

‘To Explore the World of Sound’: Music, silence and nation-building in *Bing Bang Boom* (1969)

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The National Film Board documentary *Bing Bang Boom* (1969) depicts Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer (1933–2021) teaching seventh-grade students in a suburban public school in Scarborough, Ontario. A close study of the film informs the larger trajectory of the composer’s previous and later writings and compositions over the next several decades, while a deeper dive into archival materials and concurrent productions from Canada’s National Film Board (NFB) illuminates the organisation’s strategy of nation-building at a crucial moment in the country’s history. Together, Schafer and the NFB illuminate Canada’s problematic relationship to Indigenous peoples, places and sounds.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1969, a crew from the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada filmed a series of music classes with a group of seventh graders at the newly opened Tecumseh Senior Public School in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough. Under the direction of Joan Henson, the edited footage was released as the documentary *Bing Bang Boom* later that year. This short film of approximately 25 minutes depicts Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer (1933–2021) leading the group in actively questioning the concepts of music, sound and silence inside and beyond the classroom. Before the film premiered, Schafer had written about his unconventional approaches to music education, and more publications would appear on this topic. Thus, *Bing Bang Boom* offers an early view of Schafer’s emerging ideas about close listening that reverberate through the composer’s extensive writings and compositions over the next several decades.

In this article, I will frame Schafer’s work with a group of 12-year-old students in the Toronto suburbs within larger, transnational discussions about the teaching of music, and public education more generally, that were in wide circulation throughout Canada and the United States. These concepts embody post-war aesthetic attitudes and values, especially through discussions of music, silence and noise, that resonate with the work of mid-century composers active in the United States. Not surprisingly, John Cage is the most

conspicuous presence within this discourse, and Schafer openly acknowledged Cage’s influence on the educational philosophies on display within his contemporary writings that inform his work in the documentary. In addition to placing *Bing Bang Boom* within larger musical and educational contexts, this study further interrogates the role of the NFB in presenting a consciously curated, privileged and racialised view of Canadian culture that was part of a larger strategy of nation-building at a crucial moment in the country’s history.

2. EXPO 67 AND THE CANADIAN CENTENNIAL

Eighteen months before the documentary was filmed, Canada celebrated its centennial year with a range of festivities and events designed to define a nation in transition. On the one hand, English Canada’s alliances with Britain were tested as the former world power diminished and other Commonwealth nations sought independence. On the other, increasing influence from the United States through mass media, economic incursions and opposition to the Vietnam War fuelled anti-US sentiments. A rising English nationalist movement sought to differentiate Canadian values and views from those of their southern neighbours, who were viewed as ‘violent, aggressive, individualistic, disorderly, and immoral’ (Azzi 2012: 214, 216). Largely absent from much of the English Canadian nationalist rhetoric were discussions of the rights of marginalised populations within the nation, including francophone Canadians, first-generation Canadians, and Indigenous peoples.

The most impactful manifestation of this emerging, exclusive nationalism was the World Exposition of 1967 in Montreal, Quebec, or Expo 67 – referred to here as Expo. Between 27 April and 29 October, over 50 million visitors from Canada and around the world explored the sprawling, 900-acre complex built on constructed islands in the St Lawrence River’s Hochelaga Archipelago (Wall 2017). This area was

named after the original farming village of around 3,000 inhabitants and 50 houses inhabited by Iroquoian-speaking inhabitants which encountered the European party led by Jacques Cartier in 1535 (Pendergast 1998: 149).

Attendees were given a ‘facsimile passport’, serving as a ‘multi-use ticket, in the guise of a travel document’ that ‘reinforced the idea that Expo 67 functioned as a miniaturised mirror image of the entire planet’ and transformed the visitor ‘into a citizen of the world, challenged to bear witness to the tremendous range of peoples and things on display, and consequently drawn into processes of cultural exchange’ (Kenneally and Sloan 2010: 3–4, 7). Ninety pavilions representing 62 nations, corporations, industries and humanitarian organisations offered diverse interpretations of the exposition’s theme, ‘Man and His World/Terre des Hommes’, with an emphasis on the positive impact of technology on human progress.

Expo was informed by the ideas of a Canadian philosopher who had gained fame in recent years for his ideas about globalisation and media: Marshall McLuhan. By 1967, McLuhan was such a central figure in the public’s mind that the media-centric Expo earned the nickname the ‘McLuhan Fair’ (Chang 2022: 92). In addition to his new book, *The Medium is the Massage* – a teasing twist on his famous dictum from 1964, that ‘the medium is the message’, resulting from a publisher’s typo – and an experimental LP recording issued by Columbia Records, McLuhan was profiled in a provocative 54-minute documentary that aired on the NBC network on 17 March 1967, titled *This is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium is the Massage* (McLuhan 1967; Pintoff and Fraumeni 1967). Addressing his US-based audience, McLuhan credited the origin of his ideas concerning media to the complicated, unequal relationship between Canada and its southern neighbour, stating that ‘I come from a nineteenth-century country, Canada, and this gives me a great advantage in looking at the twentieth century . . . So, any Canadian can see what you cannot see. That is, you live in the twentieth century . . . and it becomes therefore invisible’ (Pintoff and Fraumeni 1967: 00:02–00:09, 00:27–00:39).

McLuhan’s concept of the global village was closely tied to both Expo and BBC’s *Our World*. The first live satellite broadcast, *Our World* was shown worldwide during the height of the exposition on 25 June 1967, and would be remembered primarily for the live performance and recording of the Beatles’ ‘All You Need is Love’ (Singer 1967). In an interview promoting the event, McLuhan connected the immediacy of live-broadcast satellite television to Expo, stating that both create ‘a mosaic of all those societies as well as all the latest ones, and everything happens at the same moment. You can be in Beirut, or in Tokyo, or in New

York at the same moment, in this kind of mosaic world of all-at-onceness’ (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 1967; Salemy 2017). Notably, the ostensibly utopian ideal of the technologically interconnected global village – and later global theatre – was and remains deeply entangled with colonialism and neocolonialism (De Kosnik 2015; Nolan 2018: 1), a fact readily evident by McLuhan’s remarks in the same interview that ‘the backwards countries have to become contemporary simply because of this instantaneous quality of the mosaic’ (Salemy 2017).

The systemic inequities underlying McLuhan’s global village and Expo were evident in two pavilions that revealed the simmering tensions underneath Canada’s claim of national unity. For many franco-phone Canadians, the Quebec Pavilion served as ‘an architectural metaphor for the radical opening-up to new knowledge and communication that was transforming the cloistered and conservative Quebec of recent memory’ into one that was ‘vibrant, socially and creatively progressive’ (Scriver 2022: 223). The pavilion’s sleek, modern, European-influenced design, its exhibits showcasing the province’s rising stature and independence from English Canada, and even its prominent placement on the waterfront embodied the province’s transitional moment: as such, ‘the constructed islands of Expo 67 would stand in for the island of a French Quebec floating in the sea of English-speaking North America’ that emphasised its independence as ‘symbolically promoted to nation-state status, a peer among fellow nation-exhibitors competing for recognition on the world market’ (Hurley 2011: 35). During his visit to Expo that July, French president Charles de Gaulle voiced the growing discontent of Québécois against political, economic and cultural oppression by both English-speaking Canada and the United States, proclaiming ‘Vive le Québec libre’ from the balcony of the Montreal City Hall. These forces coalesced into the *révolution tranquille*, or Quiet Revolution on the heels of Expo, and the Parti Québécois, a political party dedicated to the sovereignty and independence of the province, was formed the next year.

The pavilion dedicated to Indigenous Peoples offered direct critiques of Canadian nationalism within Expo’s grounds.¹ While the building’s stereotypical design involving a stylised tipi and drum was dictated by the federal government, Indigenous artists and other contributors offered significant criticisms of settler colonialism at the very site celebrating the country’s emerging nationalism (Miłosz 2022). The pavilion’s large-scale art commissioned for the exterior subtly criticised federal interference with

¹In this article, I have avoided using offensive terms from historical records, and instead refer to Indigenous peoples and cultures. These terms do, however, appear within titles in the reference list.

Indigenous rights (ibid.), while the interior exhibits used images, artefacts and oversized printed statements – such as 'The early missionaries thought us pagans' and 'imposed upon us their own stories of god, of heaven and hell, of sin and salvation', 'War and peace treaties deprived us of our land' and 'our fathers were betrayed' – to confront the history and present reality of colonialism including the unflinching brutality of the still-operational residential schools (Durand 2020: 126). These pointed denunciations of the ongoing impact of settler colonialism served as a 'formative moment in the development of an activist Indigenous cultural politics' (Grussani and Phillips 2022: 115).

