of the chief events in the year when the community came together in a spirit of celebration to see some of their own entertain them for a period of three hours using material which was nearly all funny. It would seem that all they expected of the performers was that they be comical in the dialogues and as long as they did it without offending, these events became a part of the lore of the community and were recalled with pride and enthusiasm as "the wonderful concerts we used to have."

Today the community concerts still attempt to be humorous and to avoid the "corny material" available from publishers they resort more and more to writing their own, thereby ensuring that the audiences get what they want. There is a different aspect to the audiences in that they are no longer performed solely for one community. With the use of advertising and convenient transportation the audience could consist of people from anywhere within reasonable driving distance of the performance. The final result must, therefore, stand up to the larger audience and, in some

cases, be subjected to a review for the local and regional newspaper.

7.3 Summary

The predominant style of acting exhibited in the community concerts relied heavily on slapstick techniques, thus creating a theatrical presentation which was geared to make audiences laugh. Those members of the community who were good actors were those able to break the pattern of their everyday role as serious worker and become someone else either in the dialogues, minstrel routines, or pantomimed songs. The incongruity which resulted from having a respected member of the community being subjected to the requirements of the texts was one of the chief causes of the comedy the audiences wanted.

Throughout Newfoundland in nearly every community the concerts were regarded as major entertainment and social events which contributed significantly to the cohesiveness of the community. During the two or three night run of these events everyone participated in the drama, either as an audience member or a performer where the only restriction was that the material presented not be bawdy or offensive. A testament to the celebratory nature of the concert is the

widespread Newfoundland expression, "As good as a concert," used to refer to something considered uproariously funny.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

This study of the Newfoundland community concert as a theatrical event with emphasis on its production and presentational style is inextricably tied to an examination of the sociological and historical milieu in which the tradition developed. The historical perspective presented in Chapter One focuses on the economic and political factors which contributed most significantly to the development of Newfoundland society and its unique character. The original attempts to establish settlements on the island were violently opposed by the British authorities thereby compelling the pioneers to seek refuge in the isolated harbours and coves around the coast. These communities were, for the most part, cut off from contact with the outside world until this century. It was this extreme isolation which determined the nature of these settlements as complete units with their own unique customs, dialects, and traditions reflecting the

influence of both the Old World as well as things peculiar to the immediate region.

Newfoundland history is hallmarked by a dependency on one industry, the fishery, and as a result of inefficient political controls, fluctuating world markets, and a form of pre-industrial technology its most consistent characteristics have been poverty and economic disaster. These were most apparent in the island's communities by the lack of essential services such as health care and education as well as near non-existence of financial aid from the government to alleviate the plight of the people. Help, with regard to these matters, came from two sources; first of all the churches established schools and made in-roads towards maintaining social order; and second, the people drew support from the various forms of entertainment and celebration they had inherited or otherwise created.

Among the community entertainment practices; that is, those events and happenings which were organized for everyone's benefit as opposed to something intended for individual or family purposes, the one dramatic event familiar to all Newfoundlanders, was the concert. These theatrical affairs were organized, directed and produced in the villages and hamlets throughout Newfoundland to fill

both the need for entertainment and for financial assistance to individuals, the church and school, thus ensuring some degree of self-sufficiency and contributing to the cohesiveness of the community as a whole.

Although the concerts were an integral part of the Newfoundland community life it was seldom initiated by members of the local population; since very few of the people possessed either the time or the education necessary to conduct such an undertaking. It was the teacher who, in most areas, was instrumental in producing the event, and was therefore responsible for procuring suitable materials, directing, and the arrangement of the program.

The variety of items which generally made up the programs of the Newfoundland concert fell into three categories: Dialogues, Recitations, and Songs. The first of these presented the greatest challenge and in performance elicited the most excitement. They were, to a large extent, obtained from published dialogue books and were selected for inclusion in the program on the basis of their comic potential. The challenging aspect relates to the time required to rehearse the dramatic pieces and the memorization of the dialogue, plus the effort on the part of the director and the actors to alter the formality of the speeches with

improvisational inserts using the local dialect and expressions.

Unlike the dialogues, songs and recitations did not figure prominently in the rehearsal process. Often they were pieces which were already known by the performers and simply required a pre-arranged spot on the program or, as in some cases, a request was made by the master of ceremonies or members of the audience during the show.

