"...still looking for home..."

Paddy Tutty
interviewed by George W. Lyon and John Leeder

Paddy Tutty, traditional singer from Saskatoon, after a sold-out Friday night house concert at Mountain Sunrise B&B in Calgary, took time out from making the rounds of record stores Saturday afternoon to chat with the Bulletin editors in the coffee room of JL’s workplace. (We thank Joe Wilderson for helping out with the transcription.) [JL]

Bulletin: It’s February 27th, with John Leeder, George Lyon and Paddy Tutty. Paddy, you’re from Calgary....

Paddy: Originally, yeah, I was born here—a little further south.

Bulletin: You grew up here, went to school and all that sorta thing?

Paddy: I was here till was about 12 or 13, yeah.

Bulletin: Started music here?

Paddy: Music? I became exposed to a few things, like hootenannies. I was pretty young, but I remember the early 60s and hootenannies, and I remember getting involved in the Beatles, and that whole movement, listening to music as a kid. I wasn’t playing the guitar or anything like that.

Bulletin: Hootenannies on TV you mean, the TV show, or....

Paddy: On TV and at school

Bulletin: Elementary, junior high?

Paddy: Well, I was still at elementary, mostly; I was here till Grade 7, but my sister was actually in junior high, and she had a teacher named Barry Luft, who taught her how to play the ukelele. She became very influential to me.

Bulletin: So when you left Calgary, she left?

Paddy: We all left as a family, because we were all still in school. My mother relocated to Prince Albert, she got a job up there, she was originally from there, so I was the kid who had never lived there, but now we all got to live there. When I first got there, I was not involved in music, really. I guess I grew up just going through car trips with the family and singing in the car, and there was always singing around in our house.

Bulletin: Your sister—

Paddy: My sister and my mom and my brother and me were all—it was always there, it wasn’t anything out of the ordinary, it was just always there.

Bulletin: You weren’t shy

Paddy: I was very shy. I was very shy.

Bulletin: About singing in the family?

Paddy: No, about everything else.

Bulletin: I’ll bug you about everything else later; right now we’ll just deal with family. So, performing was part of your lives.

Paddy: It was just always there, lots of musicals as a kid, you know, movies that were musicals, so I was exposed to that stuff from Day One, and my mom was always enamoured with classical music.

Bulletin: Was your mother less than happy about your interest in things like the Beatles? Or did she accept that?

Paddy: She was actually less than happy about my involvement with the Beatles’ music. She just couldn’t understand it, because I was the youngest, and I was the first one that caught on to that music.

Bulletin: When you got out to Saskatchewan, then, was that still present?

Paddy: At that point I was just basically into school, school, school. I had no peer group who were interested in that kind of stuff, so I more or less, probably, went inward a bit. Actually, all this time I had a guitar, you see. I had a guitar I had won at a contest, I think CFCN, when I was about 8 or 9 years old.

Bulletin: Oh yeah, what did you do?

Paddy: Not much; there was a little riddle, and courtesy of the encyclopedia, we found the answer, which was “harpsichord,” and apparently that was the only correct answer of all that, they kept drawing wrong answers, and finally they drew the right answer, and I was the one sibling that got to write “harpsichord” and won, so I had to go on TV and accept this little Harmony guitar, mahogany sides and back and top, and try to learn to play the guitar at that point, but I’m a left-handed person. There’s no support. You know, I’d taken piano lessons since I was about 6, and I really really wanted to play this guitar, but getting anyone to teach me left-handed was impossible at that point. This would have been the early 60s.

Bulletin: I’m interested in who would have been here to teach you there in those days. I’m also interested in issues
of left-handed people, 'cause you don't reverse when you play.

Paddy: Yeah

Bulletin: What was your column called?

Paddy: It was called Discs and Doodads or something horrible.

Bulletin: So you were quite active musically at that age, then.

Paddy: It was just an obsession, absolutely an obsession. Between, you know, taking classical music lessons.

Paddy: God, that was a long time ago, you know, really it was. I was actually cynical about songwriting at that point, saying "Why are these people writing this song? It sounds just like that one!"

