

# “HERE COMES THE BAND!”:

## *Cultural Collaboration, Connective Traditions, and Aboriginal Brass Bands on British Columbia’s North Coast, 1875–1964\**

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SUSAN NEYLAN, WITH MELISSA MEYER

### MOMENT ONE: SUSAN NEYLAN

In 2002, I visited Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands) for the first time. I was eager to see the new poles recently raised at Skidegate (in the summer of 2001) and the Haida-run museum at Kaay Innagaay. Along with a bit of natural history, the museum features, of course, Haida material culture. One room in particular is filled with historical pieces that most visitors associate with Haida artistic styles – poles, bentwood boxes, elaborately carved argillite. However, in the corner of this room, hanging on the wall, there are also two rather well-worn, obviously well-loved tubas and a big drum. Accompanying these is a photograph of the Skidegate marching brass band. The caption reads: “The band had won three competitions on the mainland in 1910, 1911, and 1912. The cup, brought home with the band after that third win, is now located in the Skidegate Band Office.”<sup>1</sup> Nearly a hundred years since being won in the battle of the Aboriginal brass bands, the trophy is still held in high esteem by the village, and the inclusion of mementos of the brass band in their local museum suggests that the Haida value this musical past as cultural history.

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\* Hartley Bay resident Simon Reece told us that when he was young, children who heard the village band strike up a tune used to call out: “Here comes the band ... and the marriage,” referring to one of its most common public performative duties, which was to play at weddings (Margaret [née Clifton] and Simon Reece, interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Hartley Bay, 18 July 2003). Portions of this article were presented at the BC Studies Conference, Vancouver, British Columbia, 2 May 2003; and the Annual General Meeting of the American Society of Ethnohistory, Chicago, Illinois, 29 October 2004. Financial assistance has been provided by a standard research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The methodology was approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University Ethics Review Board.

<sup>1</sup> Kaay Innagaay Heritage Centre and Museum, Skidegate, British Columbia.

## MOMENT TWO: MELISSA MEYER

My auntie Muriel told me a story about my grandfather Paul Price, who had played in the Port Simpson Band for years. It was during the years of the potlatch ban and she was getting her Indian name. She was only five years old, and she remembers standing in the hall on an Indian blanket and that my grandfather was there in his band uniform. It makes you think of how the uniforms were used and remember that, like traditional regalia, they were valuable and indicative of one's prestige and high status. Because the potlatch ban also prohibited wearing "traditional costume," and gave colonial authorities the power to seize such regalia, it was a way that community members could appear in a type of regalia without risking going to jail. Several people we interviewed also mentioned that band uniforms were called regalia.

## INTRODUCTION

**N**UMEROUS VILLAGES on the north coast of British Columbia, along the Nass and Skeena rivers, and, by the early twentieth century, on Haida Gwaii, had at least one concert band, and some had several. A few have survived to this day, representing century-old traditions in their respective villages. Historically, these bands ranged considerably in form and function, from extracurricular school bands, to full-blown uniformed marching bands representing an entire village, to Salvation Army bands, and, by the 1950s and 1960s, to dance orchestras and jazz ensembles that played not only on land but also on cannery-operated ships and coastal fleets. Band members were skilled performers who regularly welcomed visiting dignitaries and competed for prizes. Performers spent considerable sums to purchase their brass instruments, while a few musicians even made their own. This collaborative ethnohistorical study of the understudied phenomenon of Aboriginal brass bands on the north coast, especially among the Tsimshian, demonstrates how older cultural identities and practices persist in new forms, including those outwardly associated with assimilationist policies, mission life, and colonialism.

The textual records on Aboriginal bands are scant, yet provocative. Missionary publications, reports, and letters from the field, local newspaper articles, or the minute books kept by some of the bands themselves reveal how Aboriginal social, political, and cultural interests were served and advanced through musical performance. We learn that the bands played a full range of sacred and secular pieces, and even



Figure 1: Skidegate's brass band "on the march" in the early twentieth century. Perhaps among its members pictured here are the same players who won three consecutive music competitions against rival Aboriginal brass bands in Prince Rupert in 1910, 1911, and 1912. British Columbia Archives photograph no. H-07293.

some Aboriginal compositions, at varied venues within the region and beyond. Local newspaper stories indicate the frequency with which contemporary observers recognized band members as gifted musicians and regularly called upon them to welcome visiting officials. In pursuing textual sources, however, photographs, such as the one on the wall of the cultural centre and museum at Kaay Ilnagaay, catch one's eye.

Photographs of Aboriginal brass bands abound in archival collections and mission publications: some of them are formal band portraits, others are more candid shots of the bands on the march, receiving visiting officials,

or playing at weddings. This legacy added to the overall popularity and proliferation of Aboriginal brass bands before the Second World War. Struck by the compelling photos of the bands, historians have identified over thirty-six different groups in the province between 1864 and the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Family members cherish images of their relatives in old albums or on display in their homes – framed memories that tie them directly to this musical past. Oral records reinforce the importance of such connections and provide a rich historical source (more complete than textual ones) on the scope of this musical movement among Aboriginal peoples.<sup>3</sup> Over a dozen of these brass bands originated in the north coast area among the Haida, Tsimshian, Nisga'a, Haisla, and Heiltsuk, or inland among the Gitksan. Bands came from the villages of Metlakatla, Kincolith, Port Simpson (“Nelson’s cornet band”), Masset, Skidegate, Greenville, Claxton, Aiyansh, Kitamaat, Kitsumkalum, Kitkatla, Kitwanga (“Totem Pole Brass Band”), and Canyon City.

This article highlights a few of these bands and performance occasions, primarily examining how Aboriginal musical participation was viewed by Natives (in their villages and “on the road”) but also looking at what non-Natives thought of it. The textual, pictorial/artefactual, and, especially, oral records reveal how Tsimshian social, political, and cultural needs were served through musical performance. Viewing brass bands within their historical and relational contexts, the authors find that these bands facilitated continuity with existing Aboriginal cultural traditions and modes of identification. At the community level, band membership and the types of local service provided by the bands highlight the complexity of maintaining and adapting cultural practices in light of the rapid change and repression brought about by the Aboriginal-European encounter. These Aboriginal musical groups acted, in effect, as a connective institution that intertwined family, community, and culture.

Aboriginal brass bands were cultural collaborations; they were one of the ways in which Aboriginal culture adopted and adapted colonial forms to create new kinds of performative expressions. Such collaboration allowed them to work within and against the unequal power dynamic that characterized the Native-Newcomer relationship under

<sup>2</sup> David Mattison, “On the March: Indian Brass Bands, 1866-1916,” *British Columbia Historical News* 15, 1 (1981): 14. His list of thirty-three bands was duplicated and modified to include a total of thirty-six in Dale McIntosh, *History of Music in British Columbia, 1850-1950* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1989), 43, 49.

<sup>3</sup> This article draws on approximately twenty interviews conducted at the primarily Tsimshian communities of Kitselas, Kitsumkalum, Prince Rupert, Hartley Bay, and Lax Kw'alaams/Port Simpson in July and August 2003. Melissa and I remain grateful to all participants for their time and stories.

colonialism. Outwardly, the bands appear simply to be capitulations to colonial endeavours – vivid symbols of “civilized” activities and replacements for old forms of entertainment. But in reality they are much more complex cultural forms, proof of neither assimilation nor acculturation. For one thing, the bands permitted the engagement of age-old Tsimshian customs of public performance, travel, competition, and corporate identity within a “modern” context. For another, they facilitated new ways for chiefly, village, or tribal groups to demonstrate material wealth and to garner economic gain.<sup>4</sup> Given what we now understand about the nature of First Nations resistance to colonialist practices, the bands can also be understood as one of the vehicles by which Aboriginal peoples staged performative protests against assimilationist programs, positioned the social group ahead of the individual, and publicly reasserted their rights to autonomy and self-government through repeated interactions with government and Crown officials.<sup>5</sup>

Aboriginal resistance to colonialism has long been a major focus in the historiography of Native-Newcomer encounters. Only recently have scholars begun to develop more sophisticated interpretations, whereby definitions of such resistance involve acceptance as well as rejection, change as well as continuity, and adaptation to as well as appropriation of colonial cultures.<sup>6</sup> Opportunities for performance were embraced by First Nations as forums within which to express precisely this kind of multifaceted response to the colonial process. As several historians have demonstrated for the case of Aboriginal participation in royal visits, while on public speaking tours at home and abroad, and during tercentenary celebrations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Canada, Aboriginal people were simultaneously integral to, yet separate from, public ceremonies – “sometimes cast in their roles by the white elites that organized events, and sometimes thrusting themselves forward on the

<sup>4</sup> For examples of the complexities of ethnic, social, and ceremonial relations among the Tsimshian, see Louis Allaire’s analysis of recorded Tsimshian oral traditions. Louis Allaire, “A Native Mental Map of Coast Tsimshian Villages,” in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past; Views for the Present*, ed. Margaret Seguin (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993 [1984]), 82–98.

