the film is perhaps unfortunate. A young radical decries the use of the fiddle as a constant symbol of Acadians, comparing it to Indian drumming in cowboy movies. When the movie Indians stop drumming, he comments, they’re ready to go to war. What happens, he asks, when the fiddler stops? The camera then cuts to Edith Butler’s guitar, which may have seemed a revolutionary tool in the early 70s, but now is just pleasant. Perhaps the fiddle can be more revolutionary than some people realize.

FOLK MUSIC IN CHILDREN’S MUSIC EDUCATION IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD

by

David W. Watts

[Editor’s note: This article was adapted from a chapter in Mr. Watts’ forthcoming book Exploring the Joy of Music With Young Children.]

GREAT BRITAIN

Although the influence of Orff and Kodaly spread to the U.K. in the 1970s, and is evident in the British primary music educational curriculum, not much attention has been paid to Kodaly’s injunction that music education must be rooted in the local folk culture. The English are rather ambivalent here. Traditional songs such as “Oh Dear, What Can the Matter Be?”, “Scarborough Fair”, and “Early One Morning” are sung throughout the English-speaking world, yet the folk tradition, in its local richness and ongoing evolution, is little in evidence in the teaching of music in primary schools.

Folk music is regional in character. When non-Brits think of “British” folk music, it is often of songs from Scotland, Ireland or Wales. Even if we confine our thinking to the borders of England, it is still likely to focus on the outlying areas: Cornwall, which has its own “national anthem”; Yorkshire, with rousing chor-
schools and community concerts, doing the same thing east of the Atlantic as a number of groups in Canada: concentrating exclusively on the pre-teenage market. The Kettle's blend of traditional Scottish and contemporary children's material is starting to permeate classrooms and even nurseries. It is to be hoped that more such groups will join them.

"DOWN UNDER"

Though I've never been there, I can't let Australia pass without mention. It's home to Rolf Harris, one of the earliest and most enduring of the current crop of children's entertainers. His 1961 hit "Six White Boomer" was one of the few good "pop" Christmas songs to come out in the past 25 years. Harris followed with two other distinctly Australian songs that became international hits: "Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport" and "My Boomerang Won't Come Back". In the 70s and 80s he's toured the English-speaking world giving solo children's concerts featuring such numbers as "Jake the Peg".

It was an Australian group, The Seekers, who popularized Malvina Reynolds' children's song "Morningtowm Ride" on their debut LP album in 1965. Other Seekers' single hits were "Georgy Girl", "A World of Our Own", and "I'll Never Find Another You".

A contemporary Australian husband-and-wife duo, Mike and Michelle (Jackson), has been touring internationally on a smaller scale, bringing quality entertainment and education to folk clubs and children's concerts. Though their children's album "Plamates" has been released in Canada by Elephant Records (label of Sharon, Lois and Bram), they are broader in their scope than most Canadian children's performers.

NORTH AMERICA

The English-speaking New World is characterized by a vastness and a newness that is hard for a ciosely in 1938, when the School Board of Boston made music a part of the curriculum for a maximum of two hours per week. Lowell Mason (1792-1872) published the first American songbook especially for school children, and shaped music education along Pestalozzian principles of "head, heart, and hand", with emphasis on "learning by doing".

In the early 20th century the emphasis shifted away from musical skill development to "music appreciation". This became a more viable option with the invention of the phonograph (record player) and tape recorder. A mid-century recording pioneer was Moses Asch (000-1987), whose New York-based "Folkways" label produced in limited quantity albums by Huddie Leadbetter ("Leadbelly"), Ella Jenkins, Tom Glazer, Pete Seeger, and Canadian Alan Mills, long before these were being recorded on larger commercial labels. The Folkways repertoire included songs that were being sung in taverns, in union halls, at summer camps, riding the rods — a significant part of American culture that to this point had remained underground.4

In the late 1950s and '60s, three simultaneous developments contributed to the "gelling" of American public music education. The Young Composers Project, funded by the Ford Foundation, brought composers and music educators together, and music composition into the public schools. This became the Contemporary Music Project, and culminated in the articulation of the distinctly American approach that is known as "Comprehensive Musicianship".5 Secondly, the spread of television brought a potentially educational medium into the home at a pre-school level. Programs such as "Sesame Street", and later "The Muppets", used music as a general teaching tool as well as a stage for special children's performances by Pete Seeger and other artists. And, finally, the combined impact of television, the recording industry, and other changes in American society (e.g., the civil rights movement) gave birth to what has been called the American folk music "revival".