These exceptions aside, other pavilions sponsored by the Canadian government offered a carefully curated view of the nation based on a notion of colonial humanism, or 'a set of principles including the espousal of universal values and the appropriation of Indigenous art and imagery in order to recast Canada as a model among nations through a variety of discourses that uphold and valorize whiteness' while downplaying the devastating impact of colonial rule and systemic racism on Indigenous populations (Copeman 2022: 151–2). The same ethos prevailed at the massive Ontario Pavilion, a sprawling, floating construction covered with a white, angled, tent-like networks of roofs pitched over more than 1,300 granite blocks. The space was designed by Macy Dubois (1929–2007), an American-born architect who had settled in Toronto in 1958 and was active in the construction of educational and government buildings. In addition to the pavilion's enormous restaurant, visitors could watch a relentlessly cheerful tribute to the nation's most prosperous province in the 17-minute, 70-mm film *A Place to Stand* (Chapman 1967), which would win that year's Oscar for Best Live Action Short Subject. Shown in a 570-seat, IMAX-prototype theatre using multiple screens, the film was intended 'to give everyone a big boost and make them feel good' as director Christopher Chapman later recalled (Chapman 2014: 164) while showcasing Ontario's agricultural, mining, logging and steel working industries. Despite constant images of a nearly homogeneous white population at work and play, Indigenous people had been filmed but did not make the final cut, as illustrated by outtakes from the film (Mitchell 2014: 179).

The Canadian government sponsored other pavilions that endorsed and disseminated this sanitised view of the nation's upward trajectory, including a pavilion dedicated to the NFB. Founded as a federal agency in 1939, the NFB's primary charge was to 'produce and distribute . . . films designed to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations', and the organisation's founding head described its purpose as doing 'its duty by the nation' (Government of Canada 1985; Allan 2000: 30). With few exceptions, NFB films

'aligned with government values concerning national identity, progress, and the exploitation of natural resources', producing public media for television broadcasts, theatrical distribution and educational use 'that supported the principles and political ambitions of the state' (Clemens 2022: 2–3). And yet, the NFB in the mid-1960s produced a number of more experimental films that embraced creative freedom and, occasionally, an activist approach in order to critique otherwise invisible issues of poverty, racism, sexism and regionalism (Evans 1991: 157).

Despite this modestly progressive agenda, the NFB's most popular contribution to the Expo offered a visually arresting yet intentionally vague cinematic statement. *Labyrinth*, a non-narrative film shown on a 60-foot screen in a cruciform of five simultaneous screens, blandly addressed the stages of human life on a global scale (Feldman 2014: 42). The film reproduced elements of other documentaries of the time in 'eradicating the historicity of social worlds and pretending instead that they are the products of a universal and timeless nature' while denying 'the structural inequalities of the world, as if to say that we all cry and laugh, get born and die, and the fact that some of us have an excess of material comforts and others lack essentials should not obscure such things' (Highmore 2010: 134). The NFB preserved sanctioned views of Expo as well, consistently reproducing and disseminating government-approved messaging. In fact, the NFB produced and distributed a documentary on the pavilion dedicated to Indigenous peoples that sidesteps the exhibit's more provocative elements by focusing on and objectifying Indigenous 'hostesses' who were hired to serve as a guide at the space (Régnier 1967). The film is 'confined within a settler framing' and proclaimed 'a positive message of future assimilation', undermining and contradicting the activist goals of the pavilion's contributors (Grussani and Phillips 2022: 137).

Beyond the NFB, other independently produced avant-garde films contributed to the success of the most media-centred exposition in history, one frequently identified as 'McLuhanesque'. Described by visitors as 'the ultimate psychedelic experience' and 'the LSD experience without the LSD' (Morley Markson and Associates Limited n.d.), the Kaleidoscope Pavilion combined contemporary experiences of drug culture, avant-garde rock performances and accompanying light shows (Sloan 2014: 56, 60–1). A joint project by the University of Waterloo and industrial designer Morley Markson, Kaleidoscope was sponsored by six chemical companies in Canada on the theme 'Man and Colour', and its vivid exterior replicated the form of a slide carousel on a mammoth scale. The principal attraction inside Kaleidoscope was a 12-minute film created by Markson meant to represent a day 'from

sunrise to nightfall, during which one experiences the emotional, psychological and even physical effects of color', creating the sense of being inside a kaleidoscope (Whelan n.d.). As visitors moved to the last of the chambers of immersive media, the 'combination of projected film and strategically tilted mirrors produced the illusion of being afloat in a gigantic sphere or dome' (Sloan 2014: 57). Notably, none of the sponsoring companies were identified inside or outside of the pavilion, such as the Canadian division of Union Carbide, whose parent company was active in producing chemicals used in Agent Orange during the Vietnam War (ibid.: 58–9).

In planning the sound dimension of the pavilion, Markson reached out to a childhood friend. R. Murray Schafer grew up in a relatively affluent family in the northern Toronto suburb of York and had early interests in visual arts and music. After losing one eye due to glaucoma at the age of eight, he was given a glass eye that caused significant stress at school. As Schafer recalled:

In grade seven I won the gold medal for public speaking but I can't remember what I spoke about. I find it difficult to remember much about my years in elementary school, probably because I was so frequently beaten up in the schoolyard by boys who didn't like one-eyed classmates. 'Murray's got a glass eye! Murray's got a glass eye!' they'd holler and punch me in the stomach, or kick me until I fell down. (Schafer 2012: 15)

He later described high school as 'a revolting experience' (Bradley 1977: 190). After being discouraged from pursuing visual arts for a career, he enrolled in the new Artist's Diploma programme in music at the University of Toronto. Importantly, his most impactful courses were not in music – although he valued his studies with composer John Weinzweig and pianist Alberto Guerrero – but in his 'Poetry and Music' class with a last-minute substitute professor: Marshall McLuhan (Schafer 2012: 21–2).

Following his expulsion from the University of Toronto, Schafer lived in Vienna and London, where he interviewed composers including John Ireland, Benjamin Britten, Michael Tippett and Peter Maxwell Davies for a radio series sponsored by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The interviews were published in 1963 as a book, *British Composers in Interview*. As Schafer later recalled: 'In those days a lot of British music was played on the CBC and in Canadian concerts. The British Commonwealth was still intact, and the Canadian music scene was both enriched and enfeebled by the presence of British organists and theory teachers' (2012: 36). In 1967 when Markson asked him to provide a score for the Kaleidoscope pavilion, Schafer had been teaching music composition at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia for two years, a post he would hold until 1975.

Schafer's recorded soundtrack does not survive, and the detailed visual record on Markson's webpage mentions only that Schafer's electronic sound score 'was programmed second by second' to create 'an exact marriage with the imagery to enhance the overall spatial effect' (Morley Markson and Associates Limited n.d.). In 2012, Schafer speculated in his autobiography that the music 'would sound quite jejune compared to the advances made in the medium since those days' (Schafer 2012: 97). Still, Schafer's contribution to Expo is significant. In hindsight, it is no coincidence that figures such as Schafer and Macy Dubois played a role in the promotion of Canadian nationalism at Expo. Both were emerging leaders in their respective fields with the international credentials from the most important cultural influences necessary to succeed in Canada at the time: Dubois through his US training, and Schafer through his European and British – specifically English – pedigree. Their indirect collaboration the next year would be dutifully documented by the NFB while reflecting the values of settler-colonialist Canada at its most cosmopolitan.

3. TECUMSEH SENIOR PUBLIC SCHOOL AND EXPERIMENTAL EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

In the climate surrounding Expo 67, Canadian politicians and policymakers sought out additional opportunities to showcase the nation's progressive agenda. Within the province of Ontario, scholars, educators and legislators actively questioned traditional curricula, teacher training and the design of educational spaces. Drawing primarily on contemporary research in the United States, the result of these investigations dramatically reshaped the experience of teachers and school children throughout the province, captured in real time in *Bing Bang Boom*.

These experiments were particularly noticeable in Ontario's capital, Toronto, and its affluent suburbs. The city took its name from *tkaronto*, a Wendat term for a meeting place. The area and its connected waterways had served as an important trading site for thousands of years, with tribal groups of the Iroquois, Algonquin and Mississauga inhabiting the region at various times (Bobiwash 1997: 6–8). In 1923, and without legal representation, some of these peoples signed a hastily executed treaty designed to deny all rights to these lands (Wallace 2020). Afterwards, their names lived on in the city's suburbs such as Mississauga and Etobicoke, which exploded with population growth through the 1960s and 1970s. Other regions of what would become Metropolitan Toronto (or 'Metro') were named after English towns and counties such as York and Scarborough.

