

Saskatchewan 1984

by Bill Sarjeant

This year gone was a difficult one for folk music in this Province. Though much good music was performed, financial and other problems clouded the prairie skies to a disheartening degree.

As usual the Regina Folk Festival, which will be reported on more fully in a later article in this *Bulletin*, was the high-spot of our year, though the heavy emphasis on women's songs perhaps produced an imbalance in concert scheduling and the decision of the women performers to keep their evening social events separate from the rest of us caused disappointment and disquiet. Nevertheless, once again, a good time was had by all and we are looking forward already to next year's gathering (14-16 June 1985). The next festival will again feature women's songs, but to a somewhat reduced degree, and will give greater emphasis to "working" workshops.

The other festivals rode a rockier course. The Flin Flon-Creighton Festival, fortunate in being supported by funds from two Provinces, perhaps did best, featuring such notables as David Essig, Sandy Greenberg, Moon Joyce, Paddy Tutty and the egregious Valdy, as well as local musicians — though, as that list will tell you, it was not strong on traditional folk music. The Tugaske and Meadowlark (Saskatoon) Festivals were both considered artistic successes but ran into such deep financial trouble that it appears doubtful, at the time of writing, whether they will again be staged. If they do continue, a scaling-down and a shift to local performers seems likely. Of the Redberry Lake Festival, concentrating as it does on "country-and-western" music, I have heard no details.

The Livelong Festival, essentially a small-community affair, a sort of private party to which both musicians and audience go only by invitation, is worth noting as a possible pattern to be followed in other small prairie communities that would like to hear some folk music.

The Saskatchewan Organization of Folk Arts remains alive, despite reports to the contrary that have been circulating recently. After getting off to a good start in 1983, it did indeed encounter funding problems in 1984. Nevertheless, 6 Full (organizational) members and 30 Associate members, mostly professional musicians, have joined

so far — quite an impressive roster, for a new federation in a small Province. A "Music in Schools" programme has been inaugurated and two editions of the newsletter *Folkus* appeared during 1984. A grant from the Saskatchewan Department of Culture and Recreation is allowing the Board of Directors of S.O.F.A. to meet at intervals during the present months and chart its future course. Though voluntary assistance will be sought, professional staff seems essential if its objectives are to be attained; and several grant applications are pending. In the meantime, for information on folk activities in Saskatchewan, you can still write to S.O.F.A. at 2256 Rae, Regina, S4T 2E9, or phone (306) 522-0248.

The Regina Folk Guild has had a difficult year for the simple reason that, though excellent musicians have been booked, the audiences have not been coming. The Coffeehouse, held on every Saturday evening from September to December, has suffered continuing financial losses in consequence; and a subsidy from the City of Regina, though useful, has not been adequate to keep the books in balance. A lack of touring musicians is causing further concern for the organizers. Further fund-raising is being attempted, but a retreat to bi-weekly Coffeehouses seems likely in 1985.

The Guild Gazette, Saskatchewan's only folk music magazine, has continued to appear regularly. It features reports on musicians, interviews and record reviews, as well as news of doings at the Guild.

In Saskatoon, Cafe Domingo has done rather better than the Guild in terms of audiences, the present venue in The Basement on 3rd Avenue proving a popular one. A newsletter is produced irregularly and a programme sheet regularly. A campaign by its organizers, the Saskatoon Folk Music Association, helped to pay off the debt-load incurred by the Meadowlark Festival's financial failure; and the success of "Open Stages" shows that there is an abundance of local talent. Nevertheless, since the Cafe has worked in tandem with the Guild in booking out-of-Province guests, the Guild's decision to move to a bi-weekly schedule may force the Cafe to do likewise.

In Moose Jaw, a folk club has been formed recently and developments are awaited. Elsewhere in the Province, though there remains a positive plethora of folk-dance groups,

folk song is rarely to be heard outside people's homes. There have been no new records or tapes of folk music issued, unsurprisingly when financial circumstances are so grim. However, there are rumours of an LP to be produced in 1985, in commemoration of the centenary of the Riel Rebellion.

Until 1984 only one Saskatchewan radio station, the University of Saskatchewan station CHSK-FM, has been broadcasting folk music on any regular basis. The series *The Folk Singers*, produced by the undersigned and featuring folk music from all parts of the English-speaking world, has been heard weekly throughout the year and will be heard again in 1985 — at least until September when, through an altogether reprehensible decision by the University's Board of Governors, the station is to close down. (This is a penny-pinching financial measure that will save the University only about \$75,000 annually, a mere drop in the leaking academic financial bucket.) There is some possibility that the Students' Union may yet step in to save the station; we can only hope that this will happen.

Michael Taft, Saskatchewan's only professional folklorist, published two books during 1984, *Inside These Greystone Walls: An Anecdotal History of the University of Saskatoon* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 230 pp.) and *Blues Lyric Poetry: A Concordance* (New York: Garland, 3,150 pp.). He is serving on the Nominating and Centennial Index Committees of the American Folklore Society and is Chairman of the Editorial Board of the Saskatchewan Museums Association's heritage journal *Liaison*. Recently he has been engaged by Dance Saskatchewan Inc. to conduct oral histories for a proposed book on the history of dance in Saskatchewan.

The undersigned continues to represent Saskatchewan on the Board of Directors of this Society and looks forward to the holding of our Annual Meeting in Regina on November 1st to 3rd, for the first time in this Province. The Workshops and Concerts are always enjoyable and the A.G.M. itself gives you chance to air your views on the Society's doings, so do plan to come along!

I am indebted to Paddy Tutty, Michael Taft, Bob Toso and Norman Walker for help in producing this report.