

Both "Stanley G. Triggs": A Recollection

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Stan Triggs, a man of many parts, can be viewed from two perspectives. First, as he became a genuine folk musician, eventually to have his songs pass into oral tradition and his performances recorded; second, as a certificated photographer and photographic technician, then as a graduate in anthropology, and finally, as a widely-known archivist and historian, the developer and Curator of the Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of History, at McGill University.

"Stan the music man" (as he autographed my copy of his first major photo publication *Portrait of a Period*) was shaped as a musician when, after leaving high school in Nelson, BC, he took up a trapline in the Duncan River region at the north end of Kootenay Lake. There he met others living in that remote locality who made their own music. He learned to play the mandolin in order to join the fiddlers at social gatherings, and also learned songs from others in various Kootenay workplaces. He left this life to enroll in a photographic school in California. On graduating he went to work for the Disney Studios. Becoming disgusted with the way animals were treated on filming locations, he left Disney and came to Vancouver with his young family.

To earn a living, he signed on as deckhand on a coastal tug. Stan's talent for storytelling and his sense of humour along with his grassroots experience with folk musicians resulted in his writing tug-boating songs, which he sang for his shipmates. He accompanied himself on his distinctive Carlson 12-string mandolin. When he left the tugboats, he tried to make a living as a family and nature photographer, and, happily for us, in mid-1960 met someone involved in the Vancouver folksong revival scene. This meeting eventually led to his performing a set at the Folk Song Circle. I recall that we were impressed with his songs and his unique mandolin technique, but saw that he was a real bunkhouse singer, not projecting even in the not-overly-large room in the basement of the Alma YMCA where the "Circle" gathered. I invited him to my home, introduced him to the recordings of Woody Guthrie (the only singer with whom I could compare him), and encouraged him to "sing out." He shortly became an important part of Vancouver's folk scene. He soon took up the guitar, and in 1962 he played guitar, mandolin, and harmonica on tapes which became the main part my 1979 LP *"Where the Fraser River Flows"* and other Songs of the Pacific Northwest.

In 1961 Vancouver boasted a couple of coffee houses. Kel Winsey, a West Indian singer involved with one of them, "The Question Mark," went east to check out the Toronto folk scene. He suggested that Stan send a tape to Sam Gesser, Montreal-based Canadian producer for Moses Asch's Folkways Records. By this time Stan had met and played with one of Vancouver's most creative "folk" instrumentalists and arrangers, Barry Hall. Another element in a serendipitous mix

which ended in Stan's Folkways LP *Bunkhouse and Forecastle songs of the Northwest* (FG3569), was the skill of recording technician, Doug Gyseman (now known as Kurtis Vanel at SFU). With Doug as technician, Stan and Barry recorded the tape which became the LP. It was unveiled as a new Canadian showpiece by Gesser at the August 1961 Conference of the International Folk Music Council, held in Montreal. Stan soon moved east to join Gesser's Les Feux-Follets, comprising dancers, singers, and such musicians as Jean Carignan. In October, 1962, with six other Canadian performers Stan took part in Sam Gesser's "Canadian Festival," held in New York City's Town Hall.

While with Les Feux-Follets, Stan met his present wife Louise. Although Stan did not continue in the entertainment business, music was part of their family life. Today his youngest daughter Emily accompanies her own singing with guitar and joins Stan in performing at social events in the farming community around Hemmingford south of Montreal. With the family he continues to play mandolin, guitar and harmonica, but has turned more and more to the accordion, for which he has composed tunes.

Several of Stan Triggs's songs from over thirty years ago are still full of life, and they are sung today especially in British Columbia. Triggs has set to music other people's verse, and has put his individual stamp on songs such as the gospel song "Farther Along", and Ean Hay's frequently sung "Kettle Valley Line." Selections from his Folkways LP are available today on Sam Gesser's two recently-produced CD anthologies.

Now a few words about the other Stanley G. Triggs: Stan Triggs's 27-year career as Curator of the Notman Photographic Archives is especially notable. He designed and supervised the setting up of the archives from scratch, making order of an immense and diverse collection of material dating from the year 1856 when William Notman, a Scotsman, first set up his camera in Montreal. Notman's business eventually involved twenty studios in central and eastern Canada and in northeastern United States. Triggs, through the physical archives, his own knowledge and interest, and a functioning photographic laboratory, has preserved and made accessible a unique documentation of some four decades. He is associated with many publications (seven are listed under his name in UBC's Library) as consultant, editor, author, and historian. In this field his expertise is recognized internationally. A rewarding experience awaits anyone who looks into his 1985 book, *William Notman: The Stamp of a Studio*, which displays beautifully reproduced photos from across Canada together with an informative text on the photographers. Finally, it must be said that Triggs himself is an excellent

photographer whose own work is regrettably still "under a bushel." Although Stan retired from the Archives in 1993,

rumour has it that, like the retired Marius Barbeau, Stan is still there working as hard as ever.

Sources

Triggs, Stanley G. *Portrait of a Period: A Collection of Victorian Photographs 1856-1915*. Montreal: McGill UP, 1967.

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