Over the Waves

Folk Routes is broadcast each Sunday afternoon from 3:30-5:30 across Alberta, and to the interiors of Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Northern Montana. In 1994, the Alberta government relinquished support of the CKUA Radio Network and left the 68 year old station to find its support with the public. The station, which has a listening audience of 92,000, maintains offices and studios in both Edmonton and Calgary, and its programming features Jazz, Blues, Worldbeat, Classical, and temporary artists as Richard Thompson, Loreena McKennitt, Ashley MacIsaac, Zachary Richard, and Bob Dylan and such pioneers as Wade Hemsworth, Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams, Ewan MacColl, and the Seeger Family.

The folk scene in Alberta is strong. Supportive patrons of music have assisted in the growth of a vibrant festival circuit, which includes the Edmonton, Calgary, Jasper, and Canmore Folk Festivals, Fort McLeod’s South Country Fair, and the North Country Fair, as well as country, bluegrass, and old time music festivals. The program explores the traditions of the British Isles and the journeys the music has taken in the formation of the Acadian, cajun, zydeco, bluegrass, hillbilly, acoustic blues and country music.

Tom, a music reviewer and record collector, is one of the organizers of the Edmonton Folk Festival. From 1985 to 1992 he hosted a Celtic program called In the Tradition at the University of Alberta. The popularity of the program led to two trips to the UK to research and interview performers such as Wade Hemsworth, Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams, Ewan MacColl, and the Seeger Family.

Dick Gaughan, June Tabor, and members of Fairport Convention. Folk Routes is a musical extension of In the Tradition that explores not only Celtic music but also the various styles that have created a truly unique North American sound.

As a member of the North American Folk Alliance, Tom is a strong supporter of folk music and Canadian artists. "Artists in Canada have so much to offer—and I ensure that their voices, music and stories are heard. At the recent Folk Alliance in Washington, DC (all nationalism aside—really), the Canadian artists were the most sought after because of the originality in tradition—with Mary Jane Lamond, Fred Eaglesmith, Mad Pudding and David Essig leading the charge.... I'm very pleased with audience support for Folk Routes and the acceptance of the balance between the variety of styles that may include a program with ornamented singing from the Isle of Barra, hillbilly music of Doc Watson, or the sweet sounds of Loreena McKennitt.

"It all fits together. The program is about connections in folk music and the history that fuels the many artists who are drawing on the traditions of history to create new music. I love turning a Celtic corner in a Bluegrass tune and then playing some early blues ballad, and then going back to an English traditional song.... That's the routes and roots of music."

The program is also available on satellite, and on the Internet. Thanks for listening. If you want to get in touch with Folk Routes, the address is 1007, 221 -6th Avenue SE, Calgary, Alberta T2G 4Z9. Voice 403-262-9020 Voice/Fax 403-261-8624 or e-mail to folkrts@cadvision.com

—Tom Coxworth

The Centrefold

According to a partial result of the survey conducted along with membership renewals (results which we’re continuing to tabulate for the rest of the year), over half of our members consider themselves to read reasonably fluently in French as a first or second language. So those of you who like to keep up with happenings in other parts of the country would do well to cast an eye at a couple of informative French-language newsletters.

One is Le billochet, organ of Le Centre franco-ontarien de folklore in Sudbury (of which our Associate Editor Donald Deschénes is Director General). The one copy I’ve seen so far includes a short article on a Breton folksong concerning the capture of a ship, "Le Foudroyant," in 1758. The ship shows up in songs in French Ontario as "Le Foudron," and the article draws some interesting parallels. There’s also a folk tale, "Les Voleurs de poules," a brief profile of sculptor Maurice Gaudreault, and updates on the Centre’s successful revival of traditional song-and-story sessions for the holidays La Sainte-Catherine and La Fête des Rois. (Donald told us in more detail about the latter at the paper session at last year’s Annual General Meeting of CSTM.) The newsletter lists recent acquisitions of publications by the Centre, recommends books on history and music available at the public library, mentions upcoming TV shows featuring franco-ontarien storytellers, and of course includes news of organizational doings, like all good newsletters.

Le billochet is available with membership, $20.00 per year. Its frequency is unspecified. The address is: Centre franco-ontarien de folklore, Maison d’Youville, 38, rue Xavier, Sudbury, Ontario P3C 2B9.

The CSTM’s meeting in Québec in 1987 was hosted by the group which later became Le Centre de valorisation du patrimoine vivant, so we’ve been receiving their Bulletin for years (but I have only one copy before me at present). As you’d expect in a milieu with many thriving organized folk music events, many festival reports, from throughout the province, are included in the newsletter. There’s also a column of other news
briefs. For example, I was interested to see that old time dances at Le Poulallier (literally "The Chicken Coop") in Inverness are being revived. We had a memorable experience there in 1987—it's definitely "à ne pas manquer!"

The Centre has a goodly selection of cassettes and CDs of Quebec traditional music for sale, which might in themselves be worth the price of a membership. The rate is $10.00 (student/senior), $15.00 (individual), $25.00 (family) and $30.00 (organization). As usual with newsletters, there's no indication of the frequency of publication of the Bulletin, but this issue is designated "Printemps 1996," so I'd guess quarterly. The address is: Centre de valorisation du patrimoine vivant, 310, boulevard Langelier, suite 241, Québec, Québec G1K 5N3.