The 1960s folk movement extended far beyond the U.S., and briefly even beyond North America. It was less a rebirth than a first-time coming together, for it brought the spotlight of mass culture to bear on many of the previously underground subcultures. Admittedly, the majority of the groups in vogue — "The Kingston Trio", "The Highwaymen", "Peter, Paul and Mary", and "The Limelighters" — were White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (also mostly male), and toured mainly campuses and white coffee houses. But their repertoire included black spirituals, "blues" by Leadbelly and union songs by Woody Guthrie, as well as traditional ballads updated and served with Dylan protest songs. However commercial the packaging and short-lived the mass market, the "folk revival" served to broaden and diversify the popular culture coming out of American recording studios.

The groundwork for the 1960s movement had been laid from 1949 to 1952 by "The Weavers", considered by many to be the most important single folk group in the history of the U.S. They "bridged the gap between America's rural heritage and post World War II urban folk music revival".6 Their 1950 success with
European to comprehend. North America includes at least a dozen distinct regions and three world languages spread between three countries, two of them primarily English-speaking. Canada and the United States share a continent, a mass culture, and a summer camping tradition that has been significant in the development of folk music. Yet they have developed politically, educationally and culturally along different lines.

Canada remains a much more regionalized country than the U.S. Her educational system has not been a particularly strong unifying force; even within many provinces there exist separate school systems for different religious and language groups. In curriculum, English Canadians have usually been borrowers rather than innovators. For a long time after Confederation, the East (Ontario and the Maritimes) remained strongly oriented towards the Old World and the British Empire. When the Western Provinces developed an orientation "independent" of Eastern Canada, they drew heavily on American progressive education of the Dewey mode. Perhaps the most innovative feature of Canadian schooling has been the emergence of federally-funded French immersion programs, through these are attended by only a limited portion of the population. This development has been accompanied by the exposure of numbers of English-speaking children to French and French-Canadian rhymes and folksongs.

In the United States, by contrast, public education has had a stronger unifying role in reflecting and shaping American ideals. This why "bussing" and school integration became symbols of the drive for social equality. Bilingual education, where it exists in the U.S., functions mainly as a bridge to facilitate the assimilation of non-English-speaking immigrants into the mainstream of American life. Religious schools, and schools for the maintaining of second languages and cultures, are all privately funded.

The United States

Culturally, the U.S. is as regionally diverse as is English-speaking Canada, particularly when one looks at the traditions of New England, Appalachia, the South, the Pacific Northwest, etc. But the size of the total American market, coupled with the effect of the mass media, has produced a mass culture and national subcultures which are commercially viable. This is seen in the strength of the American educational and textbook publishing industry. It is reflected in the success of the American stage musical as a major Western cultural genre. George Gershwin, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and Lerner and Loewe not only are quality music and first class entertainment; they have become an international social conscience in a powerful but non-preaching way. "South Pacific" raised to consciousness the issue of race relations in a setting outside of the American South, "My Fair Lady" held up both the British class system and the use of people in academic experiments, "West Side Story" raised the pathos of street gangs in the New York concrete jungle.

Music education in schools had begun inauspiciously coast to coast. One of her original songs, "Robin in the Rain", was rediscovered and popularized by children's entertainer Raffi in the 1970s.

Children who didn't attend church could hear folklorist Alan Mills singing traditional songs on a weekly C.B.C. Sunday morning radio broadcast heard across Canada. "Folk Song Time" was the creation of Edith Fulton Fowke, a Saskatchewan-born English teacher (later professor), who collected and edited the first cross-Canadian anthologies of folk music for the general public.

