

Roy Menagh

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MMS - In Orillia, Ontario, October 29th ... no, September 29th, 2018 with Roy Menagh. Roy, if I could start out, what were your early years as a young musician like?

RM - So, when I was a young guy, actually I didn't ever really know my father. He was a concert pianist and he died when I was seven. So my mother raised my sister and myself and I played the piano because my father played the piano. Progressed through all of my formal education in the public school system, playing a bit of piano and then when I was in high school, I took up ... I played the saxophone and so on and became a bit of a leader in the school, in the music department. So, when it came time to go to university, I went to the Faculty of Music in Toronto and majored in piano.

MMS - What years would those have been?

RM - That was 19-

MMS - High school years.

RM - '65 through to 1970. '69, '65 to '69, four years in the faculty. In those years I was introduced to choral music with the "Mendelssohn Choir" through *Elmer Iseler*. He was the conductor of the choir then and he convinced me and a number of other young people to join the "Mendelssohn Choir" and I was in the "Mendelssohn Choir" for seven years until I moved North. So the background was very much the structure of Royal Conservatory piano playing and then added on top of that, when I got a little older, I was a singer, second tenor in the "Mendelssohn Choir". In those years, I was introduced to all of the major choral works with *Seiji Ozawa* and *Carl Ancerl* and a number of other great, great conductors, including *Elmer Iseler*. And in that context, started my teaching career in North York in a middle school, grade seven, eight group. My very first recollection of doing community music was, I was asked to be an Assistant Choral Director of a show, "Orpheus in the Underworld," with "The York Minstrels" in North York. I went in as a young guy and I had a choir that was preparing to do this production and they just threw me into it and said, "No, you teach them how to sing these parts." And of course I had training to do it but I'd never done it before, so I was really jumping in and never really looked back in 53 years. I've always done choirs and so on, throughout the country, in every community. Believed community music is a really, really important part of a community, you know? My trip north ... *Nancy* and I ... *Nancy*, my wife, is a public health nurse so she knew that she could get a job in the North as a public health nurse. We decided that we were going to move somewhere out of Toronto, the Toronto area because I'd lived in Toronto for all those years. We had a sort of event in which we threw a dart at a map and it happened to land in the Hudson's Bay. The next day I phoned Yellowknife and asked if they needed a music teacher and it just ... the music teacher had just resigned a week before or something, so they were

looking for somebody and it was very serendipitous, it was just a fluke. And with three references, I got a job in Yellowknife, in teaching in the high school. First classes had very few students in them but then they grew over the next two or three years.

MMS - Stop you there and back you up a little bit. So that would have been your phone call, your decision to move north would have been in '72, '73?

RM - '72 or 3. I think it was the summer of '73. That spring was just ... and I took a leave of absence from a job that I had in North York, in Toronto, for a year to try it out. Then was there 14 years in Yellowknife.

MMS - So this is a ... the question always begs to be asked, how was your trip up?

RM - Well, it was seven days. We pulled up stakes, all our friends thought we were absolutely crazy to leave the comfort womb of southern Ontario and secure jobs and everything. But it was an adventure, it was an adventure to go north. So we loaded our Saint Bernard and a cat and the two of us in a Volkswagen Beetle and drove to Yellowknife. Having a month before, purchased our home which was also trailered up to Yellowknife and ended up in a trailer park in Yellowknife. We started a new phase of our life. That was how it was back then. So it was a tremendous adventure because the Arctic, even though it was cold temperature wise, it was extremely warm in human relations, you know, small town, 5600 people. And everybody wanted to be involved in ... certainly a large number of people were attracted to music making. The community band started up then with 12 people, ended up to be 30 or 40 and we toured that band all over the Arctic, the north. I never took it south. Made the conscious decision, I mean, anybody can go south but the challenges were to get on small planes and larger planes and go north into the smaller communities in the Arctic. So that's what we did.

MMS - Your first few days, weeks and months in Yellowknife, from Toronto to Yellowknife, of whatever the population was in Toronto to the population of Yellowknife at that time was, you think around 2500 or something like that?

RM - Well, I think Yellowknife, when we moved there was ... the number that strikes me is about 5600 people. But we were aware that there was tremendous growth going on in Yellowknife. There was a buzz, there was very much of an excitement because the Arctic was opening up. I think economically and politically and in every way, it was becoming ... and it was a gold town. The two gold mines were the basis of the economic situation there. So, we experienced a growth in the Arctic that was quite unique and it was a bit of a window in time. It wasn't ... it had just sort of started and we were there at the right place at the right time, to see that development. Of course, it wasn't just the development of the city and the north, it was ... there was an arts development going on too, there was a willingness for people to glau on to the excitement of singing in a choir or playing in a band. There were some ... there were people there who had instrumental ... some instrumental technique from their high school education, who moved into Yellowknife. They willingly wanted to play in an ensemble, so it was relatively easy to put that together. We had some interesting times, you know?

