

Perth senior has new career penning patriotic songs



Ellis Craig

[Desmond Devoy](#)

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Ellis Craig, 84, does not want to replace “O Canada” but he does want to complement it with his own patriotic song.

The Lanark Lifestyle Retirement Residence resident is a retired RCMP superintendent, but he has found a new career — as a writer of patriotic songs.

“I’d never written a song before in my life,” he said during a telephone interview in mid-December.

In 2017, looking for music online to accompany a video of a recent vacation to Australia, he saw a video from the folk group, The Seekers and their hit ode to their homeland, “I Am Australian.”

It was catchy and he joked that, “I almost wished I was Australian, after I heard it three or four times,” he said. So, a small voice within him asked: “Why don’t you write one?” A song, for Canada? So, “fuelled with a couple of glasses of wine I put a few lyrics together.”

The lyrics of the song “We Are Canadian” name checks everyone from astronaut Chris Hadfield to runner Terry Fox, from the Stanley Cup to poet John McCrae.

[**Click here to hear the song “We Are Canadian”**](#)

BIRTH OF A SONG

He showed his wife his efforts, and she told him that they were “good, really good.”

He then took the lyrics to Garth Hampson, a retired RCMP staff sergeant, and former RCMP band lead singer, known for singing “O Canada” at sporting events and other public gatherings. Hampson said the lyrics were “fabulous” and pointed him in the right direction with music producers in Ottawa.

“Carey Blackwell (of the Blackwell Brothers Band) had prepared the music for the song,” he said. About three months later, an MP3 file arrived in his email with a version of the song. Blackwell had composed the music for the song, and, in the online video of the song, the music tracks and vocals are by Alan Sandeman.

A GOOD WORD

Craig sent the video out and about to see if it would catch the eye, or rather, ear, of an interested Canadian music icon. He sent it to Anne Murray, who told him politely that she had retired from music about a decade ago, but told him, “it’s pretty darn good.”

“From a Maritimer, that’s pretty good praise,” he said, glowing from the Nova Scotian singer’s words. (He himself hails from the greater Fredericton, New Brunswick area.) He hopes that “the uncle of Michael Bublé or a Tragically Hip member will hear it,” and bring it to their famous nephew’s attention.

Craig intended the song to be sung like a folksong, one that would make “ordinary Canadians react with tears and goosebumps.”

His goal is to see the song performed on Parliament Hill one Canada Day. He called it “a big ambition,” but he was determined to “go big or go home.”

The closest Canada has come to an unofficial, folky, “patriotic, singalong” national anthem, has been Bobby Gimby’s “Ca-na-da!” which was everywhere during Canada’s centennial celebrations in 1967.

“What a void we have here,” Craig lamented.

But it appears that void is being filled.

PRAISE

The online video has attracted more than 77,700 views online so far, as of Dec. 22.

It got a standing ovation when it was played at a meeting of the Probus Club in Belleville and has been selected by the 60-member Waterloo Regional Police Chorus as their lead-in song, once the pandemic is over.

Jody Benjamin, director of Ottawa Shout Sisters Choir, also lauded it: “The tears are still in my eyes,” she wrote after hearing it. “It really is great.”

NEW SONGS

But his new song writing catalogue does not end there. Craig also has other songs in the works. He has music and lyrics ready to go for a song, “Known Just to God and Me,” about the Unknown Soldier.

He has lyrics, and is awaiting music for two other pieces. The first is “The Ever Dwindling Few” about Canadian soldiers storming Juno Beach in Normandy on D-Day 1944. The second is “Here Come the Snowbirds!” which he jokes is about the military air show flight demonstration team, not elderly Canadians who flock to Florida every winter.