

The Secretariat under Graham George: Kingston, Canada, 1969–1980

Beverley Diamond

The Secretariat of the International Folk Music Council was based in Kingston, Ontario, Canada, when Graham George (1912–1993) became honorary executive secretary from 1969 to 1970 and then secretary general from 1971 to 1980. Born in the UK to an English family, Graham George (figure 1) moved, first to Ottawa, and then Montreal in 1928. The Montreal years undoubtedly gave him a grounding in French, which proved useful during his ICTM service. Following World War II, he married Tjot Kosten, whom he had met in the Netherlands, and he accepted a position at Queen's University in Kingston, where he remained for the rest of his life.¹ He was the inaugural department head of the School of Music at Queen's University. Tjot (figure 2) would become his assistant as ICTM secretary general, although her training as a singer at the Amsterdam Conservatory probably did not prepare her particularly well for that job. I know that she found it arduous. She had command of several European languages, however, which proved to be useful for international communications.

Graham George was a rather soft-spoken person, albeit with a sardonic wit, but also a man with ambitious aspirations. His own self-portrait (written originally when he published his first book) is indicative:

GG was trained under Dr. Alfred Whitehead in Montreal, receiving the degrees of Bachelor of Music in 1936 and Doctor of Music in 1939, both from the University of Toronto at a period when Sir Ernest MacMillan and Dr. Healey Willan were the chief examiners. He became a Fellow of the (now Royal) Canadian College of Organists in 1936. Much later he submitted with finite groans and infinite gratitude to the cruel rebirth of advanced studies in composition with Paul

Hindemith (for whom his second son is named) at Yale University.

His miscellaneous molding experiences include three years as an architectural draftsman, active service with the Canadian Army Overseas, and studies in philosophy. As musician, he claims competence in church, school and university, inclining to suppose that his chief usefulness may be in the area of analysis, musical and aesthetic ...

My wife, the dear dedicatee [of George 1970], says all the dates should come out because they make it look as if I'm applying for a job! And that I ought to mention that I got three prizes for composition (1938, 1943, 1947). But since they were, internationally speaking, unimportant prizes I think it better not to put them in, especially since my effectiveness as a composer is irrelevant to my abilities as an analyst. (But the 1938 one brought me \$500 smackers when I was a young buck). When I knew almost nothing about composition I got paid handsomely for it. Now that I know something, I don't. (Graham George Fonds, R14399, box 2, folder 85)

While always acknowledging that he was not an ethnomusicologist, he described himself first and foremost as a theorist. I suggest, however, that, like several early IFMC presidents (including founding president Ralph Vaughan Williams, Zoltán Kodály, as well as Poul Rovsing Olsen who were composers, as well as scholars), composition was his primary professional love. Since he was also an organist and choir master, it is not surprising that he wrote many works for organ and choir. However, his compositional output also includes ballets, operas, and other works for larger instrumental ensembles. Two of his three operas, as well as a ballet, were performed in full-scale productions. His style was more indebted to Whitehead than Hindemith. As a theorist, he wrote two books: the aforementioned *Tonality and Musical Structure* (1970), an academically oriented study of late tonal works that use what he called "progressive tonality," and the other a pedagogical text, *Twelve Note Tonal Counterpoint* (1976). His artistic leadership in the community was extensive: he founded and conducted the New Symphony Association of Kingston and the Kingston Choral Society, as well as

1 I knew Graham George as a colleague at Queen's University, although his career was near its end when mine was just beginning. The Georges graciously invited me to their elegant home in Kingston and to the country log cabin that they built themselves (probably with some help from their sons), when President Poul Rovsing Olsen visited early in his term as president of ICTM in 1978. Both Graham and Tjot enjoyed the travels that ICTM required of the secretary general, and their home exhibited artwork and objects from the many places they had opportunity to visit.



Figure 1. Graham George
(photo courtesy of the Canadian Music Centre).

other organizations in communities within an easy commute from his home base.