Most of the songs presented at the concerts were not the traditional Newfoundland type; instead, the programs usually contained numbers which originated in the U. S. A. and Great Britain. However, the popular Newfoundland folksongs, those published in booklet form and tourist brochures, were seldom presented in a serious mode as a solo performance; these were performed as pantomimes with actors treating it more like a dialogue than song.

Very little spectacle was utilized in the presentation of the dialogues, songs, and recitation. The stages were extremely small - often built for the events at one end of a schoolroom, thus, allowing little space for sets and scenery. Most attention was paid to this aspect of the presentation when the dialogues or songs required local items and materials for properties and costumes.

A significant role in the presentational process was that of the chairman or master of ceremonies, which was usually carried out by a member of the community who held some particular status such as the clergyman, merchant, or teacher. It became his job to ensure that the program ran smoothly, to entertain between items as well as to invite certain audience members to participate.

The final section in this study was devoted to the acting style and audience reaction to the concerts generally. With regard to the former it was established that certain persons in each community were considered good actors which, in all cases, meant that they were able to make the audience laugh. Their ability to "act the fool" by getting outside of their everyday selves was appreciated in those who played in the minstrel routines as well as those who played in the dialogues and pantomimed the Newfoundland folksongs.

Those who performed songs and recitations were not judged by the same criteria as the "actors" since comedy was not always the intended effect with these items. The reputations of these performers were not necessarily made at the concert, they were established at parties, informal house-visits, as well as at Times. The essential requirement for someone to be a popular performer in this category was that they have an extensive repertoire of songs and monologues.

An examination of the audience reaction and attitude revealed that these theatrical events were regarded throughout the province as major celebrations in the life of the community where the people came together to see some of their friends and family members entertain them with traditional and contemporary material. The magic of seeing a member of the community appear on stage in black face or with a local everyday item such as a dory impressed people to such a degree that the contributors to this project (many in their seventies and eighties) could still recall the excitement engendered by the community concert. A testament to that attitude is the frequently used Newfoundland expression, "As good as a concert," used to describe an uproariously funny situation.

The audiences were usually tolerant of poor performances but were not accepting of items which used bawdy or otherwise offensive language. This precaution was necessary since the concert audiences were made up of nearly everyone from the community.

The concerts were a viable form of entertainment within the framework of the communities utilizing its available resources. It was theatrical, and for the most part was presented in the comic mode. It drew on the rich folklore of

Newfoundland in that it presented the songs and recitations which recorded important events and situations; it allowed the dialogues to be changed to fit the tastes of the group, and it contributed to the lore by introducing items from the outside thereby enriching and sustaining the oral tradition.

8.1 Suggestions for Further Study

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made with respect to further investigation of the Newfoundland Community Concert tradition.

1. The role of the teacher in the production of the concerts should be examined more closely as a way of explaining why the presentational style, the programs varied so little from one part of the island to another.

2. In order to better understand the nature of entertainment and the role it plays in the life of a small community a project which involves an in-depth study of its forms of celebration should be attempted. This should require the person conducting the research to live for a period of time in the area and become familiar with the social context in which the practices are carried out.