I did forget one point, we actually turned down the job initially, I did. I said "Well I'm sorry, we can't go." The person who was hiring us ... hiring me, to work in the school said "Well, we really want you to come," and I said "You can't accommodate a dog in the accommodation you're offering me." I had a Saint Bernard. So, I said "Well, is there an alternative?" And he said "Well, actually there is an alternative, you could live in our brand new trailer park. Northland Trailer Park. I can put you in touch

with the person who can sell you a trailer or whatever but we can find you a lot there then you could bring your dog and you'd get a subsidy, for living outside of the government housing." So, I did some research in a couple of weeks and found out that I could buy a trailer in Ontario and put my canoe in it and other things and drive up there and all we needed to do was get somebody to take it. So that's what we did, we bought a trailer in Exeter, Ontario and we got a guy who was deadheading it back to Manning, Alberta and he happened to go the rest of the way and dropped it off in Yellowknife. That was our home for all the time we lived in Yellowknife. Well, until we bought a house on 52nd Street. So, that's what I mean about the adventure of it all. It wasn't just musical adventure, it was everything adventure. We didn't have a television set. When we got a television set, I took a picture of the weather report one morning and it was 36 below zero. Sent it in a ... put it in an envelope and sent it back to our friends in ... these were days when there wasn't any internet or anything like that. Telephone calls happened on a Sunday when you could afford to call. So it had challenges that way because we were separate from family, you know? But looking back, one of the most important decisions we ever made, was to move North. I would recommend it to anyone, to experience the Northwest Territories. I don't know about now though, I haven't been back since we left.

MMS - Maybe about that age, your age and you're young and adventure-

RM - Absolutely.

MMS - Here's this destination, you pick it or whether you throw a dart at a map in order to get there. Yeah, like I said it's just a ... Obviously the climate was an adjustment that way. But it sounds like you were busy, obviously with the work and probably dived right in. Nancy was able to work as well?

RM - Oh yes. She immediately got a job as a public health nurse. It was in the years when *Marten Hartwell* ... the *Marten Hartwell* story. The year before *Marten Hartwell* was discovered and his story became known in Canada and *Nancy* was actually *Judy Hill's* ... one of *Judy Hill's* replacements, who died in that plane crash, in that *Marten Hartwell* story. So when she got there, immediately she was doing medevacs, in two engine planes, instead of one because of the *Hartwell* story. So we were young, we didn't have kids and the program in the school was developing, the community was responding to the community music business. We decided in the second year that we'd extend the leave another year and stay another year. Then the third year, North York said "No, you have to resign," and we stayed. We stayed for 14 years, our kids were born in Yellowknife and so on. We have pictures of the ... when City Hall in Yellowknife was built and inaugurated, there was the concert band, the community concert band opened it and our two kids were sitting at the stage. Our one little girl *Leslie*, who was three years old or something, looking at the band and you know...

MMS – You've already sort of touched on this but It really seems like you say there were these beginnings of arts, community arts, programming in the North and within the educational system. If I could ask you, sort of, what was the state ... or where was the music curriculum at when you arrived?

RM - So, the music curriculum and the curriculum generally in the schools in Yellowknife was basically the Alberta curriculum. It was the Alberta school system. We were tethered to that and in subsequent years when I eventually became principal in Inuvik, a number of years later, we were working in the Alberta curriculum, there was an agreement that we could use their curriculum. It was at a time when parent advisory groups were being developed which is the precursor to boards of education. So in Inuvik and I believe when I arrived in Yellowknife, there wasn't a Board of Education, there was an Advisory Committee of parents. So, the music program was basically modeled after the Alberta curriculum, so the

credits that people got were ... I believe they were Alberta credits that the territories adopted. So we had ... and the curriculum was set, in Alberta and so it was Grade 10, 11, 12, there was no Grade 13, so it was four years or three years. 9, 10, 11, 12. Not sure whether there was a Grade 9 at the school, I think it was 10, at the school before. So it was a three year program and I arrived in '73, so '73, 4, and by '77, we had our first graduated class. Those three years we did amazing things, within the structure of the school program. But there were rehearsals constantly after school and what I remember, is that the Music Room was really a center of activity. All the music students and others met in the Music Room and picked up instruments and played and we had various ensembles that were ... and then, once or twice a week we had a big band rehearsal and so on. Then it was getting band music in which had to be purchased and brought in and I needed budget for that. The administration at the time slowly became aware that there was an interest in building this up, so instruments were purchased. I remember, there was quite a bit of money spent along the way because if you didn't have your own instrument as a student, you had to have an instrument, so the school ... I'm pretty sure we equipped the whole music room with a set of clarinets and flutes and we had three, four or five saxophones. These are expensive instruments. We had one tuba or then a couple of tubas, a baritone, trombones, trumpets. So there was a ... and those were expensive at the time, you had to-

MMS - Did you have to start from scratch with those instruments...?

RM - We-

MMS - Or was there some of that stuff already there?

RM - There wasn't much there. I'm not sure whether *Randy (Demmon)* had any instruments there, he may have, to start. But we gradually built that up and then the students that came in at the lower ... I was there for ... till the early '80's, so seven or eight years. So it was a good developmental program in the arts, you know? Then in the community, we didn't do any choral music in the school, it was all instrumental but in the community we had a choral presence. I was able to sort of marry the two disciplines. We had some instrumental work done, as accompaniment to the choir and concerts organized that crossed into the community and so on. And traveling around too, we did our own school trips, into the Arctic. But we also had community trips that ... some students joined the community band and others didn't, you know?