Toronto's educational board based its recommendations on an influential and widely publicised experiment in team teaching at public schools in Massachusetts starting in 1957, funded by the Ford Foundation and implemented by researchers from Harvard University and an affiliated centre, the School and University Program for Research and Development (SUPRAD) (Anderson et al. 1960: 71). One of the SUPRAD's most prominent leaders, Harvard's Robert H. Anderson, was profiled in radio and television documentaries, which disseminated his views internationally (Shayon 1959). In fact, Anderson's work was directly influential on innovative approaches to education in Toronto. At the Pleasant Avenue School in Willowdale (a growing suburb, to the west of Scarborough), the school's principal, Kenn Johnson, began reimagining public school education in 1962 with Anderson serving as his mentor (Clausen 2014: 72). By 1966, as scholar Kurt Clausen notes, educators saw Pleasant Avenue School as a model for re-envisioning education throughout Ontario, producing and circulating a 17-minute documentary on the school, titled *Learning to Learn* (ibid.: 68).

The school prioritised a student-centred approach that provided a variety of learning environments and subjects to foster curiosity, discovery and lifelong learning. According to Clausen, this approach encouraged 'student independence (and eventually interdependence)' in which 'students should be able to decide what they are going to learn' with the support of considerable resources such as film and overhead projectors, audio recordings, and a well-supplied library. Also essential to achieving this goal was the introduction of team teaching in open concept learning spaces (ibid.: 69–70).

These views had an immediate impact on provincial policy that reshaped the public school system for decades. Officially titled 'Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario', the Hall-Dennis Report was completed in 1968 (Hall and Dennis 1966). Committee members visited the Pleasant Avenue School and incorporated its principles into the document (Clausen 2014: 82–3). Most importantly, they sought a local university professor who happened to be an influential, internationally famous public intellectual: Marshall McLuhan. As the committee's co-chair Lloyd Dennis recalled, McLuhan stated bluntly that 'Your education system is dead meat' (Dennis 1997: 168), while he and others recommended significantly rethinking the use of technology in the classroom, including the cautious use of television teaching (Hall and Dennis 1966: 2). Other recommendations directly addressed the layout and architectural design of new schools that would emphasise 'the

flexibility and expansiveness of space for human use and comfort, closely linked with aesthetic, intellectual, and social opportunities' that avoided the 'antiseptic, cold, uniform, box-like schools' of the past (ibid.).

The educational reforms voiced in the Hall-Dennis report directly impacted how those schools were designed and built in the later 1960s, including the Tecumseh Senior Public School. The school was one of thousands built in the decades after the end of World War II to accommodate increasing enrolment in Ontario elementary and secondary schools, which added around a million students between 1946 and 1963 (Cameron 1972: 67). The school's construction was funded by the Ontario Foundation Tax Plan of 1964 that provided grants to school boards in the fastest-growing districts, with the provincial government lending '\$150 million to municipalities and school boards for the construction of elementary and secondary schools' in 1968 alone (Ontario Provincial Government 1967). Most of that growth was concentrated in Toronto and its suburbs, including the northeastern suburb of Scarborough, where the population had more than quintupled from under 50,000 to nearly a 250,000 between 1950 and 1964 (Bonis 1969: 206). By 1968, the suburb's one hundred elementary and secondary schools were still inadequate to serve around 78,000 students, many of whom were housed in temporary trailers on school grounds (ibid.: 347). The combination of explosive population growth and economic development resulted in 'a teacher shortage across the province' and the unprecedented need for Toronto's schools to 'compete for good teachers' in Ontario's largest and most prestigious school district (Reynolds 1990: 109). The school was unusual in that it was the first in Ontario to be designated as 'senior public', which continues to be considered the upper levels of elementary school. Serving only seventh and eighth graders, the designation made it somewhat distinct from a junior high school (grades 7–9) or a middle school (grades 6–8) in the United States.

While there is no documentation available about the selection of the name, Tecumseh Senior Public School followed a well-established pattern of colonialist appropriation of Indigenous historical figures for the naming of public institutions and their sports teams, often using racist mascots and imagery. In this case, the school's name embodies 'the institutional racism that has made such imagery secure, acceptable, and seemingly natural' through the appropriation of images, names and cultural artefacts without recognition of the destruction and displacement of Indigenous peoples (King 2004: 3). In this case, the new school was named after the Shawnee leader and British ally in the War of 1812 who fought to reclaim native lands through a unified confederation that would oppose

American treaties designed to divide individual tribes whose lands were being acquired by the US government (Calloway 2007, 139). Tecumseh's name and legend had been in the news recently, with the dedication of a new memorial commemorating his martyrdom for the British cause in southern Ontario in 1963, on the 150th anniversary of his death. The memorial proved controversial for portraying Tecumseh wearing a British uniform based on a romanticised portrait from more than a half century after his death, despite opposition from Indigenous people within Ontario about the inaccuracy of this imagery (St Denis 2005: 130–7). A contrasting monument celebrating his murder at the hands of an army led by William Henry Harrison stands in the United States' Capitol Building Rotunda, further exemplifying the stereotypical image of an Indigenous figure defined not by their own identity and culture but by their significance as enemy or ally to competing colonial powers (Thompson 2022).

The primary architect for the Tecumseh school, which opened in September 1968, was none other than Macy Dubois. The building's design merited a multi-page feature in the industry periodical *Canadian Architect* (Figures 1 and 2) as well as a mention in *Architecture Canada* (*Canadian Architect* 1969; *Architecture Canada* 1969). Like Macy's other commissions throughout Ontario, the Tecumseh school features a Brutalist aesthetic with 'exposed concrete columns and slabs' that maximise open spaces and bring neutral light into the building (*Canadian Architect* 1969: 43). According to *Canadian Architect*, Dubois carefully considered the building's placement to demarcate the exterior spaces for seventh and eighth graders from the adjacent Golf Road Junior Public School serving younger students. The dedicated music room's location at the far edge of the second floor (Figure 2) embodies the goal of keeping all 'noisy areas ... away from the classrooms'. The music classroom is visible at the closest corner of the photograph in Figure 1, and as shown in the scale drawing of Figure 2, represents a larger than average single classroom space within the building.

In its physical space as well as its cutting-edge curriculum, the Tecumseh school exemplified Pleasant Avenue School's educational principles as well as those espoused in the Hall–Dennis report. These features were highlighted explicitly in the *Canadian Architect's* profile, which describes the library, centrally located off the main lobby, as a 'warm, colourful space' and further notes that the 'central classroom spaces are capable of being combined, in keeping with current educational thinking', with a design flexible enough to incorporate additional 'teaching machines, television and team teaching' in the future (ibid.: 43, 45) (Figure 3).

This background helps to explain why R. Murray Schafer may have been invited into the classroom at Tecumseh Senior Public School in its opening year for the filming of the documentary *Bing Bang Boom*. These new facilities were designed by a leading (inter) national architect to support progressive education, which helped to justify the filming of this experimental approach with actual students. Given the immediate interest in redesigning Ontario schools to be more student-centred, engage in active learning and challenge conventional attitudes about teacher training, the decision to invest the NFB's limited resources in a documentary film demonstrating these values in action begins to make sense. And yet, this work could have been accomplished with a low-budget independent documentary like Pleasant Avenue School's *Learning to Learn*. Why Schafer's visit to this music classroom merited support from a nationally funded institution such as the NFB, as did another NFB documentary filmed in a separate classroom that same year, deserves closer scrutiny.

4. 'TO EXPLORE THE WORLD OF SOUND'

The excitement over these new initiatives may have inspired the making of *Bing Bang Boom*, known by its working title at NFB as *Children's Music*. As shown in the institution's archives, the footage was shot in the 7B classroom between 17 and 31 January 1969. The approval of the film is dated 9 January, with a budget of 25,000 dollars and the following justification (Figure 4):

Today, music in the schools is being granted increasing importance and time. R. Murray Schafer, a Canadian composer interested in education, has demonstrated that children can create their own compositions. He has gone into classrooms and started classes improving within an hour to two. In his opinion, this experience is worth any number of rules of harmony or two part [*sic*] songs. Joan Henson intends to film Schafer with a grade school class working out an improvisational composition. His style is simple and bold and so the results produced will, without doubt, be startling. Schafer predicts that in about seven sessions with a class, a significant development in the children will have occurred and a composition of interest produced.