Finally, the Canadian Girls In Training movement ("C.G.I.T.") became a courier of folk culture for preteen and adolescent girls at weekly meetings, camps and retreats. The organization's official songbooks, "Lift Your Voices" and "Lift Your Voices Again", give us a sampling of what was being sung by young Canadians, not only at C.G.I.T. camps, but at other Protestant church camps for girls, co-ed camps for teens (where the girls usually taught the boys) and family camps including C.G.I.T. alumnae. They are probably also an accurate reflection of what many Canadian mothers sang to their children in addition to the standard nursery rhymes.

Canada participated in the 1960s North American folk music revival, but definitely as a junior partner. The major issues and influences were American and so were the artists, though these included some Canadian-born ones such as Oscar Brand and Buffy Sainte-Marie. English-speaking Canadians turned out to hear imported American groups, developed a national one of their own in Ian and Sylvia Tyson, and exported three superstars to the U.S.: Gordon Lightfoot, Joni Mitchell, and Leonard Cohen. But, with the notable exception of Lightfoot's "Canadian Railroad Trilogy", these three wrote and sang about relationships and change in an urban setting; there was little specifically Canadian in their material.

It was in the 1970s, after the American movement had subsided, that there a contemporary folk music that was genuinely cross-Canadian. New government
regulations requiring a percentage of "Canadian content" on the airwaves made it possible for singer-songwriters like Bruce Cockburn and Murray McLauchlan to sustain careers without leaving the country for the bigger American market. And into this new climate came the titan of English-speaking Canadian songwriters, Stan Rogers, who, had he lived longer, might well have surpassed Lightfoot on the international scene. Rogers did with contemporary songwriting what Edith Fowke had done for traditional Canadian material: he wrote, sang, and produced songs about the whole of Canada – the Maritimes, Newfoundland, Ontario, and the Northwest – and gave Canadian from these regions a greater sense of each other. He combined quality lyrics with carefully-researched Canadiana, and opened Canadian geography and history as worthy themes for Canadian songwriters.

At the same time as this was happening, "live" and recorded children's music was emerging as a separate industry in English-speaking Canada. In the U.S., as we have seen, folk singers who perform Leadbelly's "Irene, Good Night" (Number One on the hit parade for over three months) and "On Top of Old Smokey" proved the commercial viability of folk music, and led to the formation of other groups.

After "The Weavers" disbanded as a group, and after the break-up of the "pop folk" groups that rode the '60s wave, Pete Seeger and others of his circle continued to nuture the folk movement. They had been on the scene long before its commercial success, and stayed with it long afterwards, singing and recording, sometimes solo, sometimes in tandem with others. Many of the 1960s recording groups had included one or more children's songs on each album; Seeger occasionally gave children's concerts, one of which was recorded. He has sung with, and popularized many songs, by Tom Paxton and Malvina Reynolds, the two most prolific American songwriters for children of our generation.

Tom Paxton (born 1937) has devoted a significant portion of his career to work with children. He is better-known as a writer than as a singer; his biggest "hits" (popularized by others) include "Rambling Boy", "The Last Thing on my Mind", "Bottle of Wine", and "Wasn't that a Party?!". Among his children's songs are "Going to the Zoo", "The Marvelous Toy", "Jennifer's Rabbit", and "What Did You Learn in School Today?!". (The latter is really a protest song set from a child's view, like Len Chandler's "Beans in my Ears" and many English nursery rhymes.)

Malvina Reynolds (1901-1978) is another songwriter whose audience and output included both children and adults. "Little Boxes" is probably her best-known protest song; "Morningtown Ride" became a children's hit after it was recorded by "The Seekers". "God Bless the Grass", "I Live in a City" and "You Can't Make a Turtle Come Out" are less well-known, but of good quality. Her albums "Artichokes and Griddle Cakes, Etc." and "Funny Bugs, Giggleworms, Etc." consist largely of material for children. Many of these songs appeared in a book "There's Music in the Air" (now out of print).