MMS - What were the challenges in those early days? What kind of challenges did you bump into? Within the school?

RM - I think scheduling ... I think the second year, I had to make, with the principal, some decisions about ... in order to make it ... because we had a successful first year and *Randy (Demmon)* would have experienced this in the years he was there. But, scheduling in a small school because Sir John Franklin High School was relatively small school, in the grand scheme of things, it would have been a few hundred students. But it's not really quite enough to have a very wide range of courses because you had to have ... if you did that, as an administrator, you'd have only a few kids in a class, right? So, it wasn't economically very viable. But over time, we were able to arrange the time table, such that students could take music in Grade 10 then move on to Grade 11 music class, the band class. I can't remember whether we were semestered because that presents a whole other different kind of problems, right? Or whether it was all year programs, that made a difference, it did in the whole business in scheduling music and classes, anywhere you looked. But somehow it worked out, we had a thriving music program by the end of the '70's. It was ... the room was full and as I mentioned to you earlier, eventually we were

traveling so much and every semester we had a major trip and it was into the North. The budget, including the air transport, was bigger than the operating budget at the school. The impact was very, very interesting because we were called on by the Commissioner to put together a stage band or a dance band because the Commissioner had a problem. In order to get his legislative balls operating, he would have had to get a band up in Hercules from Edmonton or Calgary. So, it was to his advantage to basically get us to provide a dance band. I remember I got some charts, I can't even remember where I got them from but we had swing pieces that were well known to the people that were attending these balls and we were able to put together a sound that was acceptable because they could dance to it. So that was an exciting time, sort of a breakthrough. Then there was never any problem getting travel and airplanes to use for the other parts of the program. But also musically, it was an exciting time because the whole music program had another layer. There was the dance layer and then there was more classical and then the more idiomatic band music that we played and so on and toured around with and took north. I remember we did an "Oh Canada," in Coppermine. We did it on one tour and we recorded the "Oh Canada," in every community that we visited, in the earlier years. For years later, I heard that they had used that "Oh Canada," every time they opened the day of school. So that was kind of a heady experience. The impact of the concert band, small concert band that visited every day, they heard it.

MMS - Reminded of that for sure.

RM - Yeah.

MMS - What factors and circumstances made the events and initiatives that you lead to be as successful as they were?

RM – So, I've been ... I'm now 73 and I've done well over 500 concerts, in communities in which I've lived in this country, in everywhere I've lived. Thousands of people who have ... and the one factor that has always been there is, you have to get parent or community support. You gotta somehow, with the program, either in a school, you have to connect to the community. It can't just be separate, it can't just be an academic exercise. Music and music making and the whole idea of community music and community arts programs, has to have an intimate connection with something else in the community. Now in many cases, it was the business community but also the service clubs, the ... for instance, there was a military base in Yellowknife and they needed ... one year they came to me and asked me, "We want to have an Oktoberfest," and I said "Well that's no problem." Not really knowing what I was talking about, by saying that. Well, what I was talking about, is that you had to have Oktoberfest music and you had to have an Oktoberfest band which is basically a tuba, trombone, clarinet, drums and trumpet. You gotta play German music. So, that's what I mean. But once we got that in place, we could replicate it every year because we had the charts and we had the idea of an Oktoberfest band, you know, you dress up in lederhosen and you look German and you play really quite simple music. But the impact for the people that don't know anything about music, was enormous, they loved it. That drew in military families that were away from home, living in Yellowknife or in Inuvik and all of a sudden they were connecting, because "Oh okay, we're going to go to the concert," it was a night out, during October. Just one example. And then churches, sometimes they'd have special services where they needed ... for instance, November 11th. There's always a musical presence for special occasions like November 11th or Christmas. Everybody wants to sing Christmas carols at Christmas, so you had ... if you had a band that could play them then you were connecting with the soul of the community, you weren't separate from the community, you were connecting. So, to answer your question, that's, over the years and certainly in those early years, very soon I realized ... you know, one of the first gigs we ever had were six people

on a float, going down the main street of Yellowknife, for the celebration at the beginning of September, in the summer.

MMS - You mean the longest day?

RM - It was a parade. So, if somebody said to me "We need a band for a parade." I didn't say "Oh no, we can't do that." I just figured out how to do it because if I didn't, I'd lose that thing. So if you say "Yes" enough times, that does two things, over the years that wears you out. Which I'm reaching that point now, right? And also, the opposite of that, is you create an incredible excitement and buzz which people are attracted to. So, as long as you had the buy-in from the community ... music has tremendous health benefits for everybody that's involved. Especially if they're playing and breathing and doing all the things that's required to be involved with music, there's unbelievable health benefits. It's like breathing, after a while, you know? So, those were good years in Yellowknife, they were really fun.

MMS - That's why I was asking you about just the challenges, I guess, and...

