Our Back Pages

Fifteen Years Ago
Bulletin 17.1 (January 1983). In those days, the Bulletin carried the minutes of the AGM (a noble tradition which we’re reviving this time), and the bulk of this issue consists of those minutes plus “State of the Art,” reports from the regions across Canada—a great overview of what was happening in folk music in this country in those bygone days. Other content included articles on songs: "Dans le temps du sucre" by Donald Deschênes and "Three Sailors Went to Yellowknife" from Yurgen Ilaner. A third song was Ian Robb’s "The Iron Lady." Columns from Alister Brown and David Spalding made an appearance, as well as reviews of Michael Cooney’s Pure Unsweetened and books Je danse mon enfance (France Bourque-Moreau) and Stan Rogers: Songs from Fogarty’s Cove and Coast to Coast Fever (Arthur MacGregor, ed.).

Ten Years Ago
Bulletin 22.1 (September 1988). Yes, that date is correct! Issues sometimes were late in those days, too! This issue included the new Constitution of the Society, totally rewritten at the 1987 AGM in Quebec City, which has survived with a few modifications until the present. Articles carried included Bill Sarjeant’s call for regional reorganization of CFMS (which had in fact inspired the new Constitution), David Watts’s "Creativity and Mourning in the Work of Stan Rogers," and Gregg Brunskill’s account of the newly-formed Winnipeg Folk Connection (as its name then was). There were no columns this time, but the issue included reviews of James Keelaghan’s Timelines, Dick Howe’s A Scotsman in Canada, Dave MacIsaac’s Celtic Guitar and the Regina Folk Festival (with a photo montage by Bill Sarjeant). Several songs appeared: Kirk MacGeachy’s “MacDonell of Barisdale,” Newfoundland traditional song "The McClure," and "Aux veillelles du 28 février 1925," about an earthquake in Québec.

Five Years Ago
Bulletin 27.1 (March 1993). An editorial announces that, after producing the magazine for the better part of a year, George and I have decided to carry on. (Hard to imagine that that was five years ago...) The ‘zine was still newsletter-style, but it was roughly back on schedule after the interregnum between Lynn Whidden’s tenure and ours. The feature article was "Consumed by Consumerism" by Jon Bartlett, with full translation by André Gareau. The second "Ethnofolk Letters," "Over the Waves" and a still-unnamed magazine column were included. Songs and tunes were tied in with reviews this time: "I’ve Been a Gay Roving Young Fellow" and "Empty Nets" accompanied the review of Jim Payne’s recording of the latter name; tune "Flight Six-Seven-Six" went with 100 Toe-Tappin’ Tunes for Fiddle by Gordie Carnahan and "Joey Beaton’s Reel" with Jerry Holand’s Collection of Fiddle Tunes (wish we could get that slick LP); also reviewed was Roy Johnstone’s Flying Tide. As well, the first "Canada Camps" (now "Camps and Courses") made its appearance. [JL]

News, Views, & Stuff

Visit the Great North Wind Web Site

The GNW web site contains vast quantities of information including homepages for The Blackflies, Glen Reid, Rick Fielding, and The Grievous Angels, as well as articles on Mac Beattie and The Ottawa Valley Melodiers, The Music of Northern Ontario (did I say vast?), The Porcupine Awards (complete accounts) and playlists from the Great North Wind Radio Program. And then there’s the Great Canadian Fiddle Liner Notes, which contains all the liner notes from over 250 Canadian fiddle albums (and the list is growing). Naturally there’s great links and hijinx. Lastly, the Great North News has updates on future GNW programs, interesting obituaries and books and mags. That sorta thing. Use it and abuse. [Steve Fruitman]