The memo included a note that the film could be released as a theatrical short. The next day a consent form (Figure 5) was typed and sent from the documentary's director Joan Henson to the students' mothers, addressed 'Dear Mrs.' in accordance with gender norms of the day, but does not identify Schafer or indicate that a non-professional instructor will be in the classroom: 'I am planning to make a film on music with children and would like to use the grade 7B class of Tecumseh school. We have found in our research

Tecumseh Senior Public School, Scarborough, Ontario

Architects : Fairfield & DuBois

The school is built immediately to the south of the existing Golf Road Junior Public School, but each school has a separate entry and as far as possible will retain its own identity. To preserve the already restricted playground the architects adopted a two-storey solution for the senior public school. All major spaces lead off the two-storey entrance lobby with easy access for visitors and staff to the gymnasium, multi-purpose rooms and administration areas. These areas have been kept separate from the classrooms for functional and acoustical reasons, and because the gymnasium and multi-purpose room were required to be capable of

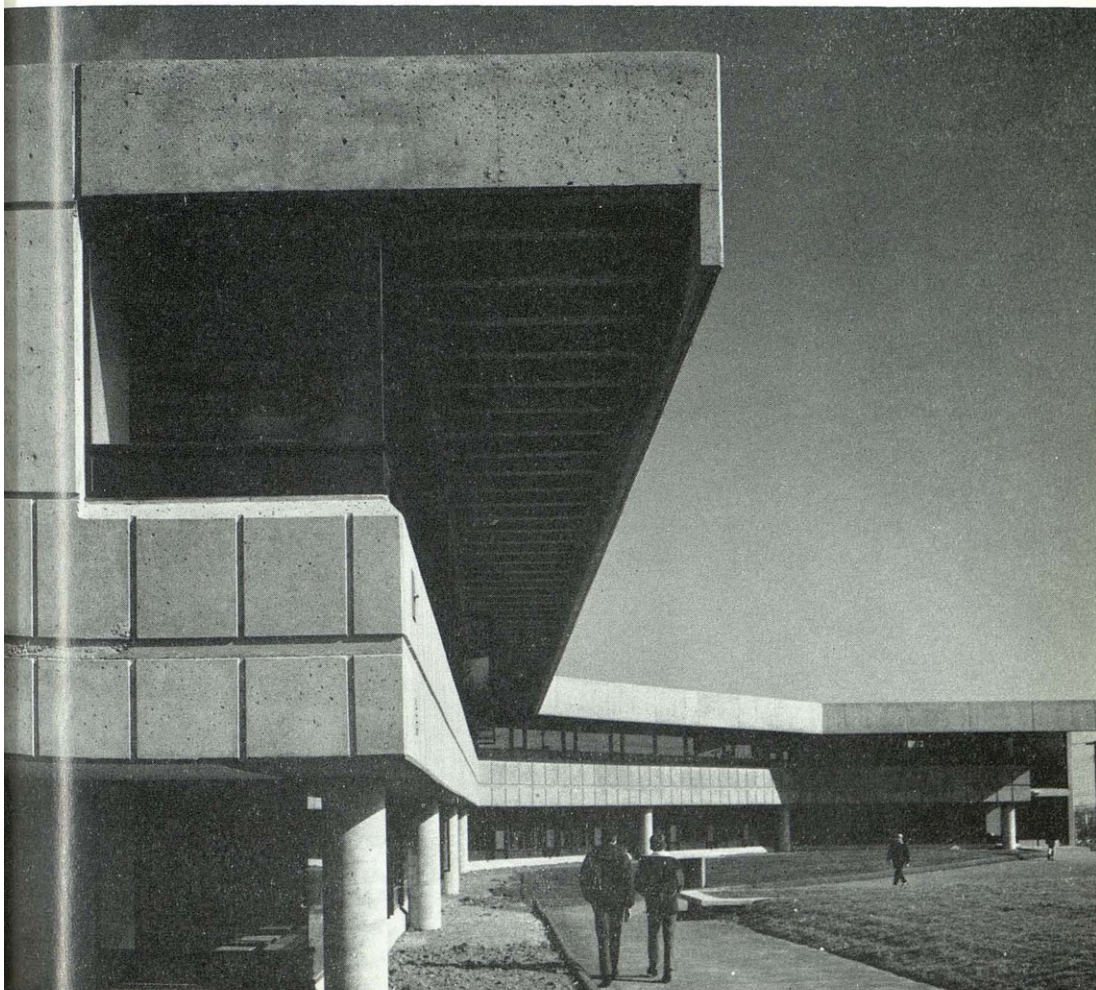
expansion as the number of students increase. The library, a lower glazed space contiguous to and revealed to the main circulation, has the top-lit art room above it.

All noisy areas are kept separate from the classrooms which are also turned away from the noisy playgrounds of the junior public school. Student entry is towards the playground area and separate from the street entrance.

The materials for the building are exposed concrete columns and slabs with non-loadbearing block infill walls. The central classroom spaces are capable of being combined, in

keeping with current educational thinking. It is intended that the school shall be expanded to double its present size and as the extent to which teaching machines, television and team teaching will be employed is at present uncertain, this extension will be designed for greater flexibility.

Macy DuBois was the partner in charge of design and Andre Leroux was project assistant. Consultants were: H. B. Tryhorn & Associates, structural; R. T. Tamblyn & Partners, mechanical; Jack Chisvin & Associates, electrical; Oswald Konway & Associates, landscape.



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Figure 1. Opening page of feature article on the design of Tecumseh Senior Public School from *Canadian Architect*, 43. The music room occupies the corner room of the second floor.

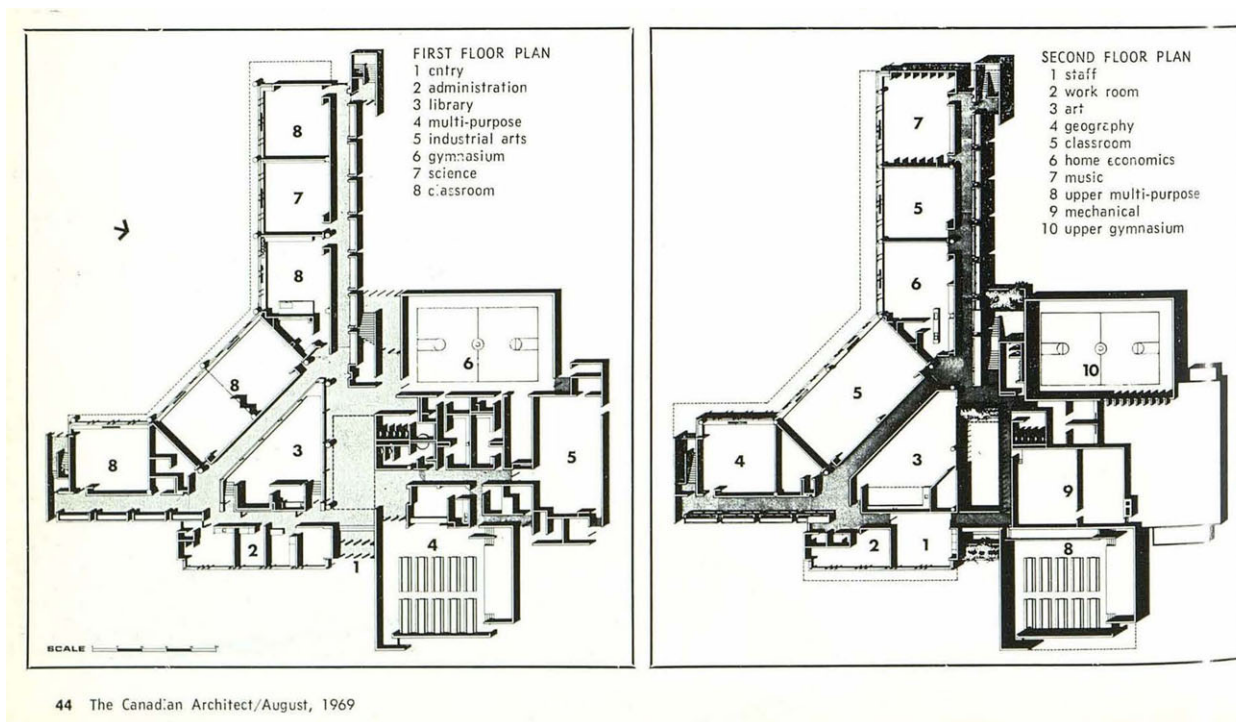
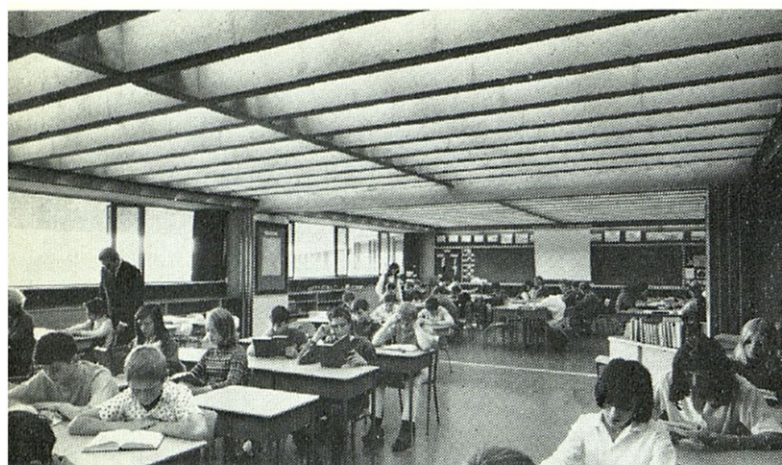


Figure 2. Floor plan of the Tecumseh Senior Public School from *Canadian Architect*, 44, showing the location of the music classroom (number 7 in the second-floor plan).