RM - Administrators ... and I was an administrator in school. You can kill anything you want. You have a tremendous amount of power and you do it through time table. You can time table any program you don't really favor or like or whatever, out, easily. Just by matching it with something that every kid has to take, for instance. Or making it more difficult for students to ... when they tick off the courses they want to take and so on. In these days ... well, you'll see when we go over to St. Paul's. There's a music school in that church now. And that music school is thriving. There are two women that operate the school and they're thriving because the school system is not providing music programs and music education like it used to. So they're filling in the gap. There's always going to be teaching of music going on in the community somewhere, thus the rise of community music, as an academic discipline, in universities. It's an essential part of the fabric of a community, the fact that you can find an outlet to express yourself, in performance. Doesn't have to be high level performance but you can still derive a tremendous amount of satisfaction by playing in a group or singing in a group. That went on in Yellowknife all the time. That went on ... I mean, we had "The Singing North" in Yellowknife. 65 singers, all adults. There's a picture on the wall over there, of one of the choirs, right in the corner. I remember when we had our first rehearsal in September one year, I stood up and I said "Okay, what I'd like to do is a "Messiah" performance, in December." Pretty much everybody in the room said "Well, we can't do that. How are you ever going to get us to sing those choruses?" and so on. I said "Well, just watch me." And that was the year we had our first "Messiah" performance. It was a piano accompanied "Messiah", you were in it, so was *Angela* and *Christina (Waleski)*, I think. The piano player was *Marg Suddaby*. She, in the performance, got lost or I got lost and I'm in ... not the Hallelujah chorus, but the Amen chorus, the final piece in the program and we were so lost, for a moment, for four bars or something. She stopped playing and shouted out "Where are we?" And I shouted back, I said "Bar 75!" She went in, we started again, then finished the piece. The next year we had it right and eventually, we ended up with string players from "The Edmonton Symphony". Sort of an annual thing. So, people felt really good about those times, you know? It's a grind for some living in the North. This was an outlet, psychological outlet. And in any community, that doesn't have that, they're losing out, there's a gap, there's a thing that's missing, right? I think.

MMS - Now even more so than ... call it a competition, if you will, for entertainment.

RM - Right.

MMS - And so, what was happening in Yellowknife, as far as other entertainment ... technologically or-

RM - Okay, so, an interesting experience was in Yellowknife, there was the "Folk on the Rocks". The first two or three years of "Folk on the Rocks", which is now a well-established folk festival, we were living there when that was starting up. This one year, I was part of helping at "Folk on the Rocks", and we attended. I was backstage and one of the artists came up to me and said "I'm just going on stage here, would you mind just taking my wallet and my watch and just hold them? And then when I finish, you can give them back to me." So he handed his watch and I put it on my wrist like this and he handed me his wallet because he didn't want to be encumbered on the stage. And he got on the stage and he opened his mouth ... talk about other experiences and I heard one of the most beautiful male sounds, I'd ever heard in my life, as a singer. And I just ... it moved me, absolutely moved me to tears, I thought "Oh my." This guy is one of the greats and he was in his young part of his career and it was *Stan Rogers*. He came off the stage and he said "I'll take my wallet again," and I almost didn't give them to him. And I became a *Stan Rogers* fan and so did everybody else that night. So that was ... you were probably there. That was one example and then *Stuart Hodgson*, who was the commissioner of the day, he was bringing in all kinds of dignitaries and that sort of thing. The entertainment for those dinners and they were woodwind quintets or woodwind trios or one occasion, we had some bag pipes and some music from a British Isle somewhere. It was entertainment, it was ... people were sitting, listening. The Prince of Wales opened the "Prince of Wales Northern (Heritage Centre)" ... you know, the Heritage Centre. The choir in town, they didn't bring in their own ... some outside choir, it was a choir in town and the band played in the opening of ... when he opened it.

Those are moments, when people were involved in them, they'll never forget them. It's a historic event. There were many situations, in that short period of time, I would say three years, where indeed, history was being made in the music business. Absolutely, for sure. I was invited to go to a choral workshop with a very famous ... *David Willcocks*, *Sir David Willcocks*, British choral guy. Young guy at the time and he was having a workshop in Halifax. The deal was, that every province could send two choral directors. So there were 12 choral directors, there were 10 ... no 20, 10 provinces. 24 and 2 territories and they included the territories. And when that was put out there, I was the only active choir director, in the Northwest Territories. So I went, and rubbed shoulders with the greatest in the world.

MMS - Wow.

RM - They had competitions in Ontario for the two people that would go to Halifax and work with *David Willcocks*. Like competitions and they were heavy duty, like you had to audition to go and all that sort of thing. Well, I was sitting in Yellowknife, and "Well, you go." Hopped on a plane, went to Halifax. That was mind blowing, life changing. And then eventually, got a call from Ottawa and somebody said to me, in an office in Ottawa, early one morning, when I was living in Inuvik, that they were going to send the "Toronto Symphony". I said "No, you're not. This is crazy." No, we've got the money and so on." And the next person on the phone was *David Crombie* (Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs) and he said "Yes Roy, this is going to happen, we've got the funding and we want you to be the lead in this thing, in the Arctic." I was living there at the time and I said "Well, no problem. I'll do what you want." He said "The first thing we need is a Twin Otter. Can you make that happen?" I said "Well, as long as you call the Commissioner." He said "It's already been done." So I went across the street, stood in the office ... *Danny Norris* was the Administrator in the Arctic at the time. I just sat there, left my office as Principal of "Samuel Hearn School", and sat there and finally he said "What do you want?" I went into the office and I said "I just need a Twin Otter for a year, at my disposal." And he said "Well, that isn't going to happen. What do you think, I don't have a Twin Otter." I said "Would you just make a phone call to *John Parker*

(Deputy Commissioner of the NWT) in Yellowknife? Get his assistant, at least." He was on the phone for less than two minutes and he turned to me and he said, "You have your plane, for the year." So that set up the 1987 symphony trip, that was the first time the "Toronto Symphony" or any orchestra had ever gone to the arctic. It was revered, filmed ... "National Film Board" Film, "Rhombus Media". "The Northern Odyssey Symphony" trip, 1987. So, things like that just kept happening, you know, through the years. And of course, anybody who was involved in them, they were moved, changed, because it was a frontier, it was still a frontier.