<sup>5</sup> Specific examples of this process in performances from the BC Northwest Coast that did not include brass bands include those mentioned by Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005); and Susan Roy, “Performing Musqueam Culture and History at British Columbia’s 1966 Centennial Celebrations,” *BC Studies* 135 (2002): 55–90.

<sup>6</sup> The historical literature is far too comprehensive to list here, but it was already well established when Kerry Abel and Ken Coates explored the state of the field. Kerry Abel, “Tangled, Lost, and Bitter? Current Directions in the Writing of Native History in Canada,” *Acadiensis* 26, 1 (1996): 92–101; Ken Coates, “Writing First Nations into Canadian History: A Review of Recent Scholarly Works,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 1 (2000): 99–114.

scene.”<sup>7</sup> As Paige Raibmon illustrates in her analysis of Kwakwaka’wakw participation at the Chicago World’s Fair, their performances served more than *one* agenda as the performers were motivated by the ability to earn money, to exercise cultural and social prerogatives, and to flaunt the assimilationist model being pushed by Canadian government officials.<sup>8</sup> In comparable situations on British Columbia’s north coast, when the members of Aboriginal brass bands – although not always dressed up as the “imagined Indian” – played the parts of entertainer, ambassador, and role model before non-Aboriginal audiences, were they not also pursuing similar goals?

In his wide-ranging discussion of the practice of modern ethnography among twentieth-century indigenous peoples, James Clifford asks, “what if identity is conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject?”<sup>9</sup> Identities created and transmitted by musical performers were one such “nexus.” Self-representation balanced audience expectations for “Indians on the stage.” Meaning and motive were negotiated and renegotiated through performance. As Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson argue for the case of Mohawk writer and performer E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), such interactions enabled Aboriginal people to “talk back” to the dominant culture.<sup>10</sup> Without doubt, Tsimshian musical groups and those of their neighbours on the north coast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century “spoke back” to colonialism through concerts and band competitions. In any analysis of phenomena such as brass bands, the *context* of musical performance on British Columbia’s north coast must be a key consideration. In other words, we should reflect not only on who was playing and who was listening but

<sup>7</sup> Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 206–41; Wade Henry, “Imagining the Great White Mother and Great King: Aboriginal Tradition and Royal Representation in the ‘Great Pow-wow’ of 1901,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 11 (2000): 87–108; Cecilia Morgan, “A Wigwam to Westminster: Performing Mohawk Identity in Imperial Britain, 1890s–1990s,” *Gender and History* 15, 2 (2003): 319–41; and H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 164–97. Quotation is from Radforth, *Royal Spectacle*, 216.

<sup>8</sup> Paige Raibmon, “Theatres of Contact: The Kwakwaka’wakw Meet Colonialism in British Columbia and at the Chicago World’s Fair,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 3 (2000): 157–90; and Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 15–73.

<sup>9</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 344. My thanks to John Troutman for reminding me of Clifford’s discussion in a footnote. John Troutman, “‘Indian Blues’: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1890–1935” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2004), 415.

<sup>10</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson, *Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 3.

also on why this was the case. A common refrain heard over the course of conducting our interviews was that we can better appreciate these musical groups when we view them as institutions that connect family, community, and culture – a relational identity in the most literal sense: that of one’s lineage. Thus, one level of band performances was not intended for the colonial audience at all. Our discussions with former and current band members and their families illuminated the continued relevance of bands as cultural institutions with long histories of serving their communities.<sup>11</sup> Understanding the history of brass bands, therefore, captures a sense of Tsimshian identities between the mid-1870s and the 1960s and, perhaps more significantly, provides insights into the process of identification itself.<sup>12</sup>

#### WHY BRASS BANDS? THE ROOTS OF MUSIC

Interest in Aboriginal brass bands among academics remains underdeveloped, in contrast to the enthusiasm and interest they arouse in Aboriginal individuals when brought up in conversation. Scholarly investigations of Aboriginal music have been confined mainly to lyrical and notational analyses and have almost universally ignored (post)colonial forms like brass bands.<sup>13</sup> Recently, this has begun to change. New studies pay attention to the performative contexts: for example, studies of musical forms as they occur in their specific reservation/reserve and pow-wow environments, and studies that pay attention to the politics of music, focusing on dancing, singing, and playing as a means by which Aboriginal peoples negotiate and challenge lines of identity and citizenship.<sup>14</sup> Our approach follows the latter trend. As Philip Deloria reminds us in his discussion of related phenomena

<sup>11</sup> At the same time, our conversations hinted at the impact of expectations regarding “authentic” Native traditions – expectations that have diminished some of the earlier feelings about brass bands as indigenous institutions. Not only do these musical expressions continue to struggle to survive in the face of mass media and pop music, but now they must also face the resurgence of dance and drum troupes in contemporary villages.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the utility of “identification” rather than “identity” as an analytical framework, see Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 14–7.

<sup>13</sup> For a fuller discussion of historiographic trends in writing about Native American music, see Troutman, “Indian Blues,” 8–15.

<sup>14</sup> For examples of recent contextual studies that do not ignore recent musical traditions, see Troutman, “Indian Blues”; Tara Browner, *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance in the Northern Pow Wow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Luke Lassiter, Clyde Ellis, and Ralph Kotay, *The Jesus Road: Kiowas, Christianity, and Indian Hymns* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); and Clyde Ellis, *A Dancing People: Powwow Culture on the Southern Plains* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

in the United States, “if music was intimately involved in the setting and selling of expectations of Indianness, Native American people were involved in recording, contesting, affirming, transforming, controlling, and performing those expectations in critical ways.”<sup>15</sup> Aboriginal brass bands were neither “traditional” Aboriginals dressed up so that missionaries and government officials missed who they really were nor simply imposed colonial forms created to replace existing performative traditions.

Aboriginal cultures of the Northwest Coast cultural region have long valued music. Singing greeted the first European ships that showed up on the coast, and music has, since contact, played a major part in both secular entertainments and sacred rituals. Northwest Coast peoples traditionally engaged in performance and historically spent considerable portions of each year involved with private and public ceremonial activities. Feasting and potlatching occupied much of the winter season up and down the north coast. Diverse manifestations of music, drama, and art played a huge role in the entertainments and ceremonies that accompanied these activities.<sup>16</sup> To this day, chiefly displays of wealth or power, theatrical entertainments, and travel to other villages (as representatives of kin, house, or village) remain characteristics of most BC Aboriginal coastal groups.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, one of the first attractions of Euro-Canadian-style musical groups – featuring expensive instruments, distinctive regalia, exclusive opportunities for material gain (e.g., monetary prizes, trophies, and medals) and the exercise of political status (e.g., when welcoming foreign dignitaries) – must have been that they were new “spins” on familiar practices.

Tsimshian music came with powerful spiritual associations. Songs, for example, were often gifted from supernatural sources to signify the witnessing of spiritual transformations, or they were ways of gaining access to power or maintaining communication with non-human helpers. Several of the dancing societies originated among the Tsimshian’s southern neighbours, suggesting a pre-existing tradition of

<sup>15</sup> Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 188.

<sup>16</sup> Viola Garfield explains the interconnection of music, song, and drama for Tsimshian people: “Ancient legends, visitations of tutelary spirits, and current happenings were reenacted for the glorification of chiefs and their lineages, for the spiritual benefit of individuals and for the pleasure and instruction of spectators.” See Viola E. Garfield, “The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors,” in *The Tsimshian and Their Arts*, ed. Viola E. Garfield and Paul S. Wingert (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 56. See also Jay Miller, “Feasting with the Southern Tsimshian,” in Seguin, *The Tsimshian*, 27–39.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher F. Roth, “Goods, Names, and Selves: Rethinking the Tsimshian Potlatch,” *American Ethnologist* 29, 1 (2002): 123–50.



receiving musical forms from external human donors rather than just supernatural ones.<sup>18</sup> While music retained many of its sacred connections after the arrival of Europeans, the musical associations of the European religions brought new opportunities. In this respect, Aboriginal brass bands on the north coast have developed a strong and enduring historical connection to Protestant mission work. As the *Vancouver Province* observed in the 1950s, First Nations “chose their religion by the noise they made.”<sup>19</sup>

Music was and is a key element in Christian rituals, and it is an attractive one for many Aboriginal converts. Music remains a major expression of Christian faith, whether as an integral part of early conversions and revivalistic activity or as a form of regular worship among stable church congregations. It is not surprising that many missions had choirs and brass bands that played an active role in the Christianization process.<sup>20</sup> Based on his experiences at the Tsimshian village of Metlakatla, the Anglican lay missionary William Duncan included the introduction of “brass bands and other forms of music” as part of his twenty-part plan for successfully running a mission.<sup>21</sup> Metlakatla’s band was reputedly the first in the region, soon to be followed by others established in nearly every village with a missionary presence.<sup>22</sup> Brass bands occasionally played in Christian services. Musicians who

<sup>18</sup> Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture: A Light through the Ages* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 3, 12; and Susan Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 41, 190.

<sup>19</sup> Ann Garret, “They Chose a Religion by the Noise It Made,” *Vancouver Province*, 6 December 1958.

