

THE STATE OF THE ART: THE FOLK REVIVAL IN CANADA

Photo: Nola Johnston.



Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat in a Vancouver classroom.

Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat, the authors of this article, have been working musicians for the past ten years and singers for twenty. Since the late 'sixties they have worked too in the organization of folk music, as Directors of the Vancouver Folk Song Society (both having served terms as President) and as Officers of the Canadian Folk Music Society, of which Rika is presently Secretary and Jon President.

Jon was Editor of Come All Ye from 1972 to 1977, and Rika Editor of the Society's Three Quarter Times from 1975 to 1977, in which year they

became founding Editors of Canada Folk Bulletin.

Their professional work has taken them across the country, performing in concerts and workshops in schools, universities, clubs and festivals in every province. Since 1977, they have concentrated on singing in schools and on giving workshops to teachers in the use of Canadian folk song in support of the school curricula. In the fall of 1979, their radio series of sixteen half-hour shows incorporating traditional Canadian songs, produced in collaboration with Gary Marcuse,

was aired on the Western Educational Network of the CBC. The series is to be repeated this fall, and may be heard on alternate Thursdays at 2 p.m. in British Columbia and in Manitoba. Their first record, "The Green Fields of Canada", will be issued later this fall.

This article arose, as they say, partly out of the need "to sort out our own thoughts on the revival" and "to open discussion on the tentative conclusions reached" in it. With the closure of the *Bulletin*, that discussion sadly cannot take place here, but they would be pleased to hear your comments. You can write to them at 1537 Frances St., Vancouver, B.C. V5L 1Z2.

Nola Johnston

The purpose of this article is to examine the folk revival in Canada today. We shall examine in turn the history of the revival, the performers and their music, and where the music is heard—at folk festivals and in folk clubs.

Our observations are based upon our experience as working musicians over the past ten years, and as editors and publishers of *Canada Folk Bulletin* since its inception in 1978.

We set out to write the article in this, the last issue of the *Bulletin*, in order to sort out our own thoughts on the revival, to open discussion on the tentative conclusions reached here, and to provide a historical survey in an area which has hitherto lacked substantive analysis.

It should be noted that the article concerns itself with the revival proper, and not with folk music found in its traditional and historic context. Neither do we cover *la*

Rêlève, the revival in Quebec, since the information reaching us has been fragmentary.

The Canadian Folk Revival— The History

Both the Canadian and British revivals sprang from that which occurred in the U.S., and so it is to that which we must first turn.

The American revival is taken to have started with the popular acceptance of the Almanac Singers in the 1940's, though its immediate roots go back to the late 'thirties with the music of Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie. The topical and political repertoires of these singers gave the revival a pronounced leftish complexion, which it retained. When the McCarthy era began in the early 'fifties, such folk songs went "underground", with their singers, such as Pete Seeger, blacklisted. Those were the years of Burl Ives and Richard Dyer-Bennett, singers with primarily American traditional repertoires. Then in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties with the change in the political climate, politics became again one of the strongest ingredients in the folk revival. Songwriters such as Tom Paxton and Bob Dylan wrote what became known as "protest" songs. These songs became the voice of a new generation of Americans reacting against the passivity of the Eisenhower years. Coffeehouses sprang up all over the country where young middle-class Americans sang and listened to such songs as "Blowin' In the Wind". "Ban the Bomb" marches rang to the strains of "We Shall Overcome". But the resurgence of politics in the folk revival did not eclipse the traditional content: people such as Joan Baez

and Pete Seeger sang a large number of American traditional songs which were learned and sung across the country. By the mid-'sixties, the folk revival had already had a strong impact on commercial music: Peter, Paul and Mary, the New Christy Minstrels and the Kingston Trio could be heard on AM radio.