MMS - Amazingly enough, even in that day you're talking, 1980's, which was-

RM - Yeah.

MMS - Not that long ago.

RM - No.

MMS - It was still very much-

RM - Yeah.

MMS - Like you say, a frontier.

RM - Yeah.

MMS - For sure. Any special moments stand out from...

RM - Well, meeting *Prince Charles*, was a pretty heady experience and singing for him. Singing a British Madrigal and a Canadian art song ... *Healey Willan*, "Rise up my Love." That was a big, big moment. Others, well, numerous opportunities for young people to be raised up into a level of appreciation, that they would have never experienced in other places in the country because we were the only game in town, in those years. It was, as I say, all of us made ... we made the effort to be there and we brought a talent to the north and it was recognized.

I'd say one of the other experiences ... and it wasn't for me ... awards. I've won many awards over the years. I've ... in Orillia, they gave me the award, the "Order of Orillia", you know, for community music work. In the North, it was the "Commissioners Award". I was in Edmonton the day it was announced publicly and I was in a hotel room, the light was flashing and *Nancy* phoned and said "You'd better sit down. There's a dinner in your honor tonight at the Yellowknife Inn." And I said "Well, I don't think I can make it." It was 4:00 in the afternoon in Edmonton. And she said "You're getting the "Commissioners Award." And that was not ... no award is ever for the person who gets it. The award is for all of the people that ... are support system and are the reason why the award is given. Orders of anything, Canada or whatever are given because there's something else going on behind the scenes that is moving, in the broadest sense, things forward a little bit. And the arts are a good place to do that, in the sciences too and, of course ... But that was going on in those three years. We had our first choral workshop, in the northern city of Yellowknife and people came from Edmonton and other places and all over the north and we had clinicians in and so on. It was ... I remember that time too and it was all

through the schools. And you know, all those bands and musical experiences and you were part of them. Did you ever remember going to Edmonton to the "Kiwanis Festival" in Edmonton? Never?

MMS - No.

RM - That would have been the natural thing to do. It just made no sense to me, we didn't need to do that. Why would we need to get a mark, for making music? We knew how to make music, we knew how to light up the community, it was natural. Those are really special moments when they happen. If I thought more deeply, I could find that my memory ... many, many others ... trips into isolated communities when ... over lunch, I told you about the time we went to Holman Island and got the community to come to a band concert in a snow storm in the gym of their high school or in their public school. We got in the back of a truck at 30 below zero and played instruments down the main street. We were an anomaly, we were crazy. "Who are these people?" Window blinds open and people looked at the truck go along the only street in town. Of course they're curious so they ended up at the concert. Remember Inuit kids reaching and touching a French horn bell and realizing that they'd never seen one, they'd never heard one, they'd never heard a French horn, they couldn't imagine what it would sound like. They probably did on the radio but they never were in the presence of a brass instrument like that. Their instruments were fiddles and other music, made drums and that kind of thing.

Then I realized that, what we were playing, was a *Mozart* piece that was a transcription of some other kind of idiom. All of a sudden I realized that, *Mozart* wrote that piece 300 years before and this kid, was from an ancestry that lived 300 years also, in another part of the world. And that was the first intersection of the arts, through the arts, of those two cultures. Bang, there it was, starkly in front of all of us, as the kid reached and touched the ... So, very powerful, moving moments and there were many of them, there were many of them. When those things happen, the music becomes an essential part of a person's life that experiences it. Reflecting on that is, very, very exciting, as an old guy now, right? It's really, really interesting.

MMS - Interesting that just ... beautiful and like you say, powerful moments, that come down to ... just comes down to a snap shot.

RM - Just a moment. All of a sudden, they're in front of ya. You hammer away and you work at stuff and you practice and you learn notes and you ... or you work the piece and you have ... it's kind of like two steps forward, one step back. And the one step back would, 90% of the time would wipe you out because it's bad, when it's one step back. But if you just keep going, keep one foot in front of the other and you get a little better each week, a little better each week and then all of a sudden, you're in a situation where you turn a corner and something magical happens. And that magic, you realize at that moment, is because you put in the work, it just appears. I don't know, some people call that ... a very religious person would call that a religious moment. They'd call it a ... it's a gift, from another place, like a ... I think it is a gift. But you set up, you till the soil, so that it has the option to happen and we had many of those, we had many of those. I have had many of those, since I left the north with some of the greatest musicians in the world. I've got the first horn player of the "Toronto Symphony", or the "Canadian Opera Company", was a soloist for us, just in the past five years, six years. One of the top trombone players in the country, *Alastair Kay*, played with us, in a community band that I directed. Juno Award Winners who dip in to the amateur business and what they meet is excitement, of people that are so awestruck by the art form that they'll go way beyond what they're ever capable of doing. That is ... that's exciting, that's lifelong, you know?