His interest in folk music undoubtedly was encouraged by Marius Barbeau, who served as vice president of the IFMC, and founded (with IFMC's encouragement) the Canadian Folk Music Society in 1956, serving as its first president (1957–1963). Graham George was the third president (1965–1968), although he ceased to be involved with the Canadian organization shortly thereafter, perhaps because the IFMC took all his attention. Barbeau engaged George in the organization of the international conference of the IFMC in Quebec City in 1961, although—alluding to the unilateral decision-making that Marius preferred—Graham would later remark that “no one, I think, will deny that it was in truth ‘his conference’” (Graham George Fonds, box 1, folder 1). He later expanded on the strong leaders within the IFMC:

Readers who knew Maud Karpeles well knew that it took a strong man to get his own way against her wishes, and I should guess that Zoltán Kodály and Marius Barbeau were the only ones who did. They were three people of great qualities and they more than respected each other.²

In an obituary for Marius Barbeau that Graham George wrote for the *YIFMC* (1969), he notes that “all IFMC conferences are ‘special,’ but the Québec conference was special even among the specials” (George 1969:13). Barbeau also engaged Graham George to transcribe songs from Salish (First Nations) singers, and he

encouraged him to study Inuit music, which they both felt had been sadly neglected. While Graham wrote an article (George 1962) and gave conference papers on the Salish songs, he was never able to pursue his intent to study Inuit music.

Graham George described the move of the Secretariat to Canada as follows:

The move of the International Folk Music Council's secretariat to Queen's, with myself as Honorary Executive Secretary, came about because this twenty-year-old organisation (of great international cultural importance, as I have realised more and more in handling it) was running fast down the slope of financial disaster because of excessive expenditure on salaries. (Getting folk music organisations out of financial messes seems to be becoming a habit of mine, my three-year presidency of the Canadian Folk Music Society having originated the same way.) ... In the sense of advantage [to my university] I think there is some in that I have this close contact with ethnomusicologists the world over.³

He served with three IFMC presidents: Willard Rhodes (1967–1973), Klaus Wachsmann (1973–1977), and Poul Rovsing Olsen (1977–1982).

Under the watch of Graham and Tjot George, the Council grew. On 30 June 1969, the year he assumed responsibility for the Secretariat, paid membership was 462 (*BIFMC* 35, Oct 1969:14). Membership fees rose during this twelve-year period, from \$12 to \$20. On 31 May 1980, during the last year of Graham George's term as secretary general, the number of members and subscribers was 1,248, and there was a healthy bank balance (*BIFMC* 57, Oct 1980:6). This report seems inconsistent with what the Christensens reported after the Secretariat moved to New York a year later (see Seeger in this volume).

Graham George oversaw world conferences in Kingston, Jamaica; Bayonne, France; Regensburg, Germany; Honolulu, USA; Oslo, Norway; and, to a large extent, Seoul, Korea. The ambience of conferences in this period varied, as it still does, depending on the country where they take place, but the relative intimacy and interaction with the local population set the conferences of this period apart from the large-scale events of the twenty-first century. The sociality can be sensed in an extended series of reports that President Willard Rhodes commissioned on the Jamaica conference (*BIFMC* 39, Oct 1971). Each of the sections in this report are signed, except for one titled “The Fun We Had in Jamaica” (pp. 25–28), a section probably written by George, since he refers to his female travelling companion and mentions Canada. George played a particularly significant role in 1973 when the IFMC conference that had been planned for San Sebastian,

2 While obviously intended for publication, the document available for viewing was handwritten (Graham George Fonds, box 1, folder 2).

3 Letter to Dean Ronald Watts, Queen's University, 1970 (Graham George Fonds, box 9, folder 2019).

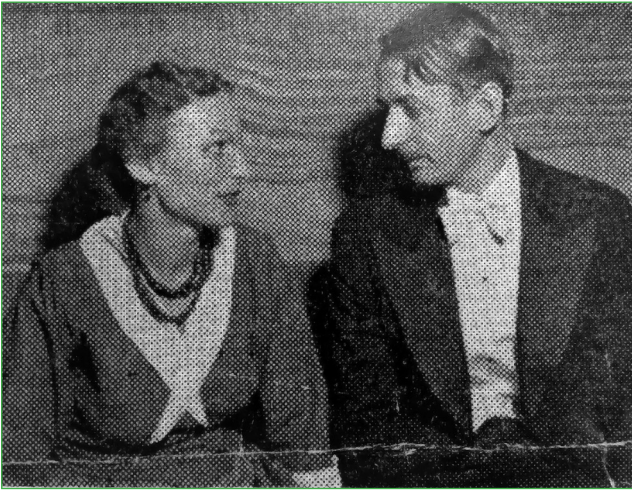


Figure 2. Tjot and Graham George, Premiere of his opera *Evangeline*, 1948 (photo courtesy of the *Kingston Whig Standard*).

Spain, was cancelled at the last minute. He worked tirelessly to relocate the world conference to Bayonne, France, with only weeks to spare.

