more is that some audience members may believe that this describes anybody and then think that this is what they heard. —GWL

Karl Wm. Neuenfeldt, a Canadian now living in Australia, is preparing and editing a book on the cultural production and use of the didjeridu, a joint publication of Perfect Beat (The Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary Music and Popular Culture) and Allen & Unwin. He wants to be informed about didj bands [That’s what he called them, honest!] in Canada and to have contact with individuals who are teaching or researching in contemporary/traditional music and/or Aboriginal studies. Any information or suggestions of names would be appreciated. Write him at the Department of Aboriginal and Intercultural Studies, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, Bunbury Campus, Robertson Drive, Bunbury, Western Australia 6230, Telephone (097) 910 222. Fax (097) 216 994.

Hey, that problem was solved too easy! Maybe we could complicate it a bit. Does anyone have any other possibilities?

Lost Souls

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

Bruce Barton, 2736 Laurel Cr. SW, Calgary, Alta. T3E 6B3
Rhys Evans, 5503 Yalta Pl., Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1L7
Dale Innes, PH7-627 MacDonald Ave., Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. P6B 6A6
Larry Jones, 1982 Kelden Cr., Gloucester, Ont. K1B 4X9

Letters to the Editors

I’m a professional singer who is interested in obtaining songs in the French language, for possible recording. I’d like to hear from contemporary songwriters, in order to evaluate their material for possible use. I’m interested almost exclusively in songs written in the French language.

Nicholas de la Forge
Box 811
Palo Alto
CA 94302
USA

one the Society’s hardest jobs ever! -- J.L.

Sheila and I went to the biggest folk festival in Queensland over New Year’s, called the Maleny Folk Festival, about an hour’s drive northwest of Brisbane, in beautiful coastal hill country amidst small towns and farms. It was blistering hot, no rain, and large crowds crammed the site. As in most big Canadian folk festivals, there was a lot of loud electric stuff (some of it pretty well done), but we did find some grubby traditional performers playing archaic acoustic instruments. The festival had more of a bazaar feel, with lots of booths selling Pakistani silk shirts and Indonesian sarongs and food of every description and fresh fruit and sugar cane and tarot cards and woodcraft and musical instruments. And they also did a lot of pagentry, parades, juggling/fire eating/drama in the grass, as well as a huge New Year’s Ceremony where they burned a giant
provide the key for the solution of a historical puzzle."

Thus until the early 1800s the river is usually marked on maps as the "Moingona." In 1931 Minnesota historian Grace Lee Nute published her classic work The Voyageur. In it she discusses briefly a French Canadian voyageur song that may shed some light on the Des Moines River contro-versy. The song is entitled "Ah! Si Mon Moine Voulait Danser", which she says that young girls in Quebec still sang in 1931 as they played with their tops. (Why not in France? Why does "moine" not mean "top" in France?) She gives the following verses and translation:

Ah! Si Mon Moine Voulait Danser
Ah! si mon moine voulait danser!
Ah! si mon moine voulait danser!
Un capuchon je lui donnerais,
Un capuchon je lui donnerais.
Danse, mon moin', danse!
Tu n'entends pas la danse;
Tu n'entends pas mon moulin, lon, la
Tu n'entends pas mon moulin marcher.

Ah! si mon moine voulait danser! (bis)
Un ceinturon je lui donnerais. (bis)
Danse. etc.

I am researching the early history of the Des Moines River, which cuts diagonally across the state of Iowa from northwest to southeast.

During the last 100 to 150 years there has been a periodic discussion in Iowa about what "Des Moines" means. You may find that strange, but surely you know how little familiarity we Americans have of other languages. Let me assure you that those of us who believe the name means what it says in perfect French (the "monks" or "friars") are a very small minority in Iowa. Most Iowans have no sense that the name could have this French meaning. Indeed, they have little or no conception of Iowa's French, Spanish or British heritage. Those few historians who are aware of the French meaning often try to deny it, and they have convinced the public at large that the name only in the early 1800s, as is frequently implied. Without getting into the details of these maps, it appears that the name "Des Moines" was applied to the river within 27 or 28 years of Marquette and Joliet's discovery. That does not seem like a long enough time for a corruption to take place among voyageurs. But perhaps you would wish to argue with my presumption from your knowledge of French Canadian folklore and language.