MMS - Can you recall some of the characters and the players that you interacted with, in those times up there? The allies and the adversaries alike.

RM - Well, that's a really interesting question. I think one of the very exciting interactions and kinds of interactions, were with elders, indigenous Inuit and Dene elders and how open they were to new artistic stimuli. Specifically, when we put together concerts that had ... they were live concerts, so they were string players which is traditionally a western civilization concept, it's not an indigenous concept. Because ... and indigenous music had other influences and it had a huge history, they're 5, 6000 years of drumming, for instance and tunes that were played on various kinds of instruments. But they weren't the traditional orchestral instruments or any of those kinds of things. So when you introduce beauty which is in both cultures but through the medium of clarinets and trumpets and tubas and yet they still had the same kind of power, artistically. It became a curiosity for them because it was out of their experience. I remember many times, when both the high school program and also the community programs, playing musical things that were more traditional western music but the reaction of some of the thing ... one example, and that was, a woman who told me at the time, she was a young woman but she was the head of the Education Authority in Fort McPherson. Her name was *Sarah Jerome* and I've never forgotten her name. She was so moved after we played in Fort McPherson, sections of the "Vivaldi Gloria," with an orchestra and a choir. All the elders were sitting intently listening to this, came to the concert, in a hall in Fort McPherson.

We had a traditional string group, and the choir singing in Latin and it moved her so deeply that years later when she visited Toronto, unbeknownst to me, I didn't recognize her but I took her to the Toronto Symphony because she requested it. She said "I would like to go to the big orchestra." We went to that concert and she told me, when I took her back to her hotel room, "do you know who I am?" and it was the same person. Much older but she had never forgotten the introduction to that. So, that was one. Then when the "Toronto Symphony" went north, the impact of the large orchestra in the north, in J.H. Sissons Elementary School gym. The first three rows were all of the elders from the whole region. They sat there and listened to *Sibelius* which is a connection that they'd never experienced before. There wasn't a person there, who wasn't in tears, just for the sheer beauty of the music. So, all of what went on in the music making, through the school and in the community, it's all worth it because it laid down an imprint on many, many people, old and young. And you're probably one of the products of that, because you haven't left the north and you got your introductions, some of the introductions, through the program.

MMS - Yeah.

RM - The programs that we did. It's a question of the right place, at the right time. As far as the negative sides of interactions, there was certainly within the school, there were teachers that were very suspicious of the success of the program because they weren't experiencing to the same degree. So it became, not stressful but an interesting tension in the school. But we just plowed on, you know? I was reflecting that some of the teachers that I worked with were so upset by the fact that the budget I had for the music program was larger than the operating budget of the whole school because we were hopping on airplanes and traveling distances and doing something that was very significant, culturally, you know? When we went on those trips, the people in the communities where we visited, we shared ... because we had many times when they ... we would ... they would play their music and we would play our music, so we were learning too. I'd never experienced a drum circle, for instance, until I went to the far arctic and stayed up late at night to the beat of the drum. It's interesting about that because there's a phenomenon in the Middle East, of a musical style and it's a Dervish, a Whirling Dervish type of style.

It's a rising of ecstasy and it's connected to a very deep religious beliefs. Recently, I've just experienced that, in Egypt and had the same kind of experience, it was ... I was sort of moved but I didn't realize why, until I suddenly realized that as the minutes were ticking by of this increasing energy, in the music, that actually, I was being carried along with it. That's the same thing that happens with indigenous drumming.

Lots of western cultured people don't understand that about Native drumming, so ... and by the same token, when we played, for instance, the "Vivaldi Gloria," it's built on the same principles artistically, because it gets more excited at the end but it's more controlled because it's within a classical music context, rather than more than a free Whirling Dervish kind of context. So all of these threads were operating back in those years and I didn't understand them all. I just knew that we kept having exciting experiences, with music that everybody seemed to enjoy and everybody seemed to buy into or many people, not everybody but many people. They were good times, really good times.

MMS - Who were some of the ... I guess in the characters outside of the event in itself that sort of facilitated and made those possible, the...

RM - Oh yeah, oh yeah. So, in Yellowknife, none of this could have happened without some person or sort of class of person, that were buying in, that had influence and were able to make major decisions. One of those was *Stuart Hodgson*, who ... as I worked with him closely on a number of special occasions, he really got it. Of course he was the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, so, to have a guy like that understanding, either directly or innately understanding, to some level. When you had his support, then there was never any problem with money. There wasn't any ... you know somehow things kind of worked out. And in many cases, I never realized why. The other one was the owner of Northwest Territory Airlines. (*Bob Engle*) He had a Twin Otter and a DC-3, not a Twin Otter, a DC-3 and a DC-6. I could call him any time, he was right on track. He understood what was going on, he had the adventurous spirit. It was kind of like, *Max Ward*, bush pilot, spent his young life, going into the Arctic, off in a small plane and then built a major world airline. So that's what I call a sort of, northern frontieristic spirit.