Tecumseh Senior Public School

Figure 3. Tecumseh Senior Public School showing open-concept classrooms with moveable partitions. *Canadian Architect*, 46.

with various schools that the Tecumseh school best suits all our purposes The purpose of this film will be for education.²

²Henson directed a total of eight films for the NFB between 1968 and 1988: no other information seems to be available about her at this time.

In its completed form, the documentary is framed by a disembodied, authoritative Anglo male narration that introduces its key figures and agenda echoing the approval memo:

At Scarborough, Ontario, one of Canada’s best-known composers Murray Schafer is guest teacher at a grade seven music class. He feels that if the children’s musical

G. Bertrand

cc: H. McPherson
F. Spiller
G. Pearson ✓
W. Jobbins
M. Malacket

I. MacNeill

Jan. 9/69

Recommended Addition to the Program
CHILDREN'S MUSIC

Recommended for Program to complete

Category: Youth

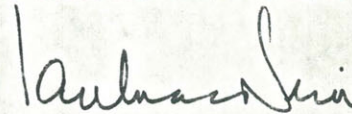
Tentative Title: Children's Music

Length: About 20 minutes

Maximum cost: \$25,000

Film maker: Joan Henson/ Joe Koenig

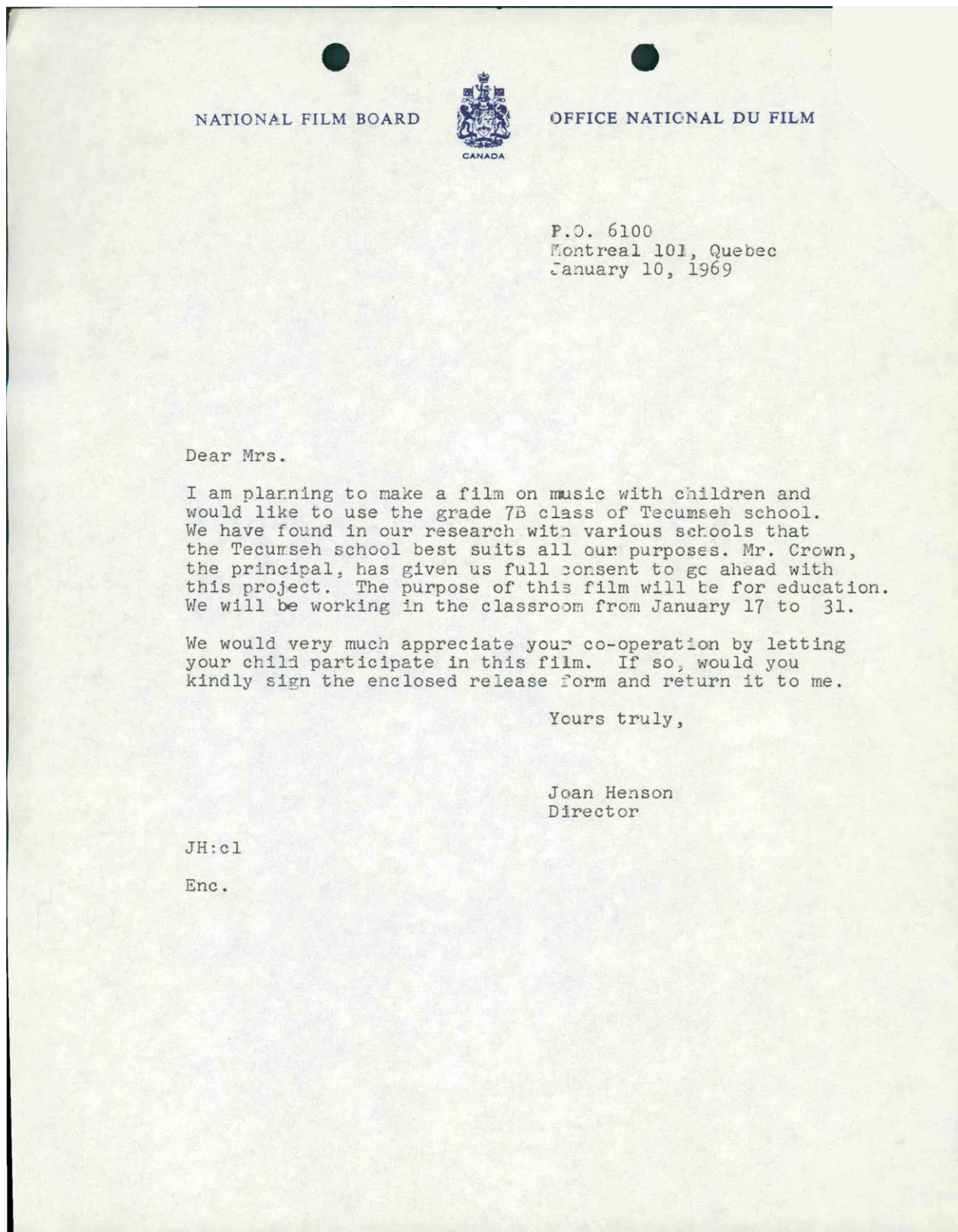
Description: Today, music in the schools is being granted increasing importance and time. R. Murray Schafer, a Canadian composer interested in education, has demonstrated that children can create their own compositions. He has gone into classrooms and started classes improvising within an hour or two. In his opinion, this experience is worth any number of rules of harmony or two part songs. Joan Henson intends to film Schafer with a grade school class working out an improvisational composition. His style is simple and bold and so the results produced will, without doubt, be startling. Schafer predicts that in about seven sessions with a class, a significant development in the children will have occurred and a composition of interest produced.



Ian MacNeill

Notes: The producer and the film maker have the option, encouraged by the Group after investigation, of returning to the Group to propose that the film be shot in a manner that would produce a Theatrical Short, perhaps at additional cost.

Figure 4. National Film Board of Canada Institutional Archives, memo approving the making of the film *Bing Bang Boom* (9 Jan 1969). 35-014/F-0326.



NATIONAL FILM BOARD



OFFICE NATIONAL DU FILM

P.O. 6100
Montreal 101, Quebec
January 10, 1969

Dear Mrs.

I am planning to make a film on music with children and would like to use the grade 7B class of Tecumseh school. We have found in our research with various schools that the Tecumseh school best suits all our purposes. Mr. Crown, the principal, has given us full consent to go ahead with this project. The purpose of this film will be for education. We will be working in the classroom from January 17 to 31.

We would very much appreciate your co-operation by letting your child participate in this film. If so, would you kindly sign the enclosed release form and return it to me.

Yours truly,

Joan Henson
Director

JH:cl

Enc.

Figure 5. National Film Board of Canada Institutional Archives, permission letter template from Joan Henson to parents of children filmed in *Bing Bang Boom* (10 Jan 1969). 35-014/F-0326.

creativity is to flourish, they must first be encouraged to listen, to explore the world of sound. He will give eight lessons, while the regular teacher looks on. (Henson 1969:, 0:48–1:11)

The documentary then profiles Schafer's work with the students (Table 1), challenging them to write down everything they hear and to discover and bring to class interesting sounds. A subgroup of the class is led by Schafer in a field trip to downtown Toronto, where they discuss the differences between noise and sound from vehicles and construction sites – an early manifestation of Schafer's lifelong battle against noise pollution – followed by Schafer challenging the students to experience silence while they are at home. The next class features a discussion of the impossibility of experiencing complete silence. In the film's second half, Schafer works with the class to distinguish and categorise sounds, identified variously by volume, appeal and associations with shape and landscapes. The final section focuses on the class working in small groups to create and perform a joint composition, with Schafer telling the group rather generously 'you're composers now' (18:11–18:13).