The Secretariat oversaw the printing of the *Yearbooks*, but also collated and often wrote material for the biannual *Bulletins*.⁴ Graham and Tjot greatly expanded the information published in the *Bulletins*, working hard to get more national committees, liaison officers, and study groups to write reports and providing more transparency about Board meetings and finances. While the Executive Board remained *the* authority on most matters, the move to provide more information to the membership was arguably a small step toward a more democratic organization that would finally emerge with the election of executive and Board members in the twenty-first century.⁵

During the 1970s, issues of concern related to the place of IFMC in the larger world of scholarly music organizations. The International Music Council (established by and affiliated with UNESCO since 1949) and the American-based Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) were at the top of the list of the “competing” associations, all established post–World War II and all striving to be globally representative and broadly relevant. IFMC in the 1970s had a close relationship with national media organizations, some of which contributed quite

generous funding. Radio programmes were thought to be a valuable educational tool of the Council and under a programme named *Rostrum*, “biennial presentation of short sound-recordings” were produced in different countries “to demonstrate and discuss the latest developments in the countries concerned” (Daems and Kuijer 1977:27).

At the same time, the IFMC was ahead of its “competitors” in some regards. Unlike the SEM, for instance, IFMC was already much more nationally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse because they encouraged the creation of national committees as affiliates. Even the Board meetings in the 1970s⁶ were multilingual (unlike the English-only meetings of the first decade of the twenty-first century when I was a member). The Executive Board was hardly a male preserve, including strong women (Honorary President Maud Karpeles, Claudie Marcel-Dubois, and Olive Lewin to name three of the most important), even if it would not be until 2017 that another woman would be appointed as secretary general. At the same time, “Honorary” was added to Graham’s title—perhaps to give him more status than his predecessors who were mostly women—and it was deemed acceptable that he relegated much of the work to his wife as his assistant. Indeed, she worked full-time while, by his own admission, he worked “a fair amount whenever I feel like it, and I don’t get paid.”⁷

Other debates that concerned the IFMC leadership during the period of the Graham George Secretariat foreshadowed changes that would occur in the following years. The boundaries of genres and styles, and old assumptions about what scholarship should aim to do were at the core of many discussions. Although the IFMC matriarch Maud Karpeles had long argued that folk music is a living process, not static but characterized not only by continuity but by variation and community selectivity, debates about authenticity were heated during this period. Some members of the Executive Board observed that the concept of folk music differed across languages, but they generally upheld distinctions between folk music, art music, and popular music, even if some observed that classical music from Asia in particular was studied by many members and that such things as religious music often crossed the boundaries. A suggestion was made already in 1979 to change the name of the society to reference “traditional music,” rather than “folk music” (*BIFMC* 55, Oct 1979:15–16)—a suggestion that came to fruition early in the term of the next secretary general. Dance was already a central subject for many of the Council’s members.

4 This history would be very difficult to write without the *Bulletins*. All *Bulletins* are available online on the ICTM website (<http://ictmusic.org/publications/bulletin-ictm/past-issues>).

5 In the 1970s, there was a mechanism for national committees, study groups, or ordinary members to nominate individuals for the Executive Board, but this rarely happened until the end of the Dieter Christensen Secretariat. The Board, further, had (and has) the authority to co-opt additional members, often to ensure diversity or to have an active Board member from the country where the next world conference would take place.

6 Graham George taped some Board meetings (Graham George Fonds).

7 Draft letter (no recipient indicated) (Graham George Fonds, box 2, folder 6).

IFMC study groups of the 1970s were concerned with such matters as preservation and the systematization of analytical approaches (among other topics). But there were also proponents of a broader spectrum of music-making, studies of socialization, and projects that spoke to the needs of specific locales and historical contexts. John Blacking wrote in 1975 in the *Bulletin* in strong terms about different perspectives on the aims of scholarly work:

some European scholars see their own work as musicological and that of the Americans as more anthropological, as if anthropology were chiefly concerned with programme notes about the social context of the music. (Blacking 1975:22)