The people that were moving up into the North, if they had creative tendencies or they had a sort of a feeling of connection and alignment with arts development and they had that frontieristic spirit, anything became possible. We literally flew into remote places and brought music to people who had never experienced it before, they could never have imagined it. They maybe heard it on the radio but there it was, right in front of them. It's extremely different when it's sitting right in front of you and you're live. Anybody can listen to a recording but there's a different, a completely different dynamic when it's live, then you see and hear, in the present, the artistry of the ... it's one of the unique things about music. It's not like a piece of art on the wall, it's alive, the minute the first note's played.

MMS – For sure.

RM - Oh, one other example. I mean that question is very interesting about others being drawn into it. I go to the 1987 Toronto Symphony Tour, that went into Inuvik, Aklavik, Tuktoyaktuk and I believe Fort McPherson. There were parts of the orchestra that went into those communities. These were people who grew up in Toronto, in Southern Ontario and honed their craft as musicians. Joined the orchestra, somehow got into the Toronto Symphony and then traveled north and brought their skills face to face with people who had never heard them before. But the impact on their visit to those remote communities because I was right in the middle of all of that and I had feet in both camps, you see. So,

the significant and dramatic impact on their understanding of the North became very apparent when I watched them interact with ... there's one example. There was an interview with one of the oboe players in the symphony, his name is *Frank Morphy*. *Frank* had an interview with a guy on a radio station, I don't know exactly where it was, it was one of the far north radio stations. One of the questions that this interviewer ... he was an Inuit interviewer and he said "Well now *Mr. Morphy*, tell me about the oboe. We don't have oboes here." He asked the obvious questions and of course *Frank*, who was ... he was completely immersed in his whole life in music and traditional university training and Royal Conservatory technique and all that kind of thing, was now put in a position where he had to actually respond to somebody who knew nothing about it. It was really a moving thing. It was in the movie, the Interview and the pictures of *Frank* being interviewed by this person and it changed him. He said "Oh my. I had no idea that nobody ... that there was somebody out there that didn't understand what a symphony orchestra was." But, why would anyone who lives in a remote Inuit community in the far north, ever have any experience with that? So it was ... and he told me that, *Frank* told me that, he said "I had no idea. I had no idea that I was so ignorant."

I think music has the power, when it's introduced into those situations, of bridging those gaps and making both sides realize there's a wisdom on the other side, you know? You know we interacted with *Andrew Davis*, who's one of the best ... still operating in 2018, as a major worldwide conductor. He's currently conductor of the "Toronto Symphony," he's in his 70's and he was on that trip and his final party was at "Ingamo Hall." He ate raw meat, he ate fish, he ate country food. Not just he but his entourage, his wife. These are all sort of white, Anglo-Saxon, very good musicians. And they walked away, I know this because I spoke to many of them after, when I came back to Ontario and I still have contact with some. It changes you, when you are in the face of another culture like that. So, those years, there were many people ... if I reflected more and more and more, I'd come up with other names. It's a very good question, that question about the impact on the minds and hearts of people. The whole issue is, you got to stay open to it and many people don't, they just close up and "Oh yeah, they live up there." What the problem is, that our country, it's the biggest shame we have, we do not take care of Native ... this is all about the reconciliation piece but it goes far deeper than that. It's why is there a human being living in Canada that doesn't have a toilet or proper water filtration in their community? It boggles my mind. Anyway.

MMS - Good point, for sure. Bring it back a little bit more local, within the Yellowknife music community. At that time, there was people here, again, allies who were doing the ground work and stuff like that. Who would some of those folks have been?

RM - For instance, there were mining companies and there were bank managers and there were the earlier stages of computer programmers, who all were adults. They were 30 years old and up, who were living in Yellowknife and they had experience playing an instrument in their high school career. So they came ... they were transplanted from the south, high school programs where they played the flute and the clarinet and this sort of thing as kids and then they moved to the North and they took their clarinet with them or their trombone or whatever.

So, one of those people was *Pat Carney*. So *Pat Carney*, before she was Minister of Energy for Canada, she was third clarinet player in the "Yellowknife City Band." She was a consultant with a company called "Gemini North," worked with another man, *Frank Basham* and the two of them were both musicians, amateur musicians. *Pat (Carney)* told me in those years, that was her recreation. But it was far more than that because we used to travel, we took that band into communities. So there was *Pat Carney*, who was a major leader in this country for a number of years in the *Mulroney* Government and she was the

third clarinet player in the concert band. So, when she visited communities, Native communities, she was exposed, through music, through her music and so were all those other people. *Angus Payton* was a tuba player in the band, he was the bank manager for the "Bank of Commerce" or one of the major banks in Yellowknife. Those people were very, very important adults that were supporting. When the high school music program needed support, in some way, like attendance and audiences and that sort of thing, all of a sudden, oh yeah, it all links together. They're going to come to the concerts, they're going to support financially. That's how you build a cultural matrix that bridges all of culture in a place like Yellowknife. That was just the instrumental side of it, the other side was the choral side. We had a group called "The Singing North," that did "Messiah" performances, full "Messiah's", with soloists and everything and they were coming out of the woodwork. That wasn't as connected to the indigenous people as I wanted it to be but still, it was on the periphery and there were some that were dipping in. As I say, *Sarah Jerome*, she was open minded at the time and was moved to greater understanding of what that art form was about. When we built NACC, "Northern Arts and Cultural Centre," there were lots of connections that were developing there because I ... at that time in 1980 ... whenever NACC was built, 1978 or 9, I think it was in the '80's. It was in the '80's, 1981. That was when I was ... that drew in the entire country because the funding came from every province in the country, through *Roy McGarry*, from the Globe and Mail. That's where the money came from and locally, there were local things.