These approaches were already well documented in Schafer's published writings, based in part on his teaching at Simon Fraser as well as earlier visits to public school classrooms in Ontario during summer 1964. Schafer had tried out these ideas in short essays such as 'The Composer in the Classroom' (1965) and 'Ear Cleaning' (1967); 'The New Soundscape' (1969) appeared in the same year as the documentary, while later writings such as 'When Words Sing' (1970) and 'The Rhinoceros in the Classroom' (1975) continue to explore the approaches evident in the Tecumseh school (Schafer 1986). (My references are to the later collection, Schafer's *The Thinking Ear* from 1986.) 'The Composer in the Classroom', published four years before the documentary was made, includes such exercises as questioning the difference between noise and music; making loud, 'terrifying' sounds on cue; and encouraging students to create and perform their own works collectively – all of which he reused in *Bing Bang Boom* (ibid.: 10, 12, 41–2, 45).

In 'Ear Cleaning' from 1967, Schafer documented an expansion of these core ideas based on his 'experimental music course offered to first-year students at Simon Fraser University', in his first year of teaching (Schafer 1986: 46). Schafer's main addition is the focus on silence, quoting Cage directly ('There is no such thing as silence') which he will repeat, understandably without citing Cage to children, in the documentary (50). He provides the same exercises as that used in the documentary, asking students to complete a 'take-home assignment: Silence is elusive. Try to find it!' and 'Take paper. Write down the sounds you hear.' Similar to his discussion with the music

teacher in the documentary (01:13–01:41), he writes that 'while many of the adult students failed to notice most intimate sounds of all – the sounds of their own body, their breathing, their heartbeat, their voice, their clothing, etc.', much younger children 'were very sensitive to such sounds' (51). By 1969, his directions to the students are more specific: 'tonight, sometime, when you're at home . . . I want you to be very quiet . . . You're going to look for silence, or listen for silence. It's very hard to find, silence. And maybe you'll find it and maybe you won't' (09:20–09:54).

Perhaps tellingly, in 1975 Schafer would summarise his work in the Tecumseh classroom as follows:

Critics have often pointed out that as I am a classroom teacher only avocationally, I have never actually worked with one group of children long enough to determine whether an approach such as mine stands a better chance of raising the competence of the profession or even of producing a greater number of musical epics than other methods . . . A series of eight sessions with 12-year-old children was recorded in the film *Bing Bang Boom* by the National Film Board of Canada, and this did at least lead us up to a point where the class composed and performed its first piece of music. Equally important, from the point of view of demonstrating my abiding belief that the teacher's first task is to plan for his own extinction, was the fact that while at the opening of the film I am the central figure, asking questions and devising stratagems, by the end I have become almost invisible, while the class has taken over its own destiny, criticizing the composition and planning new works. (Schafer 1986: 240–1)

Schafer's seeming indifference to the outcome of his methods is affirmed by a later description of working with a 12-year-old student named Marty that suggests this composer should not have been in the classroom:

I wanted to find out how far their sense of time extended, and so I asked them how long the longest imaginable piece of music might be. 'Two hours', said [Marty]. 'Do you think you could play a two-hour piece of music?' He thought he could, so I asked him to choose his instrument. He chose a bass drum and started booming. That was the end of that class. We all listened to him for fifteen minutes, then the bell rang and the class went home for lunch. 'How much longer?' he asked faintly at 12:30. 'About an hour', I said and he went on beating. At about one o'clock two of his chums returned early and brought him some chocolate milk. Then, as encouragement, they started beating along with him. Most of the class drifted in early to find out what was happening. When the two hours were up, the drummer collapsed on the floor. The principal heard about the experience and later asked me: 'What did you do that for?' . . . 'Well', I replied, trying to summon up confidence, 'it may be that education is merely the history of all the most memorable events in our lives. And if that is so, all I can say is that this was one lesson Marty will never forget.' (Schafer 1986: 242)

Table 1. *Bing Bang Boom* overview

Time Stamp	Descriptions	Other Notes
0:00–0:28	Schafer signals students to make noise by holding up one finger (low, soft murmuring) or two fingers (loud, explosive outburst).	Includes opening credits
0:29–1:41	Schafer instructs class to write down every sound they hear. As they do so, he discusses the greater sensitivity of younger listeners to sound with the regular teacher, Miss Nugent.	Includes voiceover (0:48–1:11)
1:42–2:49	Female students report what sounds they listed with comments by Schafer. Some students identified (Darlene, Paul).	
2:50–4:33	Schafer gives assignment for students to ‘bring in an interesting sound to school, any interesting sound’. Camera follows a group of two boys as they look for interesting sounds in a garage, and Schafer speaks with the teacher about his philosophy and approach.	
4:34–7:39	Students demonstrate the sounds that they brought to school including a ukulele played with an empty glass. Schafer discusses how to describe and draw the sounds with students.	
7:40–8:42	Schafer leads a small group of students in a field trip to downtown Toronto, at the corner of Yonge Street and Dundas Street. They discuss the sounds of the streets, and the purpose and loudness of the noises from vehicles and construction work.	
8:43–12:09	Schafer discusses relative silence and assigns the students to ‘look for silence, or listen for silence’ at home overnight. Students report their experiences, leading to a discussion of the impossibility of silence and an exercise in listening to other students’ heartbeats.	
12:10–16:44	Schafer leads an exercise in creating the softest, loudest, repulsive and beautiful sounds. Students work in groups to create continuous sounds that imitate landscapes.	
16:45–18:20	Schafer assigns an exercise for groups to ‘find an interesting sound using your voices’. The students experiment and bring back their discoveries. One group creates a sung phrase based on the text ‘me, you, us, friends’, while another group sings the do-re-mi scale. A student asks Schafer, ‘are you allowed to criticize the critic?’ (18:05).	
18:21–24:17	The students collaborate in performing their compositions together, through trial and error. During the process, a group of boys challenge Schafer on his expectations for the composition, leading to a discussion of what constitutes a song and what is a conductor (20:22–21:58). The process of rehearsing, performing and conducting is taken over by the students.	Includes closing credits

Given Schafer’s lack of empathy – even cruelty – to this student, it is tempting to connect this incident with his own abject experiences in elementary and high school.

The available outtakes of around 75 minutes fills in the details of the making of the film as well as the editorial choices made by Henson and her crew (Table 2). From the outtakes, which do not include sound, it appears that the crew shot a significant amount of footage with another group of students than the one featured in the final cut. Moreover, several outtakes show students performing notated music on traditional instruments (piano, horn, accordion, and guitar), as Schafer observes and listens, suggesting that the film’s image of an unconventional classroom was curated to remove the more established elements of instruction.

Likewise, the ‘regular teacher’ mentioned but not named in the spoken introduction remains in the background throughout the final cut. Yet the outtakes show her capably leading her own class in a variety of

activities when Schafer does not appear to be present. Identified in NFB materials only as ‘Miss Nugent’, the teacher is shown leading rhythm exercises using Orff instruments, a standard part of the province’s training for music teachers. (A survey of public records of teachers active in the Ontario public schools did not yield additional information on her identity.) While the outtakes show Nugent and Schafer addressing the class together and leading a discussion, she remains sidelined in the final version, listening silently as Schafer expounds on his views of music education (Figure 6).

Other segments of the final film and in the outtakes suggest that Schafer struggled in dealing with the middle schoolers (Figures 7 and 8). In one segment from the final cut (20:20–21:28), a group of boys gradually surrounds Schafer, who is sitting at a desk and at times avoiding eye contact: he appears to be uncomfortable and defensive as the boys criticise both the quality of the sounds and the organisation that involves combining different groups of students:

Table 2. Outtakes from *Bing Bang Boom*

Outtake Number	Description
STK-ID: 40339 (approx. 21 minutes)	Schafer watches a group of three students, two playing piano with sheet music and one playing horn. Students undertake a writing exercise while sitting in a circle. Students take turns leading the group in a performance. Additional footage of students challenging Schafer (16:00). Schafer and Nugent speak to the class (18:30).
STK-ID: 40343 (0:47)	Exterior shots of Tecumseh Senior Public School.
STK-ID: 40342 (8:45)	Brief footage of two students talking on swings in the playground. Additional footage of field trip to Yonge and Dundas (3:15). Includes visit to a musical instrument store, Whaley Royce Musical Instruments.
STK-ID: 40341 (approx. 23 minutes)	Student writes 'MUSIC' on the blackboard. A student explores the sound of a dropping book and possibly sighing (0:22). Other students experiment with sounds by dropping writing instruments, rulers and scraping chairs. Footage of students in another classroom taught by a male teacher (1:55). Additional footage of students conducting in a combined performance. Schafer and Nugent lead a class discussion. Students play accordion and guitar, reading from music. Nugent teaches rhythm exercises written on the board to the students who clap (15:40) and later play what appear to be Orff xylophones and hand drums. Nugent leads class discussion and more rhythm exercises (21:25).
STK-ID: 40340 (22:34)	Schafer talking to students. Additional footage of students performing own compositions in groups. Nugent teaching students playing Orff instruments and singing (3:10). Female students in gym class (5:18). More footage of ukulele with glass (10:33), as students draw the sound on paper. Students complete an exercise with sound and arm movements. Nugent leads a rhythm exercise (13:50) with hand drums and voices.

