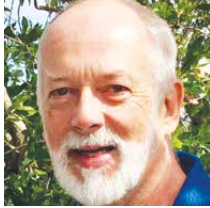


COLUMN —

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Listen to the music!



By Paul Knowles

Forgive me, but it's time for a mini-rant. I don't know if you listen to current pop music, but if you do, whether you are listening to radio or streamed music on some diabolical device, I guarantee you are hearing a lot of Spanish-language music. In Canada. Spanish!

Now, I have nothing against that language as such, or the people who speak, or in this case, sing in Spanish. Great entertainers I'm sure, even if they are inexplicably named Bad Bunny.

But here's the crux of my rant: we're Canadians. Yes, we are a mélange of cultures and ethnicities and the more the better in my opinion, but it annoys me to turn on the radio or make a request of Alexa and hear a lot of Spanish... but never anything

that represents the varied and vast spectrum of unique Canadian music. Nothing in French, nothing in Indigenous languages, nothing representing the unique and wonderful musical traditions of Newfoundland and Labrador or the Maritimes.

So in this column, I am suggesting you turn off your radio or tell Alexa to shut up, although she doesn't like that much, and hit the road to explore the amazing music of our amazing country.

I had the opportunity to do just that during my recent time in southwest Nova Scotia. And it was marvelous. A million times more satisfying than whatever Alexa or CHYM decided to feed my ears this morning.

The music on offer was consistently entertaining, often downright inspiring, wildly varied, and quite surprising.

In Yarmouth, we were treated to a concert by the Yarmouth Shantymen, whose on-line intro says it all: "Shanties and beer since 1984!" This a cappella group celebrates the history of the local fishing industry, singing the work songs of sailors, many of them replete with tragedy, because the authentic history of sailing in the

Maritimes is often a story of disaster and loss.

Then at a lobsterfest, also in Yarmouth, the feature band was The Radiaters, a southwest Nova Scotia band that can rock cover versions of top ten hits, but also will dish up some wonderful, updated Acadian music.

Ah, yes... about Acadian music. I went to Nova Scotia without a clue about the Acadians, other than a vague sense that the Acadians had suffered some tough times at the hands of the English, a century or five ago. But you can't travel in the Yarmouth and Digby area without learning a lot, and fast. I'll be writing more about this in subsequent columns.

It helped a lot that one of my guides/companions during the first days of my trip was Charles Robicheau, a tourism and development officer with the Yarmouth and Acadian Shores Tourism Association. Charles is Acadian; his first language is French, and he attended the French language Université Sainte-Anne in the tiny centre of Church Point on St. Mary's Bay.

As we travelled through his home territory, where French is the first language

and the Acadian flag flies everywhere, he told me a lot about Acadian history as well as present-day Acadian culture, alive and well in southwest Nova Scotia. There were hidden depths of Charles. It turns out he can hit a golf ball a mile (sometimes in an undetermined direction), and that when the Radiaters took to the stage in Yarmouth, the very talented guitar player looked quite familiar. Yep, Charles – a multi-talented guy, and a fine musician.

The music, Acadian in origin, was terrific, accompanied by the most energetic and charismatic step dancer I have ever seen. Again, nothing I would ever encounter in our American-dominated Ontario radio waves.

We experienced Acadian music in a more laid-back style during an excursion to Big Tusket Island. Once on the island, our boat's captain, Simon LeBlanc, produced some terrific fish chowder and an acoustic guitar. He sang some Acadian folk songs and then broadened his scope of Canadiana, with tunes by Gordon Lightfoot and Stan Rogers. A wonderful concert presented to an audience of eight enthralled

listeners.

My travels were exclusively in Nova Scotia but the travel conference at the heart of my trip was sponsored by, among others, Newfoundland and Labrador, so on the first night in the Rodd Grant Hotel pub I had a front row seat to a concert by Juno Award-nominee Rum Ragged, a Newfoundland group that brings high energy and incredible talent to the musical tales of their home province.

Ask your internet device for Newfoundland music by Rum Ragged, Acadian songs by Radiater or Simon LeBlanc, or songs of the sea by the Yarmouth Shantymen. It's not going to happen.

You just have to go east to escape this artificial environment of American imports and savour the authentic music of this part of our country.

You'll bring the tunes and the passion at the heart of the music back home with you. And your life will be richer for it.

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email pknowles@golden.net.



The Yarmouth Shantymen, singing songs of the sea. (Photos by Paul Knowles)



The Acadian band The Radiaters, including Charles Robicheau on guitar.