When we opened NACC, *Peter Gzowski* was the ... flew in for the ... and opera singers and people who were very excited about finally a theater in the only capital city in the country that didn't have one, that was *Roy McGarry's* vision. So it's a ... it was a time, in those years, when visions were being realized. In this day and age, in this country, a lot of visions just get shelved and put on a shelf. You write a report and it goes somewhere, it's never actualized. In those years, things were getting done, there was progress being made, in bridging as I say and creating this matrix of understanding of the cultural dynamics of the North. I haven't been back, so I don't know ... I don't fully understand what's going on there now but in those years, that was important, that was really important. Laid down in the minds and hearts of a lot of people, native and white. It was very exciting times and you know it because you've never left the North.

MMS - You were instrumental in, without a doubt in sort of what this next question is but I guess in your time up North, the changes were happening very fast... What changes did you see and experience, sort of locally and northerly and on a northern basis in probably different areas that would have an influence on the development of what you're talking about, economical, political and cultural?

RM - So that also is an interesting question, and I remember the moment when ... actually it was later in that time but it all built from the earlier years and the understanding in the school music program but also in the community. But again, I go back to the Toronto Symphony trip and because all of the building blocks, all those building blocks had been put in place, when the symphony arrived in Yellowknife and Inuvik, in 1987, in the country because it was a very public and well publicized trip. My sense was, that in ... down on Bay Street, "Massey Hall," people knew about Inuvik, more than they ever did. "Inuvik, where's that?" You know? These are people that have a history of being immigrants who had come in to Toronto, from lots of different places in the world. And the influence of the development in that very fast time, through the '70's, late '60's and in through the '70's and '80's, so I would say til about mid-'80's which is about when I was beginning to pull away from the... come further south. But there was more of an awareness of the far North. It became ... the North was built on resource development, gold and now diamonds. But, I'd like to think, that it was also built on more of an understanding of what the cultural dynamics were, in Inuvik and Holman Island and Coppermine. Those places are romantic Canadian iconic centers, in my view. They're worth visiting because they just are. Anybody can get on a plane and fly to

Regina or Vancouver but the truly frontieristic travelers will go to Bathurst Inlet and Inuvik. Walk down the streets of Inuvik, even today. What you're going to see and feel and understand is, the cold, you're going to understand the struggle that indigenous people have had over thousands of years, still live there and they don't want to leave, that's their home. That's the same as ... their home that people that live in North York.

I always ... when I came back, after living in the North, the great joke was when I was out socially with friends out in Toronto is, "Oh yeah, we're going to go up north this weekend." Well, up North to a guy, to a family that lives in Rexdale, is Barrie. It's not ... and even the odd, real adventurous person from downtown will say "Oh yeah, they'll go to North Bay or even Temagami", Lake Temagami. That's still, Southern Ontario, in the comparison to what Coppermine is. That's the far north, that's the 40 below zero, for six months place, where you don't go cross country skiing, if it's colder than 25 below zero because you can't. See, I've experienced stepping off a Twin Otter in Fort McPherson at 56 below zero and trying to walk 200 meters in that and you can't do it. So, how do those people, over the centuries ... there's a reason why they were able to succeed and survive that. The reason is, intellect. Intellect. They figured it out, just like we all are trying to figure out in our own ways in our societies, how to make our way in the world, they did. Same as the Egyptians did, same as the Muslims in Syria or anywhere else. Those places are unforgivable environments to a human being but somehow, they survive it. The layer, of just putting arts on top of it, just enriches that experience and it did in those years. It's ... I've forgotten your question, initially now.

MMS - Changes. Changes that economically, culturally, politically.

RM - Exactly and I would say it had an impact on all of those things because more people in powerful positions became more aware of what Inuvik was or Yellowknife was. It was important to do that because they're not isolated places, they are part of Canada, all of them, in every way. Whether we like it or not, they're still ancestors of 5000 years, still living in Holman Island and they're not going to leave, they're not going to leave. I know that, it's ... they're going to go about their day the way their ancestors did, to some extent. There's still influences, we introduced them to sugar and so on and a diet that is harming them and other kinds of cultural things, like television sets and stuff like that. So, some of those skills are lost but, by and large, I believe the cultural norms are ... they're not going to change. It's like a Chinese person who's grown up in China all his life and now living on Bay Street in Toronto. They're still Chinese, there's a good part of them. I'm Irish and that's probably fourth generation Irish living here and I still have a yearning to go back to Ireland. I don't know why, but I do. Same kind of cultural thing. So, I think the influences were strong there, and as you say, it's because everything is moving so fast, in those years.