August 6 to 8, 1993

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR FOLK FESTIVAL*

St. John's, Newfoundland
(bus.) (709)-576-8508

Annual since 1977

"A weekend of traditional singers, music, dancers, storytellers and craftspeople from across the province."

August 13 to 15, 1993

HERITAGE FOUNDATION FOLK FESTIVAL*

Terra Nova National Park, Newfoundland
(709)-533-2801
(709)-533-2884

"Newfoundland folk artists gather to entertain with traditional songs and recitations."

August 14 to 16, 1993

PARADISE LIONS/LIONESS FOLK FESTIVAL*

Paradise, Newfoundland
(709)-782-1495

Learning About Folk

Vic Bell

As I write this, I'm in the midst of booking this year's festival, gazing at stacks of promo and heaps of tapes. There's a great pile of still-unlistened-to CDs on my living room floor. In February I was in Tucson at the annual convention of the North American Folk Alliance, a wonderful conglomeration of over five hundred performers and presenters of every stripe. As the tapes pour in, it continues to astonish me how many musicians there are who create and perform what we call "folk".

I grew up in Vancouver and hung out in coffeehouses after high school. I bought my first guitar. I sang all the campfire and hootenany songs, Child ballads, Guthrie, Paxton and Dylan. I learned

August 20 to 22, 1993

BARSOK FOLK FESTIVAL*

St. Anthony, Newfoundland
(709)-454-3954

UNDATED FESTIVALS

CAPE FREEL'S FOLK FESTIVAL
Greenspond-Deadman's Bay (July) Children's day, dances, traditional food, boat races, local talents are all featured at this festival.
(709)-536-2159

HOLYROOD SQUID JIGGING FESTIVAL
Holyrood (August) Folk arts festival, regatta, old-fashioned concert and many other fun events.
(709)-229-7010

BAKEAPPLE FOLK FESTIVAL Point Amour/Labrador Straits (mid-August) Includes folk singing/dancing, music, games, traditional crafts and food.
(709)-931-2743
songs from the Sing Out! reprints. I went to the Bunkhouse to listen to Josh White, Jose Feliciano, and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee. I had heard and learned "Early Morning Rain" and "Circle Game" before Lightfoot and Joni Mitchell released their first albums. I thought I knew about folk.

I moved to the Queen Charlottes and started performing and songwriting. I kept in touch by listening to Touch the Earth on CBC. When I heard about a folk festival starting up in Vancouver, the draw for me was Bruce Cockburn, Stan Rogers, David Essig, Pied Pumkin and David Whiffen. Most of those other names on the program were unknown to me at the time, and that festival acquainted me with the music of Ken Bloom, Margaret Christl, Claudia Schmidt, David Amram and a host of others. I was hooked. After years of performing, going to every concert possible and attending between three and six festivals a summer, I thought I knew about folk.

I moved to Calgary, drawn by friendships, proximity to the mountains and five folk clubs. After a few years, I started booking the Nickelodeon Music Club. In '89 I took on the Calgary Folk Festival. No one else would do it, and besides, I thought I knew about folk. Four festivals later and heading into a fifth, I’m still being inundated with music and performers I’ve never encountered before. It’s daunting and it’s wonderful. There are over six hundred acts in my file.

Songwriters hold a special attraction for me. The singer-songwriter category tends to become a joke amongst festival directors, because we get swamped by so many of them, and, not surprisingly, there are many very average songwriters.