<sup>20</sup> In the nineteenth-century mission era, Tsimshian missionary Reverend William Henry Pierce once declared, “If I have, say a fine good singer with me, in a little time we shall have revival amongst the tribes, both inland and coast.” See William Henry Pierce, typescript of letter to Reverend F.C. Stephenson (Toronto), 26 September 1913, Port Essington, BC, Methodist Church of Canada, Methodist Church Missionary Society, Board of Home Missions, Home Department Records, Accession no. 78.099C, box 8, file 10, 1906-16, United Church Archives, Toronto.

<sup>21</sup> William Duncan, “Plan for Conducting, Christianizing and Civilizing Missions on the North Pacific Coast by Mr. William Duncan based on his own experience, 3 March 1887,” in Henry S. Wellcome, *The Story of Metlakatla* (New York: Saxon and Co., 1887), app., 379-80.

<sup>22</sup> Duncan procured a donation of instruments sometime in 1875 or 1876, although when the Metlakatlans took them up is less clear. Anglican missionary Reverend W.H. Collison indicated in his memoirs that the instruments were hanging in Duncan’s office until 1897, at which time a band instructor was hired to teach them how to play. See William Henry Collison, *In the Wake of the War Canoe: A Stirring Record of Forty Years’ Successful Labour, Peril, and Adventure amongst the Savage Indian Tribes of the Pacific Coast, and the Piratical, Head-Hunting Haida of the Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia*, edited by Charles Lillard (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1981 [1915]), 179.

developed their abilities in these groups regularly assumed the role of choir leader or played the organ in community churches.<sup>23</sup>

Another direct link between Christian organizations and brass bands had to do with the fact that musical education was part of the curriculum at residential schools.. This proved significant to the later appeal and dissemination of the bands. Music instruction was long remembered by students “as a haven in an inhospitable academic landscape” – a landscape that otherwise robbed Aboriginal children of their freedom of expression and their identities.<sup>24</sup> From playing in brass bands and cadet corps to Christmas pageants and children’s choirs, exposure to “music with bright tunes and improving sentiments” had been intended to inculcate Aboriginal students into “the Canadian way.”<sup>25</sup> Although both male and female students played in school bands (some of the female bands included New Metlakatla’s Girls’ Zobo Band, Sechelt’s All Girl Fife and Drum Band, and the kilted Girls’ Pipe Band from Williams Lake), boys were especially encouraged to take up brass instruments.<sup>26</sup> Music was a *re-creation*, not simply recreation, and it was designed to impart regulation, order, and “civilized” behaviour among students.<sup>27</sup> Several of our interviewees mentioned learning to play instruments or to read music while attending residential schools, where attempts to instill “rational” leisure activities were part of the schools’ assimilationist agenda.

On this point, musical education at Aboriginal residential schools in Canada had something in common with popular music trends within the British Empire and elsewhere. The nineteenth-century “brass bands

<sup>23</sup> Methodist missionary Thomas Crosby’s published memoirs featured a late nineteenth-century photograph of the “Carol Singers” on the steps of Port Simpson’s Methodist Church, revealing the use of brass instruments alongside the vocalists. Apparently, such traditions have continued. Contemporary village residents Gloria and Harvey Russell shared fond memories of a special night, known as “Organ Echo,” held at Grace United Church in Port Simpson, featuring the village’s brass band performance. See Thomas Crosby, *Up and Down the North Coast by Canoe and Mission Ship* (Toronto: Methodist Mission Rooms for the Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, Young People’s Forward Movement, 1914), 72; Gloria and Harvey Russell Sr., interviewed by Susan Neylan and Caroline Dudoward-Garay, 21 August 2003.

<sup>24</sup> J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 179.

<sup>25</sup> John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), 35, 37.

<sup>26</sup> One Oblate teacher in the 1960s declared: “Teach a boy to blow a horn – he’ll never blow a safe.” See Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision*, 282–3. Information about girls’ bands found in New, “Indian Concert Bands,” 28–9. The often reproduced photo of the Girl’s Zobo Band is from the Sir Henry S. Wellcome Collection, NARA Pacific Alaska Region, Anchorage, Alaska (Collection WME). See also Phylis Bowman, *Metlakatla: The Holy City* (Chilliwack: Sunrise Printing, 1983), 145.

<sup>27</sup> Milloy, *A National Crime*, 37.

movement” in Great Britain, according to historian Trevor Herbert, was characterized by the proliferation of bands, especially among the working classes (after the 1850s) and by their function of creating a “common territory between the classes.”<sup>28</sup> He writes, “many bands owe their origins to religious and moral movements whose ideals found easy accord with those of the rational recreationists. Playing in a brass band was an improving activity that supposedly kept its [working-class] members away from public houses and other centres of corruption.”<sup>29</sup> The middle-class movement to influence the “moral” leisure activities of the working classes was readily embraced by working people as *their* musical tradition. Missionaries acting with similar paternalistic intent introduced brass bands to Aboriginal peoples, and, as with the English workers, their Aboriginal charges integrated brass bands into their own cultural traditions. In Australia and the United States, as in Canada, musical education in Native boarding and residential schools spawned adult brass band movements.<sup>30</sup> In Mexico, by 1900, nearly every Native “village had at least one brass band as a central part of community ceremonial life,” which historian Guy Thomson insists “cannot be seen as simply or even primarily a consequence of the pursuit of European tastes, musical standards and urbanity.”<sup>31</sup> Precolonial musical forms endured through Mexico’s brass bands. Where they functioned as modernizing institutions, they still remained under Native control and served the ceremonial and political needs of Native villages.<sup>32</sup> In light of these wider patterns, our example of brass bands on British Columbia Northwest Coast does not appear to be unique. Brass band music was intended to inculcate civility and modernity among subordinated populations, be they defined according to class categories or racial categories. Yet,

<sup>28</sup> Trevor Herbert, “Introduction,” in *Bands: The Brass Band Movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Trevor Herbert (Buckingham and Bristol: Open University Press, 1991), 8.

<sup>29</sup> Trevor Herbert, “Nineteenth-Century Bands: The Making of a Movement,” in Herbert, *Bands*, 46.

<sup>30</sup> Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 207. Elverina Johnson curated a museum exhibit and later created a musical story produced by the Queensland Arts Council on the history of brass bands of Yarrabah and Mona Mona. See, for example, “Yarrabah to Host Indigenous Brass Band Exhibition,” 21 January 2003, Australian Broadcasting Corporation website at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200301/s766757.htm> (viewed 7 October 2005). See also Johnson’s curriculum materials for “Blow ‘Im,” an indigenous history and music experience for elementary-aged Australian students, Queensland Arts Council website at: <http://www.qac.org.au/htm/blowim04.asp> (viewed 7 October 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Guy P. C. Thomson, “The Ceremonial and Political Roles of Village Bands, 1846–1974,” in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 317.

<sup>32</sup> Thomson, “Roles of Village Bands,” 309, 325, 336–7.

Aboriginal players also reinvented those forms to serve their own cultural needs and religious expressions.

For the Tsimshian, who had begun to add Christianity to their spiritual identities after the mid-nineteenth century, one religious group that was particularly associated with brass bands was the Salvation Army. This Christian movement, which had been founded on the streets of industrial London and which used music to fight sin and poverty, arrived on British Columbia's north coast in the 1890s. Key characteristics of the Salvation Army, which did not always have a full range of band instruments, included the use of military uniforms, flags, drums, and lively music. First exposed to this appealing form of Christianity in Victoria in the late 1880s, the Tsimshian took it northward, where they operated their own versions of the Salvation Army for nearly a decade before the London-based Army was shamed into opening an "official" mission among them.<sup>33</sup> The musical tactics of the Salvation Army may have augmented the existing passion for music among First Nations of the coast. Indications of this appeared in local newspaper stories. According to a Prince Rupert newspaper account in 1911, for example, the Skidegate Brass Band started when a Haida saw a Salvation Army drum arrive, noted the firm that had delivered it, and wrote for a catalogue – certainly a credible narrative given the history of the Army in the region.<sup>34</sup> Other denominations responded to the Salvation Army's success in converting Tsimshian peoples by introducing their own organizations, all of which prominently featured music: the Anglicans with the Church Army and the Methodists with the Band of Christian Workers and the Epworth League. Missionaries introduced Western musical forms to both children (in day and residential schools) and adults as part of daily life at mission towns. They encouraged music not only as a form of Christian worship but also as an acceptable leisure activity. Indeed, missionaries hoped that, under their guidance, during the winter months band music would be effective in keeping the men at home practising and away from pursuits that harkened back to pre-Christian times. First Nations, who had long had a passion for music (consider, for example, the importance of singing and dancing during the winter feasting season) likely viewed musical expression as both familiar and appealing.

The playing of music had a seasonal rhythm that was similar to that of the "traditional" feasting season. Band members were among those

<sup>33</sup> Neylan, *Heavens Are Changing*, 61-3.

<sup>34</sup> "Seven Highly Efficient Native Indian Brass Bands," *Evening Empire* (Prince Rupert), 25 May 1911.



