Audio-Visual Review:

NORTHERN SIGHTLINES

by Larry O'Malley

John Spearn is a dedicated teacher of Social Science at Vimy Ridge Academy in Edmonton, Alberta. John is also a passionate performing musician who has combined his teaching and musical ability to develop a resource that will benefit classroom teachers.

His first CD "Northern Sightlines" contains 10 songs of Canadian History and culture that fit into a wide variety of grade and subject classes. The songs, composed by Mr. Spearn, portray the historical realities of Canada in an entertaining way. Topics covered range from the tragedy of John Franklin, to the tragedy of Louis Riel, the building of the CPR and the execution of Edith Cavell, to name but a few. Each of the songs is historically accurate and the music captures the attention of the students as they become encompassed in the History of Canada. In addition to the CD, an accompanying teacher's guide has also been developed for teachers to use. The teacher's resource manual contains the lyrics to each of the songs and has a "Curriculum Units Cross-reference Chart" to show how the songs can be integrated into the curriculum expectations for various grades and subject areas. The songs can be used for Social Sciences, Language Arts or Environmental Science. "Ribbon of Broken Dreams", for example, can be used in Social Science to cover Canadian History, immigration, labour unions and human rights. It can also be used in Language Arts to examine poetry (the ballad). Each of the songs is accompanied by a listening test (with answer key) as well as extension activities. The extension activities contain questions/ activities that are useful for both teachers and students.

John is completing a second CD "Northern Sightlines II" that extends his song writing ability to capture more of Canada's History. This CD, set for release in autumn 2002, features 15 songs that cover Canada's past. Songs featured include "Dieppe," "The Corvettes of Halifax," "Ten Thousand Guns (Vimy Ridge)", and "Roy Brown and Wop May." The

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CD is not, however, just about Canada's role in the war as songs such as "Run Terry, Run" (Terry Fox) indicate. This CD promises to be as informative and entertaining as the first. I was fortunate in that I was able to "test" the second CD with my Grade 10 History class. The song "Dieppe" had the entire class completely silent. Its eerie rendition

of the morning of August 19, 1942 enabled my students to be a part of that ill-fated raid in a way that text readings and video clips could not. The other songs that I used from the CD had a similar impact on the class.

"Northern Sightlines" is clearly a very worthwhile project. It is both entertaining and informative for anyone interested in the History of Canada. The excellence of the project is reflected in the fact that it was nominated for a Prairie Music Award in 2001. In addition, John has been invited to attend the ceremonies marking the 85th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge (for which the song "Ten Thousand Guns" was composed) in April 2002. The Northern Sightlines CD's are available through Nelson Thomson Canada ($29.95 c/w Teacher's Resource) at 1-800-268-2222 **www.nelson.com** or you can reach John at **www.canadasongs.com**