Our Back Pages

Fifteen Years Ago
Bulletin 17.3 (July 1983) celebrated the centenary of the birth of Marius Barbeau and thus carried lots of material on that theme, including a photo-essay and articles on Barbeau by Tim Rogers ("Marius Barbeau") and Donald Deschenes ("Le legs de Barbeau?") and a song collected by him ("La complainte des bûlus"). Other music in the issue: Lem Snow's "The Great Lobster Boil"; three versions of "St. Anne's Reel"; and Jim Payne's "The Shoe Cove Station Communication Shutdown." The issue also boasted the very first Folk Festival Directory and "Copyright in Musical Works," by law professor Peter Mercer; Marc Dobbie interviewed luthier Mario Lamarre. Columns this time were Murray Shoolbraid's "Folk Notes and Queries" and "The Singers," this time by Margaret Christl. The following were reviewed: Paddy Tutty's first cassette; book Mon Violon from Maurice Celliard; two albums from Tom Mawhinney, Await the Time and Highway #1, Eritage's recording La Ronde des voyageurs, and the review section of Canadian Folklore canadien. Talk about a meaty issue!

Ten Years Ago
Bulletin 22.2-4 was published in December 1988. I'll write about it next time.

Five Years Ago
Bulletin 27.3 (September 1993). This was the last (we hope!) of the "newsletter-style" issues. It featured Robert Rodriguez's article "The Devil at the Dance" (with French version by André Gareau), and a directory of Yukon folk contacts. For the Ethnfolk Letters column, we treated the world to Judith Cohen's actual handwriting; radio column Over the Waves and magazine column The Centrefold both showed up as well. Just one review, of CD Six Mile Bridge, by the group of that name. Songs "The King William's Town Brides" by Jim Dauncey and "Orran Bhan Cúchá (A Song of Vancouver") and some "housekeeping" features completed the issue.

[[JL]]

News, Views, & Stuff

The address for Kitty's Kitchen accompanying the review of their CD [31.2, p. 42] is no longer in service. Does anyone know how we can reach the group, to send them a copy of the review?

Various folks associated with the Bulletin have celebrated important milestones in their lives since last issue. George Lyon and Lois Genge were married August 1 in a ceremony replete with music, poetry and warm thoughts. The music carried on through the reception, and hasn't really died down yet.

Two days earlier, a daughter, Clarissa, was born to Maureen Chafe and Oisin McMahon; she's a sister for Genevieve (and, recent information has it, a goddaughter for Marge and me).

Also, at the end of June, Dave Foster celebrated his retirement from the teaching profession; we now expect him to spend the rest of his life looking after the Mail Order Service....

We're going in reverse chronological order here, and this should have gone in last issue: James and Priscilla Prescott tied the knot last April 2.

Congratulations to everybody! [JL]

Got a CD? Want to get airplay on a 24-music service specializing in folk and roots music? Rocon Communications' Galaxie Folk/Roots Channel broadcast tracks from 476 different albums in July, and they're looking for more. Send submissions for broadcast consideration (two copies) to Rocon Communications, 16 Whitehill Avenue, Nepean, Ontario K2G 3A8. Thanks to Vic Bell for the info. Vic also passed on the following.

Festival Distribution has recently produced an all-Canadian sampler featuring artists from our catalogue. Their web site has been updated and a new site created specifically for the "Festival to Go" sampler. The main site can be found at

<http://www.festival.bc.ca>.

The new site holds information on all of the artists that are part of the recording. You can find this site at

<http://www.festival.bc.ca/to-go/>. 

The artists that are profiled are Compadres, Wyrd Sisters, Joe Sealy, Jerry Alfred, Barachois, Silk Road Music, Tim Williams, Time Warp, Susan Crowe, Fathead, Chester Knight, Maureen Brown, Sharlene Wallace, Hart Rouge, Heather Bishop, Celso Machado, Christina Smith & Jean Hewson, Nancy White and the Arrogant Worms.

If you would like a copy of the sampler, send Festival your name and mailing address, and they will send it to you along with their brand new catalogue that will be ready in mid-October.

