The most important development for folk music in this Province in many years came in April 1983, when the Saskatchewan Organization of Folk Arts (SOFA) came into being. This was funded initially by a grant of $36,000.00 for six months, under the Federal/Provincial NEED scheme; the period was subsequently extended for four further months, with additional funding (to February, 1984). The object of SOFA is to link together folk music performers, clubs, coffeehouses and festivals throughout Saskatchewan for mutual publicity, the development of joint activities and, in particular, the establishment of a performing circuit for touring folk musicians. Despite the wider scope implicit in its name, SOFA is not concerned with crafts or writing and has no present involvement with folk dance.

A founding conference was held in June and a weekend workshop in August, in which guest speakers talked about such topics as making bookings, promotion, fundraising and the encouragement and deployment of volunteers. Now that the organization has been launched so successfully, funds are being solicited to keep it operating. The contact person is Margaret Fry, who can be reached at the SOFA office in Regina, telephone number (306) 522-0248 for further details of activities.

The major event in our calendar was, as usual, the 15th Annual Regina Folk Festival, held on May 13-15, 1983. An array of distinguished performing talent was assembled for this and, as always, it was an extremely enjoyable occasion. A full review will appear in a future issue of the Bulletin; for the moment, it must merely be noted (and regretted) that, though many musical traditions were represented in the Workshops, there was little traditional music (other than Chilean) to be heard in the concerts, even such supposed stalwarts as John Wiznuk and Margaret Christl preferring to use contemporary material largely or exclusively. Indeed, no single Canadian traditional song was sung during any of the three concerts.

The Regina Folk Guild has had a good year once again and has included some traditional performers, like bluesman Ken Hamm and Newfoundland folksinger Jim Payne, among its guests. In October, jointly with the South Saskatchewan Irish Club, the Guild sponsored a performance by Conhaltas Ceoltoire Eirann. This Irish organization strives to keep alive the traditions and language of that country; its touring representatives were young musicians, singers and dancers who had attained high distinction in their homeland. The result was a most exciting and memorable evening.

A major event in Saskatoon was the holding of our first-ever folk music festival. It was organized by Bill Root on behalf of the Saskatoon Folk Music Association, and staged on 11th June 1983. Daytime performances were held in front of City Hall from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., with sessions for children under the trees and the City Hall steps used as main stage. Authentic folksong was well represented, with Julie Lorer and Bill Root, Brenda Baker and The Prairie Higgles singing in the European and north American traditions and the group Alturas in the Chilean tradition, while the International Folk Dance Club gave energetic renditions of dances from a variety of countries. Afternoon attendance, unfortunately, was reduced by unseasonable rain and wind. The evening concert was less of a success, beginning late and with the most monotonous of modern jazz. Though Paddy Tutty sang as well as always, the latter part of the evening "concert" became a dance, enjoyed doubtless by its participants but with the residual audience pushed further and further back until they gave up and left. Well, it was a first attempt; we shall hope for many more to come.
Cafe Domingo, the city’s Sunday-evening musical coffeehouse, followed the example of the city’s jazz club and moved from its old, rather too institutional quarters in the YWCA to a new and pleasanter setting in the “Bassment” of the St. Tropez Bistro, 245-3rd Ave. S. This also is run by the Saskatoon Folk Music Association (specifically by Brenda Baker and associates) and is attracting more volunteers and a solid audience than ever hitherto. Though a wide range of performers are featured, traditional folksingers regularly appear: visitors have included the Red Clay Ramblers, Ken Hamm, Jim Payne, Margaret Christl and Lesley Partridge, while local singers such as Paddy Tutty, Julie Lorer and Bill Root, Pippa Hall and John Henderson (now, alas, departed to Ottawa) and The Prairie Higglers are featured regularly.

Both Regina and Saskatoon have an annual Folkfest at which the customs, cuisines, beverages and dancers of many nations are to be enjoyed. Saskatoon’s was held late in August. There was much folkdance but little genuine folksong. However, the new English and Welsh pavilion featured both Paddy Tutty and Jim Raybould while Paddy and the Regina group Claddagh performed in the Irish pavilion. Christine Lindgren has organized a story-telling group, originally informally, more recently on a regular basis on Mondays at “The Bag,” 608 Duchess Street.

Outside the two major cities, traditional folk music has continued to be hard to find. Coffeehouses featuring traditional folksong have been operating in Tugaskie in June and the Flin Flon and Redberry Lake festivals in August. Of these, however, only the Flin Flon festival featured much traditional music, with Ken Hamm, Crooked Creek, Holly Arntzen and John Leclaire; and indeed, the Redberry Lake festival features only country-and-western performers nowadays. For those who enjoy massed fiddles, there was pleasure to be found in the Western Canada Amateur Old Tyme Fiddling Championship, in Swift Current from September 29th to October 1st; and the Friends of Old Tyme Music perform regularly in the Birch Lake area.

Folklore scholarship in Saskatchewan continues to be manifested in a single individual, Michael Taft. He is presently under contract with the University of Saskatchewan to do an oral history of the University (and has been doing some travelling to interview people in this connection). He presented a paper for the Folklore Studies Association of Canada meeting held in Quebec City, May 1983, entitled: “Unmasking Hallowe’en: a preliminary look at a small town celebration.” During the year, Michael has published three books: Discovering Saskatchewan Folklore (Edmonton: NeWest Press, pp. 140); Twelve Tales of British Columbia (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, pp. 100); Blues Lyric Poetry: An Anthology (New York: Garland, pp. 379) and he has a fourth, Blues Lyric Poetry: A Concordance, in press with Garland, New York. Sadly, however, no permanent position in folklore studies has yet been created for him, as he deserves, at the University of Saskatchewan.

Folk music programmes, produced and presented by the undersigned, have continued to be featured by CJUS-FM, the radio station of the University of Saskatchewan. My series The Folk Singers ran until August 5th and an earlier series, Folk Song Sampler, presently is being rebroadcast. This fall the station has changed its call sign to CHSK and is reaching out to wider audiences.

All in all, though folk music activity in Saskatchewan remains at a low key, this year has given encouraging intimations of better times to come!