3. Throughout this study references have been made to the fact that interest in the concert tradition waned con-

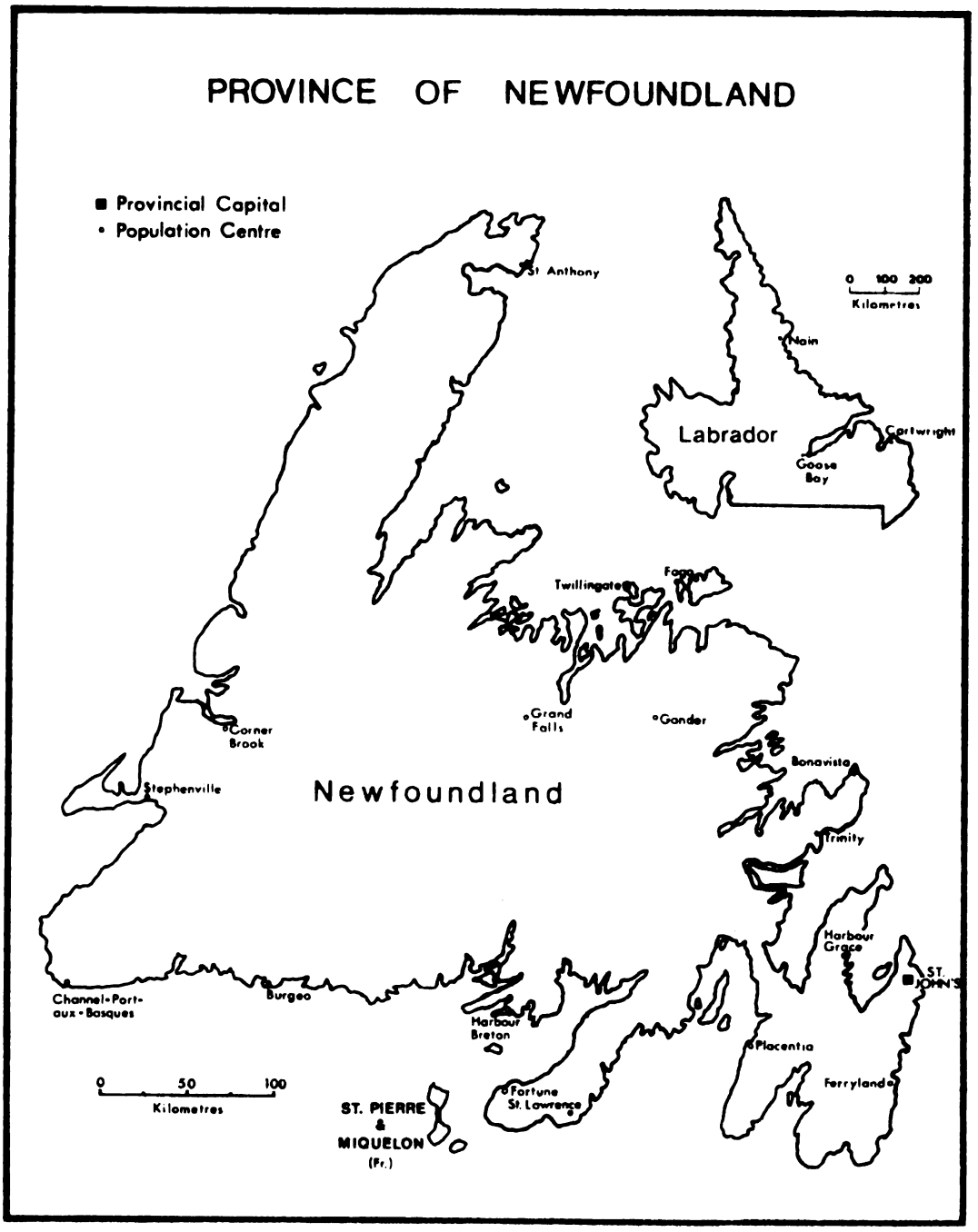
siderably since the 1950s. A study should be designed to explore some of the influences and changes in the community structure and environment which brought about the change in the entertainment practices. Consideration would have to be given to the effects of the Centralization program and the concomitant changes the local school system.

4. Theatrical related entertainment similar to the Newfoundland forms are to be found in other parts of Canada. Therefore, a comparative study of the concert and the variety show, the revue, or the chautauqua would reveal new insights into dramatic activity at the grassroots level.