Blacking emphasized that structures of music are equal concerns for anthropologists. An equally strong “Statement of form and aims of work within the IFMC,” signed by Rokus de Groot (the Netherlands), Gord Bauman (German Federal Republic), and Jan-Peter Blom (Norway), appeared in the following year, urging more consideration of “international political relations, national and ethnic power-structures and world economy” (*BIFMC* 48, Apr 1976:4–5). More profoundly “disruptive” of the colonialist norms, were comments about divergent social histories. Foreshadowing the post-colonial concerns in the twenty-first century, Executive Board member Olive Lewin (Jamaica), for instance, argued at one Board meeting for the need for oral history as a corrective to the inaccurate histories of slavery and the Christian suppression of folk religion in her country. Historical inaccuracies were perpetuated by collectors, among others, she observed.⁸ Analysis was less important, she contended, than collecting with a view to revitalizing interest and intergenerational knowledge transfer. She urged that action must be done quickly before more elders die.⁹ Interventions such as Olive Lewin’s did lead to more emphasis on educational initiatives. But there was reluctance even to allow membership input about the themes at conferences, or indeed to allow too many themes, presumably in case the full complexity of social experience and the inequities of cultural imperialism were unleashed.

The end of the Graham George Secretariat was regrettably acrimonious. Without consultation with Graham, a Board vote was taken and by a slim margin, they

electd to ask him to resign.¹⁰ On 22 September 1980, President Poul Rovsing Olsen wrote:

The Executive Board has for some time been preoccupied by the question of the position of the IFMC within the world of international scholarship. You know as we do of the threats against us coming from the SEM and the IMC, among others ... We have arrived at the conclusion that under these circumstances we need an ethnomusicologist as our Secretary General ... It is with the deepest regret that the Board must ask you to resign. (Graham George Fonds, box 3, folder 96)

Rovsing Olsen wrote a separate, private letter to Graham and Tjot, a letter that implied he did not personally agree with the Board’s decision. In this private letter he said:

The enclosed official letter has been written very reluctantly. The words may seem cold and cruel ... I will never forget how nicely you took over the job as SG in 1969 at another quite difficult moment in the life of the IFMC. So thank you. (Graham George Fonds, box 3, folder 96)

Graham responded by questioning why Rovsing Olsen had described the SEM and IMC as “threats.” Mostly, however, Graham felt betrayed because no one had warned him that there were concerns about his work for the society. The request for resignation came “out of the blue.” “There is always frank talk—between gentlemen,” he wrote to Rovsing Olsen on 16 December 1980.

Many IFMC members wrote to Graham George expressing their dismay about this turn of events, expressing concern about the international ill effect on the Council. In his letter to Graham, Oskár Elschek said that he had elsewhere written the following:

I know the IFMC more or less detailed almost 20 years and I think he was in the period the best secretary general we had. He brought much order into the administrative and financial situation of the IFMC and had beside these also a generous handling of the internal and external problems of our society. (Graham George Fonds, box 8, folder 96)

Graham responded to each letter of support in a similar way, not denying the anger he felt but exhibiting a graciousness as well. In one such letter, for instance, he observed:

What I objected to was that the change [of Secretary General] was discussed in Tunis without consulting me ... We have had so many expressions of regret that things were done as they were. We shall remember our time with the IFMC, involving so many fascinating factors and the making of so many far-flung relationships, with the utmost pleasure and satisfaction. (Graham George Fonds, box 8, folder 96)

8 Her very passionate interjection was accessed on the tape recording of the Board meeting on 12–13 August 1975 (National Archives of Canada, Tape 395 327-T5-432). Her comments on this matter were not recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

9 Executive Board meeting in Regensberg, 1975 (Graham George Fonds, tape 395327-T5-432). Also see EB minutes, meeting 49, 12–13 1975:§771.

10 Although I am aware of no evidence about this, I suspect that some early signs of memory loss that would be later diagnosed as Alzheimer’s disease might have been already making his duties increasingly more difficult for him and less reliable for the IFMC.

In *BIFMC* 58 (Apr 1981:3), President Rovsing Olsen expressed the Council's "gratitude for the long and unselfish service" of Graham George.

References cited

- Blacking, John. 1975. "Summary of the Conference: A Personal View of the 23rd IFMC Conference." *BIFMC* 47 (Oct): 21–23.
- Daems, Hendrik, and Henk Kuijer. 1977. "Report of the Committee on Radiotelevision and Sound/Film Archives." *BIFMC* 51 (Nov): 22–27.
- George, Graham. 1962. "Songs of the Salish Indians of British Columbia." *JIFMC* 14: 22–29.
- . 1969. "In Memoriam: Marius Barbeau." *YIFMC* 1: 10–13.
- . 1970. *Tonality and Musical Structure*. New York: Praeger.
- . 1976. *Twelve Note Tonal Counterpoint*. Oakville: Harmuse Publications.
- Graham George Fonds. MUS197. National Archives of Canada.