The British folk revival began as an offshoot of the American revival. The late 'fifties in Britain saw the birth of hundreds of "skiffle groups" (jug bands) which played American music. Folk clubs sprang up which featured British performers singing American blues. Politics was also an important ingredient in the British revival. The Aldermaston marches of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament spawned many songs and songbooks. By the early 'sixties, thanks to the work of such people as Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd, traditional songs from the British Isles—particularly Scottish ballads—became part of the British folk revival. By the late 'sixties, those people who had once sung American songs were now singing British traditional songs, and the folk clubs (which like the American coffee-houses were attended predominantly by the younger middle class) featured almost exclusively British traditional music. Professional performers who devoted themselves to traditional British music began to appear, and new record companies put out hundreds of records of traditional music, particularly field recordings of non-professional traditional musicians. What evolved was an extremely high level of awareness of Britain's folk culture in which folk club audiences could often

distinguish regional styles or ballad types.

Like the British revival, the Canadian folk revival began as an offshoot of the American revival. In many ways it was almost identical: during the 'fifties middle-class Canadians were listening to Burl Ives and Richard Dyer-Bennett records and learning the songs on them; by the late 'fifties and early 'sixties Canadians were singing "Blowin' In The Wind" and Tom Paxton songs in coffeehouses across the country. Canada also had its "Ban the Bomb" marches, and by the mid-'sixties we were also listening to Peter, Paul and Mary on the radio.

The British revival had begun with a predominantly American repertoire and so had the Canadian. But the British revival had begun to look to its roots in its own traditional song. Where were the traditional songs of Canada? Though Alan Mills and Ed McCurdy had issued a few records, almost all of the songs recorded on them were from the Atlantic provinces. Edith Fowke, host of a CBC folk song radio show at the time, began to receive requests for Canadian material, and she found that there was very little on record, with the exception of the Atlantic records mentioned above. This scarcity prompted her to begin collecting songs from her own province of Ontario and publishing them. Some of these songs found their way onto record, either as field recordings or as interpreted by Alan Mills.

The 'sixties saw the beginnings of careers for quite a number of Canadian folk performers. People such as Gordon Lightfoot and Ian and Sylvia became almost as well-

known as their American counterparts. But here the Canadian revival differed from the American and British revivals: these performers did not popularize traditional songs from their own country. What traditional songs they sang were American. In spite of the valiant efforts of Alan Mills and Edith Fowke, Canadian traditional music never gained even a fraction of the popularity enjoyed by traditional British music in Britain.

By the early 'seventies, most of the folk coffeehouses of the 'sixties were dead, and the folk revival seemed to have come to an end. Any singing that happened took place in people's living rooms, although a few festivals and clubs here and there managed to survive the lull. But by the mid-'seventies, things began to pick up again. "First Annual" festivals such as those in Winnipeg and Sudbury were established and coffeehouses and folk clubs sprang up. They were not so numerous as in the 'sixties, but they could be found across the country in a large number of communities. Unlike those of the 'sixties, most of them were not set up and frequented by people in their 'teens and early twenties. They were by and large organized and attended by precisely those people who had been involved in folk music in the 'sixties—people who were by this time between twenty-five and forty years old. This trend has continued: the current folk revival still fails to attract youth. Most of the organizers and audiences at folk festivals today are between the ages of thirty and forty-five. It is extremely rare to meet a teenager who is interested in folk music, and anyone over the age of fifty at a festival is usually a parent

who has been coaxed to come.

Why is this? Why are "folkies" in this country today primarily the same generation of people who were involved in folk music during the 'sixties? And why has Canada never had a revival of its *own* traditional music, such as took place in Britain?

The turn of the decade from the 'fifties to the 'sixties marked the birth of a new generation. Brought up under the political stagnation of the McCarthy and Eisenhower years, this new generation reacted and began questioning the status quo. It became politically active and united in support of common causes—civil rights, "ban the bomb", end the Viet Nam war—evolving a language and style of dress which set it apart from the values it was reacting against. This generation provided the perfect base for a music culture. Songs from the black chain gangs were incorporated into this culture, and songwriters emerged whose songs were picked up and sung at rallies and coffeehouses. People had a sense of purpose and of belonging to a community within which the oral transmission of songs such as "Blowin' in the Wind" and "Five Hundred Miles" took place in much the same way that songs are transmitted in traditional cultures.