Festival Distribution <fdi@festival.bc.ca>.
Also thanks to Vic for the story on the British Columbia Touring Council’s website. The site has information on performing spaces throughout the province and an on-line artists directory in which performers can be included for a small fee. There are links to Pacific Contact, other provincial contacts and more. The website address is


The annual convention of the North American Folk Alliance takes place in Albuquerque, New Mexico, February 25 to 28, 1999. An early bird rate is available for members until October

Lettres/Letters

I just came across Kenn’s "Fishing Grounds" in 32:1. The song doesn’t make a whole lot of sense unless you understand the terminology used in it. The following was published by us in an earlier issue of BC Folklore, the bulletin of the British Columbia Folklore Society, Number Two, Spring 1996, pp. 14-16.

"Fishing Grounds" is a commercial fishing song about trolling for salmon off the Queen Charlotte Islands. There are a number of different methods used to catch salmon. In trolling, the fish are caught on lines suspended from poles, like giant fishing rods, slowly trolled (towed) behind. On board, a line is wound round a gurdy, or winch, and then led up to the linespring (verse 5), with its warning bell (verse 5), which is suspended from the pole. The purpose of the linespring is to allow for any sudden tension on the line, and the pole’s purpose is to get the line high enough to trail over the side, free from obstacles. Lines have numerous hooks spaced along them, each with a spoon-shaped lure to attract the fish. If one colour of lure doesn’t appear to be attracting fish, it is sometimes substituted for another colour (verse 5). Also, the lines are weighted down with 50lb round lead weights, called cannonballs.

Ken’s boat ran 12 trolling lines, back in 1981, when the song was written, but the law has since changed and only 6 lines are now allowed. To keep the lines from tangling up with each other, giant Styrofoam floats, known as "pigs" (verse 2), are attached to them. The pigs have angled vanes that force the lines out to the side as they are being towed forward. Once a salmon is caught, the trolling line is winched in, but is only able to bring the fish to the boat’s side. From there it has to be gaffed and pulled over the side by hand (verse 3).

There are a number of different species of salmon in British Columbia’s coastal waters but, without confusing the issue unnecessarily, it is safe to cite five true native salmon: the pink, the coho, the spring or chinook, the chum or dog, and the sockeye. The salmon being fished for in "Fishing Grounds" is the spring salmon, known in the fishing trade as "smiley" from the shape of its mouth, which takes on a more pronounced "smile" as it gets older. This is especially noticeable after the fish has passed a weight of 25 lb.

There are two types of springs, one red and one white. The reds, at that time, had a value of $4.50 a lb. whereas the whites brought in only $1.00 a lb. from the buyers. Fish caught had to weigh over 25 lb., but fish up to 60 lb. were not unusual. During the spring salmon-fishing season, coho salmon are also in the area, passing through on their way to their grounds. The coho themselves, however, cannot be caught and kept because they aren’t yet in season (verse 5). If they are caught by mistake, like the rock cod (verse 6), they tie up the line, waste time, and have to be released. One way of finding where the fish are is to look out for gulls ("birds," verse 4) which flock over tight schools of herring, known as herring balls, under which the spring salmon come to feed on the herring.

The boat was fishing off Hippa, an island off the west coast of Graham Island, the large north island of the Queen Charlottes, in a rough sea with short, erratic, choppy waves ("a dirty lump," verse 2) and, consequently, the pigs were bouncing (verse 2). One might expect that a fishing boat would not remain at sea during such weather but, unfortunately for the fishers, that is apparently the best time to troll for salmon. Because of the rough weather and a lack of fish however, Ken thought that hand logging (verse 6) and log salvaging on the west coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands might have been a better way to make a living. Perhaps he could have put together a raft of logs which could then be towed to Charlotte (Queen Charlotte City) for quick sale and a quick profit.

"Skunk" (verse 2) comes from "skunked," to be defeated or out-witted, and is especially used in fishing and sports. [In lots of other fields, as well, including guitar-picking and English-teaching, alas! —GWL]

"Keep" (verse 3) comes from "keeper" or, more usually, "a keeper," and here refers to a fish whose size is within legal limits. It is also commonly used when choosing things of a better standard from a pile, or when selecting finished pieces during a job where quality varies.

Ken Hamm is a singer/songwriter living on Vancouver Island and is one of Canada’s most respected blues performers. Although not all of his songs are written in the blues format, "Fishing Grounds," track 2 on his new CD Eagle Rock Road.