affairs of others. Entering a stranger's home or a community hall is not an easy thing to do, even when, as in most cases, the people being studied are amused, intrigued and even proud to have a researcher interested in their traditions. The unease of fieldwork is partly the result of the need to be at least somewhat dispassionate — the necessity to control one's emotions, to be less emotionally engaged than other members of the audience in one's observations. Observing, describing and analyzing a musical event do not destroy that event, but they might disrupt the emotional well-being of the researcher. At the risk of sounding hackneyed, I would contend that there is a little bit of Mr. Podolak in all ethnomusicologists — an inner gremlin whose irrationality and romanticism work against dispassionate intellectualism.

It would be easy to dismiss Mr. Podolak for his obvious wrong-headedness, but he teaches us some lessons. He gives us an insight not only into the workings of another kind of belief system, but also into those areas of our own anti-intellectualism which we would rather ignore. Perhaps it is not too extreme to admit that emotion is at the core of all good ethnomusicological research.

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THE FUNCTION OF FOLK FESTIVALS

I was asked by John Leeder, guest editor of this year's edition of the Canadian Folk Festival Directory (a mighty fine and useful piece of work, I should add), to write this short article. It was supposed to be about my "philosophy" on festivals. I'm not sure I would dignify my thoughts on the subject with the word "philosophy", but I certainly have some thoughts. These should be taken as personal, subjective and prejudiced to the hilt.

I got into this racket with a background in political organizing for social change and an embryonic academic career as a historian, therefore it really is not surprising that I think that the function of folk festivals is to change the world by arming people with an appreciation and knowledge of their history. These days it seems that there are two great dangers threatening festivals. The first one is that somehow their success may be measured by the size of their audiences and their box office. The second is that they are somehow becoming farm teams for the mainstream of the popular music industry. Let's deal with these one at a time.

Size, whether in sex, building construction or festivals, is a vastly overrated and potentially destructive obsession. Having the biggest anything strikes me, at best, as fetishism. At worst, it leads to the worship of form over content. And it is precisely content which I think is key to any kind of value that folk music festivals might have.

The second danger, which flows from the first, is that folk festivals may become places where you
catch a rising star on the way up or, more likely, catch a burned-out star on the way down. While clearly there is a certain pride in being able to say that you had so-and-so shortly before they signed that 47-record deal and ate up the charts, once again the question is whether or not that particular artist was any good, rather than whether they went on to sell a gazillion records. All too often there seems to be an obsession with finding artists who are "about to break". Many of the finest folks around are never going "to break", and that does not lessen their value.

I am interested in organizing a festival that presents artists who are important; as long as I can break even over the long term doing that, whether my festival is bigger or smaller than anyone else's is immaterial. I am interested in presenting artists who reflect the values and aspirations of groups of people who are acting in and upon society, and artists who are carrying on, preserving, extending and transforming traditions.

I think that festivals have a role which is totally independent of, and in fact counterpoised to, the commercial music industry. Even though we may to some degree be in that industry, we are not of it. To the extent that our interests coincide, that is coincidence. They're in business to sell as many of whatever they sell as they possibly can. We're in business as non-profit organizations, to preserve and extend culture, or at least that part of it which is covered by the term "folk music". The festivals have a responsibility to reflect the world we live in and to be a force to create the world we are going to live in. Artists in the women's, environmental, trade union and other movements that seek to transform reality have been, are and will be a vital part of folk music. Folk music to a large degree is how people who do not own radio stations, TV stations and newspapers write their history; it was ever thus. The denial of a place at festivals for these artists in the name of "we're not political" is a denial of nature. It is exclusionary and anti-democratic and amounts to censorship. Nobody who is involved in booking a festival can tell me that they are not presented with the material of dozens of artists who are seeking to use their music for political goals. From Woody Guthrie to Pete Seeger, Billy Bragg and Sweet Honey in the Rock, many of the very finest "folk singers" have had at the heart of their art the aspiration to use their music as a tool and a weapon. In my view, it is the responsibility of festivals to be the soap box upon which these artists stand to address the "folk". You don't need to agree with an artist to present them. I am a died-again atheist who hates religion with a passion as the very embodiment of human ignorance, but every year I present gospel music. The point is that gospel singing is an important part of folk music and has a legitimate place at a folk festival. The aspiration to express political views is certainly as strong as the aspiration to address issues of a more personal nature. People spend a lot of time thinking about the world, their jobs, etc., probably more time than they spend thinking about love in its various forms. Yet at most festivals which I attend I hear rather a lot of songs about human beings of various sexes meeting other human beings of various sexes, and rather little about many other subjects which interest me far more.

Festivals have a responsibility to reflect the diversity of traditions that exists in the country, the region or city in which they occur. Festivals that exist in cit-
ies with a large Caribbean population or Asian population but do not go out actively seeking artists from these communities for their festivals tell a lie about the community they exist in. This kind of programming has nothing to do with drawing in an audience from these communities. I do not program Asian artists in Vancouver to sell tickets in the Asian community. The audience at my festival, and at most others, is overwhelmingly European in origin. The point is to educate audiences about the richness of the places where they live, about the possibilities inherent in the creativity of the human beings of their community. The role of festivals is to educate, to expand the musical horizons of the people who attend them. A festival that cannot demonstrate at least an elementary sensitivity on this front betrays itself and its audience.

I think that festivals must accept the challenge of internationalism. We live in a world where relatively cheap communication and travel make it far easier than a decade or two ago to look at the vast array of the world's culture as a palette from which to draw. Festivals which remain trapped in a narrow nationalism or continentalism deny their audiences access to some of the planet's great artists and music. The notion that folk music and "ethnic music" are separate is xenophobic, to use the kindest term I can think of. It is often artists who are the most articulate spokespersons for a culture or a nationality. And it is precisely by presenting these artists from many countries that folk festivals provide a service which is not being provided anywhere else.

Folk festivals in Canada have a mass audience. They reach hundreds of thousands each year through the people who attend them, and often the radio and television broadcasts which emanate from them. The dozen or so artistic directors and the few score members of boards and staff that organize these events have an enormous power to influence and determine that traditional musicians are able to reach enormous numbers of people, that songwriters who'll never be played on commercial radio can find sizeable and important audiences, that artists from a multitude of cultural backgrounds can transcend the limits of their communities. This opportunity is ours for the taking. We can be a force to educate, and through that education to transform, in limited but significant ways, the world we live in. Or we can surrender that opportunity, and carve out a comfortable existence in a parasitic, symbiotic relationship with the music industry juggernaut, living a life similar to those birds that live off the vermin that infest cattle. I believe that we should chart the former course, not the latter.

These are some of the things which I believe in and which direct my work at the Vancouver Folk Festival.

Gary Cristall