Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MA (University of Bristol, 2009)
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“Music and Sonic Space in Victoria, B.C., 1871–1886: The Creation of British Identity in a Canadian Frontier Town”

School of Music

Monday, December 12, 2016
1:00 p.m.
David Turpin Building
Room A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Michelle Fillion, School of Music, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Susan Lewis, School of Music, UVic (Member)
Dr. Wendy Wickwire, School of Environmental Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. David Gramit, Department of Music, University of Alberta

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Adrienne Williams Boyarin, Department of English, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

In the process of carving a new England out of the southern end of Vancouver Island in the later nineteenth century, the population of Victoria, BC sought to forge a British identity for themselves through music and its associated rituals. They did this through the pursuit of purposeful acts of cultural meaning. In the social sphere, concerts, parades, religious services, and theatrical productions heightened and inspired loyalty to Mother England. Victoria’s upper classes could then dominate by excluding those people—including Jewish, Chinese, Indigenous, African-American, and Hawaiian residents—who did not conform to that identity. In late-nineteenth-century Victoria, music became more than just a way to celebrate, worship, and recreate; it defined social life for British and non-British peoples alike and shaped the physical space in which they lived.

This dissertation explores late nineteenth-century Victoria’s creation of a British identity through music. Ensuring that their churches had a powerful organ and talented organists, Victoria’s religious community proved that they could undertake Britain’s highest social point of sacred musical performance: the choral festival. Positioning George Frideric Handel’s *Messiah*—with its strong connotations of Britain and her Empire—as their showstopper, these choral festivals served to cement relationships between those citizens who considered themselves British, while also proclaiming this identity as a mark of superiority to the community at large.

Itinerant opera troupes further strengthened these imperial bonds by importing European and British opera to Victoria. Through the performances of these professional travelling musicians, Victorian Victorians were able to experience high art and popular operatic music of the Western world, joining the particularly British *Pinafore* and *Mikado* crazes of the 1870s and 1880s. These itinerant singers thoroughly impressed local musicians, who avidly tried to reproduce what they had heard, first in instrumental overtures and medleys in the 1860s and 1870s, then with vocal and instrumental operatic numbers in miscellany concerts in the 1870s and 1880s, and finally with full operatic productions in the 1880s and beyond. As with choral festivals in the religious sphere, taking part in opera productions also helped to create a shared sense of British identity among Victoria’s upper classes, during a time when other defining factors of social placement were not yet secure.

Settlers in Victoria removed the Indigenous and natural impediments to the construction of their new metropolis, in effect silencing their cultural “voice.” Besides the Indigenous peoples of Vancouver Island, other recent settlers posed challenges to British hegemony, especially Chinese immigrants and “coloured” people of African origin, many of whom came from the United States. Even the gender demographics in the male-dominated frontier society posed challenges to the civilizing process. The Jews of Victoria, the majority of whom were of German or English origin, present an ambiguous case of a cultural and religious community at the crossroads in mid-nineteenth-century Victoria. The butt of rising anti-Semitism in continental Europe, Victoria’s Jewish minority used music and ritual to establish themselves as members of the dominant class.