That got me thinking about songs that endure. I chose fifteen songs by Canadian writers. Each of them connects with a place and a time in my life. I see faces of friends and lovers. I see oceans, mountains, cities and log cabins. I remember performances in bars and clubs, at concert halls, arenas and festivals. I remember many late nights around the campfire. Some make me happy. A few of them make me very sad. For some reason or no reason, these have stayed with me:

"Mama Just Wants to Barrelhouse All Night Long" -- Bruce Cockburn
"Little Child Eyes" -- Stephen Fearing
"Ain't Life a Brook" -- Ferron
"Night on a Hill" -- Roy Forbes
"Bird on a Wing" -- Connie Kaldor
"The Ballad of Jenny Bryce" -- James Keelaghan
"The Lonesome Kind" -- Mark Koenig
"Steel Rail Blues" -- Gordon Lightfoot
"When I Can't Play" -- Joan MacIsaac
"Down Along the Livingstone" -- Sid Marty
"Out Past the Timberline" -- Murray MaLauchlan
"That Song About the Midway" -- Joni Mitchell
"The Jeannie C." -- Stan Rogers
"Writers are a Funny Breed" -- Jane Siberry
"One Horse Town" -- Ian Tamblyn

There’s more on my extended list, of course, and I’d probably change things around if I thought about it more fully. Playing with this, however, has made me curious. What songs would you choose? Are any of these songs ones you would pick to be on your Canadian folkie song list? It’s much harder to make a short list, and I suggest you do that. Let’s face it. some of us could easily nick ten Stan Rogers or Joni Mitchell or Bruce Cockburn songs, but if you only chose one, which one would it be? Are these songwriters on your list at all?

To be totally arbitrary, let’s draw a line at 1960; it’s contemporary Canadian songwriters I’m interested in. Send me your list, and, if there’s enough of a response, I’ll contrive to tally it all up and present the results later on. They can be songs
that resonate with your past, or songs that you’d sing to represent the depth and breadth of contemporary Canadian folk music. Decide for your own reasons, but send me your list.

If you happen to be one of those songwriters who sent me a tape and haven’t been hired, keep on writing. Don’t stop. Don’t ever stop. What is it that makes certain songs stand out before all the rest? I guess if I knew that I’d write me some. I’m still learning about folk.

[Vic’s address is: 2112 12th Ave. NW, Calgary, Alta. T1N 1J9. Send him your song lists!]

Lost Souls

If you know the new address of the member listed below (with last known address), please let us know.

Jocelyn Cano, 18 Radford Ave., Toronto, Ont. M6R 1Z6
Eleanor Long-Wilgus, #114 Northampton Plaza, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, USA

Letters to the Editors

...a column on Traditional Music will be appearing in the Newsletter of the North American Folk Music and Dance Alliance... I should like to invite you to send me notice of appropriate materials for the column which you know or may come to know about. I have in mind two categories:

(1) New or on-going scholarly research studies on traditional music and folk song in the United States, Canada and Mexico. I have in mind work being done by members of academic departments or by other, independent, scholars either working alone or in association with a foundation, a library or some other group. I should be pleased to have a brief (or longer) description of the work along with name and address, etc., so that members of the Alliance can contact the scholar. I’ll also include notes on established archival collections, as I discover them, and bibliographical information as well. One cannot assume the Alliance member would know where to look for scholarly studies.

(2) Preservation projects. Here, I have in mind programs that seek to collect the songs of and the biographical details about a traditional singer, for example, or to collect the folk songs of a local community or ethnic group. Programs in schools or elsewhere designed to "pass on traditional folk song" or even "reconstruct" (a term suggested by Joe Hickerson!) historical styles and types would be of interest, along with archival projects designed to preserve a given musical heritage. The point is this: there is much traditional folk song activity at the community level that has no perceptible "trade" orientation, but is devoted, rather, to carrying on a tradition of folk music in that community. (Not that many touring singers don’t share in all that!) I recall, for example, a loose-leaf collection of song variants put together by a folk song group in Kansas City, Mo., back in the mid-60s. It was a serious piece of work, although not a scholarly study in the strict sense. Notice of such a project, however, might be of real interest to the membership of the Alliance.

I don’t plan to write about straight recording projects or new releases of traditional folk song. Art Menius covers all sorts of recordings in his column, including those. By all means please send me names of persons to whom this letter should have gone, but perhaps did not.

Dr. Richard W. Wilkie
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