Ali's Corner

The coming of summer means some fundamental changes in the way that your average folkie gets to hear the music. It has pretty well become standard practice for folk clubs (commercial coffeehouses aside) to close for the summer. A drastic reduction in already small audiences, due to lighter evenings, holidays, a significant number of student members and other factors has led the Cuckoo's Nest in London and this year, Fiddler's Green in Toronto to close their doors till September, when things get swinging again.

Over the years, the Cuckoo's Nest's final night has become a wild affair, with a morris tour in the afternoon, followed by a barbecue, downpour, and singaround at the club. Putting up the shutters for the summer has been such fun in the past that, this year, the closing festivities will take two days. By the time you read this, the windows will have been repaired and the letters of comp-

laint will be gathering dust on a desk somewhere, but here are the plans at the time of writing. Eight morris teams, from the southern Ontario region as well as from Michigan and Virginia, are spending Saturday touring small villages on the shores of Lake Huron. Saturday night, there will be a country dance at the University of Western Ontario, and on Sunday, the teams will take part in a walking tour of downtown London, followed by the usual barbecue, and singaround at the Cuckoo's Nest (due to many requests, we're missing out the downpour this year).

The only folk club that I know of presenting any traditional music and operating throughout the summer will be Mariposa Mainland at Toronto's Harbourfront on Wednesday evenings. One highlight there this summer will be Breton artist Alan Stivell on July 15. Write to Mariposa at 525 Adelaide St. E., Toronto, Ont M5A 3W4 or call (416) 363-4009 to be put on their mailing list.

Several interesting tours by British groups have taken place this spring. The southern Ontario region has seen (or will shortly see) concerts by Scottish bands the Tannahill Weavers, The Battlefield Band, and Martin Carthy and the Watersons.
Doug McArthur, a songwriter and singer who books for Change of Pace coffeehouse in London has, in the past few years, risen to prominence as a humourist. A successful appearance at last year's Leacock Festival of Humour in Orillia, Ontario, has led to many job offers. Most recently, he has been asked to host a new CBC radio show, which will be aired nationally and broadcast from major cities across the country. The series will begin in the fall. Along the same lines, it was good to hear Hamilton singer Dave Essig playing host for a time on CBC's 'Variety Tonight', that daily smorgasbord, which occasionally (very) has some good folk music content.

As I mentioned in the last issue, David Gallop of Peterborough held a country dance weekend in May, with a view towards forming a branch of the Country Dance and Song Society. He tells me that the weekend was a success with over fifty people attending. He was not aware that his weekend is also that of the Marlboro Morris Ale in Vermont, with at least two area morris teams going there. This conflict may lead to a change in dates next year: watch this space.

There are two records at present being made which may be of interest. After many years of requests, both pro and con, Toronto-based group Friends of Fiddler's Green (in which I must declare an interest) have decided to immortalize their thoughts in vinyl. Rick Avery and Judy Greenhill, also Toronto-based, are also recording an album consisting almost entirely of traditional material. Both of these will be available sometime in the fall.

Summer is, of course, festival season, and whether or not you agree with the concept, it cannot be denied that pure economies of scale mean that you have an opportunity to hear many musicians who otherwise would not appear in your area. They also allow the uninitiated (and sometimes the over-initiated and the downright bigoted) a chance to see folk music in a better perspective, by allowing musicians of quite diverse backgrounds and disciplines to share a stage and demonstrate their approach to a common theme. This can, I think, illustrate the meaning of the folk process as well as anything.

There are several major folk festivals in this area. London hosts the Home County Folk Festival July 17-19. This is a totally free festival, featuring a variety of musicians playing both traditional and contemporary music. Crafts feature largely, with over seventy-five artisans displaying and selling their wares. Daytime activities are workshops and concerts on three main stages, a children's area and an open stage. Concerts take place in the evening on one stage. Emphasis is placed on dancing, with a variety of country dances, as well as morris, Ontario clogging and Appalachian clog demonstrations. For more details, write to Box 4190, Station C, London, Ont. N5W 5H6.

The Sixth Annual Summerfolk Festival takes place in Owen Sound August 14-16. Artistic director Ross Gibbons has lined up about fifty performers including Eritage, Friends of Fiddler's Green, Louis Killen, Tom Paley, Stan Rogers and Nancy White. Admission is by ticket, and the enthusiasm itself for this, one of the last bashes of the summer, by performers and audience alike, make it a very enjoyable, if occasionally chilly, weekend. Write to Box 521, Owen Sound, Ont. N4K 5R1.

The disastrous financial collapse of last year's massive Toronto Folk Festival has meant that there will be no festival in that city this summer. In a letter to creditors (including most of the performers), President Ray Woodley outlined some of the causes of the failure and gave details of their present financial position - to wit: debts of $100,000, and no cash balance. Mariposa will however be repeating their smaller (and more successful) Fall Festival this year. More details nearer the date.

Till then, enjoy the summer.

- Alistair Brown