Figure 2: Bella Coola (Nuxalk) Band departing Rivers Inlet. According to our interviews, similar traditions of “playing people off” to their home villages after work at the Lowe Inlet and Rivers Inlet canneries was practised by the Kitkatla and Hartley Bay brass bands. Vancouver Public Library photograph no. 8497.

who migrated each summer to the salmon canneries, where bands were used to signify the solidarity of Aboriginal workers. Tsimshian fishers were leaders in the union movement among BC Aboriginals and, accordingly, their brass bands often appeared at marches, rallies, parades, and during strikes. In the summer of 1900, workers in the fishing industry along the Fraser River went on strike. The Port Simpson Brass Band led the parade and played at the 15 July rally in Vancouver.<sup>35</sup> It also travelled to Nanaimo to raise funds for the striking fishers. There, the band’s reputation as a symbol of “working-class” culture would have been very apparent to the local coal miners, who all had brass bands of their own.<sup>36</sup> Closer to home, on the mid- and north coasts, Aboriginal

<sup>35</sup> James A. McDonald, “Images of the Nineteenth-Century Economy of the Tsimshian,” in Seguin, *The Tsimshian*, 53; and Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Labour in British Columbia, 1858-1930* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1996), 204.

<sup>36</sup> Brass bands in Nanaimo, Cumberland, South Wellington, and Ladysmith were composed largely of coal miners. See Mattison, “On the March,” 42.

workers from Kitamaat and Hartley Bay, who headed home from Lowe Inlet and Rivers Inlet after the close of the 1901 cannery season, were accompanied by the Kitkatla Brass Band, which played for each group upon its arrival home and which gave concerts at the villages along the way.<sup>37</sup> When interviewed, Chief Johnny Clifton confirmed that this cannery-related practice became an established tradition for the Hartley Bay Band (established in 1904) later in the century.<sup>38</sup> Regular practice resumed after the fishing season, and the entertainment that the bands provided brightened up the long, rainy winters when people returned to their home villages. Port Essington's Tsimshian missionary, Reverend William Henry Pierce, declared in the early twentieth century that, in mid-winter, "without the brass band, our village would seem dead. They really play very nicely, and their music is much enjoyed by both whites and natives."<sup>39</sup> In several villages, practice halls and bandstands were permanent fixtures, and people clearly took pride in being band members, even if they were involved in organizations such as fire companies, which had not been created with music in mind. Indeed, the Reverend George Henry Raley lamented that Kitamaat's fire company had its own brass band even before it had pails, ladders, ropes, and axes.<sup>40</sup>

In this highly musical atmosphere, a number of impressive Aboriginal soloists and bandmasters emerged, although non-Aboriginal outsiders were also commonly hired as instructors. Tsimshian Job Nelson was a remarkable musician and bandmaster who, from the late nineteenth century until his death in 1928 at age seventy, performed multiple roles. He was, at various times, responsible for leading bands at Metlakatla, Port Simpson, Aiyansh, and New Metlakatla (in Alaska).<sup>41</sup> Besides being a player and a teacher, he also wrote music, notably the "Imperial Native March" (published in 1907 by Whaley-Royce of Toronto). This piece was played by Aiyansh's brass band at the New Westminster Exhibition in 1905, where it was "highly praised by the Royal Irish

<sup>37</sup> [G. H. Raley], "The Kitkahtlah Band," *Na Na Kwa or Dawn on the Northwest Coast*, no. 16 (October 1901), 5. The *Na Na Kwa* was a publication started and predominantly authored by Methodist missionary George Henry Raley in Kitamaat and in its final year, in Port Simpson, between 1898 and 1907 mainly to describe community affairs and to promote support for mission work in the region.

<sup>38</sup> Johnny Clifton ('Wah'modm), interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Hartley Bay, 19 July 2003. Ken Campbell writes that the Hartley Bay Cornet Band was first established in 1904. See Ken Campbell, "Hartley Bay, British Columbia: A History," in Seguin, *The Tsimshian*, 20.

<sup>39</sup> W.H. Pierce, "Letter on the Port Essington Indian Mission, 28 January 1915," *Western Methodist Recorder* 14, 8 (1915): 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Na Na Kwa*, no. 4 (October 1898), 6-7; and *Na Na Kwa*, no. 8 (October 1899), 7.

<sup>41</sup> McIntosh, *History of Music in British Columbia*, 45.

Guards Bands.<sup>42</sup> Job Nelson also composed pieces for particular villages. At the New Westminster Exhibition, the Aiyansh band had also performed a march, entitled simply “Aiyansh,” that Nelson had written for the village during his tenure as its band instructor.<sup>43</sup> Nelson also wrote at least two pieces for Hartley Bay – the “Promise Island Waltz” and the “Antifreeze March.” The “Antifreeze March” was designed to be played outdoors in cold weather because it required only limited use of the valves on the instruments.<sup>44</sup> While Nelson’s talents as a composer were exceptional, other Aboriginal composers also emerged to produce original pieces or to adapt compositions to full band formats.<sup>45</sup>

It is perhaps worth noting here that some individuals played many different instruments, even crafting their own. Speaking of her father David Mason’s extraordinary musical abilities, Kitselas resident Lorna Johnson reminisced about the many homemade instruments he used, ranging from handcrafted pieces made with combs, saws, chimney parts, and pot lids to the flute-like harmonicas carved out of local wood. These instruments stood alongside others of more conventional make – such as the piano, the guitar, the ukulele, the banjo, the trumpet, and (his favourite) the saxophone – that her father also played.<sup>46</sup> Home-fashioned instruments definitely harkened back to older traditions of musical entertainments, though Mason’s embrace of foreign-produced objects was commonplace in the experience of many Aboriginal people. Reconciling a delight for musical performance with the adoption of new technologies denotes creative collaboration with, and within, colonial formats.

The joy of musical performance and self-taught musicians prompted the sorts of spontaneous musical gatherings remembered by the daughter of a missionary at Kispiox and Port Simpson. According to Margaret Booth (née Sansum), Sunday evenings in the early twentieth century were for socializing. Typical of this tradition were the informal sing-song nights at the mission house accompanied by the brass instruments that Aboriginal

<sup>42</sup> Brian Stride, “Aboriginal Brass Band Contest: Dominion Exhibition, 1905, New Westminster, British Columbia” Available at: [http://lmbb.vabbs.org/aborgina\\_brass\\_band\\_contest.php](http://lmbb.vabbs.org/aborgina_brass_band_contest.php) (updated 8 September 2004; viewed 18 October 2004); and T.V. Anslöcker, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Empire* (Prince Rupert), 6 June 1908, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> McIntosh, *History of Music in British Columbia*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> Helen (née Robinson) and Johnny Clifton, interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Hartley Bay, 19 July 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Several interviewees commented on the talents of Aboriginal musicians who adapted printed musical scores for use by different instruments, often copying out the parts by hand. Johnny Clifton shared with us one such booklet, which had once belonged to the Hartley Bay Marching Band and contained examples of this as well as original compositions by Job Nelson that were created just for the village.

<sup>46</sup> Lorna Johnson, interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Kitselas, 15 July 2003.

people brought along.<sup>47</sup> Then there is the experience of Reverend Robert Clyde Scott, who, working in the 1920s and 1930s aboard the United Church mission boat the *Thomas Crosby III*, logged accounts of the many impromptu musical evenings sparked when he brought out his guitar and was joined by local residents playing violins, mandolins, or other instruments.<sup>48</sup> Residents of Hartley Bay also fondly recalled musically talented mission boat workers who relished the opportunities to “jam” with Aboriginal players.<sup>49</sup> Growing up in Port Essington, Tsimshian Norman Brooks remembers with fondness the informal musical groups: “a group of individuals gathered together to have a fun night,” “to break the monotony,” and to simply have a “social gathering.” He went on to explain: “I think that it was really important for a small community to communicate in those days ... and have fun. It was real lots of fun.”<sup>50</sup>

The more formal brass bands, however, were part of the colonialist modification and reformulation of pre-existing social functions such as potlatching, a Northwest Coast practice that was banned from the 1880s to 1951. Observing the effects of the revisions of and adaptations to potlatching among the Tsimshian during the period of its official ban, anthropologist Viola Garfield noted the emergence of new social groups whose membership was based on alignments that were neither family- nor clan-centred.<sup>51</sup> At Port Simpson/Lax Kw’alaams, by the late nineteenth century two fraternal orders, the Firemen and the Soldiers, not only had roles similar to those traditionally performed by lineages but each group also had its own uniformed band. These bands, Garfield observes, were “prominent in New Year’s celebrations, funerals and on other occasions when display was in order. A chief was their leader and bandmaster.”<sup>52</sup> Garfield explains that, during her fieldwork at Port Simpson in the 1930s, in addition to the musical groups of the fraternal orders, the Tsimshian community also had a town band, a dance orchestra, and a small choir: “The Port Simpson [town] band is called upon to provide music for funerals and members are paid by

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Booth (néé Sansum), interviewed by Margaret Whitehead, 6 December 1980, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), tape 3866, no. 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Scott spoke of the music he played at both Native and non-Native ports of call up and down the BC coast. See Robert Scott Clyde, “Logbook of the *Thomas Crosby III*” (United Church), 1924-28, 1929-30, BCA MS-1299, box 2, file 4.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret (néé Clifton) and Simon Reece, interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Hartley Bay, 18 July 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Norman Brooks, interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Kitsumkalum, 15 July 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Viola E. Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society* (University of Washington Publications in Anthropology 7, no. 3, 1939), 319.

