

Labrador Life

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Efforts continue
to have Labrador
husky recognized

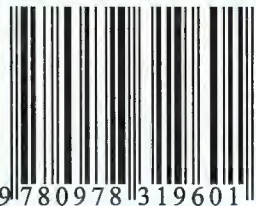
**Nain Brass Band
returns to roots**

**A painter's
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*Ode to Labrador***

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Karrie Obed, Mike Dyson and Devin Obed in rehearsal.

Homecoming

Nain Brass Band returns to original roots

story by Mark Turner

What is it that makes a community? For some, the immediate answer might be one of shared space. We travel upon the same streets, work in the same buildings and shop in the same stores; therefore, we can be said to be a community. For others, community comes about because of exclusion.

Here, the struggle to fly the Labrador flag is instructive. Labrador is not Newfoundland after all. It is a community defined by a border with Quebec to the west and south and by an ocean to the east. But neither of these answers is entirely adequate. Both leave something out. There is another more abstract force that makes communities, something we only sense in times of sorrow, hardship or joy. And it is this force that I – being

neither of the north coast of Labrador, nor of the Moravian faith – came to have a clear understanding of in accompanying the Nain Brass Band to Herrnhut, Germany in the spring of 2015 for the 36th biannual Brüderischen Bläserfest (Moravian Brass Festival). Broadly speaking, it is a force that issues from a shared set of practices, a sum far greater than the sum of a tradition of faith along with a tradition of music.

When the Moravians first came to evangelize the Inuit of northern Labrador in 1771, music was a tool amongst many in their kit. And like the choral, string and organ traditions they brought with them, the brass band was adapted and modified from the Moravian tradition to something decidedly local. But unlike those other traditions that generally required performers to be stationary, the

brass band was remarkably portable, occupying bell towers, playing for arriving ships and even – on occasion I’ve been told – performing for unwitting audiences in their beds. For a very long time, the brass bands provided the public music for the Moravian communities of the north coast. For visitors prior to the advent of air travel, there was a good chance the brass band was both the first and last thing you heard. For residents, it was the soundtrack of church feasts, fiftieth birthdays and funerals, to name a few events. This made the fading of the tradition in the 1990s and 2000s all the more difficult to accept and the revival of the tradition by way of the Tittulautet Nunatsiavuttini – Nunatsiavut Brass Band workshops again all the more satisfying.

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It was, ultimately, the Tittulautet Nunatsiavuttini initiative that led to the Nain Brass Band's invitation to the Brüderischen Bläserntag. Developed by Dr. Tom Gordon of the Memorial University of Newfoundland funded by the International Grenfell Association, Tittulautet Nunatsiavuttini not only provided local, practical, training for those interested in reviving the brass band tradition, it served as a rally for the tradition more generally. For elders on the north coast, living memory gave way to living practice. For everyone else, fuzzy or non-existent impressions gave way to something concrete and immediate. And for those outside of the region, there was recognition that a distinctly local tradition had been given new life. Dr. Peter Vogt, co-pastor of the Herrnhut Parish (home of the Moravian Church) understood this and, through the intermediary of Dr. Hans Rollmann, approached Dr. Gordon about the possibility of the Nain Brass Band participating in the Brüderischen Bläserntag.

For Devin Dyson (trombone), Gwen Dyson (trumpet), Michael Dyson (euphonium), Darlene Holwell (trumpet) and Karrie Obed (euphonium), accepting that invitation meant committing themselves to a range of duties above and beyond the regular activities of the brass band. New repertoire needed to be learned, absences from work and school needed to be cleared, itineraries needed to be created and all of the administrative work that comes along with international travel needed to be tended to. The most arduous of these tasks – something that will come as no surprise to Labradorians outside of Upper Lake Melville and Labrador West – was acquiring passports. In spite of the fact that planning began five months before the May departure date, the band was only able to secure their documents the same day they were to fly from St. John's to London. It was a process made all the more difficult by way of a weather hold in St. John's that delayed the band's arrival. Without the deft manoeuvrings of Dr. Gordon and the efforts of the patient and dedicated staff at the local Passport Canada offices, the band's journey would have ended in St. John's.

