

IN MEMORIAM

After six months of illness, Mr. Alan Mills, the famous Canadian folklorist and former member of the Canadian Folk Music Society, passed away in Montreal, the scene of his lifework, on June 14, 1977.

A native of Lachine, historic suburb of Montreal, he was originally a newspaperman who began to collect and sing folk songs as a hobby. "He received his early professional training in interpretation of folk songs from the noted English musicologist and singer, the late John Goss, with whose quintet of "London Singers" he toured the United States and Canada in the late thirties. Since 1947, he has been featured regularly on the National and International Services of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in his own program of folk songs and in many other network broadcasts". (1)

The artist Alan Mills was not an ethnic imitator, but a sophisticated singer of folk songs. In a Moncton TIMES AND TRANSCRIPT article of April 1964, Dick MacDonald, writing about Mr. Mills' concert given in this city, said:

"A polished performer, a brilliant personality, a dedicated promoter of Canada's history in Folk music. That is Alan Mills". During his stay in this city, he invited the performers "to dig up some of the tunes from the Maritimes - Helen Creighton had listed some 5,000 from Nova Scotia itself - and present them to the masses". Alan Mills' suggestion received full approval.

People of this country and of other lands became familiar with Alan Mills' warm baritone voice and his equally-warm personality. For years, Alan Mills and H el ene Baillargeon, two of Canada's foremost interpreters of folk songs, worked together as a team. If they became known to thousands of Canadian radio listeners and television viewers, they were also known outside of Canada through their American recordings of Canadian Folk Songs, as well as through their transcriptions and three years of weekly short-wave broadcasts to Europe and Latin-America for the International Service of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Since 1955, Alan Mills also worked very closely with Mr. Jean Carignan, the outstanding Canadian Fiddler with whom he gave concerts in Canada, the United States, Great Britain and France. "Songs and Fiddle Tunes of Canada", interpreted by these two artists, appear on Folkway Record FG 3532.

In constant demand for concert appearances, Alan Mills, if he sang for numerous city audiences, did not neglect invitations coming from schools, colleges and universities. Mrs. Barbara C a s s - B e g g s of the Canadian Folk Music Society, presented the artist to several Schools in Saskatchewan; she had been profoundly impressed by his human attitude towards young folks.

(1) Folkways Record, FC 7750 - Christmas Songs of Many Lands.

Some years ago, Gérald Denis, writing an article on Alan Mills in a Montreal Journal, compared him to the great Charles Marchand and said that he was not only "un chanteur à la voix d'or", but something more: an artist trying to reveal the soul of peoples. He associated Alan Mills' name with that one of an ambassador, an ambassador of the two official cultures of Canada, the French and the English.

In Canada, in various countries and within the Canadian Folk Music Society, Mr. Mills had a host of friends and collaborators. These, along with him, built works of enduring value. To mention but a small number of these: Helen Creighton, Héléne Baillargeon, Jean Carignan, Edith Fowke, Richard Johnston, Kenneth Peacock, Helmut Blum, Bram Morriison.

In answer to my question: "What sort of man was Alan Mills?", I received the following answers:

"He was a true man in every sense of the word, a responsible person who made and knew how to keep real friends, and who could be counted on to be a true friend in time of need". - (Mrs. Alan Mills).

"He was a truly great Canadian. He was an upright man, a jovial, humble, affectionate and generous man. While he was always tolerant about the behaviour of others, he was simply inflexible in the domain of art; everything had to be authentic as well as artistic." (Héléne Baillargeon).

"No words can fittingly express all that Alan Mills was as a person. In my whole life, I have never met another such wonderful man and, in all likelihood, I never shall". - (Jean Carignan).