We don’t usually cover events south of the border, but this suits our blues theme for the month, and, besides, it’s just too delicious not to mention. The Erie Art Museum, 411 State Street, Erie, Pennsylvania 16501, is offering an exhibit of Dobros, Nationals, and related instruments. It’s entitled Loud and Clear: Resonator Guitars & the Dopyera Brothers’ Legacy To American Music and lasts until April 15, 1998. (It’s available to travel thereafter, so you might think about bugging your local institution.) If there’s anyone left who doesn’t know what a resonator guitar is (hard to imagine since, as Bob Brozman put it, rock stars have taken to them as fashion accessories), they’re the instruments that look like they have pie plates screwed on the front. Some gyppo firms actually did in fact put out cheap plywood guitars with the equivalent of pie plates screwed on, but on genuine examples, the decorative cover protects a metal resonating cone, not unlike the cone in your stereo speakers. (A friend of mine once had an off brand in which the resonator was made of fibre, precisely like a speaker.) Some resonator guitars have metal bodies, some have wood—obviously the latter produce a more mellow tone than the former.
Resonator guitars were invented by the Dopyera brothers in the mid-1920s, when the guitar began to seem a more appropriate ax for band rhythm sections than the banjo though it couldn’t compete with the volume of brass and reed instruments. The single-hole guitar attempted to perform the same function. Both of these acoustic solutions to the problem seemed to be eclipsed with the invention shortly later of the electric guitar, but both have been revived in recent years, as musicians have rediscovered the unique capabilities of these instruments. The dobro guitar in bluegrass bands, and the steel-bodied National came back into prominence when young folkie blues-players noted their presence in classical recordings from the 1930s.

Resonator guitars did not have to wait for the Folk Scare to make their way into Canada, however. Poke around in some archives, local histories, photos on LP liniers by such folks as the CFCN Old Timers in Calgary, George Wade’s Cornhuskers in Ontario, or Don Messer from the Maritimes, and sooner or later you’ll see a pie plate guitar. They got around. If you’re getting around this Spring, you might truck down to Erie, Pennsylvania. I wish I could. [GWL]

S.J. Mills off to WWII with a Regal resonator guitar. It was a good box, but it couldn’t take the change of climate and fell apart in Italy. (See his "The Depression Blues" on page 13.)

I also wish I could make it to England this summer; I’d head for Folksong Tradition and Revival: An international conference to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the Folk Song Society, 10-12 July 1998. Conference themes include Revival of Folksong (UK or international), History of Folksong Scholarship, Women Collectors, Studies of Individual Songs or Singers, Melodic Tradition, Group Traditions, Folksong in the Modern World, the Future of Folksong Research.

The Folk Song Society was founded in 1898 as an endeavour to preserve for posterity the traditional songs of England and further afield. Its supporters included many of the influential figures in the art music world of the time, most notably Ralph Vaughan Williams. Some, such as Lucy Broadwood, devoted their energies purely to the collection of songs; some, Gustav Holst, for instance, drew on the material in their own compositions; whereas others, such as Percy Grainger, did both. The first singers collected on behalf of the Society were the Copper family from Sussex.

Under the inspiration of Cecil Sharp and largely within the framework of his theories, the Society established itself as a centre for research and scholarship, a movement with a mission, extending its influence far beyond the salons of polite musical society into the classroom of every child in the public education system. The two World Wars did not extinguish the movement, and the 1950s-1960s saw a huge rekindling of interest in folk-song collection and performance. The study of folksong was similarly reinvigorated. Many today owe their introduction to the subject to such notables of this second revival as Alan Lomax, Ewan MacColl, A.L. Lloyd, Seamus Ennis, Hamish Henderson and Peter Kennedy. This interest in collection, research, and performance continues to the present day.

The influence of the Folk Song Society (and its continuation as the English Folk Dance and Song Society) has been far reaching. Through its journal, publications and library, it has provided an important forum for debate. It has also been the subject of debate. This conference will highlight the shifting perspectives of modern scholarship in this field; it will provide viewpoints of the past that are both celebratory and critical, while offering a vision for the future study and research of folksong in the twenty-first century.

The conference—which will include two days of paper sessions, informal singing, and a concert by the present-day Copper Family and other local traditional singers—will be held at Halifax Hall in the University of Sheffield, England. The conference fee is 26.00 UK pounds plus 85.00 UK pounds for full board and accommodation.

All offers of papers, enquiries and bookings should be addressed to: Ian Russell, Bridge House, Unstone, Sheffield S18 4AF, United Kingdom
tel/fax 01246 417315
e-mail: <ian.russell@dial.pipex.com>
web-site:<www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/ectal/folksong.html>

The conference is jointly sponsored by The Department of Music at the University of Sheffield, The National Centre for English Cultural Tradition at the University of Sheffield, and The English Folk Dance and Song Society, and supported by The British Library National Sound Archive and The South Riding Folk Network.

"We have received over 50 paper proposals thus far but are still open to offers (asap). It's creating a great deal of international interest with at least 15 countries represented. Early booking is advised (by snail mail please)."