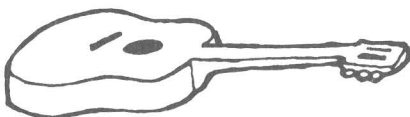
With the experience of the 'sixties behind them, is it any wonder that the present-day "folkies" should want to recreate that experience? Folk music united them and gave them strength. In setting up coffeehouses and festivals where folk music could take place, perhaps some of that strength and unity could be recaptured. But the 'seventies and 'eighties are not the 'sixties. The

social and political climate is totally different. The young generation today is not as politicized as that of the 'sixties and, as a result, folk music is not their language. It remains the language of a generation that is growing inexorably older.

But in Canada, unlike Britain and the U.S., this aging generation does not sing its own traditional songs. The main reason for this has been the proximity of the U.S. The folk revival of the 'sixties was part of a political upsurge and the issues it addressed were primarily American—the Viet Nam war, civil rights, the student movement. Canada had a few pale imitations of the upheavals in the States. The Jerry Rubin-inspired occupation of UBC's faculty club was a parody of events at U.S. Campuses. The Canadian folk revival was essentially a "branch plant" of the American revival. Even though the revival in Britain began as an offshoot of the American revival, Britain was far enough away and had enough of its own pressing political issues that the revival there could evolve into a uniquely British phenomenon. Also, unlike Canada, Britain has a highly evolved and distinguishable culture. In Canada, the question, "What is our national culture?" is still a hotly debated issue. In Britain the question would be unthinkable. It was therefore much more natural for Britain to develop an awareness and revival of its own folk culture than for Canada to do so.

In the U.S., the folk revival was closely tied to the struggle for civil rights. For that reason, the traditional songs of the oppressed black minority—chain gang songs,

spirituals—formed a significant part of the repertoire of the folk revival in that country. Canadians did not have comparable songs in their own traditional music with which to express their political stance. The most oppressed group in Canada are the native Indians, but it would be very difficult to incorporate their traditional music into an essentially white, middle class folk revival. Had Canada had a more accessible form of traditional song which could give voice to the political climate of the times, perhaps an ongoing and broader interest in Canadian traditional music could have been germinated. But without this, the songs and ballads of Ontario and the Atlantic provinces were kept alive only within the villages and communities in which they were born and by such collectors and diehards as Edith Fowke and Alan Mills.



Performers

Who are professional Canadian folk performers and what kind of music do they play?

We took as our sample all Canadian performers appearing in seventeen festivals between the years 1974-1980 and classified them according to the kind of music they play. Where performers play two kinds of music they have been listed under both categories. Only professional performers are included in the list with the exception of a handful of non-professionals who have performed extensively and are well-known on the national scene. Groups are listed as one performer

and francophone performers are not included. Here is the breakdown:

Singer/songwr.	70	48.0%
Blues	16	11.0%
Political	8	5.5%
Canadian trad.	8	5.5%
Native protest	8	5.5%
'20's & 30's music	8	5.5%
British trad.	7	4.8%
Kids music	6	4.1%
American trad.	6	4.1%
Old-timey	4	2.8%
Humour	4	2.8%
TOTAL	145	

Notes: *Singer/songwriters*—7 out of the 70 specialize in country music. *Political*—5 out of the 8 are women; 2 are groups. *Canadian traditional*—6 out of the 8 perform primarily the music of their home province; 4 play almost exclusively instrumental music and 2 include only a few Canadian songs and tunes in their larger repertoires; only 1 of the 8 is involved in performing traditional music from across the country. *British traditional*—6 out of the 7 are immigrants from the U.K. *American traditional*—all but one are ex-Americans.