With this as background, let me move to the questions I have for you.

There are more types of language confusions than just corruptions. And a language confusion of some kind may be at the heart of naming the Des Moines River, especially since there is no documentation of friars or monks being on it so early in its history.

Moreover, my observation suggests that in the 17th or 18th centuries, North American French documents usually refer to priests as "pères", "religieuses", "missionnaires", "frères", "robes noires", "abbés", "Jésuites," "Recollets" and "clergé." They are rarely, if ever, termed "moines." Therefore, the choice of "Des Moines" for our river leads me to speculate about a purposeful confusion.

One possible confusion could be a pun or other play on words.

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Ah! si mon moine voulait danser! (bis)
Un ceinturon je lui donnerais. (bis)
Danse. etc.
Ah! si mon moine voulait danser! (bis)
Un chapelet je lui donnerais. (bis)
Danse, etc.

Ah! si mon moine voulait danser! (bis)
Un froc de bur’ je lui donnerais (bis)
Danse, etc.

Ah! si mon moine voulait danser! (bis)
Un beau psaltier je lui donnerais. (bis)
Danse, etc.

S’il n’avait fait voeu de pauvrete! (bis)
Bien d’autres chos’ je lui donnerais. (bis)
Danse, etc.

Translation

If My Old Top Were a Dancing Man
If my old top were a dancing man!
If my old top were a dancing man!
A cowl to fit I would give him then,
A cowl to fit I would give him then.
Dance, old top, then, dance in!
Oh! you don’t care for dancing,
Oh! you don’t care for my mill, la, la,
Oh! you don’t care how my mill runs on

If my old top were a dancing man! (repeat)
A sash to fit I would give him then. (repeat)
Dance, etc.

If my old top were a dancing man! (repeat)
A cap to fit I would give him then. (repeat)
Dance. etc.

If my old top were a dancing man! (repeat)
A gown of serge I would give him then. (repeat)
Dance, etc.

If my old top were a dancing man! (repeat)
A psalter fine I would give him then. (repeat)
Dance, etc.

Had he not vowed he would poor remain, (repeat)
A lot more things I would give him then. (repeat)
Dance, etc.

What does the reference to the mill mean in the song?
Do you know how old this song is? Was it in existence in 1700? In 1680? In 1673, when Joliet and Marquette went down the Mississippi?

Is there a special explanation why the word "moine" should have become confused with the word "top" in this song? Is there a special understanding that would be accessible to French-speaking Canadians that would not be apparent to English-speaking Americans?

If the song were in existence from 1673 to 1700, under what circumstances might voyageurs have sung it?

The Des Moines River empties into the Mississippi River right below what used to be an approximately 10 mile long rapids, also named "Des Moines", even though it is in the Mississippi. Another long rapids was located not too far north, near the mouth of the Rock River and today’s Quad Cities (Davenport, Iowa, and Rock Island, Moline and East Moline, Illinois). Could it make sense that voyageurs completing the run through the rapids felt themselves spinning like tops and began singing the song as a joke—as a sign of relief? Then the river at the foot of the rapids took the same name. The name "Moingona" might even have suggested the word "moine", and the song, to voyageurs just completing a run of the rapids.

If this is not a fruitful track for investigation, can you tell me if the word "moines" might have some obscene or humorous connections? A few years ago, when my French-speaking older two children were living with us, we hosted a young girl from Normandy during the summer. When I asked her what the name of our city meant to her, she blushed and giggled before responding with the answer I expected, "monks." I also have several historical reasons for suspecting some off-colour connection.

If you cannot help me with these questions, can you refer me to a French Canadian language expert who can? Is there such an expert with whom I could correspond in English? Although I have had a year of German, Old English, Middle English and lots of Latin (enough to kick around in French, Spanish and Italian texts), I must confess I have no writing or speaking ability in any useful language other than English. And my French-fluent children now live a thousand miles away.

I would deeply appreciate any help you might be able to give.