APPENDICES

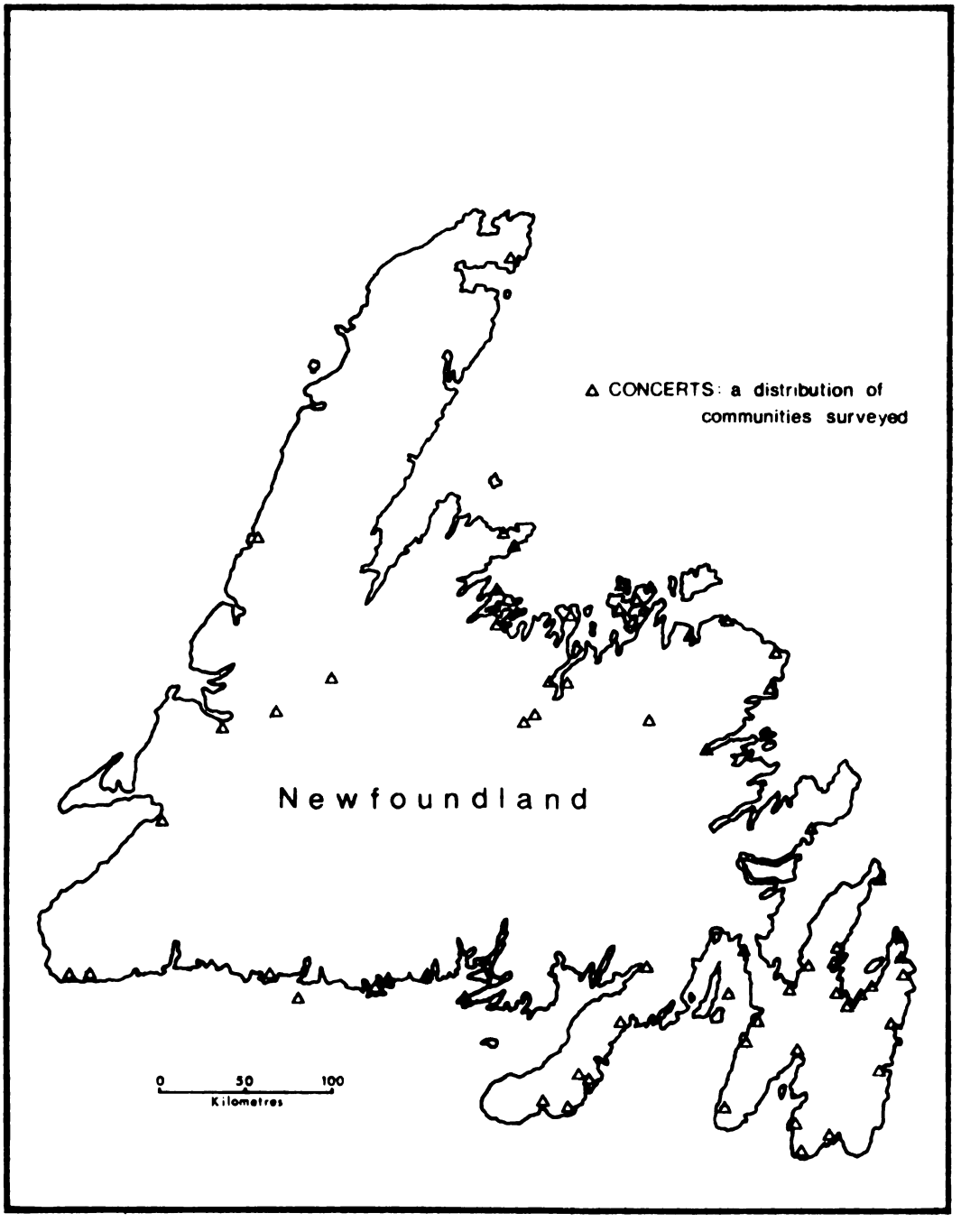
Appendix A

Map of Newfoundland



Appendix B

Distribution of Communities Surveyed



Appendix C

The Questionnaire

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND
FOLKLORE AND LANGUAGE ARCHIVE
QUESTIONNAIRE Q80B

TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY CONCERTS

The subject of this questionnaire is community concerts particularly those organized and produced by the community as a whole and held as traditional yearly community occurrences. Although not as commonly encountered today as in the past, such concerts were once common to most parts of the province. They are made up of songs, skits or dialogues and recitations, and they are major happenings in the communities.

The questions are provided to assist you and/or your informant in recalling details about the concerts. They are by no means all-inclusive and are not meant to be treated as an official form to be filled out from beginning to end.

Although questions are phrased in the past tense ("Who organized?"), we are also interested in the way people put on concerts today, and in the changes between past and present.

An informal essay and/or a tape-recorded interview would be much appreciated. We are particularly interested in the skits (dialogues) and songs used in the concerts. Any fragments of these should be recorded along with the description (however brief) as to how it was acted.

Thank-you, and please add other details which you would like to share.

NAME_____ DATE_____
BIRTHDATE_____ BIRTHPLACE_____
PRESENT ADDRESS_____ TELEPHONE_____
HOME COMMUNITY_____ BAY_____
RELIGION_____ ANCESTRY_____
(FOR EXAMPLE, ENGLISH, IRISH)
OCCUPATION_____

Please provide information about your informant(s):
NAME: AGE: ADDRESS:

A.GENERAL

1. Are concerts still being held in your community?

    a. If not, were they ever, and when did they stop?

    b. If so, at what time(s) of the year did they take place?

2. How long were the concerts? What time of the day did they usually start?

    a. Did a dance or time follow the concerts?

3. Did you ever participate in a community concerts?

    a. When?

    b. What did you do?

Did your informant ever participate in a concert?

    a. When?

    b. In what capacity?

