

David Parry (1942-1995)—*Ave atque vale*

Anyone who knew David Parry can picture him, determinedly striding into a room, chin thrust forward. "Right!" he'd say, a grin on his face, rubbing his hands together in gleeful anticipation. This could be the precursor to a wide variety of activities—a good yarn, an open ended evening of well lubricated chorus songs, or the approach of the dessert tray at the end of a meal.

David threw himself into everything he did with similar enthusiasm. Even to those of us who knew him well, the sheer number of different projects he cheerfully coordinated, researched, led, or participated in, continued to surprise.

This became very obvious to many on the Sunday after his death in June this year, when the Great Hall of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, where he directed dramatic interpretation, was filled to capacity for a celebration of his life and achievements. There were tributes and presentations from his family and friends, and from many of the groups and individuals he had worked with and influenced over the years: The Friends of Fiddler's Green, his singing and travelling companions for over twenty years; the PLS, the mediaeval drama group which he directed for many years at the University of Toronto; his co-workers at the Museum; the acting troupe he directed at the Museum; the Savoy Society, for whom he directed a production of Gilbert and Sullivan; the Toronto Morris Men.

An actor by training, with a PhD in Mediaeval Drama, David loved storytelling, and will long be remembered for his renditions of stories by Sir Bernard Miles, Bob Roberts, Stanley Holloway, and Robert Service. Few of us present at the time will ever forget the occasion when, stranded in Ann Arbor, Michigan by a snowstorm, the Friends were spending the night on the floor of the Ark, giggling like schoolkids at a slumber party. As the hysteria settled and we began to drift off, we heard the opening lines of the now-familiar monologue by Bernard Miles, "I was born and raised in Ivinghoe. I was born at me granny's...." David had decided to treat us to a bedtime story! Typically, none of us had heard it before.

David was very impressed by Peter Bellamy's interpretations of the works of Rudyard Kipling, and he determined to do similar work with the poems of Robert Service. Initially, he recorded some songs based on Service's



Photograph by Rosie Donovan

work on his cassette, "The Wind That Tramps the World" released in 1985. His 1993 release, "The Man From Eldorado: Songs and Stories of Robert W. Service," was a natural sequel. The whole was bound together with readings in what David described as "a kind of sug-gestive narrative shape...." As he said, it seemed appropriate from one storyteller to another.

His death, at the age of fifty-two, has put a sad end to the many other projects he always had simmering somewhere. Last summer, he talked about travelling to all the ports mentioned in the song, "The Cruise of the Bigler" and making a documentary of the "passage down to Buffalo from Milwaukee." A dedicated singer of shanties, he was particularly excited about his upcoming role as shantyman for the sailing ships travelling from Kingston, Ontario, down the St. Lawrence to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the fort of

Louisbourg. Sadly, it was not to be. Instead, his ashes were scattered overboard in a memorial ceremony during the voyage.

Knowing David as we did, we shouldn't be surprised that his life ended at full gallop. Despite having felt unwell for some time, he continued the brutal pace that was his norm. The evening before he died in his sleep, he returned from performing at Mystic, Connecticut. He did the laundry, fixed the screen door, and went to bed. Four days later, at his wake, someone walked through the screen. David would have liked that.

The folk music community in North America will miss his sheer joy in singing, his tireless dedication to the principle that singing and storytelling are, above all, a social activity, and his never-ending willingness to prove it by being the last to leave a session. On stage, his sense of timing and control was uncanny. He could hush an audience, still guffawing from some joke or other, simply, it seemed, by leaning forward in anticipation, and would then hold them entranced with the magic of his story or ballad. His friends will miss a sensitive, kind man, who, however rushed he might be, and he was always rushing, would give you his undivided attention for as long as it took, for he genuinely cared about other people, and was interested in them and what they had to say.

David was fond of quoting these lines from Kipling's

"Sestina of the Tramp Royal," and they obviously echoed his sentiments: "God bless this world. Whatever she hath done,

except when awful long, found it good. So write before I die, 'He liked it all!'"

The David Mackenzie Parry Memorial Fund has been established at the Community Foundation of Ottawa-Carleton. Earnings from the fund will be used to provide financial support to charitable purposes dear to him, to bring special performances to the Songs of Sail Festival at Penetanguishene, and to provide scholarships for "The Woods" folk camp in Muskoka. Please send donations to 150 Laurier Ave. W., Ste. 320, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5J4.

—*Alistair Brown*