Patrick J. Ryan
4240 Harwood Drive
Des Moines
Iowa 50312-2318
USA

I was pleased with the manner in which you presented my two folk songs ["Two Shtetl Folksongs", 27:4, p. 4]. (I call them "mine" by now.) Also pleased with the French translation. Just what I wanted…

The other night I saw a program "Klezmer on the Hoof" (U.S. of course). Interesting. Any chance of having a Canadian equivalent?

Speaking of klezmer, let me regale you with a little true story from our family lore. In 1960 our family decided to give a surprise party for my parents’ 40th wedding anniversary. We reserved a hall, sent out invitations, and I wanted to have musicians who played "Roumanian shtetl music." Since at the time klezmer was not yet en vogue, I had a real brainwave and called the Musicians’ Union here for help. They suggested a trio who assured me they knew
Canadian klezmer music, we should all live so long—or, perhaps, seeing how TV often treats music, we might be better off without it! —G.W.L."

Please accept my congratulations... for the excellent job that you’ve done in reviving the Bulletin. I really do believe that it’s the life blood of the Society and that the Society’s future depends on a healthy Bulletin. It’s the principal (almost the only) significant means of communication with the membership—few members can afford to get to the Annual Meeting, and even if many could, a once-a-year communication isn’t enough. Thanks again and cheers!

Hugh Hendry
313 Egbert Ave.
Saskatoon Sask.
S7N 1X2

[We, of course, thank you for providing the centrepiece for the issue. Your anecdote is lovely; as corny as it may sound to say, this is a small world. As for televised recognition of

Reviews/Comptes-rendus

Books


Canada badly needs books about Stan Rogers. Little has been written about Stan since his death in 1983, and much of what has been written is ill-informed. Which is no surprise; Stan was never part of the mainstream music industry, and most mainstream music writers of the time were oblivious of the folk music scene, if not actually patronizing or contemptuous of it. As a result, not much was written about Stan while he was alive, and now that he’s posthumously being recognized as a songwriting genius and a major influence in Canadian music, current writers who weren’t part of the era have little to go on in getting the feel of the times and Stan’s part in them. Most of what has been written about Stan since his death (with the exception, of course, of the Bulletin’s tributary issue) has been written by outsiders for outsiders, and it shows!

So it’s about time that a book-length work of substance appeared. But this long-awaited milestone turns out to be a disappointment, showing the marks of too little research and too much acceptance of informants at face value. Not that it’s without its merits; it serves as a worthwhile introduction to Stan’s life and work for those who are meeting with him for the first time. It’s a valuable treatment of Stan’s early years and influences, including the early part of his musical career—people who know Stan as a performer but not as a person will find much to fascinate them. There’s a collection of photos which are likely the most complete assemblage available outside of Stan’s family. (Not that the pictures are numerous or artistic—there’ll never be a Stan Rogers coffee table book! But it’s documentation never before seen by most of us.)

So what are the problems? Why do I leave the book feeling unsatisfied with the portrait of Stan Rogers painted by Chris Gudgeon? For one thing, there’s just too little meat on the bones here—even less than appears at first glance. Perhaps in an effort to give background to the Canadian folk music scene of the ‘70s and early ‘80s, Gudgeon has included numerous thumbnail sketches of various Canadian performers of the time, with quotes from them concerning Stan. Trouble is, many of the quotes are not very illuminating, many of the performers were not really part of Stan’s world (for example, Stompin’ Tom Connors), and, whatever the author’s intention, the technique gives the impression of padding, to take material sufficient for a healthy magazine article and plump it out to book length, as well as name-dropping, to bolster the author’s credibility.

And credibility is in question here. For one thing, the author presents a one-sided picture of Stan Rogers as a person. The dark side of Stan’s nature, which most people who had dealings with him will attest to, is barely hinted at. In a passage which neatly manages to insult Canadians and Americans at the same time, Gudgeon writes that Stan “was an immediate hit with American audiences [because]... his personality was probably better suited [to] the American temperament. Like it or not, Canadians tend to be compliant and polite, two adjectives rarely used to describe Stan Rogers. On the contrary, he was brash and demanding, which is exactly how Americans expect talented people to behave.” However, any stories of “brash and demanding” behaviour recounted in the book are of the “lovable scamp” variety. The Stan Rogers who could set fire to a stranger’s Cadillac...