Once in Europe, our travel fortunes fared little better. Waking in Frankfurt to begin what was the fourth day of travel



Devin Obed visits Jens Haven's grave. (Submitted photo)

for the band, we received news of a nation-wide railway strike. The route from Frankfurt to Löbau (the nearest town to Herrnhut with a railway station) was already indirect. The strike rendered it almost unworkable. From Herrnhut, Dr Vogt devised an alternative rail route for us, albeit one that was considerably longer and required departure from a station in an entirely different part of the city than we had originally planned. Braving rush hour traffic, language barriers, a near loss of band members and, among other things, a self-identified vampire, the re-routing proved a success.

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The approach towards Herrnhut brings with it a sense of calm, a sensation that anyone who has undertaken this journey is aware of. I imagine that such feelings are common in the final stages of any pilgrimage, but it takes a distinct form here. Modern metropolises give way to cities defined by their historical architecture that, in turn, give way to rolling hills and distant forests. The change in landscape is mirrored by the change in the attitudes of passengers. Urban guardedness yields to rural openness. Fields of rapeseed surround Herrnhut: a sea of yellow and green around an island of white and ochre. The town is remarkable for its stillness.

But this tiny island is also remarkable for the way in which past and present seem to co-exist. For the Nain Brass Band, this provided a mechanism for identification. Part of the north coast seemed to be here, or, perhaps, part of Herrnhut seemed to be in the north coast. Directly across from our accom-

modations and overlooking the community as a sort of park is God's Acre, where the remains of generations of Labrador Missionaries beginning with Jens Haven lay. The church, a short walk away, is the foundation for the same structures in Nain and Hopedale. Though much larger in scale, and designed for a more forgiving climate, the building greets its visitors with the same detailed and functional unpretentiousness as its offspring on the coast. And the brass bands, though schooled in European traditions, still provide the same kind of public music as their Labrador counterparts.

What was striking about the Bröderischen Bläserntag was how much it seemed to be patterned on this idea of community. The objective of the festival was for brass players to come together to rehearse and perform a common program of music for the community. Individual bands were not featured in the final performance; rather each had roles

to play in the communal events leading up to the final concert. For the Nain Band, that took the form of a number of performances during church services. Karrie Obed and I performed duets of "Kilarutjålaunga" ("Nearer My God to Thee") and "Sivolilaurit" ("Jesus Day by Day"), while the band performed "Takutigilåmmiintinut" ("God Be With You Till We Meet Again") twice, the final time leading the entire Herrnhut congregation in song. The band also featured the traditional Easter tune "Ernik Edlegidlapagit". Originally thought to have been composed by an Inuk from Labrador – the only tune in the north coast brass band tradition to hold this distinction – audience members reported hearing a similar tune in Moravian villages on the banks of the Volga River. Each of these performances was received with a warmth and attentiveness that deepened the band's welcome within the larger ensemble and the community. Like the north coast, here, audi-



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Entire Ensemble. Official Photo by Stephan Schmorrd

ences listened to their songs as stories.

Here, people were also eager to convey their solidarity with brothers and sisters from a Unity Province seldom represented but regarded highly at Herrnhut. Many people seemed to either know or have been related to missionaries on the north coast. Martin Vollprecht, a tuba player who travelled from Spiegelberg to participate in the Brüderischen Bläserntag spent much of his youth in Hopedale, the son of Missionary Gerhard Vollprecht. The previous summer, Martin had travelled to the north coast with his niece Christiane, a trumpet player from Königfeld. Both served as voluntary guides, translators and confidants to the band. Heidrun Kuchler a resident of Herrnhut, was the descendant of a long line of Labrador Missionaries. Accepting an invitation from her husband, Heinz, to visit their house, the band surveyed two centuries of photographs, postcards, correspondence and artwork generated on the north coast. These were not presented as artefacts out of time and context. Like the band's repertoire, these well-worn pieces are the basis of a living practice that continues to define a community.

Now, some months after our return, we see that what it was that the Brüderischen Bläserntag had provided was a cadence. In this, the last year or funding for the Tittulautet

Nunatsiavuttini initiative, it served as a conclusion to work that had begun three years ago. To the best of our knowledge, this was the first time a brass band from the north coast had ever visited and performed at Herrnhut. But that distinction also brings with it a new beginning for the brass band tradition in Nunatsiavut. Now, as true ambassadors of their tradition, the work of the Nain Brass Band is to reaffirm and promote that tradition in Labrador and abroad.

A new community remains to be built. †

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