

# REGIONAL REPORTS

## B.C. REPORT

### SO YOU WANNA RUNNA COFFEE HOUSE...#2

(This is the second in a series of articles on organizing a coffee house.)

Probably the most important single decision to be made by a would-be C/H organizer is where to hold the event. Ideally, the place should be the right size to accommodate the expected audience, in a familiar location, have a workable floor plan and contain the proper facilities. Location is your first consideration. The place should be accessible and on a bus route, if your area has one. Lots of people who go to coffee houses do not have vehicles, especially in a large town or city. Remember that if the place is big, you may need a sound system, which is an additional headache and expense. If you are starting small, it is best to avoid needing one unless you have access to one and a good person to run it. Smaller places have better atmosphere, and encourage mixing amongst the audience; after all, people go to these things to get together as well as to hear the music. Smallish places are sometimes less frightening for inexperienced performers too.

Size is only the beginning, when you are considering the building itself. The floor plan can pose problems. If the washrooms are located behind where you want to put your stage, or the lighting or doors are in the wrong place, or you cannot get water for your coffee urns without disturbing a performance, then the relaxed atmosphere you are trying to create will be seriously impaired. Try to visualize exactly where you are going to set up your stage and audience and anticipate problems that can crop up. Check your

entrances—you will only want one door for "in" traffic. Next, consider the floor itself. Is it lively wood, so that anyone walking or moving a chair will sound like a major disaster in progress? If you are very lucky, you may get a carpeted space, but it will more likely be a gymnasium or something similar. Next, ask what furniture would be available to you. Quiet chairs and small circular tables are ideal, of course, but you may be forced to use noisy metal chairs and huge rectangular tables. Study the available lighting. Can it be dimmed? Can lights be on at the door and in the kitchen without being on elsewhere? Check for electrical outlets, especially around the stage area. It is possible that a few stage floodlights are all you need for the whole room to be lit up enough. If you want to use candles on the tables, check with the fire marshall.

Next, take a long look at kitchen facilities. These might be just a sink out back somewhere, or you may be allowed access to a complete kitchen with a closable service counter. Coffee and goodies are a source of revenue and a way to keep people friendly. Try to have a setup that allows people to get refreshments with a minimum of fuss and lining up. Also, there is nothing worse than having to carry a 60-cup coffee urn from the tap down the hall to a high table top and then discover the cord is too short or you have two pots and one outlet!

When visualizing how to arrange your audience, stage, doorways "in" and "out", and refreshment area, be very aware of traffic flow. Try to organize things so that people can get to the washrooms or come in to the coffeehouse at any time without disturbing the performers or having to get past a refreshment lineup. Try also to ascertain whether the place is adequately heated, ventilated and/or air-conditioned. A comfortable audience is a receptive one.

Finally, make certain that any rental is within your budget, and all expenses to be charged to your group for the use of the space are clearly understood. Sometimes a

cleanup charge is included. If you suggest that you do your own cleanup you can save yourself a few dollars, and if you do a really good job of it, you are on your way to establishing good rapport with the management. Your reputation as a well-organized group will build on this alone.

That seems a lot to consider, but much of it is just common sense. Decide what you want to happen in your coffee house, and write these things down before you start looking for a place.

#### TIDBITS

The **Shuswap C/H** group successfully put on their Music Festival on the first weekend in July. I am continually amazed at both the quantity and quality of the talent that comes out of the woodwork when something like this takes place. While there I met **Maureen Eaton**, a professional folksinger from the Okanagan who has a really strong stage presence, and a powerful soprano voice. I also talked to **Burt Cohen**, who is trying to get some music going in Vernon.

I am sad to hear of the demise of Vancouver's **Green Cove C/H**. I feel it is the end of something of an era in the Vancouver folk scene. More energy is going into the **Folk Song Circle**, which is also run by the Vancouver Folk Song Society, which may eventually lead to a new C/H rising, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of the old Green Cove.

**Bob Bossin** of Stringband and Roach the Maple Leaf Dog stayed with us overnight on their way down to Vancouver for the Folk Festival. Stringband are putting out a new record album this fall and we managed to obtain a test pressing from Bob. All I can say is "wow"; this is their best record to date, and incidentally it is their folkkiest. It is well worth buying and listening to.

**Phil Thomas** now has his new record album to go along with the book *Songs of the Pacific Northwest* (see review this issue). This collection of recorded songs represents his lifetime dedication to preserving as much of B.C. folk song

tradition as he can. Without Phil's perseverance we would have lost a lot of very singable songs along with a privileged look at a slice of living B.C. history.

The **Kamloops Art Gallery** sponsored a coffee house on July 25, and it was held in the basement of the Art Gallery. It was well-organized by **Lynda Hicks**, and presented a balanced, fairly laid back program of local musical talent. It was rather a treat not to have to organize it myself and it was good to know that the energy is here even in the summertime (and Kamloops is HOT) for such events.

I received a record album in the mail from a folk duo called **Dennis and Lori Cox** from Nova Scotia. They are planning a cross Canada musical tour in February and March of 1981 and want to set up gigs here in B.C. Their address is: Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, B0C 1E0. If their album is any indication, they would be good performers to get. They play and sing mainly traditional music but have a highly entertaining repertoire. Coffee House organizers please write and offer them what you can—who knows when they will be able to get to B.C. again.

I am hearing very glowing reports about **Sam's Deli** in Victoria; it sounds like **Paul Finkleman** has a good thing going there.

*Sue Unia*