Canada

In the early 1950s Canada was in an "adolescent identity crisis". Many of her English-speaking people still thought of themselves as primarily British rather than Canadian; others looked to the United States for a role model. Canadian children's music and education materials reflected this cultural schizophrenia; regionalism accentuated it. The Western Provinces' official songbooks for the elementary grades were a thinly-veiled revision of the "American Singer" series. School music books in the Eastern Provinces were mostly home-grown, but drew heavily on the British Isles for their repertoire. There were, however, at least three cross-Canadian influences that permeated musical and early childhood education, though only one of these had direct input in the schools:

Claire Senior Burke was an Ontario kindergarten teacher who wrote her own songs. Her collections "Scissors and Songs" and "Songs and Silhouettes", published by Gordon V. Thompson Ltd., could be found in nursery schools and primary classrooms from children have done so as only a part of a broader trade. In Canada a number of "mainstream" folk artists and performers had done this as well. But what makes Canada noteworthy, along with Australia, in the English-speaking world is the appearance of a whole genre of singers who make their living entirely from singing and recording for children, and who do this in a quality, professional manner. A number of these are former teachers. Trio "Sharon Lois and Bram" and soloists Raffi and Fred Penner are best-known across Canada; each region has local figures that are known there. One "regional", Vancouver-based Charlotte Diamond, is on the point of becoming a "national" after a 1986 Juno Award for her album "Diamond in the Rough".

Sharon, Lois and Bram are an offshoot of Mariposa in the Schools ("M.I.T.S."), the educational side of Canada's oldest and most successful "mass" folk festival. Raffi was attempting to break through as a
coffeeshouse folksinger when he started singing for young children in schools and libraries in 1974. New to the field of early childhood, he was coached by his wife, Debi, a kindergarten and Grade I teacher, and some of their friends. With his 1976 album “Singable Songs for the Very Young”, Raffi established himself as the dean of Canadian children’s music, and created a niche that has been widened by Fred Penner and others. Before this album, no children’s record had ever won “gold” status in Canada; five of his albums since then have reached this mark in sales, and “Singable Songs . . .” has passed it many times.

Raffi, Fred Penner, and Sharon, Lois and Bram have been featured performers across Canada at teachers’ conventions and children’s festivals. By taking their audience seriously, they have set a new standard of quality in children’s recordings, outclassing the Disney soundtracks and “imitation voices” that used to dominate the “juvenile” section of the recording industry. Their collective success has opened the way for a host of regional children’s singers, starting in local schools, as they did. A Raffi concert may be an annual event in a community, but these new troubadors are becoming a significant part of the ongoing early childhood music educational scene.

Sharon, Lois and Bram are singers of traditional material. Raffi and Fred Penner started out in the same way, and then began composing some songs of their own. An increasing number of the newcomers to the scene are writing their own material. Some of these homegrown songs are destined to end up among the classics of children’s folklore. New and old, these songs are being sung by and with children in the neighbourhood, and are going into their homes on vinyl and cassette. They are creating a new shared sense of identity (a folk culture!), and are helping to make singing a fun and communal experience again.

NOTES

1 “The New Seekers” (Capitol ST2319)
2 While the percentage of French- and Spanish-speaking people is miniscule compared to the English-speaking population of North America, these languages are sufficiently strong to affect the anglophone folk cultures in their respective countries.
4 Although primitive by today’s standard, these records continue to stand up favourably in content and integrity. With Asch’s death, his music collection was bequeathed to the University of Alberta, Canada, and the further production of Folkways albums was assumed by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.
5 See c. 6 in Choksy, et al., Teaching Music in the Twentieth Century.
7 Peter, Paul and Mary devoted an entire album to children’s songs (“Peter, Paul and Mommy” — Warner Brothers), which included their earlier hit “Puff, the Magic Dragon”. They were among the earliest of the major commercial folk groups to do so.
8 “Pete Seeger: Children’s Concert at Town Hall”.
9 Recorded by Seeger in “Children’s Concert . . .”, also on “Dangerous Songs”.
10 Schroeder Publications.
12 There has been less encouragement for boys to sing in English-Canadian culture. Where this has happened, at Scouts and similar organizations, it has been in isolated pockets, with toned-down “army songs”, usually with little of a Canadian denominator. With elementary school education overwhelmingly dominated by women, boys did not get same-sex adult role models for singing at an age when they might otherwise have been open and impressionable to them. At a higher age level, the Y.M.C.A (an American-founded organization) did provide this to a limited extent in Canada.
13 Lightfoot’s choice of the more American word “railroad” is significant.
14 The one area Rogers did not address in his own songs was Quebec. Not speaking the language, he had not developed the intimate first-hand knowledge there from which he had written of Canada’s other regions. To compensate, he produced an album of traditional songs for “Eritage”, a Montreal-based group that did a lot of touring in English Canada in the early 1980s. Rogers was
very conscious of this personal lack in his experience and repertoire. Towards the end of his life he spoke of learning French so that he could address French Canada himself.

