THE CITY OF NORTH YORK

Helen Mensah is leader of a professional dance group in Houston, Texas, and Abraham Adzenya currently teaches in the Musicology Department at Wesleyan University in Connecticut.

Clearly, it was as much the content as it was the effective teaching techniques which made the summer course at York University a challenging learning experience. The contents of this course (Ghanaian cultural values) were, in effect, re-created each time we rehearsed and performed the dances and songs. The traditional roles played by men and women in Ghanaian society were displayed, for example, in the Siky, a co-ed dance in which the male dancers of our group were constantly reminded that they were too feminine and that they could not "stand like real men" (we tried our best); and the women that they were either too 'soft' or too 'hard'. The latter example is understandable in view of the fact that the Ewe tribe of southern Ghana (of which Helen is a member), would consider a woman who dances 'hard' to be sexually 'fugly' or even infertile—a situation which would undoubtedly bring disgrace to her and her family. Each time the female dancers of our group digressed on this point, they were reminded of their 'sexual responsibility' to society through Helen's cries of "How do you expect to entertain your sweethearts?"

Certainly, the affective aspects of our learning experience were unlike any I had ever experienced in a classroom situation. Independent of the occasional religious and moral overtones from Helen and Abraham, the drumming, dancing and singing produced feelings of joy and fellowship which were perhaps most pronounced during performances, when the audience was invited to share in the singing and dancing of our final piece. It is important to note that the laughter and celebration which we experienced with the audience/participants during these performances were feelings which manifest themselves in the everyday lives of most Ghanaians, and are not (as tends to be the case in Western cultures) restricted to performance situations.

Clearly the "Music and Dances of Ghana" course was a challenging learning experience. By the end of four weeks we had not only shared in an unwritten tradition which emphasized group interaction and participation in a wholistic and humanistic manner, but had also experienced a system of cultural values previously unknown to us— in a manner which seemed to celebrate life itself.

Murray Douglas Smith
York University, Toronto

Book Review.

THE SONGS OF WADE HEMSWORTH.

Hugh Verrier, ed. Illustrations by Thoreau MacDonald. Penumbra Press, Waterloo, 1990. 143 pages, paperback, distributed by the University of Toronto Press. (Re hardcover edition, see below.)

If it can be said of any songs by a Canadian singer-songwriter that they have become part of our national heritage, that claim can be made for the songs of Wade Hemsworth. From a small total corpus, what is especially remarkable is that so many of Hemsworth's songs are widely known: "The Blackfly Song" tops the list, followed by "The Wild Goose", "The Log Driver's Waltz", "Foolish You" and "The Land of the Muskeg (the Shining Birch Tree)". Although The Songs of Wade Hemsworth contains but 15 songs, it represents a rich legacy.

The book was published in October 1990. This is an especially happy accident, for it would have been a birthday present for Hemsworth, who was born in October 1916. What is no accident, however, is that the whole book, from its design and appearance, to its comprehensive contents, radiates an aura of celebration. So, if not a birthday present, it serves as a public acknowledgment of and tribute to an artist in song at the end of his 74th year.

The songs appear in sequence from page 19 to page 127, with an average 7.2 pages per song. Each song is given a full page for its title, one to two pages for the English text (with Hemsworth's chords) and the same for the singable French translation (without chords). Between the English and the French texts is the music, set for piano; and with chords and tempi indicated, the settings occupy one to five pages. In addition, each song has an introductory comment or comments by Hemsworth himself. Since the page size is 8 1/4 by 11 inches (8 3/4 inches by 12 inches), the book is clearly designed for the piano.

The Songs of Wade Hemsworth is a unique book: it is both a book of song and a book of art. The designer uses the light-cream-coloured paper generously, and creates a comfortable rhythm of open and filled space.

Complementing the songs in theme and mood, some 36 black-and-white images have been selected from archival holdings of woodcuts and drawings by Thoreau MacDonald. These make the book a pictorial gem. Although small images are elegantly placed within the typographical, such as the canoe which decorates the title pages throughout, the two dozen medium and large-sized images are displayed to their own advantage, ten of them given a page to themselves.

The book is planned for both a general and a specialized audience, for those who are being introduced to Hemsworth and his work, for those who wish to share in this celebration, and for scholars who want all the relevant documentation available. It begins with a short preface by Hemsworth (in which he tells us that the idea for the book was Hugh Verrier's). This is followed by a two-page foreword by Kate and Anna McGarrigle, who share anecdotes of the folk scene in Montreal in the 1960's, and by a four-page introduction by Diane Larkin. Larkin sketches Hemsworth's life and puts the songs into that context. Before the song texts there is a page and a half by Peter Weldon titled "Wade and the Guitar", quoting Hemsworth on guitar accompaniments and describing his right-hand technique, and finally there is a half-page note by the translator of the lyrics, Philippe Tatarcheff. Following the songs are eight pages by editor Verrier giving full information on the recordings, films and publications relating to Hemsworth's songs. Verrier acknowledges the assistance of Edith Fowke and Sheldon Posen in preparing his list.

This volume is both a public book and a very personal one. It is public in that it appears within the scope of the publishers' assurance of programs of the Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council and the exploration Program of the Canada Council. It is personal, for Hemsworth's presence permeates all the oral and musical material. In the piano music, for example, we are told it was prepared by Marilynn Mulkins with Wade Hemsworth. The arrangements are essentially his. In the commentary Hemsworth gives us little insights which help to explain the charm of his songs, such as the information that he consciously used assonance in certain of his lyrics. And in a more fundamental way it is clearly personal,
for those who made it happen were all his friends. Their love and respect are manifest.

