

SPRING 2017

Renaissance

THE RETIRED TEACHERS OF ONTARIO MAGAZINE

Online inspiration



Social action
through
social media

Connecting
across time
and place

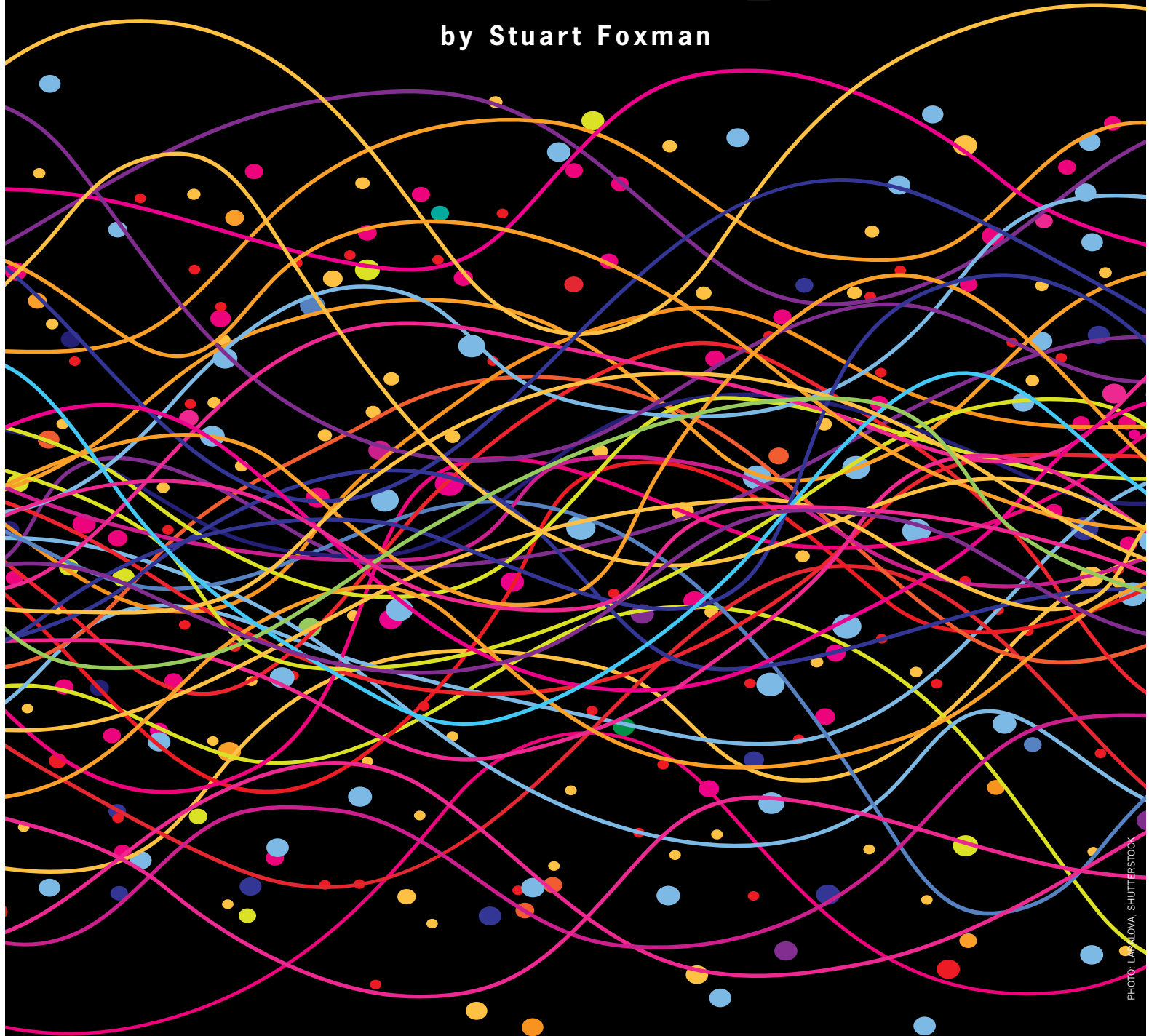
Becoming
online
inspirations

Features |

Connecting

across time and place

by Stuart Foxman



Finding information is much easier now — Campbell uses the websites ancestry.ca, familysearch.org and findmypast.com

Ennio Paola is a composer and Alan Campbell is into family trees. Both RTO/ERO members enrich these two very different pastimes through online activities.