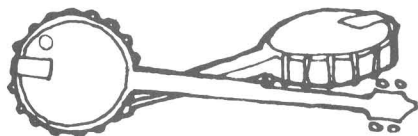
What is most striking in this breakdown of performers is the high percentage of singer/songwriters. If 70 professional folksingers (as well as countless non-professionals) are writing songs, then there are hundreds of new songs being sung to audiences across the country every year. It would be reasonable to suppose that a few of these songs would be picked up and sung by many people in coffeehouses and livingrooms. But this is not the case. In the 'sixties, songs such as "Four Strong Winds" entered the folk

revival's 'oral tradition'. Many people didn't know who wrote the song. They just heard it in a coffeehouse, liked it and decided to learn it themselves. The only songs nowadays that even remotely approach that kind of oral circulation are Stan Rogers' "Barrett's Privateers" and Wade Hemsworth's "The Black Fly Song" (which was actually made thirty years ago). Most of the songs written by today's singer/songwriters are sung only by their authors, or by friends of the author. If the songwriter is well-known, then people learn the songs from the record. But it always remains associated with its author.

Why is there no song today that has the kind of circulation "Four Strong Winds" enjoyed during the 'sixties? Perhaps it is because the folk revival today focusses primarily on the individual. People write songs mostly about their personal lives—their love life, their personal development—and not about public topics such as work, money or politics. Of the 8 people who sing political songs, 5 are women. Political songs in the 'sixties were about ending the war in Viet Nam, civil rights or "ban the bomb". Almost all political songs today are women's songs.

As would appear from the figures, traditional music plays almost a negligible role in the Canadian folk revival. Most of the performers of British and American traditional music are from those countries and are only continuing to play in Canada the music they played back home during the folk revivals in their own countries. Of the performers who play Canadian traditional music, 6

out of 8 play primarily the music of their home province and 5 of these are from the Atlantic provinces. This means that most English-Canadians never hear the indigenous music of their own community nor that of most other parts of the country.



Festivals

At the present time, every summer in Canada sees an increasing number of "festivals". Though each one is theoretically independent of all others, and though they all differ from each other, certain generalizations can be made. The total can be broken down into three groups, identified by their relative sizes (of budgets, of audience, of performers)—"parish", "regional" and "international" (though it should be noted that some of the "parish" are bigger than some of the "regional" and some of the "regional" are bigger in some categories than some of the "international").

The "parish" festival is to be found mostly in the Atlantic provinces. It is often organized directly by the town or village concerned, and might be called a festival of "culture" rather than of "counter-culture": the celebration is of the ordinary and the known, rather than of the extraordinary and the obscure. The activities of this type of festival take place most often in parks or in the streets themselves. There is no admission charge (unless there is a concert in the village hall) and there are no fees paid (though

travel expenses might be). All the "performers" are amateurs, and the relationship between the "performer" and the "audience" is similar to that of parents and children at a school play. The "performers" are personally known to many of the "audience".

The "regional" festivals resemble the "parish" festivals in many ways: most of the participants and the great majority of the audience are local, and often the local government gives the festival financial and other help. But where the "regional" festival differs is in the range of entertainment offered. The festival might be limited to "folk" music, or even to a subclass (such as bluegrass) of folk music. Historically, these festivals are mostly outgrowths of LIP, OFY or Canada Works grants of the 1970's, and justify their existence to the granting agency by claiming to promote "local" musicians, or to rediscover the area's lost history of song and music. They are in the main creations, not, as with the small festival, of the entire community, but of a smaller, less representative group, often seeing itself as "counter-culture".

Three-quarters or more of the performers will be from the region of the festival, and the balance will be made up of outside musicians passing through the area (with no transport to pay) and of better-known professional performers brought in specifically by the festival as a "headliner". Three-quarters, again, will be professional, semi-professional or would-be professional musicians, the balance being local amateur performers. This kind of festival often functions as a "talent

show" for the larger festivals or for local CBC stations.