Newsletters of local organizations are an oft-neglected source of information about other regions of the country and aid invaluably in getting the "big picture" of what's happening musically and culturally in Canada. Making the small investment to join helps out these organizations and gives us valuable windows into what's going on throughout our nation. [JL]

The British Columbia Folklore Society has presented its first issue of BC Folklore, eight pages of great promise. They begin with a discussion of the Society itself, a few queries, odds and ends, and a list of new items received for their library, which they describe as "extensive." More details on their library would be useful—one would like to know where it is located and how (or if) scholars and interested persons might have access to it. Editor Murray Shoolbraid notes that future issues of BC Folklore will include notes on current research and reminiscences from folklorists, a continuing "Folklore Glossary" explaining terms of the discipline (obviously the publication is intended to appeal both to specialists and fans), and an examination of "the song of the Seaforth Highlanders, 'Glenwhoorple'" Congratulations to Shoolbraid and to the Society!

Subscriptions to BC Folklore run $10.00 (students, seniors, unwaged), $15.00 (individual), $20.00 (household), $25.00 (institutions), $50.00 (supporting business), $100.00 supporting member, $500.00 (benefactor). Write to the British Columbia Folklore Society, PO Box 312, Cobble Hill, BC, V0R 1L0.

A recent issue of Pass It On!: The Journal of the Children's Music Network (#22, Winter 1996) includes a rather thorough interview with Raffi, who has some interesting comments to make on the subject of computers and television. Asked why he has avoided videos and television specials, the singer says, "Sure you can reach more people, but what are you saying to them? If the message is lost in the medium, that's part of the problem here. There's enough video for kids to watch.... Of course we want children to watch appropriate imagery. But quantity of watching may be even more important." He cites the research of American academic who may have demonstrated that the passive experience of television watching may "impede a child's neurological development." The same concern applies to computers: "It's a silly idea that you need to give a young child a computer at birth in order to gain a leg up, as if a child were born to compete.... The word 'interactive' is the clearest sales slogan since 'new and improved.'" Raffi's conclusion is startling, and one wishes more performers would consider the implications of it: "The children's entertainment industry is not geared to serve children. It's geared to sell things." The same thing applies to the (so-called) adult music industry, of course.

Membership for Canadians in The Children's Music Network ranges from $40.00 (individual and family) to $155.00 (corporate), with a couple of points in between. (Prices in US dollars.) Write them at PO Box 1341, Evanston, Illinois, USA 60204-1341.

Folklines 178 (December 1995/January 1996), the publication of the Queensland Folk Federation, was sent to us by Gregg Brunskill, our man in Australia (see the Letters column). An attractive publication overall (though I was surprised by the number of typos I noticed, one or two of which slowed down my geriatric comprehension—perhaps my own face can be spared a few blushes), it's a little heavy on event news to interest many North American readers, but I found a couple of items quite readable.

"More Than Just A Number" is Rob Willis's account of a recent visit to old time musician Bert Jamieson in a nursing home. Jamieson, 92 years at the time of the visit, was an important source for older dance tunes from the Australian bush. In 1991, an edition of tunes collected from him was published by Carrawobity Press, and Willis and others put together a recording, with Jamieson in the fore, of many of these tunes. Willis's brief article manages to offer a portrait of Jamieson's awakening from his ill-health to the sound of music, an overview of Jamieson's importance to Australian folk music lovers, and some important comments upon the relationship of collectors and those who share their music with them. A photo of Jamieson and one tune, an unnamed mazurka, accompany the article.

In a brief but substantial interview with Paddy Moloney (which accompanies his review of The Chieftains' appearance at Queensland), James Harper draws some interesting quotes, but Canadians might want to take note of the following: "There's a bit of a complex. Irish people are funny, you have to go away and make something abroad, then you come back and you're a massive hero. Like the Clancy Brothers did a great job in the early sixties when they did their big thing in America and they became heroes back home. Before that you wouldn't see them anywhere in Ireland...." Readers will remember that Brunskill noted in an earlier letter (Bulletin 30.1) that for many Australians, "folk music" refers to British and American acoustic music; the mental habits of colonialism seem to have begun very close to the British centre of things, probably at the London city limits.

The QFF-Folklines people have begun an interesting project, "a cultural mapping of Australia, defining the place and
value of tradition to contemporary Australia.... to define and highlight the cultural layers, forces and deeper ‘folk roots’ that formed and presently make up the contemporary culture of Australia." The Project, the results of which will in part be presented at the Woodforad-Maleny Folk Festival, will "aim to examine and present connections between the cultures represented at the festival, with a view to increasing the understanding of the role of tradition in contemporary Australian society." I’m reminded of a few, less grandiose but nonetheless significant, projects undertaken during the 60s with the profits from the Newport Folk Festival (some collection projects were funded, Mississippi John Hurt was given a guitar, &c.); have any Canadian festivals returned anything to the source in such fashion?

Worth noting, as well, that in this fairly slim publication (22 pages, generally with only two small columns and wide margins), two Canadian performers are given notice, Heather Bishop as a member of the Wandering Women Tour and, more substantially, Sarah McLaughlin as an opener for The Chieftains. Given the increasingly important role of the antipodean nations in the literary culture of Canada, perhaps the lovers of traditional music in our country might wish to begin to pay attention to Australian folk music. The Bert Jameson recording might be a good place to start—or Dave de Hugard (see Bensusan, this issue). I myself have an older cassette by the latter, The Magpie in the Wattle (Larrikin LRF-158), which is a delightful mix of country dances and songs, featuring concertina, button accordion, and fiddle. The Jameson tune book and tape, as well as other recordings, by de Hugard and others, are apparently available from David De Santi, Wongawilli Colonial Dance Club Inc., PO Box 17, Albion Park, New South Wales, 2527.

For Folklines itself, write Folklines PO Box 840, Nambour 4560. The price is given as $20 annually (Australian $, not Canadian), but that’s probably for domestic consumption. You might want to write for a current price. [GWZ]