Note: Outtakes do not include sound.

Boy 1: Sir, I still think it sounds like a bunch of racket.

Schafer: Yeah – well. It's a very unusual piece, I must say. But it's your piece, you know. You did it. You could have done anything you want, you know. When I simply said, 'Find an interesting sound' you could have – I was surprised that you didn't all come back with songs that you've learned or something. And yet you came up with these crazy sounds. I don't know. I didn't tell you to.

Boy 2: You said, 'an interesting sound'.

Schafer: That's right.

Boy 2: Well, a song. Well, that's a whole batch of sounds.

Schafer: Well, so are some of the things you're doing, they're whole batches of sound. They're not just single sound.

Boy 2: Yeah, but usually the song – you say, 'Sing a song', they're usually all nice sounds . . . But some of them that we sing, some of them come up nice and some of them come out bad.

Boy 1: You take somebody from one group and you start conducting somebody from the next group, they'd conduct everybody, they wouldn't know who they were pointing to or what was coming out.

Boy 3: We can practice.

Schafer: Yeah, you should practice.

Outtake STK-ID: 40339, beginning at 16:00, documents that this discussion continued for another minute. To be fair, Henson decided to include an edited version of this encounter in the final version, suggesting that the sessions were not the unqualified success that was expected. What seems clear is that Schafer lacked the training and experience to deal with a middle-school classroom that professional teachers in the highly competitive Toronto school system such as Miss Nugent received as part of their standard education.

Undoubtedly, some of the middle schoolers who appear in the documentary faced familial, social and economic challenges despite the appearance of relative affluence. However, in portraying the extensive educational resources including a brand-new, cutting-edge building and a visit from a rising composer, *Bing Bang Boom* reflected what the NFB wanted the world to see in Canada (Figure 9). The film was released with a promotional flyer that highlighted the experimental nature of Schafer's work in the classroom, in exclusively positive terms that emphasise his non-traditional approach:

When composer-conductor R. Murray Schafer moved into a Toronto classroom . . . the result was evidently enjoyed by everyone . . . It is clear to the children – and to the viewers – that he is playing his role of teacher by ear rather than by role. Indeed, this is what gives the lessons charm, anticipation, and obvious effectiveness . . . It is an approach far more engaging than formal approaches might be, and it may not even be what the musician had



Figure 6. Screenshot detail from *Bing Bang Boom* (1:13).

in mind when he began. But it is what the children responded to. It worked.

The film had a brief afterlife with showings in the United States: in May 1970, it won the Music and Dance award for Best Short Film at the American Film Festival in New York, and was shown at Schafer's 1974 residency at the University of North Texas (*New York Times* 1970; University of North Texas 1974).

Even as *Bing Bang Boom* gained attention outside of Canada, Ontario teachers and parents were critical of 'open concept' classrooms due to constant distraction and noise from multiple, competing learning groups. By the mid-1970s these spaces proved to be so unusable that 'architects soon began to abandon this model, and staff members piled up bookshelves to sequester their own classrooms once again', while 'many of the original schools were either gutted or seriously redesigned to recreate the traditional "egg-crate" school' (Clausen 2014: 84).³ Ontario's music education curriculum remained quite conservative overall, and still prioritises the teaching of music fundamentals in younger grades. More importantly, absent from the contemporary discourse surrounding the film is the fact that the progressive view embodied by Schafer's experimental approach and distributed by the NFB reflects a white-washed version of the resource-rich nation that could only exist with the destruction of its First Nations.

³The Tecumseh Senior Public School remains open, in Macy Dubois's original building (Pahwa 1967; Architectural Conservancy Ontario n.d.). Queries about possible renovations to the school's interior were unanswered. The 2009 curriculum – which appeared 40 years after *Bing Bang Boom* – includes the choice that seventh-grade students 'create compositions using found sounds or recycled materials', along with the option to perform from written scores on traditional instruments (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009: 142).

5. SCHAFFER AND INDIGENEITY

In spring 1969, while *Bing Bang Boom* was being edited, another documentary preserved a contrasting experience of the Canadian school system. Some 2,400 kilometers, or 1,500 miles, northwest from the Scarborough school, the NFB was making a documentary on the Anglican-sponsored MacKay residential school in Dauphin, Manitoba.⁴ An NFB crew filmed everyday life for the elementary students, most of whom lived within the school building or were billeted with local families: the surviving documentary footage (without audio) shows them cleaning the facility and making their beds with military-like precision.⁵ These students did not submit consent forms for the documentary signed by their families, having been forcibly removed or coerced from their homes. Unlike the Tecumseh school students, they were not encouraged to be creative or taken on field trips to discuss the difference between noise and music.

While Schafer encouraged the Scarborough students to listen for silence after school at their homes, the residential school students were systemically denied the most basic human rights: to live with their families, receive necessary medical treatment and be provided with decent food and housing. Silence was not a privilege to be discovered, but a mandate with which they were forced to comply, a fact eerily reinforced by the ghostly, silent footage of the children at MacKay. Rather than being encouraged 'to explore the world of sound', residential students were punished for making sounds such as speaking in their own language, singing their songs and reporting abuse. For the students at MacKay, music was a weapon of control (Figure 10, which shows the instructors only). In one extant segment, a group of students sit uncomfortably in straight rows within a gymnasium while the instructors lead the singing of an English-language song with a rigid piano accompaniment. The footage of these two music classrooms profiled by the NFB within a few months of each other could not be more different, contrasting the privilege of creative sounding and finding silence informed by the international values of experimental music education on the one hand, with the intentional destruction of generations of Indigenous children on the other.

⁴Excerpts from the documentary are available on the NFB site, including item STK-ID 13296 which is identified as 'children attending music class at Mackay [sic] Residential School for Indigenous children'. I have chosen not to include a weblink for this or other excerpts from this uncompleted documentary, and as per NFB protocols, no archival information is available for research except for survivors and their representatives.

⁵I am grateful to David Adams, who grew up in Dauphin and whose family billeted Indigenous students through the 1960s, for providing first-hand information about the MacKay school. Private conversation, 29 September 2023.



Figure 7. Still from *Bing Bang Boom*'s final cut showing students challenging Schafer about the improvisational composition (20:34).



Figure 8. Still from *Bing Bang Boom*'s final cut showing a student challenging Schafer about having students conducting different groups (21:15).

The elementary-aged residential students at MacKay were the victims of a government mandated system that denied them any of the rights bestowed on the middle schoolers in a suburb named after a town in England, occupying the traditional land of the Seneca, Chippewa and Mississauga people, in a school named for a Shawnee leader whose battle over treaty rights led to a forced allyship with the British, an early death and the decimation of his people. The documentary was never completed, perhaps because MacKay closed at the end of the 1969 academic year even though residential schools remained open throughout Canada

until the mid-1990s. The NFB may have had other reasons for abandoning the project as well, since the grim footage contradicts the positive message offered in *Bing Bang Boom* and other films about children and youth from that year.⁶

⁶Despite its conservative leanings, the NFB had made a bold move in 1968 by creating a documentary crew consisting of Indigenous filmmakers under the Challenge for Change programme, to train, support and circulate the work of Indigenous filmmakers (Stewart 2007: 56). Under pressure to censor these documentaries by the federal government, the unit was disbanded in 1973, and it would be decades until the NFB began producing new projects by Indigenous filmmakers (*ibid.*: 57–61).

**Bing
Bang
Boom**

When composer-conductor R. Murray Schafer moved into a Toronto classroom to do a bit of music teaching in his own way, the result was evidently enjoyed by everyone.

16mm Black-and-White

Produced by
The National Film Board of Canada

Screening Time:
24 minutes 18 seconds

Distributed by
The National Film Board of Canada

That music making is as much a matter of listening as it is of playing is plain to be seen in this film. Mr. Schafer begins by emphasizing the importance of listening, and of listening discriminately. He has his eleven-and-twelve-year-old "musicians" listening to anything and everything – their own breathing, their own incidental noises of feet shuffling or bangles tinkling and, eventually, he even suggests they go out and listen for silence.