<sup>52</sup> Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 319.



the relatives of the deceased, as though they belonged to the paternal lineage of the deceased. [Moreover] the band members have contributed [funds] to help pay for the funeral expenses of a few of their members.”<sup>53</sup> Playing at funerals remains a duty for existing bands today. We were reminded by several of our interviewees that Tsimshian bands were integral to all sorts of local ceremonies, including, for example, the “opening of the lights” celebration, as Hartley Bay residents like to refer to the inauguration of their self-financed power plant in 1928. On this occasion, the Hartley Bay Concert Band was joined by Haisla First Nation players from Kitamaat who come to help celebrate the event.<sup>54</sup> A recent study by Ken Campbell finds that, throughout the twentieth century, Tsimshian bands and choirs travelled to other communities as part of a religious celebration called *diyya melsk*.<sup>55</sup>

The above examples suggest ways in which certain traditional Tsimshian functions were transposed onto brass bands in ways that were quite different from what had been intended by the missionaries when they first introduced them. Brass bands and other (post)colonial musical forms, it seems clear, could serve to integrate people with, rather than to distance them from, their cultural practices.

While undoubtedly an example of musical entertainment, the involvement of brass bands in intertribal gatherings that coincided with wage labour opportunities (notably the multitribal gatherings at canneries every summer) suggests that band music also became a feature of potlatches, a characteristic that harkens back to Melissa’s story about her grandfather in his band uniform at a potlatch. In 1900, Methodist missionaries who accompanied their Kitamaat congregations to the coastal salmon canneries observed that brass bands performed at a number of feasts attended by upwards of five hundred Natives from several different tribes.<sup>56</sup> In 1945, Tsimshian ethnographer William Beynon observed that potlatching among the Gitksan even featured musical instruments distributed as gifts and that bugles and trumpets were

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>54</sup> Margaret (née Clifton) and Simon Reece, interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Hartley Bay, 18 July 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Ken Campbell, *Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts’msyen Nation* (Prince Rupert: Tsimshian Nation and School District 52, 2005), 187.

<sup>56</sup> [G.H. Raley], “Rivers Inlet Notes,” *Na Na Kwa*, no. 12 (October 1900): 5. While the author of the article indicates that the occasion being celebrated at Rivers Inlet was 1 July, it is not necessarily removed from the potlatch functions that coincided with the gathering of many groups during the fishing season. This “feast on a very extensive scale” was “given by the Bella Bellas [Heiltsuk] to the Kitamaats in the house of Chief Poutlass.”

used to call events to order.<sup>57</sup> These examples of how brass bands were integrated into older Aboriginal ceremonies points to a kind of cultural collaboration that stands quite apart from “resistance” to colonialism. Consider that band members were village representatives (in many cases they were hereditary chiefs) who, as clan and house representatives, reinforced the traditional ceremonial system by attending potlatch events that required their presence as both witnesses and participants. Hence, bands were valued because they were part of maintaining and adapting older cultural institutions that were crucial to the cultural and socio-economic survival of Northwest Coast First Nations.

#### WELCOMING BRASS, TRAVELLING AFAR, AND WINNING ROYAL AFFIRMATION

In his doctoral study of Aboriginal music, dance, and performance in the United States, John Troutman concludes that Native American “musical troupes, jazz and marching bands, string quartets and other outfits” that travelled throughout the United States between the 1880s and the 1930s were, in effect, “innovative, modern expressions of Indian identity.”<sup>58</sup> “Road weary bands and native celebrities,” he argues, “presented tribal, ethnic, racial, and musical identities that complicated and often contradicted the public’s assumptions of Indianness and the assimilative goals of the OIA [Office of Indian Affairs].”<sup>59</sup> Troutman’s research demonstrates the frequency with which Native American musical performances became occasions on which Aboriginal players confronted non-Aboriginal audiences about “Indian” stereotypes. With their boarding school educations, these seemingly “assimilated” Native musicians frequently appeared on stage as testaments to the cultural survival of their peoples. They often wore “traditional costumes” and, in addition to playing instruments, gave lectures about their people’s culture and history. Native performers also used such opportunities to publicly criticize American federal Indian policies, which involved termination and assimilation.

This experience was not unique to the United States. In her analysis of Aboriginal visitors to Great Britain in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Cecilia Morgan concludes that, “while there was much that was formulaic and stereotyped about these displays, much

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Anderson and Marjorie Halpin, eds. *Potlatch at Gitsegukla: William Beynon’s 1945 Field Notebooks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 113, 131, 133, 152-3, 167, 181.

<sup>58</sup> Troutman, “Indian Blues,” 25, 7.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.



Figure 3: This photograph shows the Kincolith delegation awaiting their meeting with commissioners for the McKenna-McBride Commission in 1915. Note the member still dressed in his band uniform. The caption reads: “Chief Paul Klayter, Chief Councillor Robinson, Council and Ven. Archdeacon Collinson.” British Columbia Archives photograph no. H-07284.

that reinforced the British public’s notions of Aboriginal peoples and played into imperial fantasies and desires, their performances were not homogenous or completely formulaic.<sup>60</sup> In British Columbia, Aboriginal brass bands travelled for ceremonial purposes. On these occasions, along with the speeches, costumes worn by hereditary chiefs and other band members conveyed messages about modern Aboriginal identity and cultural survival. The band uniforms may not have conformed to the non-Aboriginal image of a “traditional Indian costume,” and they may have been taken as markers of assimilation, but their authority as one kind of Aboriginal regalia stemmed from the context within which they were worn. A good example of this is the frequency with which government commissions were greeted by brass bands, at which the assertion of Aboriginal rights formed a substantial portion of the oral exchange that followed the musical greetings. When the McKenna-McBride Commission (1913-16) visited the north coast, the Metlakatla, Kincolith, and Aiyansh bands played for the commissioners. At least one

<sup>60</sup> Cecilia Morgan, “A Wigwam to Westminster: Performing Mohawk Identity in Imperial Britain, 1890s-1990s,” *Gender and History* 15, 2 (2003): 320.

photographic record survives of the 1915 Kincolith delegation (comprised of Nisga'a chiefs and councillors dressed in Western attire, with one member still wearing his band uniform) awaiting its meeting with the members of the McKenna-McBride Commission.<sup>61</sup>

The Port Simpson Concert Band travelled early and travelled far. It was the "first Indian band to be heard in Seattle," when it played at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in 1909.<sup>62</sup> Reportedly, Prince Rupert town boosters – the Prince Rupert Publicity Club – sent a contingent of approximately three hundred city representatives to attend the fair's "Prince Rupert Day."<sup>63</sup> Among them was the Port Simpson Brass Band, which played at several venues in Seattle, including fair parades and dances. According to the *Seattle Times*, "The Port Simpson Indian Band ... gave a concert yesterday afternoon that delighted the large crowd and whetted the public appetite for more of their music."<sup>64</sup> Success was no stranger to this band as it had won a number of similar accolades for its high profile performances. In 1900, it won the Dominion Day prize in Vancouver; in 1901, it entertained visiting royalty, the duke and duchess of Cornwall and York (the future King George V and Queen Mary); and in 1905, it won a six-hundred-dollar purse in a competition involving twelve Aboriginal bands at the Dominion Exhibition in New Westminster. The Port Simpson Band performed for Governor General Earl Grey in 1906, for Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier in 1910, and for the duke and duchess of Connaught at Prince Rupert in 1912.<sup>65</sup> This band was not unique, however; north coast bands routinely played for visiting politicians, royalty, naval admirals, bishops, and Department of Indian Affairs officials.<sup>66</sup>

In the heyday of the brass bands, from the 1880s to the interwar decades, Aboriginal communities made significant investments of time and financial resources to support community brass bands. While the belief that band uniforms were gifted by impressed audiences or mission supporters still circulates, many bands and their supporters paid considerable sums of their own money to purchase music and instruments and to outfit their players. In a property-conscious society, expenditures

<sup>61</sup> Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia (McKenna McBride Commission) Naas Agency, Testimonies (1915), 23, 50, 134, 158.

<sup>62</sup> "Feast of Music Offered at the Fair," *Seattle Times*, 6 September 1909.

<sup>63</sup> Prince Rupert Day had to be moved from 4 September to 6 September owing to the late arrival of the steamship carrying many of its citizens into Seattle. See *Evening Empire* (Prince Rupert) 21 August 1909, 9; 4 September 1909, 6; and 11 September 1909, 8. See also *Seattle Times* 3, 5, and 6 September 1909; and *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, 5 September 1909.