B.ORGANIZATION OF CONCERT

1. Why usually organized? (Individuals, church, lodge, community group).

2. How long before the event did people start getting the concert ready?

3. Who was in charge of the concert?

    a. Did he/she select the people to be in the concert?

4. Who made up the programme?

    a. How did he/she/they select what songs, recitations, dialogues, etc. were to be included?

5. Was the programme kept secret from people not in the concert?

    a. Where were the practices held?

6. Was there someone in your community who always played (plays) in the concerts? Who?

7. Who was considered a good actor or actress?

8. Can you explain why such persons were regarded as good performers?

9. How did someone get a part in a concert? (Volunteer? Asked to do something specific?)

10. How many people were usually in a concert?

    - Men?

    - Women?

    - Children?

11. Was there a master of ceremonies or more than one?

    a. Who were the masters of ceremonies?

    b. Give names if possible.

    c. How were they selected?

12. Did the master of ceremonies introduce each concert piece?

    a. Do you remember how he/she used to do it? ("The next thing on the programme...").

b. Did he/she ever praise in advance or make some humourous comment? Give examples.

c. Did he/she ever comment on a piece after it was performed? (Examples)

13. Were the concerts advertised? How?

14. Were concerts from one community presented in other communities?

a. Where? Do you remember any incidents that occurred while doing this?

Were there people from St. John's or other distant parts of the island ("strangers") who travelled to various communities presenting concerts?

C.STAGE

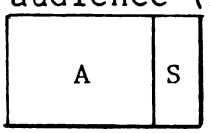
1. Where were the concerts held?

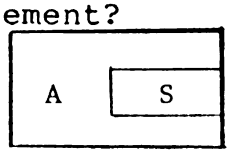
2. Was the stage permanent?

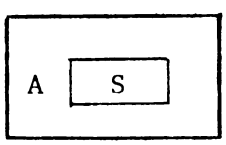
a. If not, was one built for the event?

3. Describe the stage. (Size, how high off the floor, where were the change rooms located, where did the actors come onto the stage from?) A rough diagram or pictures would be helpful.

4. Which diagram best represents the stage (S) and audience (A) arrangement?







A._____ B._____ C._____

5. Did you make any attempt at having special lighting on the stage; e.g., candles, lamps, etc.?

    a. Was the audience part of the hall darkened?

6. Was there a curtain or screen? What was its purpose?

7. Were costumes made especially for the concerts?

    a. Can you describe any of them?

8. What did the scenery consist of? (E.g. windows, doors, tables, a stove, boat, etc.)

9. Was the ,scenery changed during the course of the concert?

D. THE CONCERT

1. What kinds of things were done in concerts?

2. Were there printed programmes?

    a. Do you have any that we could copy?

3. How was the concert opened? (Special song, prayer, etc.)

    a. How was it closed?

4. Were songs, recitations, and dialogues written especially for the concerts?

a. Were they usually comical? (Examples)

b. Who were the authors?

c. Do you have copies of any locally written pieces?

5. Can you remember any of the dialogues (skits)? Record even the smallest piece, i.i. who was in it, who it was about, what they wore, what was on stage etc.

6. Were some of the dialogues taken from dialogue books?

a. Where did you get the books? Do you still have any? What were the names of some of the dialogue pieces?

7. Were the dialogues always funny?

8. Do you recall any dialogues and other concert pieces that were serious?

9. Do you remember a recitation that was popular at concerts? (Record if possible).

10. Were recitations acted out while someone said them?

11. Were songs and recitations performed in front of the curtain while the rest of the people got ready for the next dialogue?

12. Were songs ever acted out?

a. Can you recall one in terms of how it was done?

13. Did the audience ever sing along with the performers?

14. Were any people ever called onto the stage to sing or recite?

15. What songs were popular as concert pieces?

16. Do you remember a particularly good concert?

    a. What are some of the things you remember about it?

Appendix D

Dialogue Titles

The dialogues titles listed below were, at one time or another, included in the program of a Newfoundland Community Concert.