It is clear to the children – and to the viewers – that he is playing his role of teacher by ear rather than by rote. Indeed, this is what gives the lessons charm, anticipation and obvious effectiveness. No lesson in music could ever have been quite like this for these children, or for any others for that matter. Even Mr. Schafer seems to be learning new things about music as the lessons go along.

This is a film about children exploring the nature of sound, sound making and, finally, what happens to sounds when they are organized a little and directed. It may not be music as we know it but, rather, an introduction to the idea of music and of music appreciation. It is an approach far more engaging than formal approaches might be, and it may not even be what the musician had in mind when he began. But it was what the children responded to. It worked.

Direction and Editing:
Joan Henson
Photography: Tony Ianzelo
Location Sound:
Claude Hazanavicius
and Jean-Guy Normandin
Sound Editing:
Jean-Pierre Joutel
Re-recording:
George Croll, Jean-Pierre Joutel
Production: Joseph Koenig

National Film Board of Canada
P.O. Box 6100, Montreal 101, Quebec
Printed in Canada 106B 0169 060

Figure 9. National Film Board of Canada Institutional Archives, promotional flyer for *Bing Bang Boom* (1969). 35-014/F-.



Figure 10. Still from NFB's uncompleted documentary on the MacKay residential school, 1969.

After *Bing Bang Boom*, Schafer continued to publish on music education by expanding many of the listening experiments in the film with a focus on post-secondary rather than elementary instruction (Schafer 1992). At Simon Fraser University, he established the World Soundscape Project (WSP), which preserved soundscapes across Canada while documenting and critiquing the impact of noise pollution.⁷ Based on these recordings, the WSP produced a series of radio programmes broadcast nationwide on CBC radio that 'all but ignored' Indigenous peoples and first-generation Canadians from outside of Europe, resulting in the silencing of those voices and the reproduction of 'structural forms of inequality that dog even the most well-meaning white settlers' (Akiyama 2015).

Schafer resigned from Simon Fraser in 1975 and settled first in the area around Bancroft, Ontario (outside of Ottawa) and later in the tiny town of Indian Bend in the northeastern part of the province, just outside of the city of Peterborough.⁸ The winter landscape viewed from his farmhouse in Bancroft inspired one of Schafer's most frequently performed works, *Snowforms* for treble choir (1981, revised

1983), which originated with his observing snow drifts in Greenland from a plane during a flight in 1971 (Vincent 2021; Graziano n.d.). The completed work was Schafer's own version of an exercise that he used in *Bing Bang Boom* (15:37–16:44), which involved imagining and tracing landscapes on the chalkboard, and then translating the shapes into sound:

Sometimes I have given children 'sight-singing' exercises in which they are asked to 'sing' drawings or the shapes of the distant horizon. *Snowforms* began as a series of sketches of snowdrifts, seen out the window of my Monteaugle Valley farmhouse. I took these sketches and traced a pentagram over them. The notes of the pieced [sic] emerged wherever the lines of the sketch and the stave crossed. Of course I modified the drawings as necessary since the work is primarily a piece of music and only secondarily a set of sketches. I printed the work so that the shapes of the snow were in white over a pale blue background. (Graziano n.d.)

In the graphic, layered score of *Snowforms*, Schafer mixed humming and vocables with settings of Inuit words for snow such as *apingaut*, *mauyk*, *akelrorak*, *anio*, *aput* and *pokaktok* (first snowfall, soft snow, newly drifted snow, snow for melting into water, spread out snow and salt-like snow, respectively).⁹ Since the Inuit lands are located exclusively outside of Ontario, this work could be disregarded as appropriative, especially in dialogue with Schafer's problematic writings.¹⁰

Indeed, Schafer has been described as 'a gifted composer' with 'a sincere appreciation for Indigenous cultures, yet one who perhaps could only love them on his own terms, only as they fit into his own sweeping vision for a Canadian music' (Hagood 2021). In his writings he voiced racist views of Canada's 'Indigenous foundation' that 'permanently situates Indigenous music in the past' to allow Canadian composers to create a uniquely nationalist music (Robinson 2020: 5, 12). This 'celebration of cultural amnesia' (ibid.: 155) has rendered Schafer's oeuvre problematic as scholars wrestle with the legacy of settler colonialism, especially in the wake of the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2007–15) that recorded and preserved first-hand accounts of the residential school system's horrors.

In the years surrounding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, survivors told their stories in a variety of other ways: through NFB-sponsored documentaries, visual arts, musical works and published memoirs.

⁷For an excellent reconsideration of Schafer's legacy in the field of acoustic ecology, see the materials from the Research Centre for Music, Sound, and Society in Canada's online symposium organised by Ellen Waterman on 24 and 30 September 2022, titled 'R. Murray Schafer's Ecologies of Music and Sound Re-examined, September 24 and 30, 2022' (Research Centre for Music, Sound, and Society in Canada 2022).

⁸In Bancroft, he composed and engaged in community music-making in a manner that extends his experiments with amateur musicking in the Tecumseh classroom (Vincent 2021).

⁹A performance by the Vancouver Chamber Choir with graphic score is available at <https://youtu.be/GiOhtgR1T0k>.

¹⁰As one anonymous reviewer for this journal noted, Schafer did not spend much time revising his earlier publications – all of which were issued with minimal editorial oversight – in his later years, when he was completing the *Patria* cycle that combines 'ritual, identity, performance roles, and performance space' within a specific soundscape 'as a way of revitalizing performance experience' (Galloway 2007, 140).

Inuvialuit author Margaret-Olemaun Pokiak-Fenton spent two years at the Catholic-sponsored Immaculate Conception residential school in Aklavik, and later recounted her ordeal for young readers in the memoir *Fatty Legs* (2010). In 2011, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission sponsored a theatrical adaptation of the book featuring Pokiak-Fenton narrating her own story that is intended to teach the subject to middle schoolers in a manner that is both responsible and age appropriate (*Fatty Legs* n.d.; Robinson 2020: 282n5). The work later toured Atlantic Canada and Ontario in 2015, featuring Anishinaabe dancer Sarain Carson-Fox and Miikmaq actor Lisa Nasson (Watson 2015; Xara Choral Theatre 2015).

Perhaps surprisingly, the theatrical adaptation of Pokiak-Fenton's story reconnects with the Tecumseh Senior Public School's seventh-grade classroom while possibly amending how we evaluate Schafer's later interactions with Indigenous peoples. In a crucial segment of the work portraying Pokiak-Fenton's traumatic arrival at the school, *Snowforms* is performed by an on-stage chorus as the main musical accompaniment. The chanted Inuit words for snow accompany the main character's transition from her traditional culture to the brutal world of the Aklavik school. The performance of *Snowforms* is suddenly broken off as dancer and actor recount the severing of Pokiak-Fenton's braids by a violent nun. While the inclusion of Schafer's composition in the accompaniment is somewhat downplayed in the available promotional materials, the choice by the Indigenous creators of the theatrical piece to perform *Snowforms* suggests at least the possibility of reconciliation.

6. CONCLUSION: LISTEN

In 2009, Schafer collaborated with the NFB again in a short documentary that was filmed at his home outside of Peterborough (New 2009). Titled *Listen*, in a succinct summary of the composer's worldview, the film records Schafer enacting many of the exercises that he deployed in the suburban Toronto classroom 40 years earlier. Starting with a recording of *Snowforms*, the documentary shows the now elderly Schafer in the winter landscape, itemising every sound he hears. Later, he experiments with found sounds, confronts the threat of noise pollution and critiques the idea of recorded sounds, lifting the needle to interrupt what seems to be an LP of *Snowforms* and stopping a projector showing his own image. All are used to encourage the viewer to listen without mediation – ironically, preserved within a documentary film – just as these activities were employed and recorded in the Scarborough classroom.

As Schafer listens, he reflects in a voiceover (02:24–02:43) that 'the world is a huge composition, a huge

musical composition that's going on all the time, without a beginning and presumably without an ending. We are the composers of this huge, miraculous compositions that's going on around us, and we can improve it, or we can destroy it.' Echoing his invitation to the 12-year-old Tecumseh students that 'you're composers now', Schafer's words reaffirm the fundamental questions raised by this study: who speaks and who is silenced, who hears and who is heard, who creates and whose creative works are extracted. And these words are a reminder of our shared responsibility, especially those of us with the privilege to have our ideas published and disseminated, to listen to every voice in this huge miraculous composition.

Acknowledgements

This article is dedicated to my siblings Darlene and Grant, in memory of our years in the Etobicoke school system (1973–79), and to my parents Doug and Gwen, who lived their last years in the town of Peterborough, Ontario.

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