Three of Rogers’ contemporaries who have followed this pathway to some extent are Connie Kaldor, Richard White and Vera Johnson. All three are based in the West, but have a view that transcends their region. Kaldor’s “Maria’s Place/Batoche” (about Gabriel Dumont, Louis Riel’s lieutenant) was on the American charts in 1985; her “Au Revoir, Bye, Bye” has become a classic description of English-French relations in Canada on the level of a personal romance. London-born Vera Johnson, who has also written a couple of bilingual songs, has been in eclipse since the early ’80s. Her career in Canada parallels that of Malvina Reynolds in the U.S. in a number of respects.

Will Millar, leader of Canada’s best-known international group, “The Irish Rovers”, made his TV debut with a Saturday morning kids’ show in Calgary in the early 1960s. But, although the Rovers have always been considered “family entertainment” – with such hits as “The Unicorn”, “The Biplane”, “Evermore” and “Whiskey on a Sunday” (“The Puppet Song”) – they are an exception. Singer Anne Murray has recorded one children’s album (not her own material): “There’s a Hippo in my Bathtub”. Gordon Lightfoot and Joni Mitchell, Canada’s reigning international stars, have each written just one “children’s song” of note: Lightfoot’s “The Pony Man”, and Mitchell’s “Circle Game”, a song of adult reflection on childhood.

Folk festivals, both large and small, have become Canadian cultural carriers, both for the regions and groups sponsoring them, and nationally, as artists move from one festival to another. In the 1987 Canadian Folk Festival Directory there were 288 events listed across the country.


E.g., Raffi’s “All I Really Need . . .” David Spaulding ("Brandywine")’s musical setting of “The Gingerbread Man”. Also Ann Mortifee (not a children’s performer, and hardly even a “folkie” any more) has written a child-adult musical, “Reflections on Crooked Walking” (Jabula Records), which in my view, will stand alongside Peter Pan, Wind in the Willows, Winnie-the-Pooh, and other English-language classics. Mortifee is from Vancouver.

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Of possible interest to Bulletin readers is the trials and tribulations of folk festival organizing. The Regina Folk Festival has recently held a series of meetings to talk about our purpose, policies and a five-year plan.

The impetus for these meetings was a controversy over “The Honorarium Gap” and “The Star Syndrome”. The Mariposa Folk Festival was cited by many as the wrong way to go. Policies that emerged included keeping the Honorarium Gap to a minimum, treating all performers as fairly and equally as possible, raising our “base-rate” for performers as quickly as we can and not hiring “Parachuters” who cannot or will not do workshops.

Another great topic for discussion was the nature of “Workshops”. As at many festivals, the “Workshops” at Regina have become little more than mini-concerts, with many of the more “commercial” musicians playing the same “hits” they will perform later on the main stage, often with complete disregard to the workshop theme. We identified “interaction” as the most important aspect missing at present, with “educational value” close behind. By interaction we mean performers “jamming” on stage, interacting with each other, or interacting with the audience, through either answering questions or directly demonstrating aspects of their music.

Our solution, I believe, will be to divide the different stages, or times, into “Concerts”, “Jam Sessions” and “Instructional Workshops”, perhaps with sign-up sheets for the instructional workshops.

Gordon Fisch

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