<sup>64</sup> "Prince Rupert Visitors Celebrate at the Fair," *Seattle Times*, 6 September 1909.

<sup>65</sup> *The Empire* (Prince Rupert), 21 August 1909, 6; Mattison, "On the March," 12; Leslie H. Drew, "Indian Concert Bands," *The Beaver* 51, no. 1 (Summer 1971), 27.

<sup>66</sup> Mattison, "On the March," 6-14.

on these new technologies were also statements of wealth. Whether paid for by the players themselves through funds raised collectively by the whole community or by gifts from non-Aboriginal missionaries, the instruments and uniforms were valuable property. Given that Aboriginal communities at this time were not fully within the cash economy, and that cash could be both scarce and difficult to accumulate at certain times of the year, the real “cost” to them was much greater than what is indicated by the dollar value of their expenditures.<sup>67</sup> In 1880, Kincolith raised six hundred dollars to engage a band master, the equivalent of more than a year’s salary for the average labourer, skilled tradesperson, or domestic.<sup>68</sup> The Reverend George Raley reported that the Port Simpson Boys’ Home got its drum and fife band in 1907 from private subscriptions and the efforts of the students themselves, who made and sold “Indian curios” to raise the money.<sup>69</sup> In 1912, the Metlakatla band spent sixteen hundred dollars to purchase brand new silver-plated instruments just in time to play for the visiting duke and duchess of Connaught.<sup>70</sup> Good-looking uniforms were a source of pride and represented substantial financial investment, as evidenced by the scandal that resulted when four Kitamaat band uniforms were slashed while their owners played a game of baseball. The damage done to the

<sup>67</sup> “Most Aboriginal people lacked a single source of income upon which they could rely. They consequently spun themselves an economic safety net by moving between seasonal occupations” and between subsistence and wage labour activities. See Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 98. Moreover, when cash was available through participation in the seasonal wage labour economy, considerable sums were earmarked for potlatching and thus may not have been available for musical needs. See John Lutz, “After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Labouring Classes of British Columbia, 1849-1890,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 3, 1 (1992): 88-90.

<sup>68</sup> Drew, “Indian Concert Bands,” 27; McIntosh, *History of Music in British Columbia*, 45. For a sense of the “cost” of this expense, in the City of Victoria in 1889, a lumberman made approximately \$40 per month, including board; a female domestic, \$12 per month, including board; and a farm labourer, \$20 per month, including board. Accounting for the seasonality of many of these jobs, to engage a bandmaster for \$600 was the equivalent of several years’ worth of wages in any one of these occupations. See M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley, eds. *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), table series D 196-207, p. 95. In his appendix, John Lutz includes a table for average rates of pay for the 1880s, indicating general labourers could expect \$1.75 to \$2.00 per day, while skilled tradespeople received \$3.50 to \$4.00 per day. Given the seasonal nature of Aboriginal employment, with these rates it took considerable effort to put aside sums of money for brass band related purchases. See Lutz, “After the Fur Trade,” app. 2, 93.

<sup>69</sup> G.H. Raley, *Na Na Kwa*, no. 31 (May 1907): 12.

<sup>70</sup> *Daily News* (Prince Rupert), 15 August 1912, 1. Another way of interpreting this expense is to consider the average hourly wages of tradespersons in Vancouver. In 1912, carpenters, electricians, and plumbers in Vancouver made between \$22 and \$27 per week, while labourers made approximately \$19 per week. Few Aboriginal persons would have had access to this type of employment within their home territories, so they relied on seasonal wage labour opportunities instead. See Urquhart and Buckley, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, table series D 40-59 and D 60-63, pp. 87-8.



Figure 4: In 1912 Metlakatla's silver band had just spent \$1,600 for new instruments. The archway was designed as a welcome for the visit of the governor general and his wife, the duke and duchess of Connaught, to Prince Rupert. British Columbia Archives photograph no. G-04174.

uniforms, which were reportedly worth thirty-two dollars a piece (or the equivalent of two weeks' wages in 1916) was considerable.<sup>71</sup> The local newspaper reported that the man who had been accused (but acquitted) of the crime had been motivated by jealousy.<sup>72</sup>

Uniforms were usually considered snappy military attire – sometimes literally, as was the case with Metlakatla's first band, which purchased old US military uniforms, an ironic instance of cultural appropriation on the part of the “colonized.”<sup>73</sup> On occasion, however, band uniforms were uniquely Aboriginal in style. In 1890, six Roman Catholic Aboriginal brass bands and choirs took part in the opening ceremonies for a new church in Sechelt. The Lillooet Brass Band wore “buckskin suits ... gaily decked with bright colored flowers.”<sup>74</sup> When the New Metlakatla Concert Band played Seattle's Grand Theater in 1904, it did so in “Native

<sup>71</sup> Wage comparison from Urquhart and Buckley, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, table series D 40-59 and D 60-63, pp. 87-8.

<sup>72</sup> *Evening Empire* (Prince Rupert), 23 September 1916, 1; 25 September 1916, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Mattison, “On the March,” 8.

<sup>74</sup> *Daily World* (Vancouver), 4 June 1890, 3, quoted in Mattison, “On the March,” 10.



Figure 5: Nelson's cornet band from Port Simpson, circa September or October 1901. These are the uniforms they wore when they met the duke and duchess of Cornwall and York in Vancouver. Members' names – courtesy of Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 191 – are: front row (l-r) George Kelly, Henry Nelson; second row (l-r): Donald Wallace, Heber Douglas, Andrew McKay, Philip Green, Mark Green, Albert Wellington; third row (l-r): Moses Scott (with bow), Johnny Nelson, James Henry, Issac Shepard, Dwyer Green, Sam [Henry?]; fourth row (l-r) Charles Pierce (holding drum), Henry Swanson, William Pollard, John Sankey, Johnny Tait, David Swanson, Charles Wesley; back row (l-r): Joseph Bradley, Eliza Pollard, Henry Bradley, Ambrose Reid. Royal British Columbia Museum photograph no. 9331

costume” – cloaks, blankets, and hats painted with Tsimshian designs. According to one newspaper account, the band members appeared “quite the wild Indian[s] in their barbaric splendor.”<sup>75</sup> When the Port Simpson Band participated in the Vancouver ceremonies to greet visiting royalty and Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier in 1901, they were “arrayed in the full glory of their war costume, bedecked with feathers and painted with enlivening hues.”<sup>76</sup> Instead of wearing their usual red and gold military-style uniforms, the band wore smocks with Northwest Coast designs painted by a celebrated Tsimshian-Iroquois artist, Frederick Alexcee.

<sup>75</sup> “Story of Metlakahtla – How a Race of Savages Was Christianized,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 13 November 1904.

<sup>76</sup> *Daily World* (Vancouver), 1 October 1901, 5.

Each man had a *liu* (cedar ring) around his neck, an adornment usually worn only within traditional ceremonial contexts to signify that the wearer was an initiate or a member of a secret society. Band members had a personal audience with the visiting dignitaries. Tsimshian chiefs presented the duchess with a chief's headdress (*ambalaayt*), making her an honorary matriarch of the nation.<sup>77</sup> It was all good fun, according to the *Vancouver Daily World*: "One of the ladies of the Royal party was taking a photograph of the Port Simpson Indians, and she laughed heartily when one of the Indian lads stepped forward and snap-shotted her in return."<sup>78</sup> But perhaps the man had turned the tables to make a point about being an object of photography, an irony overlooked by the newspaper reporter. Earlier, Chief Henry Nelson had worn the *ambalaayt* for the group's formal photograph in Vancouver, exercising his hereditary prerogatives and demonstrating his status. Many of the newspaper headlines remarked on the loyalty and enthusiasm displayed by Aboriginal band members.<sup>79</sup> Reading between the lines, however, band members, hereditary chiefs among them, appeared to be acting as representatives of autonomous First Nations, and their private audience with royalty and other dignitaries affirmed the continuing relationship of First Nations with the Crown.