Art Critic, An

Barber Shop

Bardell vs Pickwick

Barking up the Wrong Tree

Book Agent

Both sides of the Fence

Bungtown Lycean

Cannot Be Defeated

Carpet Bagger

Cat Pie

Cat Without An Owner

Cats

Changed Housewife

Cinderelly

Confirming Echo

Courting Melinda

Courtship Under Difficulties

Crew of the Sunbeam

Defending the Castle

Discovery

Doctor, Doctor

Enrolling Officier

Every Inch a Gentleman

Fast Colours

From Down East

Getting A Photograph

Getting Up a Debating Society

Girl in the Rain

Going to a New Home

Going Whaling

Have You Heard the News

Heavy Shower

How He Teased Ned

Hospitality

How She Managed Him

How Sambo Fooled the Dentist

I Am a Man of Fashion

Imps of the Tank Room

Inhuman Monster

Irish Schoolmaster and His Pupil

Irish Servant

Knights

Learn to be content

Little Brown Jug

Little Mimics

Little Gossips

Living Statues

Lively Polly

Lochiel's Warning

Married By the New Justice of the Peace

Matrimonial Advertisement

Metals

Minister's Mistake, The

Miss Daisy Mae Floosey

Missionary Work

Moderation

New Generation

Newly Invented Telephone

Next Morning

Obtaining a Promise

Our Sam's Scrubbing Brush

Painted Calf

Playing School

Prophecy, The

Rainless Kilarney

Ready Answers

Rejected

Reaping the Fruits

Rival speakers

Rose and a Thorn, A

Rumpus in a Shoemaker's Shop

Scandal on the Brain

School Daze

Servant Girl

Shoemaker's Troubles

Sister Mary's Wedding

Sloman's Angel

Snapping Virago

Snowy White

Soap Salesman

Soldier Returns, A

Three Blind Mice

Three Little Fools

Tim Finnigan's Wake

Too Greedy by Half

Trial of Ting wing

Twenty Dollars a Lesson

What we Have

Which Will You GIve Up?

Who's Got the Ball

Who on Airth is He?

Why And Wherefore

Why They Smoke

Wrangling Prayer

Young Teetotaler

Appendix E

Song Titles

All the titles listed below, were , at one time, a part of a Newfoundland community concert program.