I wish I could. [GWL]
The 28th International Ballad Conference will be held this year in Hildesheim, Germany. If you would like to participate in this conference, or for more information, contact Dr. Helga Stein
Roemer-Museum
Am Steine 1-2
D-31134 Hildesheim GERMANY
Phone: 05121/9369-17; Fax: 05121/35283
e-mail: <rp-museum@t-online.de>

Abstracts will be accepted until May 30, 1998, and may be sent by email.

The Music and Song Section of the American Folklore Society invites submissions for the annual Bertrand H. Bronson Student Prize of $100.00, to be awarded to the best student project that combines research and analysis of some aspect of a music or song tradition. Projects may be in the form of papers or finished audio or video presentations. Papers should be written using the same general guidelines as published journal articles in terms of format and length; papers over fifty pages will not be considered. Audio or video tapes should be thirty to sixty minutes in length, and should be accompanied by appropriate annotation and analysis consisting of five to ten double-spaced pages.

Students should specify when and under what circumstances the submission was produced. The section considers one-time entries only. Send three copies of material by August 15, 1998 to: Dr. Margaret Steiner, Evermann apartments 109, Bloomington, Indiana 47408. The winner will be announced at the annual meeting in Portland.

Readers on the west coast will be saddened to learn of the death of John M. Dwyer, aged 76, an active and important participant in a variety of folk music events from his home in Seattle. Hail, and farewell!

Voyager Records are looking for a Canadian record distributor and/or store and/or CD manufacturer in Quebec who would be interested in carrying a CD reissue of the famed Quebec fiddler Louis Boudreault. Voyager issued a cassette, still in print, from a studio session with Louis Boudreault recorded in Oregon in the 1970s. Anyone interested should contact Phil and Vivian Williams at Voyager Recordings & Publications, 424 35th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98112; their website is <www.bwnet.com/voyager/>. A number of other Canadian fiddlers were recorded by Voyager Records. They also publish fiddle tune music books; contact Voyager Records for an up-to-date catalogue. (Thanks to Rod Olstad for the info.)

I have fond memories of acting as a (rather inept) translator for Louis Boudreault on his Calgary visit as part of the Old Time Music Tour in—when?—maybe 1977. "Pitou" was a gracious and vibrant gentleman as well as an incomparable practitioner of a fiddle style which doesn’t seem to be heard outside Quebec nowadays, and wasn’t much then, for that matter. In return for my efforts, Pitou taught me to "jouer des pieds," a skill which unfortunately hasn’t stayed with me, but I recall that his way of clogging, as with his fiddling, was different from what we hear everywhere else.

I have a copy of the LP of the above session, and I hope that someone responds to Phil and Vivian’s plea, and that the CD reissue will soon be more widely available in Canada. [JL]

Judith Cohen tells us she received a neat info booklet, Répertoire des collections d’archives sonores du patrimoine oral dans l’Europe du Sud. It’s a very useful compilation of details and full addresses of sound archives across southern Europe, telling which ones are open for consultation, etc. It’s available from:

Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l’Homme,
5 rue du château de l’Horloge, BP 647,
13094 Aix-en-Provence,
France
tel. 0442524000 fax 0442524366
Phonothèque: Veronique Ginouves
E-mail: <telemme@aixup.univ-aix.fr> or <mmsh@newsup.univ-mrs.fr>

They seem very friendly and helpful, says Judith.

The 5th Canadian Expressive Heritage Conference is being held March 27 to 29 in Welland, Ontario; it’s hosted by Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technology and organized by Folklore Canada International in co-operation with Folklore Ontario International and the Welland Heritage Council. As well as the annual general meeting of FCI, the weekend includes discussions, workshops on themes including "Creating the Right Market for the Product," "Expressive Heritage in Southern Ontario" and "The Tools of Development" and a showcase performance of Southern Ontario heritage groups and artists. Workshops will be in either English or French, some with simultaneous translation.

Registration fees are $90 for the complete weekend (including Saturday meals), $50 without meals, $10 for the showcase only. Special hotel rates are available. Tickets are available through the Welland Heritage Council ((905) 732-5337 or 735-5507) or Folklore Canada International, C.P. 9, Station DeLorimer, Montréal, QC H2H 2N6; phone (514) 524-8552; Fax 524-0269; Email <fcicioff@videotron.ca>.