

Saskatoon in the Winter

by Hugh Hendry

Opportunities to hear live folk music in Saskatoon have been somewhat limited since Café Domingo closed down and there were no more weekly concerts, but through the efforts of a number of different individuals and groups, including the Saskatoon Folk Music Association and Club 23 Below, last winter offered many choices for the folk music addict.

In November, Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy played to a packed house at Convocation Hall, University of Saskatchewan. His concert, sponsored by Tools for Peace, CUSO, Oxfam, Oscar Romero Refugee Committee, the Latin American Solidarity Front and the Nicaragua Support Committee, was one stop in a cross-Canada tour. Singing only in Spanish, he delighted the audience and charmed them into singing along. Several times, his references to Central American songs brought audible sighs, gasps of recognition and shouts of encouragement from different corners of the hall. A continuous translation of his comments, done with enthusiasm, sincerity and humour by Nancy Allen, brought those of us who don't speak Spanish right into the "inner circle". Mejía Godoy sings beautifully and, dedicated as he is to spreading a political and social message by his music, certainly didn't fail in his efforts to inform, entertain and delight his audience. With his diverse program, ranging from the simple singalong song "Banana" to the moving "Yo Soy de un Pueblo Sencillo", and the backing of only his own highly rhythmic guitar, he won the audience over and really spoke to us with his music. If he comes your way, or you go his, don't miss him!

Seldom does Groundhog Day herald the end of winter in Saskatchewan, but it seemed almost to do so this year, with spring-like temperatures, sun, and melting snow. And Saskatchewan lovers of home-grown acoustic music were treated to the perfect concert to celebrate the occasion. At Club 23 Below "Ookpik and Friends" gave a concert to launch their new tape, **Sister Earth**. Randy Wilson led the company of performers through a range of performances that included Native Indian music, Irish fiddle tunes and a considerable number of original songs. The "friends" were The Pockets (Al Bond, Susan Bond and Randy Ruppel), the Echoing Green, Joe Naytowhow and Bettina Grassman. The Pockets are well known throughout the province and beyond for their beautiful harmonies in traditional, modern and original material -- their performances and backup didn't disappoint their fans. The Echoing Green, with their hard-driving traditional and original material, have been entertaining Saskatchewan audiences for a couple of years now, and over the past year have contributed significantly to programs at 23 Below, both on stage and behind the scenes. Joe Naytowhow played drum and sang, and blended perfectly with the more modern music and rhythms. For me, Joe's Native Indian Blues was one of the highlights of the evening. A relative newcomer to the Saskatoon club scene, Bettina Grassman played fiddle beautifully, with rich tone and great sensitivity for the music of the other performers. All in all, it was a fine way to launch the tape -- if you want to hear what you missed, buy it!

Other bright spots of the winter were the first visit to Saskatoon by The Chieftains, a Don Freed concert and a visit by David Essig, organized by the stalwart volunteers of the Saskatoon Folk Music Association. As spring (and summer?) rolled on, Ookpik returned for a full concert of their own, and finally, in early June (winter no more!) the James Keelaghan Trio performed to a packed Bassment (our local jazz club) before they headed down to the Regina Folk Festival. There's no question that folk music is alive and well in Saskatoon!