For Paola, District 24, Scarborough & East York, Internet connections confirm a simple truth: “Music is the international language.” To Campbell, District 38, Lambton, web tools are ways to keep branching out. “I call it making like Sherlock Holmes, with lots of detective work,” he says.

Ancestry hunter

When Campbell was young, his family often moved throughout southwestern and central Ontario. His father, a gravel crusher operator, followed the work. “He went where new roads were being built,” says Campbell. “Through most of my early life, we were relatively transient, rootless.”

For 30 years, Campbell has spent considerable time finding his roots. It started when a second cousin forwarded him some family materials, including a marriage certificate and an obituary for his great-grandfather. He started to check census records, land records and local archives. Slowly, he built timelines and filled in gaps.

That was in the day of paper and microfilm records. Finding information is much easier now. Campbell uses the websites ancestry.ca, familysearch.org and findmypast.com, and also recommends the genealogy section of Library and Archives Canada at bac-lac.gc.ca. Together, the sites help people look into births, deaths, marriages, immigration, military records and much more.

Past president of the Ontario Genealogical Society (ogs.on.ca), Campbell blogs for the organization. He also conducts genealogy workshops to encourage people to record their family histories.

After retiring, Campbell became particularly introspective in general. He contacted his Grade 7 teacher, and checked out one of his old schools. It had been razed to the ground, the land now occupied by a seniors’ residence. “The path is disappearing behind me,” he says.

Campbell has traced one family line back six generations, to the late 1700s. He does more than plot out names and dates. More important, he collects details, stories and unique documents.

One such document, from 1878, allowed his great-grandmother to sign a mortgage agreement, rare for a married woman at the time. What did



Alan Campbell

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALAN CAMPBELL, DISTRICT 38, LAMBTON

it feel like to obtain that paper? “It’s a connection, a great feeling, like you’re closer to the era and understanding what it was like,” he says.

For just one side of his family, Campbell has documentation that runs about 600 pages. He has three more files like that on the go. With a family tree that keeps growing taller and wider, “It’s never done,” he says.

The sound of Dada

Paola has had experiences with different sorts of discoveries online. His eclectic career has spanned playing in rock bands, conducting an orchestra, teaching music at school, and composing in multiple styles.

His online activities centre around two sites: SoundCloud, a music and audio platform (see soundcloud.com/ennio-a-paola), and MusicaNeo, a website for sharing sheet music (see enniopaola.musicaneos.com). “Online media tools continue to play a significant role in connecting [composers] with like-minded artists as we share in developing and exhibiting inspirational projects,” says Paola.



PHOTO: JANNOON028, SHUTTERSTOCK

“As a composer, online media tools continue to play a significant role in connecting with like-minded artists”

To illustrate how those connections cross borders, he mentions German Dada artist Angelika Hoerle (1899–1923). In 2009, the Art Gallery of Ontario mounted an exhibit of Hoerle’s work. Angie Littlefield, Hoerle’s grandniece and a writer and curator based in Toronto, wrote a companion monologue play called *Angelika’s Promise*. For the play, Paola wrote a music underscore called “Comets & Shadows.”

Fast-forward six years. Paola is in the midst of writing a commissioned piano piece to mark the 750th anniversary of the birth of Dante Alighieri. And across the ocean, a German novelist named Ute Bales is researching and writing about Hoerle. While searching online, Bales stumbles upon Paola’s name and listens to “Comets & Shadows” on SoundCloud.

She contacts Paola. As he reports, “She fell in love with my music, and said it expressed the subject in a way that she could imagine Hoerle.”

In Bales’ novel, *Die Welt Zerschlagen*, she ended up acknowledging Paola. She also asked him to contribute music for her 2016 book tour. He composed a track called “The World Is Smashed/The World Is Shattered.” Bales used it when travelling throughout Germany and in a special presentation at the famed Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, a place that was instrumental in founding the Dada art movement.

Paola doesn’t speak a word of German. Bales struggles in English. Yet they found a common chord. What Paola says about music could apply to the web as well: “It breaks all the barriers.” ^{RS}

Exploring interests online

The Internet can be a means to power your passions — and also find others who have those passions. Here are four online tools that can help.

 [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)

A website where you can discover 263,000 groups that allow people to do things, explore, teach and learn together.

 [pepo.com](https://www.pepo.com)

An app that lets you share your interests and connect with experts and enthusiasts, through public and private chats.

 [groupspaces.com](https://www.groupspaces.com)

A platform for managing membership groups, from clubs to hobbies to associations.

 [affinity.com](https://www.affinity.com)

A social network with interest-specific channels for posts, pictures and news.