Over the years, the subject of the continuing relationship of the Tsimshian with the Crown has woven its way into a persistent community memory about band uniforms. A number of Tsimshian related to us a story about how they received their "colours." Uniform colours were rigorously guarded – owned, in a sense. They were seen by their uniform owners, such as Melissa's grandfather Paul Price, as earned prerogatives to be proudly displayed at public opportunities that affirmed their ownership,

<sup>77</sup> For a detailed description of the gift of the "Kiti-um-Shamorgat," or Hat of Chiefs, which had been won by Chief Henry Nelson earlier in the week, see *Daily Province* (Vancouver), 3 October 1901, 1.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> The Tsimshian group was one of two Aboriginal bands – the other being the Coast Salish "Squamish Band" from North Vancouver – to be listed as musical entertainment on the City of Vancouver's official program for the visit. However, Nelson's cornet band also played at this event, attracting, according to the newspaper press, much interest from the royal party for its members, talents and attire. One of the interesting outcomes of this visit to Vancouver was Chief Henry Nelson's encounter with the commander of the Canadian Militia, Lord Dundonald. Impressed by the band's performance, Dundonald apparently sent Nelson a set of bagpipes. The Port Simpson women of the Ginadoix tribe often provided entertainment at feasts, appearing as the "Scotch women," speaking with Scottish accents and dressed in tartan – perhaps they used these same bagpipes (Ken Campbell, personal communication, July 2004). Viola Garfield lists these modern organizations that performed at feasts, naming the Scotch women, the Russian women, the Boston women, the Hagwilget women, the Japanese women, and the Warrior women. See Garfield, *Tsimshian Clan and Society*, 321-2.



as was the case with the traditional regalia of the past. Among musicians at Kitkatla and Port Simpson, claims that visiting royalty, including Queen Victoria, bestowed upon the bands their colours, ran through our interviews. Queen Victoria never visited British Columbia and had died before the alleged gift of the uniforms occurred. But such facts are irrelevant if we understand this story as social memory. What counts is the meaning that such stories ascribe to the royal sanction of the brass bands. For Aboriginal peoples of British Columbia, most of whom never had the opportunity to sign treaties with the Crown, their historical connection to the Crown as autonomous, self-governing nations remains, to this a day, a significant one. The fact that several governors general (the Crown's representative in Canada) and the children and grandchildren of Queen Victoria heard the bands play – and on state occasions delivered gifts to Aboriginal communities in the presence of the bands – affirms a kind of royal sanction of the musical groups. The exchange of symbols of authority, like the chief's frontlet from Chief Nelson to a future queen of England in 1901, or the gift of an autographed photo of King George V to the Kitkatla band later in the century, should not be underestimated.<sup>80</sup> This Crown recognition had deep political importance at a time when BC coastal First Nations were struggling under colonialism to assert their rights to land and to resources.<sup>81</sup> The brass bands were part of the performative context that allowed First Nations to assert their position. In other words, it was their music, not merely the chief's welcomes and speeches, that “talked back” to colonial officials.

That Aboriginal communities had a deep vested interest in bands is evident in how they viewed band property. Port Simpson band uniforms and instruments were communally owned. As Sharon Bryant explained, the uniforms “belonged to the band. It was the community that did the fundraising for the band and so ... they weren't taken as personal possession ... It was passed down, and you'll see old names in the uniforms that these younger generation are wearing now. So it just gets passed, it gets returned after member dies ... or they retire.”<sup>82</sup> This corporate ownership of band property sets some Aboriginal bands apart from their non-Aboriginal counterparts in the region. The Port

<sup>80</sup> Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 189–91.

<sup>81</sup> Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002); Dianne Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal People and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849–1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990).

<sup>82</sup> Sharon Bryant (néé Henry), interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Kitsumkalum, 16 July 2003.

Simpson band's rigorous record-keeping, which persists to this day, demonstrates a sense of accountability to the community.<sup>83</sup> It also reveals the significant contributions women made towards the success of the band.<sup>84</sup> Without the fund-raising expertise of Tsimshian women, there would have been no travel to competitions, no state visits, no money to purchase music, uniforms, or instruments. Along the Nass River, the Greenville Concert Band, which typically fronted between fifty and sixty players in the 1950s (surely most of the adult male population of this Nisga'a village), was deemed a community institution. Financially supported by the village, the band, as Johnson Russ told anthropologist Philip Drucker in the mid-twentieth century, "belong[ed] to the village." The concert arrangements and travel had to be approved by the village committee. Russ added that, of all the social organizations in contemporary Greenville, the "band counts as [the] most important society."<sup>85</sup> In many north coast village groups, male hereditary chiefs acting as band leaders extended their traditional leadership roles and maintained old social structures within these outwardly new cultural forms. The notion of communal property, the presence of consecutive generations of players, and the hereditary nature of positions within the band all point to distinctly Aboriginal characteristics.

Trophy cups, medals, and badges expressed the same kind of pride and political value as did band uniforms and instruments. The accomplishments and recognition of competitive performance were cherished, as the opening vignette about the Skidegate Haida's cup illustrates. An even more dramatic illustration is provided by the Tsimshian village of Greenville. In 1933, when fire destroyed the Greenville Concert Band's trophies, the organizers immediately replaced, at great cost, the cups won at the annual Prince Rupert competitions in 1914, 1920, and 1921.<sup>86</sup> The commemorative badges and medals awarded to individual band members have always been held in high esteem by their owners. Skidegate cornet player Arthur Moody received a gold watch and medal from the governor general of Canada in recognition of his musical and conducting

<sup>83</sup> Over the course of our interviews with Port Simpson band members and their families in 2003, we were shown several volumes of the band's minute books, which contained an unbroken record of its activities dating back to the late nineteenth century. The books remain in the possession of active band members.

<sup>84</sup> Gloria Russell (né Henry), interviewed by Susan Neylan and Caroline Dudoward-Garay, 21 August 2003. Until recently, women did not themselves play in the band, although marching majorettes have accompanied some Port Simpson Band performances for decades.

<sup>85</sup> Philip Drucker, from *Field Notebooks, 1935-55*, Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives (MS-4516). Copies in the BCA, Add MSS 0870, box 1, pt. 2 (vol. 3: *British Columbia Notebooks* [1953]).

<sup>86</sup> "Indian Band Orders Cups," *Daily News* (Prince Rupert), 20 September 1922, 6.

abilities.<sup>87</sup> When attending the Prince Rupert Seafest celebration in the mid-1980s, Port Simpson band member Charlie Henry wore both the medal that his father, James Henry, had been awarded while performing in the band in 1912 and a medal celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of his own membership (1934–84).<sup>88</sup> Such ongoing connections to local brass bands link past and present players in a cultural continuum.

Competition was long part of Tsimshian musical traditions (as it was among many of their Aboriginal neighbours). Song battles regulated by formal rules and feasting protocols frequently took place between rivals. These were held in public settings to allow for full witnessing of the contest's outcome.<sup>89</sup> In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, music competitions appear to have provided performative ways to continue old rivalries, usually between villages, and they undoubtedly served to reinforce individual status. Beginning in the 1910s, competitions between Aboriginal brass bands were a regular and colourful feature at Prince Rupert's Victoria Day (known at the time as Empire Day) and Dominion Day celebrations, and, from 1913 to the mid-1940s, at the annual Northern Agricultural Fair. Local newspaper reports of competitions often included vivid descriptions of which bands came, what they did, what they looked like, and what music they played. In the 1911 Empire Day competition, much of it held on the Prince Rupert wharf, seven Aboriginal bands competed with Skidegate, who took top prize for the second year in a row. Interestingly enough, the next year, the Haida showed up to play only to discover that the Empire Day competition had been cancelled. Accordingly, they claimed the cup by default, agreeing to play a challenge match later in the year when the governor general was due to visit.<sup>90</sup> Overcoming the original slight, winning the trophy for the third time, and thus earning the right to a permanent claim on it, the Skidegate Haida still display this piece in their band office.

The band competitions also cemented relations between the largest town in the northern region, Prince Rupert, and the area's Aboriginal people. In city papers such as the *Daily News* and the *Evening Empire*, reporters frequently remarked upon the unexpectedly good and musically ambitious nature of the bands' efforts. Sometimes they resorted to the inversion of popular stereotypes of the "savage Indian" to make

<sup>87</sup> Drew, "Indian Concert Bands," 28.

<sup>88</sup> Sharon Bryant (née Henry), interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Kitsumkalum, 16 July 2003. Sharon's great-grandfather was James Henry, the conductor and band leader of the Port Simpson Concert Band and owner of the 1912 medal. Her grandfather, Charlie Henry, took over from his father as leader and band member for over fifty years.

<sup>89</sup> Garfield, "Tsimshian and Their Neighbours," 57.

<sup>90</sup> *Evening Empire* (Prince Rupert), 25 May 1912, 4.

their point: The “terror of the coast,” who, in bygone years, had arrived in “war canoes ... lusting for blood” now arrived in “smartly dressed uniforms bedecked with gold braid; Armed ... not with ... club and scalping knife, but with musical instruments.”<sup>91</sup> Most articles, however, conveyed a sense of genuine regard for the musical talents of visiting Aboriginal bands – a blurring of identities that other scholars have reported as being characteristic of Aboriginal performances.<sup>92</sup>

Beyond a doubt the musical ability of the BC Coast Indians native to the districts about Prince Rupert is one of the most interesting and admirable surprises of the whole district for the newcomer ... [The Aboriginal groups are] proficient musicians ... with proved qualities as good sports willing to contest musical events together and to win or lose band trophies with the utmost self control whether in victory or disappointment and they are exceedingly willing to entertain.<sup>93</sup>

As well, the non-Aboriginal townspeople viewed Aboriginal bands as loyal representatives of their communities and families: “They came among us well dressed, well behaved, full of loyalty and showing every evidence of quick adaptation to civilized methods,” quipped the Prince Rupert *Evening Empire*.<sup>94</sup> Both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals framed the bands’ presence as demonstrating loyalty (e.g., by attending Empire Day and/or Dominion Day and by participating in annual fairs). The Aiyansh councillors who accompanied the “Naas Indian Band” to celebrate Empire Day in 1911 were quoted as saying, “We don’t spend our time and money in Prince Rupert to compete for a prize ... but to show our loyalty to King and country.”<sup>95</sup> Northwest Coast peoples continued to assert themselves as sovereign peoples at public events, ironically honouring the British Crown and Canadian nation even as these powers denied them such status.

