Review

Paddy Tutty’s New Cassette


Saskatchewan, like all Canadian provinces, once was seeded with singers and musicians from end to end; but their music has been drowned out during the last fifty years by the ever-waxing cacophony of mechanically produced music. Only a handful of true Saskatchewan folk-singers have been recorded and unfortunately, the folk-song revival of the fifties and sixties made little impression, here in the heart of the windy prairies.

Indeed, it is arguable that Saskatchewan has produced only one notable singer in the traditional genre in the last two decades -- Paddy Tutty. From a starting-point among country-and-western and “contemporary folk” music, Paddy found her way outward into the broader and more fertile pastures of European and North American folksong. She came to develop a particular interest in the ancient songs of the British Isles and a love for the classic ballads. From the outset she accompanied her songs on the guitar, but later she mastered the Appalachians dulcimer and, most recently, the fiddle.

Paddy has come to be well known across Canada, with many tours in the west and two major tours in the east to her credit; she has also sung in several British clubs, “carrying coals to Newcastle” most effectively. However, until now there has been no representation of her music on record. Maybe a long-playing record might have been a better launching-point; but, until one becomes available, this tape will do very well. Its sound quality in general is good and the price not at all high.

The choice of material bears witness of Paddy’s particular taste. There is just one Canadian song, Rattle on the Stovepipe, from the Ontario tradition of LaRena Clark’s family (accompanied very effectively on spoons) and two Quebec fiddle tunes, La Case and Turlute a Antonio (the latter double-tracked to provide a dulcimer accompaniment also). A further tune, Sally in the Garden (played on dulcimer) is from the United States. All other items stem firmly from the British tradition. Some are relatively unfamiliar and all are sung and played excellently.

The small space of a cassette gives little room for “sleeve notes;” nevertheless, brief notes are provided on all the songs. Paddy speculates that Katy Cruel is of Irish origin; it has in fact progenitors in both Scotland and England, of which Drunk is not originally from Scotland, as stated, but from Ireland; it was collected by Sheila MacGregor while travelling in that country and is more usually known as Mickey’s Warning. (This song is the only one whose choice I would fault; to be effective, it requires a voice coarser than Paddy’s.) Paddy notes that she collected The Dancers of Stanton Drew while “in Britain a few years ago;” I am sure she did, but it is in fact a modern song in the traditional mode and not a traditional song, as her note implies.

Of the other songs included, I like especially Paddy’s version of Low Down in the Broom and I Have Wandered in Exile; and I enjoy always her versions of the classic ballads, here represented by The Lass of Loch Royal (of which Paddy chooses a North Caroline variant) and the rarely heard and lively Bonnie Lass of Anglesey.

All in all, this is a spirited and enjoyable tape, which represents very well Paddy Tutty’s particular and considerable talents. Buy it quickly; the number of copies made was not high and stocks are already running low!

Bill Sarjeant