

## Hugh Hendry (1944-1994) *Ave atque vale*

A severe blow to folk music in Saskatchewan was struck by the sadly premature death of Hugh Edward Hendry, on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1994, following an unsuccessful operation for oesophageal cancer.

Hugh was a proud Scot, born in Newhaven, a small port near Edinburgh, on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1944, the elder of the two sons of Hugh and Ivy Hendry. He grew up and received his education in Edinburgh, earning a B.Sc. and Ph.D. in Geology from that city's University. His interest in music was stimulated by skiffle, that "American folk music played with a jazz beat," and he first began singing and playing during schooldays, with the Almond Valley Skiffle Group between 1956 and 1958. His skills with the guitar were greatly enhanced by tuition from two distinguished folk musicians, Archie Fisher and Bert Jansch. Whilst a student in Edinburgh, Hugh sang and played at Dolina McLellan's club and also at the Pitstop Lounge, the Waverly Bar, Bunjie's and the University Folk Club; also he courted and married a fellow Scot, Margaret Redpath, in 1967.

Later that year Hugh and Margaret immigrated to Canada, where Hugh took up a postdoctoral fellowship at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario—a period of four years during which his musical involvements lapsed. In 1971, an appointment as Assistant Professor at the University of Saskatchewan brought him west to Saskatoon where, after progressive promotions, he became Chairman of the Department of Geological Sciences. In leisure time, he began studying classical guitar techniques with Doug Chapman, further improving an already very good style.

When I became Hugh's colleague at the University of Saskatchewan, we soon discovered a common interest in folk music. This was shared with a third geologist, the Franco-Ontarian Jocelyne Legault. After much playing at private parties, the three of us formed *The Traditional Folk Trio*. Our first public performance was at a World Universities Service concert in October 1975; thereafter we performed regularly whenever opportunity arose. After adding a fourth member, the US singer Sara Williams, in 1976, we called ourselves *The Traditional Folk Trio Plus One*; but, with the eastward departure of Jocelyne and the addition of

two new members—US singer and mandolinist Laura Powers and Scottish singer Sheila MacKenzie—the original name was becoming absurd. In consequence, and quite spontaneously at the beginning of a radio broadcast in 1980, we renamed ourselves *The Prairie Higglers*.

Further changes of personnel followed. Laura and Sheila left, respectively for Australia and for Ontario; a fiddle player, Cathie Rae, joined us lastingly, and two other musicians, Yorkshire man T.J.G. "Jim" Raybould and Ontarian Peter Moore, for briefer periods before also departing eastward. Later Chris Meek gave to the group a new sound, with his whistles and uilleann pipes. However, Hugh's strong guitar—and, later, also banjo—and his fine voice, enhanced in recent years by singing lessons, were always central.

The Higglers performed principally in Saskatoon, in concerts and on radio and television, but ventured as far away as Livelong and La Ronge. We were also featured several times at the Regina Folk Festival, in concert and on open stage. Our repertoire always embraced British and Canadian songs and music, US folksongs being intermittently featured and, with the recent addition of Lois Wooding to the group, her native Australian songs also.

Hugh's repertoire, though centred in Scottish music, featured also such Canadian classics as "The Frozen Logger," "Farewell to Nova Scotia," "The CPR Line," and "Hard Tack." His own composition, "The Saskatchewan Alphabet," promises to be long sung in this province, and, who knows, even our jointly written "Geology Student's Lament" may be remembered for a while.

Hugh had a particular ability with difficult songs: the unrelentingly breathless "The Road Makers," the complexly cumulative "Barley Mow," and the rhythmically awkward "Jovial Cutler" were all performed faultlessly. Also especially memorable, in their various fashions, were Hugh's versions of "By the Hush" and "Misty Moisty Morning," of Ewan MacColl's haunting "Sweet Thames Flow Softly" and Jez Lowe's cheerful "The High Part of the Town," while his highly amusing Scottish version of "Hamlet" always attracted particular applause.

Hugh was involved for several years with the Canadian Society for Traditional Music, under its various names. He participated in several Annual Meetings and, at the time of his death, served as the Society's Saskatchewan director. He was also beginning to write for the **Bulletin** and proposed to organize the 1995 Annual General Meeting in Saskatoon. Alas! that will not now be possible.

In May 1994, we Prairie Higglers celebrated twenty years of music together in a television programme with Carole Blenkin on CFQC-TV in Saskatoon. (After Hugh's death, part of that programme was rebroadcast in memory of Hugh, enabling his parents and brother, who had come over from England for Hugh's funeral, to see it.)

A memorial fund to Hugh has been set up by the University of Saskatchewan; contributions can be sent to the Department of Geological Sciences, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 4L3. In addition, it is hoped to produce a cassette tape of The Prairie Higglers' music as a tribute to Hugh.

—William A.S. Sarjeant

### References

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 Sarjeant, W.A.S. *The Prairie Higglers Over Eighteen Years (1975-1993)*. Saskatoon: privately printed, 1993. 18pp., 8 illus.

His last performance with us was on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August, appropriately in the Scottish Pavilion at Saskatoon's Folkfest.

At a crowded memorial service to Hugh, held in Convocation Hall of the University of Saskatchewan on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, many folk musicians were present to pay their respects to his memory. Chris Lindgren, Walter Hofmeister, Paddy Tutty, Chris Meek, and Hugh's son Neil—a superb guitarist—all played, and I spoke of Hugh's love of music. The stilling of his voice, and the silencing of his guitar, at so early an age—he was only 50—are losses irreparable to those of us who had the pleasure of knowing him—especially to us, his fellow Higglers, for whom his strong presence and leadership were so important. We will long miss him.

*The Prairie Higglers in 1994.  
 Hugh Hendry sits in front;  
 behind him are (left to right)  
 Chris Meek, Lois Wooding,  
 Cathie Rae, and Bill Sarjeant.  
 (Photograph by David Mandeville)*