Albien Nancy Lee

Annie Dear

Annie Laurie

As I'd Nothing Else to Do

Baby Boy

Back to the Woods

Banks of Sweet Dundee

Bay of Biscay

Be Not Deceived

Beautiful Songs of Spring

Belle of Baltimore

Bells of Eve

Better Bide a Wee

Better Luck Tomorrow

Bills I Have to Pay, The

Black Sheep

Bogie Man, The

Bride Bells

Brightly the Moon Tonight

California Brothers

Captain and His Whiskers, The

Captain Jinks

Come and Be Happy

Comin' Through the Rye

Committed to the Deep

Comrades

Cork Leg

Country Couple, A

Crocus

Dawning of the Day

Death of Nelson

Down in the Coal Mines

Down the Stream the Shadows Darken

Dinah's Wedding

Dream Faces

Dream the Impossible Dream

Drunkard's Dream, The

Dublin Boy

Ehren on the Rhine

England and Her Queen

Every Bullett Has a Billet

Fair is the Morning

Fairy Revels

Finnegan's wake

Forest Echoes

Firmly Stand

Fisherman, The

Fisherman and His Child, The

Five O'Clock in the Morning

Flowers

Fly and That Was All, A

Fly Away Dive, Far Away

Full and Harmonious

Galway Bay

Gipsies' Wedding

G-L-O-R-Y

Gold, More Gold

Golden Shore

Good Old Times

Grandma's Advice

Hard Times

Happy Are We

Holy Moses

Home

Home Sweet Home

I am the Merriest Girl

I Wait for Thee

I Will Marry My Own Love

If You're Irish

In the Starlight

I'll Sing You a Song in the Commical Style

Keep the Temperance Banner Waving

Killarney

Kind Words

Jack O'Hazeldean

Jack's Return

John Fury and John Joe

Johnathan, Joseph and Jeremiah

Just Before the Battle

Just Drop a Line to Mother

Life Let us Cherish

Light Canoe

List to the Convent Bells

Little Annie Rooney

Love and Our Ocean Home

Love's Golden Dream

Lover's Letter Box

Lovers' Quarrel

Low Backed Chair

Lukey's Boat

Maggie May

Master is Coem, The

Meet Me in the Lane

Minstrel Boy

Miser and His Money Bags, The

Mr. Galliger and Mr. Sheehan

Mistletoe Bough

Moon is Beaming over the Lake, The

Mother's Love is a Blessing, A

Mother Malone

Move Forward

Murmur Gentle Lyre

Murmur Shell

My Nannie's Away

Old Grandma

Oh Me Britches are Full of Stitches

Oh Me Master's Gone to Market

Our Jack's Come Home to Stay

Over the Fence

Nancy

Nancy Dee

Nellie Gray

Never Miss the Water

Paddle Your Own Canoe

Papa I'M So Sad

Passing under the Rod

Poor Benny Primrose Farm

Put My Money on a Bob Tail Nag

Red, White and Blue

Riding the donkey

Riseover, The

Row Gently Row

Sailing

Sailor's Lullaby

School Days

Seven Old Ladies

Shoulder to Shoulder

Silver Chimes

Skipper of the Fairy Jane, The

Skipper of St. Ives, The

Soldier's Farewell

Song of the Fountain

Song of the Soldier

Starry Night for a Ramble

Summer Shower

Surly Joe

Sweet Katie Conner

Take Back the Heart

Tar's Farewell

Thank God We're Surrounded by Water

That Horrid Girl

Thou Hast Learnt to Love Another

Three Jolly Sailor Boys

Three Little Pigs

Three Maids of Lee

There's a Hole in the Bucket

Tit for Tat

Tread on the Tail of Me Coat

Tripping Through the Meadow

Uncle Ned

Under the Willow

Vive Le Roi

Waiting for Father

Wait Till the Clouds Roll By

We Are Merry Little Cooks

Weeping Willow Lilly Dale

Welleo Tide a Wee

Where Are You Going

Widow, The

Wild Sea Flowers

Willie's Such a Tease

Wishing Cap

Won't You Tell Me Robin

Ye Gentlemen of England

Ye Songs of Temperance

Yellow Rose of Texas

Yeomen of England

Yes I'll Meet You Dearest

You'll Never walk Alone

Appendix F

Recitation Titles and Text of Little Meg and I

The recitation titles listed below were, at various times, included in a concert program:

