

# REVIEW

*La Rena LeBarr Clark: CANADIAN FOLK SOUND WITH LA RENA. BALLADS CANADIAN, ENGLISH, SCOTTISH AND AMERICAN. Clark Records LCS 109. (Available from Clark Records, box 242, Orillia, Ontario, Canada. L3V 6J4).*

In an earlier review (CFB vol. 2 no. 3, 1979, pp. 14-15) I have discussed Mrs. Clark's significance to Canadian folk song. Like those discussed earlier, her songs on this new record are sung unaccompanied and stray across the frontiers between folk song and the popular song of past times; but it is salutary to be made to recognize that these frontiers were drawn by scholars, not by the folk-singers themselves.

As the record's title indicates, the songs—though they all form part of the repertoire learned orally in childhood in Ontario—are drawn from a variety of traditions. Only four can be considered entirely Canadian—a lumbercamp song, "The Squire Boys"; a sentimental ballad, "A Handful of Maple Leaves"; a broadside about a murder, "J.R. Birchall" (though this is clearly derived in words and tune from a U.S. equivalent, "Charles Guiteau"), and an unusual variant of the shipwreck story "The Banks of Newfoundland". Some others, however, have changed form or tune in their passage to Canada: the story of the returning lover, oddly titled "The Banks of Inverness", and "The Blue

Velvet Band", a version remote indeed from the familiar story of the cockney criminal and his mistress.

Almost all the songs present some feature of special interest. Several well illustrate the interplay between the oral tradition and printed word. "Fair Charlotte" was clearly written for a contemporary U.S. broadsheet market and it is strange that it has survived at all in Canada. "Lord Allan's Daughter" teems with literary overtones and makes an interesting comparison with the ballads it was composed to echo; and the composers of "When the Roses Bloom Again Beside the River" were surely well aware of the traditional songs which their verses parallel. As a child in England, I knew as "Do Not Trust Him, Gentle Maiden" the song here presented as "The Gypsy's Warning" and, though its author is unknown, it must surely have circulated in broadsheet form on both sides of the Atlantic.

This record, then, well merits the attention of all Canadian folksong scholars; the typically erudite sleeve-notes by Edith Fowke are helpful. However, though to perform *a capella* is indeed in full accord with British tradition—there was no instrument suitable for accompanying songs until the 19th century, when Wheatstone invented the concertina—I suspect that it will render appreciation of Mrs. Clark's songs more difficult to the Canadian listener unused to such music. I believe she may be well advised, in future recordings, to use an accompanying instrumentalist at least on some songs, in order to give greater musical variety.

*William A.S. Sarjeant*