

Tom Gordon, Professor Emeritus, Memorial University of Newfoundland

*Meeting through Song: Pre-contact Inuit and Moravian Music Traditions in Dialogue*

The first encounter between Jens Haven, the founder of the Moravian missions in Labrador, and Seguliak an Inuk shaman and leader, offers a remarkable prefigurement of the relationship that would evolve between Inuit and the Moravians. On September 6th, 1764 Haven recorded in his diary:

[I was] asked whether I could dance and had a drum. I said “no.” He asked if I could sing, I said “yes.” He said he would sing something for me. I said “do so.” He starts to jump and dance and sang with it. I could not understand anything except “our friend has come, which makes us happy.” ... when he was finished, he said that I should answer him. I sang with a fond heart: “Naleganga” [*“Lord Sabbaoth,”* Mel. 206]. They listened and when I was finished they told me “we are without words.”

In Inuit and Moravian cultures music was integral to both social and spiritual ritual. Haven’s first-hand account recognizes the significance of formalizing a social contract through musical exchange. Seguliak’s opening questions carry the implication that the worth of a man will, in part, be judged on his ability to dance, drum and sing.

Across the centuries that followed this encounter, the musical traditions that the Moravians and Inuit brought into their relationship became intertwined in a kind of cultural syncretism. The cycles of life, the celebrations of community, and the music that accompanied them constituted a grounds for a mediation across traditions. While the Moravian musical traditions would seem to have prevailed, the foundations on pre-contact Inuit practices can be exemplified by three enduring musical traditions of Moravian Inuit: the inclusion of the Hosiana on Advent IV, the singing of *TattiKartok Gudiptingnik* (*Liebe wohnt in niedren Hütten*) on Married People’s Day, and the brass bands’ performances of *Takkotigilarminipingnut* (*God be with You*).