

Singing Box 331: Re-sounding Eighteenth-Century Mohican Hymns from the Moravian Archives

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“Singing Box 331” takes as its focus a single Mohican-language hymn verse, “Jesu paschgon kia,” from the Moravian Mission collection at the Moravian Archives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. This article is a collaboration between the authors (a historian and a musicologist), and members of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, a scholar in linguistics, recording professionals, and students, as well as with professional Mohican musician Bill Miller and composer Brent Michael Davids. Applying what might be called a nanohistorical approach to the verse’s four lines of text, we have traced the history of the creation of Mohican-language hymns at a number of different communities affiliated with the Moravian Church in New York and Pennsylvania in the mid-eighteenth century. Building upon this historical research, we have rendered “Jesu paschgon kia” as a living, multidimensional sounded text by creating three recordings, each of which highlights very different aspects of our collaborative work. These musical renderings of the verse stand as aural shorthand for the diverse meanings and interpretations of historical sources generated by varied relationships with and perspectives on those sources, speaking to recent calls for methodological innovation in the fields of history, musicology, and Native American and Indigenous Studies.