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Saskatchewan Report



If one were to ask an average Saskatchewanian about folk activities in his province, he would immediately think of dancing; and indeed, that particular cultural manifestation remains strong, with such notable groups as the Ukrainian Yevshan Ballet touring widely and even performing outside Canada. Other aspects of traditional folk life continue to be very actively maintained - weaving, the decoration of Easter eggs, various church-associated activities, and so forth. In contrast, folksong maintains a curiously low profile and, apart from whatever is to be heard in individual homes, is virtually confined to our two large cities.

Its strongest annual manifestation is the Regina Folk Festival, now into its twelfth year. It was a splendid gathering this year, with such notable singers as Charlie Maguire, Holly Arntzen, Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat, Jim Payne, David Essig and Sally Rogers and a strong Saskatchewan contingent from John Wiznuk, the Swift Current Fiddlers, the Prairie Higglers and Paddy Tutty. Some of the other performers, indeed, had little perceptible relation to true folk music; but the spirit of the Regina festival, in this and other years, was much more traditional than that of other, more renowned Canadian

festivals. It receives some financial support from the Provincial Department of Culture and Youth, but not enough. Whether the festival will survive into its thirteenth year remains dependent on the continuing commitment of a handful of hardworking people such as Brian Richardson and Kathie Kokotailo, and that cannot be relied upon indefinitely.

The Regina Folk Guild, after enduring further tribulations in its perpetually chequered career, meets fortnightly on Fridays and Saturdays at 1810 Albert Street. It is the Queen City's only folksong club and has been the most important continuous influence on folksong in the province for over a decade now.

In Saskatoon, the only place at which folksong is regularly to be heard is at a Sunday night club, Cafe Domingo, meeting in the YWCA: and here, evenings of folk music (traditional or contemporary) are interspersed with jazz, classical guitar, and other music presently finding only a minority audience. This policy of "mixing", though there is much to commend it, tends to make it hard either to establish a uniform atmosphere or a regular clientele. After a phase of near-collapse last spring, Cafe Domingo is now being run by a consortium of folksingers (John and Pippa Henderson, Shirley Oldfield and Paddy Tutty) and is presently attracting good audiences; but whether the difficulties innate in its policy can be overcome remains to be seen. Though two local restaurants (Bread & Broth on Broadway and Spartakos on 3rd Avenue North) have intermittently booked folksingers, there is no other regular singing venue in the Hub City.

In connection with the province's 75th anniversary celebrations, both Regina and Saskatoon held international folk festivals, in some of whose pavilions folk music was to be heard. Two performances by harpist Shirley Oldfield and singer Bill Sarjeant were embedded among dancing and Hollywood pseudo-Irish folk music at the Scottish and Irish Pavilion in Saskatoon's Folkfest; and ballad singer Paddy Tutty was one of the performers in Regina.

Little folk music is to be found on the province's radio and television, save in the programs on the commendably catholic University radio station CJUS-FM in Saskatoon. Two series, "A Song for Every Season" (27 programs) and "Folk Song Sampler" (19 programs), both produced and introduced by Bill Sarjeant and

featuring music from records and tapes in his extensive collection, have been each twice broadcast on this station: and a third series, "The Folk Singers" (probably of 52 programs) is to be aired through 1981. In addition, Michael Taft has produced a series of four programs, "Dimensions of Folklore", with examples drawn mostly from Canada: this was broadcast during October and November 1980.

Some years ago, Folkways produced a long-playing record "Folk Songs of Saskatchewan", based on collections assembled by Barbara Cass-Beggs. (Mrs. Cass-Beggs' original tapes are now lodged in the Archives of Saskatchewan, Regina). Since that time, there has been virtually no collecting in Saskatchewan, nor have any other traditional folksongs from the province been put on record. However, Bob Cosbey, of the University of Regina, has recently produced a book of skipping songs of Saskatchewan, *All in Together Girls*: this has been published by the Canadian Plains Research Centre and will shortly be reviewed in the *Bulletin*. Recently Michael Taft of the University of Saskatchewan has secured provincial grants to undertake original research and collecting on folklore and folksongs in Saskatchewan and to produce a book on this, so new discoveries are shortly to be expected.

- William A.S. Sarjeant