The "international" festivals, with the exception of Mariposa (which started life as a "regional" festival in what passed for Canada's "folk revival" of the 'sixties) are very recent creations. The remaining four in this category [with their dates of establishment: Winnipeg (1974), Vancouver (1978), Edmonton and Toronto (both 1980)] are, indeed, the brainchild of one person. Their budgets, as festivals in north America go, are enormous: the first Vancouver festival cost in the order of \$220,000. Included in this figure are costs for performers (fees, air travel, accomodation, meals, etc.), site preparation (acquisition, stages, lighting, sound, security, etc.) and administration (though much of this is assumed by the notional organizer, the "arm's-length" cultural organization of the municipality). The recovery of these costs requires relatively high gate prices (e.g. \$25 for a three-day pass) and consequent stringent gate security, together with a very broad working definition of the music to be played and a propensity to seed the list of performers with "big names"—musicians who will be recognized by people normally unconnected in any way with folk music. Thus national performers such as John Allan Cameron and Ryan's Fancy serve in a two-fold way: the first that of the ordinary festival participant, performing in workshops and concerts, and the second, to draw to the festival those who would otherwise not attend.

At these festivals, it is rare to find an amateur performer. Most of the performers are full-time professional

musicians, working year-round in radio, at concerts, restaurants and the like. Others have academic appointments in folklore or related subjects who are presented in workshops with the purpose of elucidating an obscure style or practitioner of folk music. Many of these performers (especially those whose base is Canada) are known to each other: they have played as back-up musicians on each other's records, they have sat in innumerable workshops at many festivals (with very similar titles) with each other, and they often journey across the country together, following the festival "circuit". This makes for an easy familiarity on stage, but at the cost of a certain distancing from the audience, some of whom feel themselves to be in the presence of an elite group.

Indeed, as we move from the "parish" to the "international" festival, so do we see the total attendance more and more divided into "performers" and "audience", and so too does the distance increase between them. It becomes increasingly more difficult for a member of the audience to talk to a performer, and the almost universal ban on tape recorders at the "international" festivals makes it all but impossible to record a song for later memorization. Even the press at such festivals are manoeuvred into seeking "appointments" through the Press Tent with performers.

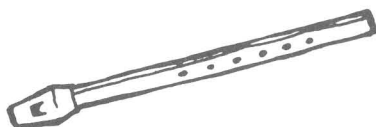
The success of such festivals is stupendous. Where they have established themselves, other loci of folk singers or musicians must adapt or be wiped out. This does not result, of course, from any decision taken by

the festival staff: rather it is a fact of life, much like the siting of a Safeway next to a corner store, and with the same inevitable consequences.

Who organizes festivals? In the "parish" category are found the organizers of the local pipe band, fiddle enthusiasts and "civic-minded" people. In the "medium" category, the organizers, often grouped into a local folk club, are often (though certainly not always) people between the ages of twenty-five and forty who would call themselves representatives of the "counter-culture", counter to the culture of New York or Los Angeles dominated music, and counter to the "free enterprise system". In the "international" category, the organizer is appointed by the non-profit "front" organization of the civic government (in Vancouver's case, for example, by the Heritage Festival Society). The organizer here quickly acquires a number of volunteer committees, who in return for their work in running the day-to-day activities of the festival receive free passes. The "regional" category is famous for its "burning out" of organizers and for tremendous splits in its structure, since the artistic director's ideas of which performers should be invited are never unanimously agreed on. Such democratic problems never disturb the large festivals, which function as autocracies. If volunteers are unhappy with any decision, they can leave.

Of all the ways in which musicians can come to the attention of an audience, whether by radio or TV appearances, records, books, concerts, coffee-houses and the like, the festival is the most effective and

efficient; the festival too shows most clearly the pressures on performers and on folk music itself from the society at large. Compared to the potential power of the festival, in making folk music (by whatever definition) heard in Canada, every other medium of communication pales into insignificance.



Folk Clubs

The "folk club" has been a persistent phenomenon in Canada for the last twenty years, though this title is used by widely differing organizations. Perhaps the most common (and the least accurate) usage is that of the commercial establishment, be it coffeehouse, restaurant or bar, which features folk music. Coffeehouses boomed in the 'sixties and 'seventies, though the trend nowadays is more towards restaurants and bars. Perhaps this is linked to the average age of "folkies", in their late 'teens in the 'sixties, and thus now in their early thirties.

