The Folk Singers

The Folk Singers - CJUS-FM University Radio Fridays at 9 p.m. re-air Mondays at 3 p.m. University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon

Traditional British and North American Folk song in the English language is a rich and varied field, both in terms of the songs, and in terms of the instruments accompanying those songs. Yet today, few people in Canada are in any degree familiar with this music; few schools teach the songs, substituting instead more recent (and, in general, more bloodless) confections, and this music is scarcely to be heard on the air waves.

Instead, for most Canadians, "folksong" has come to mean a particular genre of contemporary song to guitar, in the style of such songwriters as Gordon Lightfoot and Bruce Cockburn - a music related much more to the court song and troubadours' songs of past centuries, in both style and subject, than to true folksong.

This series, like two others presented earlier on CJUS-FM radio, attempts to bring folksong into proper perspective. The majority of songs to be included will be derived from oral or broadside traditions. However, contemporary songs will be included also, provided that they accord in presentation or subject matter with traditional approaches, for live folksong is not a dead but a living thing even today. The first series, "A Song for Every Season," was thematic, tracing each theme (songs of toil, of love, of war or of social problems) through the varying but related traditions of England, Scotland, Ireland, the United States, Canada and Australia. The second, "Folk Song Sampler," treated with a number of topics, in particular folksong on record and folksong as a reflection of history. In this third series, emphasis will be on the folk singers themselves - the singers who today perform in the traditional mode and who have added new vocal embellishments, explored new instrumentations, and written new songs or modified old ones, in a fashion that makes them a part of the long story of true folk song. Emphasis, as before, will be on songs in English, though folksongs in French and in the Gaelic languages occasionally will be featured.

Bill Sarjeant, who produces and introduces the programmes, is an English geologist now living in Saskatoon. He is himself a folk singer, formerly associated with the Nottingham Folk Workshop and more recently, a member of the Prairie Hugglers, who performed at last year's Regina Folk Festival. His personal library of folksong records and tapes is one of the largest in Canada; and he has published articles and record reviews in Folk Review and Canada Folk Bulletin.

- Bill Sarjeant