#### OUT OF THE CHURCH, ONTO THE STREET, AND INTO THE DANCE HALL: THE LEGACIES

Musical forms certainly wound their way out of the church and into the dance hall. Through the interwar period into the postwar decades of the 1950s and 1960s, dance orchestras proliferated in the villages – for

<sup>91</sup> *Daily News* (Prince Rupert), 25 May 1911, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Strong-Boag and Gerson, *Paddling Her Own Canoe*, 4, 12.

<sup>93</sup> *Evening Empire* (Prince Rupert), 3 October 1914, 2.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 May 1911, 1.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 May 1911, 2.

some, continuing the tradition of playing music long after the marching bands had disappeared. Travel remained an important part of the life of these smaller groups. From Native musical ensembles such as Stewart's Orchestra of Kincolith or the seven-piece dance orchestra under Port Essington's Louis Starr (who often played for Prince Rupert dances in the 1930s) to postwar groups such as the Super-Dupers (Hartley Bay), Chester Bolton's Band (Kitkatla), Morris Morrison's Orchestra (Port Simpson), and the Hartley Bay Five, popular music was definitely part of Aboriginal musicians' repertoires. The Hartley Bay Five was, in its day, the best known band on the north coast, in part because, from 1954 to 1964, it played every New Year's Eve at Prince Rupert's Bluebird Ball. Band members Fred Bolton, Reggie Mason, Johnny Clifton, and Steve and Charlie Robinson performed jazz tunes for dances at Hartley Bay and at other coastal communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, located as far away as Vancouver Island. They practised where they could, and this was especially difficult during the busy fishing season. Johnny Clifton remarked how they often got "gigs" after being heard in rather unlikely places (e.g., they were once hired to play at a wedding after they had been heard practising on a fishing boat).<sup>96</sup> A player of country, rhythm, and bee-bop in the early 1960s, Norman Brooks recalls that, when he worked at Cassiar cannery in 1958, dance bands flourished as weekend entertainment across the north coast region:

People used to come in [to Cassiar] by trainloads ... from as far as [the] Hazelton area and ... bring their instruments with them. They'd be practicing, ready to go, you know, [on] weekends. Used to be just crowds of people outside, listening to the rock'n'roll bands getting warmed up for the season, [to] go play for dances and stuff.<sup>97</sup>

He remembers that those "just-for-fun" jam-sessions brought families and community together.

The connection between playing in a band and kinship ties was an especially strong theme for those families with multigenerational legacies as performers in the brass bands.<sup>98</sup> As long-time Port Simpson Concert

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<sup>96</sup> Johnny Clifton, a hereditary chief, was the sole surviving member of the Hartley Bay Five when we spoke with him in July 2003. Unfortunately, he has since died. Johnny Clifton, interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Hartley Bay, 19 July 2003.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Norman Brooks, interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Kitsumkalum, 15 July 2003.

<sup>98</sup> In the case of the Russell family, at the time of our interview in 2003, four generations (Solomon Spense, Harvey Russell, Sr., Harvey Russell, Jr., and his twelve-year-old son) were members of the Port Simpson Concert Band, although the eldest no longer played. All had, at one point or another, played solo cornet.



Figure 6: Port Simpson's brass band circa 1960, wearing their distinctive red and gold uniforms, the colours reportedly bestowed upon the group by the Crown's representatives. Among them are relatives of many of the people to whom we spoke over the course of our interviews. Members are: front row (l-r) Henry Kelly, James Spense, James Henry, Johnny Tait, Paul Scott, Simon Auckland; back row (l-r) William Cooper, Andrew Tait, George Green, band manager [unknown], Charles Henry, George Wesley, Solomon Spense. Royal British Columbia Museum, Kate Ryan Collection, photograph no. 22368.

Band player, Harvey Russell Sr., summed it up for us: "It's mainly all like a family band."<sup>99</sup> His wife, Gloria Russell, elaborated, speaking about the difficulties they experience in maintaining the band tradition in the face of twenty-first-century life: "Right now our younger people, band players have moved away for work and it's not easy to get them together. But ... they do make an effort to get here for special occasions. Some just come in for a few hours, and they're gone. And they have jobs and they have families."<sup>100</sup> And yet, the Prince Rupert band managed to hold a twenty-five-year reunion for band members in Prince Rupert in 2003, and several of the present members have expressed the hope of winning the opportunity to play at the 2010 Olympics to be held in

<sup>99</sup> Harvey Russell Sr., interviewed by Susan Neylan and Caroline Dudoward-Garay, 21 August 2003.

<sup>100</sup> Gloria Russell (née Henry), interviewed by Susan Neylan and Caroline Dudoward-Garay, 21 August 2003.

Vancouver – demonstrating that many of the forms and functions of this century-old institution continue.

#### AND THE BANDS PLAY ON

Today, the long history of brass bands on British Columbia's north coast is not widely known or understood. While communities such as Skidegate publicly display battered tubas and drums in their museums, others keep their band instruments out of sight.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, all communities with a history of bands seem to have kept some of the old instruments, trophies, and uniforms. But in the current climate, which emphasizes the advance of Aboriginal rights in legal and political forums, brass bands may not be the vehicle through which they want or need to express their "tradition." Several people told us that the younger generation prefers dance and drum troupes as signifiers of their Aboriginality – and rightly so. But for many, the historical connection to brass bands as a form of cultural collaboration remains strong, especially as part of their family history. The resonance of this fascinating musical history may be seen in a declaration as public as that of the Port Simpson band marching down the streets of Prince Rupert during Seafest or in an emotional connection as intimate as that felt for a single instrument by the daughter of its owner. While discussing Aboriginal bands, Tsimshian Lorna Johnson showed us her most prized possession – the violin her deceased father had fashioned himself. "Every now and then I ... take it out and look at it," she told us. "I don't play instruments, [but] when I get lonesome for him I always take it out."<sup>102</sup>

Aboriginal cultural traditions under colonialism always reflect a lived history, including the vast array of creative responses to change brought about through the arrival and presence of Euro-Canadians. It is important to look at the cultural continuities that make Northwest Coast Aboriginals the peoples they are. We should also identify emergent cultural forms, like Aboriginal brass bands, in order to recognize the enduring vibrancy of these adaptive cultures under, and even in spite of, colonialism. By considering Aboriginal brass bands' activities as "real" cultural performances, their meanings become more than simply expressions of public Aboriginal identities. Brass bands tell us about the modes of Aboriginal identification within a colonial world. Scholars

<sup>101</sup> In contrast to the Skidegate museum's display of tubas and a big drum, the brass instruments once used by the Port Essington Marching Band remain tucked away in a storage room in the community hall at Kitsumkalum.

<sup>102</sup> Lorna Johnson, interviewed by Susan Neylan and Melissa Meyer at Kitselas, 15 July 2003.

should resist the temptation to essentialize cultural boundaries according to colonial binaries – traditional/modern, colonized/colonizer, authentic/inauthentic, civilized/uncivilized – dichotomies that inevitably paint postcontact Aboriginal culture as diminished and inauthentic.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, Aboriginal “performances” – whether “playing Indians” or playing instruments – may be one realm in which the complexities of colonialism are most apparent. Relational identities, different messages offered to different audiences, and multiple levels of meanings for player and listener alike all served to problematize culture change in a productive way. They illustrate how Aboriginal peoples collaborated as they resisted, changed cultural forms as they preserved their cherished traditions, and transformed new ways by navigating them according to the old.

Our ethnohistorical research into Northwest Coast Aboriginal brass bands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrates how older cultural identities and practices persist in new forms, including those outwardly associated with assimilationist policies, mission life, and colonialism. At the community level, brass band membership and the service the bands performed locally at weddings, funerals, and dances reveal that these institutions were “traditional,” yet adapted, forms. Bands enabled First Nations to represent themselves either as loyal allies of the British Crown or as working-class members of a union movement. Travel, public performance, music, and special regalia have long characterized Northwest Coast peoples’ ritual and social lives. Since the late nineteenth century, the adoption of brass instruments and fancy band uniforms, originating in Christian missions, has represented new kinds of property and wealth. Furthermore, the bands were a venue within which to compete with old rivals, to reassert sovereignty before representatives of the British Crown, or to just have fun. The bands facilitated the exercise of chiefly prerogatives and corporate identity and bound community and family together. Although really a musical form of another era, a few of these brass bands (or versions thereof) remain today; indeed, several individuals expressed the hope that, with the installation of music programs in village schools, community musicians would again emerge to take up the tradition so that the bands might play on.

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<sup>103</sup> This rejection of simplistic binary notions of authenticity underlies Raibmon’s work and is graphically summarized in Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 7.