These commercial establishments differ among themselves in the degree to which their entertainment is spotlighted. In some, the performers function as little more than a live "muzak" machine, providing musical wallpaper for diners. In others, the performer is the *raison d'être* for the establishment. But what they all have in common is that they are commercial—the musician is hired to bring in for the owner more dollars than he himself costs the owner. Decisions about what, how

and when to play are commercial decisions, and the performer retains his job only for so long as he is commercially viable. By definition, if there is one performer then he is a "folk singer", since there is no other generic word to cover what one musician can do. One effect of this is to broaden the public definition of "folk"; another is that the performer soon begins to perform (if he does not do so already) "soft rock", lounge music, and the like. He must necessarily cater to the lowest common denominator among his customers.

Much folk music is overtly political, and of course this music is unacceptable to a proprietor, except where his custom consists in the main of a relatively unified group. Thus Irish rebel songs would be acceptable only in an Irish bar, with an Irish name, and Irish "decor". Such songs in establishments with other motifs smack too much of conflict, which is not what diners want with their steak and lobster.

Because of these limitations, we cannot look to commercial establishments to play any role in preserving or enhancing folk music.

Here we turn to "folk clubs" proper, which might be divided into three groups according to their operating style and content: a north American model, a British model, and a hybrid of the two.

The north American model grew most often out of the folk boom of the 'sixties, where young people gathered in coffeehouses located in church basements and community halls to sing and play, and to listen to other musicians. We know of no club

in Canada which was founded at that time and which has continued to the present day. Clubs started, boomed and died in every city in Canada. New clubs were founded, only to die in turn as the organizing individual or group moved on to other activities.

It is interesting to pose the question of why this was. One suggestion is that it was the overt and tacit politics of the period which united such singers and enthusiasts. The Freedom Riders of the late 'fifties, the "Ban-the-Bomb"ers of the early 'sixties and the "flower power" of the late 'sixties all acted as foci around which musicians could gather. Often the people in such clubs thought of themselves as "counter-culture" people, people away from, and rebelling against, the mainstream of society, and proud of it. In many cases, the music in these clubs at that time would not be played on radio, and so the clubs answered a need among young people in providing a forum for a new musical culture.

The slow decline of this type of politics in society at large was reflected by the downturn in the clubs. As people moved forward in their careers, they left the clubs behind them, but younger people were no longer moving into them.

Clubs of this type today are nowhere near as widespread as they once were. Political songs are rarely heard, and politics informs little of the music. The student rebel has mostly been replaced by the would-be professional musician, who is seeking performing experience. It is significant that the times at which anyone can play at these clubs are called "open mike". The microphone, the

insignia of the professional musician, and of a musical universe divided into "performers" and "audience", was but rarely found in the folk boom of the 'sixties. It signifies too the quasi-commercialism of these clubs, since behind every sound system is its owner and an "off" switch.

Since much of the music is a- (or even anti-) political, songs in the modern coffeehouse genre can be readily heard on radio, TV and jukeboxes, and thus there is no "captive" audience. Many of those who do attend these clubs are themselves singers/songwriters, waiting their own turn to perform. Since the tendency (following that of the politics) in songs has been away from the communal and towards the individual, chorus songs are rarely sung, and thus another reason for a club, a place where people sing together, disappears.

We turn next to the British model of folk clubs, an altogether more robust animal. British clubs, founded mostly in the 'sixties, soon found and came to adapt a standard format. The club was situated in a room above a pub, and functioned once a week. A host or a house band (often the organizers and their friends), almost always non-professional, opened the evening and introduced the (increasingly professional) "guest act". A break for more beer in the middle of the evening was followed by three or four "floor singers", non-professional enthusiasts with a song or two apiece, and then the guest would fill the rest of the program. The club opened at 8:30 or 9 p.m. and closed at the pub's closing time of 10:30 or 11 p.m. When the

organizers had paid for the guest, they were probably left with enough money for a couple of pints each.