The three photographs, including the striking portrait of Henshaw with his quiet smile and deep eyes, exhibit this same spirit. The book is thus a public monument raised by his friends.

The Songs of Wade Henshaw will be prized not only by those interested in folk-styled song and/or art, but also by bibliophiles. In an edition limited to 1000 copies, with only 500 paperback available through bookstores, it will soon be sold out. The other 500 copies are bound with hard covers, numbered and signed by Henshaw, and may be purchased from the editor (see below). The hardcover edition may possibly be available directly through the publisher, Penumbra Press, but the foregoing information is as printed in the paperback. In December 1990 the price of the hardcover edition was $80.00. It comes with a handsome dust jacket. If you want one, time may well be short.

The editor's address: Hugh Verrier, 1991 Prince Arthur Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3H 4H2

Philip J. Thomas

Letters

IAN TYSON AS 'FOUNDING FATHER' 

In a recent issue of the British Folk Roots, the editor lamented the blurring in understanding the words 'folk music' and the need for a substitute--a need very much felt by this Society. This blurring in understanding is surely made manifest in the August issue of The Seen: Saskatchewan's Arts & Entertainment Magazine, in which Kim Turner writes (p. 14): 'Ian Tyson achieved international fame as one of the originators of the folk music genre...'

Well, now; some of us thought folk music's history was much longer. But here is a 'founding father', still alive and active! Something wrong, somewhere....

Dr. William A. S. Sarjeant, Department of Geological Sciences, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Sask., S7N OW0, Canada

IS THERE A SONG HERE?

Here is a money order to renew my membership int the society. I received the recent mailing of the society booklet from Brandon and noticed that my expiry date was Dec. 1990. A few minutes later, before I had a chance to open the envelope to look at the booklet, a gust of wind took the envelope out of my hand and it fell into the Pacific Ocean (I work on a C.P. Rail ferry on the West Coast). Perhaps someday, in recording the songs of the whales on the coast, certain recognizable melodies will be heard and wondered about. This incident may provide the missing clue. Anyway I would appreciate another copy if it can be arranged for the songs are now in the archives of the deep blue sea.

I thank you,

David Quindo

Open letter to Mitch Podolak in answer to "The Truth About Folk Festivals". CFMB 25/291:36

This letter assumes, for better or worse, that your comments were made deliberately, and possibly with the partial intention of sparking discussion.

Your simplistic and misleading caricatures of ethnomusicologists and "commercial radio programmers" could cause considerable harm; the mere fact that CSMT has printed your piece show that ethnomusicologists, at least, are secure enough not to worry ab out it. But for your own information and that of others. I'd like to point out that:

1) Ethnomusicologists neither "treat folk music as a dead art form" nor "consign it to the trash bin of history". In fact, they, and other thinking people, do not consider history a "trash bin".

Ethnomusicological training, writing, speaking, performance and research are not only sensitive to, but actually geared toward, studies of change, innovation, transition and other aspects of people's creativity. Never mind examples--just glance through the indices of Ethnomusicology or the Yearbook for Traditional Music if the CSMT isn't enough for you.

A surprising number of performers (at folk festivals as well as other places) are ethnomusicologists, committed to understanding and enjoying a tradition from more than one perspective.

3) Purely oral transmission is no longer, and has not been for some time, a condition for "defining" folk music.

4) It is not "placed under glass"; and it is not "protected and studied and written about" before it has any relevance. It is protected and studied and written about because it has relevance. Ethnomusicologists have recognized that multi-dimensional relevance since the "dawn", to adapt your cliché, of ethnomusicological time.

5) "For their own enjoyment" and for "creating a hit for the parade" are often, but not inevitably or automatically, mutually exclusive.

I won't answer for commercial programmers, but, as a folk singer and an ethnomusicologist, as someone who has played folk festivals and written a thesis, I strongly object to your sneer about 'whether some jerk gets to write his thesis', aside from its sexism.

I think you have something to say, Mitch, but simplistic, self-righteous, inaccurate and stereotypically nasty language is probably not, in the long run, going to motivate people to understand and discuss your point of view.

Most ethnomusicologists I know love the music they work on, and have forged lasting friendships with the people who create it. There are always exceptions. Few, if any, care to label their finds "The Truth about...", as you seem to feel confident to do.

Welcome to CSMT and fruitful dialogue,

Judith Cohen
Folksinger-Ethnomusicologist

Notice of Helen Creighton Folklore Festival of Dartmouth

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia November 2, 1991

The Helen Creighton Folklore Festival of Dartmouth is a day long celebration honoring the work of Canada's most well known folklorist. The festival takes place in the Dartmouth Public Library and offers an eclectic sample of Nova Scotian tradition song and dance. Informal talks will be presented throughout the day exploring aspects of Nova Scotia folklore including weather talk and nineteenth century dance. The festival ends with an evening concert featuring the Rankin Family, a celebrated Nova Scotian family of folksingers with a unique traditional repertoire.

For further information call:
The Dartmouth Heritage Museum (902-464-2300)
J. Dale after 6:00 p.m. (902-466-2584)