Adventures With a Pig

Anxiously Waiting

Aunt Jen's Operation

Bells of Shannon

Beautiful Hands

Berthie Roberts

Bessy's Boil

Bewitched Clock

Boy's Suggestion, A

Boxiano

Brave Old Train

Burgler, The

Bygone Days

Canoe Adventure

Captain's Story, The

Castor Beans

Census Collector

Charlotte De Bourbon

Christmas Story, The

Cheer Up

Come Home, Come Home

Crossman's Goat

Curious Custard

Darby and the Ram

Darby Doyle's Visit to Quebec

Dare to Say No

Dangerous Dan McGrew

Dinner and a Kiss

Disconcerted Supernaturalist

Don't be Teasing

Drifted Out to Sea

Drifting With the Tide

Drunkard's Inventory

Drunkard's Soliloguy

Ears

Face on the Barroom Floor

Fare Thee well

Fisherman's Dream

Fishes

Flag Raised Here in 78

Fun and Amusement

Gaining Ground

Gentle Jenny Gray

God Bless the Fishermen

Gottingen Barber

Grogseller's Dream

Halfway Lion

He Never Smiled Again

Here I stand Upon the Stage

High Top Boots

The Hymn That Bore Him Home

I Am a Man of Fashion

I'm Teetotal

I Can't Stand Mrs. Green's Mother

In a Mining Town

Imprisoned in a Wreck

Irish Immigrant's Lament, The

Irish Jubilee

Irish Letter

Irish Philosopher

Jean Findalater's Loom

Johnnie's Poetry

Judge Not

Katie's Love Letter

Kiss at the Door, A

Lady O'Dee

Lawyer Outwitted, The

Lay of the Last Chicken

Life on the Ocean Waves

Little Dickie Melbourne

Little Farm Well Filled

Little Meg and I*

Little Nell

Little Stowaway

Little Sue

Little Torments

Lost

Lost Baby, The

Mary, Queen of Scots

Me and Jim

Miss Smart

Mother's Littel Maid

Mother's Prayer, A

Mouse and her Promise, The

Mr. Claude Made a Mason

Mr. Twitcherley's Trousers

Mrs. Candle's Curtain Lecture on Shirt Buttons

Murder of Scott, The

My Good Looking Man

My Jack's Knife

New Bonnet, A

Newsboy's Cats

Nothing At All

Oh Come All Ye Young Men

Oh St. Peter

Old Chairs to Mend

Old Rocking Chair, The

Orangeman, The

Over the Fence

Pad Conners

Paddy O'Rafferty

Pa's Initiation

People Will Talk

Poor Mary's Story

Pretty Maid

Prince of Wales

Rory O'Moore's Present to the Priest

Rosa's Last Words

Rustic Logic

St. Peter at the Gate

Sam McGee

Salvation Army

Scandal Monger Jane

Shootin' Dan

Shipmaster's Story, The

Skipper Charlie

Sleeping Damsel

Soldier's Blotting Paper, A

Sweet Sixteen

Teetotal Alphabet

Temperance Light

Tommy Trundle's Adventure

Too Clever

True Orange Flag

Twelve Days of Christmas

Twine, The

Two Slaves

Victim of the Toothache

Water Babies

What I Like

What They Caught

Why Don't You Learn to Dance

Widow Spriggon's Daughter

World of Ice, The

Wreck of the Golden Beam, The

Yankee quilting Party

Yarns

You'll Never Do

LITTLE MEG AND I [237]

BY

C. T. MURPHY

You ask me, mates, to spin a yarn before we go
below;
Well, as the night is calm and fair, and no chance
for a blow,
I'll give you one, a story as true as ever yet was
told;
For, mates, I would't lie about the dead; no, not
for gold.
The story's of a maid and lad, who loved in days
gone by;
The maiden was Meg Anderson, the lad, messmates,
was I.

A neater, trimmer craft than Meg was very hard to
find;
Why, she could climb a hill and make five knots
agin the wind;
And as for larnin, hulks and spars! I've often
heard it said
That she could give the scholars points and then
come out ahead:
The old school-master used to say, and, mates, it
made me cry,
That the smartest there was little Meg, the
greatest dunce was I.

But what cared I for larnin then, while she was by
my side;

---

237 This recitation was referred to a number times as being a "good piece", it was included in Taylor, Taylor's Popular Recitations.

For tho' a lad, I loved her, mates, and for her would have died;
And she loved me, the little lass, and often have I smiled
When she said, "I'll be your little wife"--'twas the prattle of a child;
For there lay a gulf between us, mates, with the waters running high,
On one side stood Meg Anderson, on the other side stood I.

Meg's fortune was twelve ships at sea, and houses on the land,
While mine--why, mates, you might have held my fortune in your hand;
Her father owned a vast domain, for miles along the shore;
My father owned a fishing smack, a hut and nothing more.
I knew that Meg I ne'er could win, no matter how I'd try,
For on a couch of down lay she, on a bed of straw lay I.

I never thought of leaving Meg, or Meg of leaving me.
For we were young, and never dreamed that I should go to sea,
'Till one bright morning father said, "There's a whale ship in the bay,
I want you, Bill, to make a cruise; you go aboard today."
Well, mates, in two weeks from that time I bade them all good bye,
While on the dock stood little Meg, and on the deck stood I.

I saw her oft before we sailed when ere I came on shore,
And she would say, "Bill, when you're gone I'll love you more and more,
And I'll promise to be true to you through all the coming years;"
But while she spoke her bright blue eyes would fill with pearly tears;

Then as I whispered words of hope and kissed her
eyelids dry,
Her last words were, "God speed you, Bill!" so
parted Meg and I.

Well, mates, we cruised for four long years, till
at last one summer day
Our good ship, the Minerva, cast anchor in the bay;
Oh! how my heart beat high with hope as I saw her
home once more,
And on the pier stood hundreds to welcome us
ashore;
But heart sank down within me as I gazed with
anxious eye--
No little Meg stood on the dock as on the deck
stood I.

Why, mates, it nearly broke my heart when I went
ashore that day,
For they told me little Meg had wed while I was far
away;
They told me, too, they forced her to't, and
wrecked her fair young life;
Just think, messmates, a child in years to be an
old man's wife!
But her father said it must be so, and what could
she reply,
For she was only just sixteen, just twenty-one was
I.

Well, mates, a few short years from then--perhaps
it might be four--
One blustering night Jack Glynn and I were rowing
to the shore,
When right ahead we saw a sight that made us hold
our breath,
There floating in the pale moonlight was a woman
cold in death;
I raised her up--Ah! God, messmates, that I had
passed her by,
For in the bay lay little Meg, and over her stood
I.

Next day I laid poor Meg away; and nightly on the
wave

My spirit wanders forth to keep a watch beside her
grave;
Her father knows not where she lies, nor he who her
betrayed,
There's no one but Bill who knows where little Meg
is laid;
In a quiet grove of willows, her father's house
hard by,
There sleeps in peace my little Meg, and here,
messmates, am I.

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