This model, tried and tested since the early 'sixties, still exists in Britain today, and is found more and more in Canada as British singers and organizers emigrated. Its superior stamina compared to the north American model was a result of 1) its tendency towards singalong and chorus songs, 2) its tendency towards traditional music, whether from Europe, Australia or north America, which could not be heard on radio and TV, and 3) its tendency to provide a forum for the emigrés—a "little England" (or "little Scotland") away from home. This last characteristic is at once the "British" folk club's main strength and weakness. It gives the club a certain stability, but it often ensures that the club becomes the locus of a "set", a group who form a social network, which functions as the organizing body of the club, but sometimes also as an exclusive "in crowd".

The organizing group here is often composed of well-educated people with more than a passing interest in the academic side of folk music. This disinterested interest (as opposed to the self-interest of the singer/songwriter) makes for a very responsible attitude towards the club, which encourages the publication of newsletters and the sponsoring of concerts and festivals.

The last group (which is arguably a sub-group of the "British model") is what might be called the "anglo-Canadian" model. These clubs attempt to incorporate the strengths of the first two models and to minimize their weaknesses. Their

organizations closely resemble the British model, but their content and the types of activities they promote follow more the early north American pattern. The perceived weaknesses of the British model are 1) its social isolation from the rest of the community in which it exists, and 2) its propensity to look only to Britain for new material and its consequent disinclination to involve itself in anything Canadian. Often these clubs were founded by ex-British people who were concerned that their folk music represent something more than a pastoral seventeenth century view of England. Many of the organizers of these clubs are not simply interested in music as music, but in music which reflects where they live and who they are. Such music is by its very nature political, the more so in contrast to the content of the mainstream of the present folk song revival, which is dominated by American or singer/songwriter music. Thus Canadian traditional and contemporary songs (the latter social rather than personal in content) and political or union songs are heard more frequently in these clubs than in clubs of either the north American or British models. This political sense also encourages them to play a didactic role in their communities, and so they take part in community activities from singing in hospitals, old people's homes and town festivals to demonstrations, picket lines and elections.

There is a constant tension in these clubs between the values of the north American and the British models, and often discussions and bitter fights over such relatively innocuous-sounding questions as "what is folk

music?" That clubs should be playing such a public role in the folk milieu by asking and answering such questions, rather than simply accepting commercial or media definitions, bodes well for the preservation of traditional and Canadian folk music.

Why Is Canadian Folk Music Important?

Readers will have noted the constant stress throughout this article on Canadian music. We do this not out of any knee-jerk nationalism, but because Canada is our home—it is what we know. Were we British, or American, or Australian, we would sing and promote music from those countries.

Songs provide a sense of place. Where we are today, others have been before. From this sense comes a sense of history, and a sense of historical change. Songs provide a sense of value of where we are. If we sing nothing but songs from the Mississippi Delta, or New York, or Los Angeles, we devalue the place we are in, and thereby we devalue ourselves. Only by understanding ourselves and where we are can we properly understand and value others.

Canadian songs create the basis for unity between Canadians, and between Canadians and other peoples. We can derive from Canadian songs a shared identity.

Folk music is historically "music of the people" and is thereby political and subversive. Since the tendency of folk songs is to unify people, and since people united are stronger than people divided and isolated, folk music is always an inherent threat to the status quo. The

status quo will always attempt to undermine the unifying aspect of folk music—in the 'fifties, it banned it from radio and TV, from the 'sixties to the 'eighties it alternatively ignored and co-opted it. Folk music is no threat when it has been reduced to an item on a 'muzak' tape, nor when it is sold at festivals for a \$25 admission. Singing under these circumstances ceases to be a political act.

What Is To Be Done?

The contemporary revival of folk music in Canada is falling slowly and inexorably into the hands of promoters, as it did in the 'sixties. To preserve folk music means today to

understand the threats to it, and to respond to those threats. Folk music will be preserved in and by clubs that understand those threats and how to deal with them. Internally, these clubs will function democratically and will encourage participation in music and song, if necessary at the expense of the "expert" and of the "performer". Externally, they will engage in educational work in the community, both formal and informal, to make transparent the relationship between the singer and the song, and to make transparent the relationship between a community, whether local, regional, or national, and its own culture.

Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat

THE FOLKLORE CENTRE

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