Bulletin: Who were your favourites? The Beatles, but who else?

Paddy: So would I! When we made the move from Calgary to Prince Albert, a lot got thrown out.

Bulletin: So you had a budding critical sense?

Paddy: Oh, yeah

Bulletin: And did you share that with other kids who were interested in making those judgments?

Paddy: I don't know about "making those judgments"; I just had some friends I was hanging out with who were avid fans, and liked the music a lot.

Bulletin: So now tell me about being a southpaw. Did anyone suggest you flip your guitar over? Did you ever try it?

Paddy: Oh, I wanted to flip my guitar over—it's still the natural thing for me to want to strum with my left hand, but because there was no support—there is now, there's a lot more now; it's possible for a person to learn left-handed, but I don't think it was really that possible, other than—Paul McCartney played the bass left-handed, right?

Bulletin: So that told you it could be done.

Paddy: That was a big thing. Yeah, yeah, sure it could be done, but actually finding any kind of books or documentation—I just kind of gave up. I wasn't getting anywhere learning the guitar. Finally, when we moved to Prince Albert I found a guitar teacher for a little while who was actually sort of in a Hank Williams school, and I took lessons from him for a very short time. He just wasn't into the genre that I was wanting to do, but at that point I'd just given up, and I learned right-handed. I mean, being left-handed, y'know—it's a right-handed world.

For instance, I learned to cut with scissors right-handed 'cause it was the only way that worked.

Bulletin: The way they're designed—My ex-wife is a violin teacher, and she says, and I tended to assume she's right, that southpaws make a mistake to flip their axes over, because a good player needs to have a good left hand, to be accurate, to be fluent. A violinist needs both hands.

Paddy: I'm not a very strong bow-er, and I'm not a flat-picker on the guitar either, for that matter. For some reason I have been able to play with my right hand with the dulcimer, very comfortably. I'm totally at home with the flat pick with my right hand. But with the guitar I'm not, and even with the fiddle I feel like I have a definite handicap, playing the fiddle right-handed. It's that rhythm with the right hand, although I don't know if I could handle the dexterity thing either, if I did switch to playing left-handed. Obviously you do need both hands. But that's the wonderful thing about picking up the concertina: suddenly I feel like my hands are not fighting one another, and I can do almost equal things with both hands.

Bulletin: It struck me last night that on at least one concertina tune you seemed to be playing a lot more melody notes on the left hand than I would have.

You play a three-row. I've got a two-row, so I don't have all of the notes and all of the different ins and outs available to me, but it looked to me as
though you were making more left-hand choices.

Paddy: Actually, the Anglo concertina style that's in Ireland is mostly a left-hand melody thing. Not that I'm trying to play Irish style, but I was kind of Bertram Levy for a couple of weeks but I fortunately got to work with Paddy Levy for a couple of weeks at Port Townsend, and he's got a whole new theory on playing Anglo, using what he calls "The Pearl" and trying to smooth it out. So, using left and right, different rows, you'll use the G row on the left hand and the C row on the right hand to make a scale, so you can do more runs.

Bulletin: He calls it "The Pearl"?

Paddy: He calls it "The Pearl," and he was actually in the process of writing a book that he was going to call The Pearl. This was a couple of years ago. I talked to him last summer, and he's since become totally involved in bandoneon and tango music, and playing it a lot and not having time to write the book, so he'll do the book eventually.

Bulletin: Well I've read his earlier book, The Anglo Concertina Demystified, and he was moving in that direction, smoothing out the fingering.

Paddy: But he's really seriously into it. So we're going all over the place here. We all have to use both of our hands, but, because it is such a right-handed world, at one point you have to make a choice. I really wish I would've played the fiddle left-handed. I think I would've been a much better fiddler. However, I'd already been playing the guitar for a long time. I didn't start playing the fiddle till I was about 25 or so. At one point a teacher said, "Start over." I said, "All right, I'm not going to start over."

I was at Port Townsend fiddle tunes festival a couple of years ago, and Yvon Mimeault was a Quebec fiddler—I have to go to Port Townsend, Washington, to study Quebec fiddle, right? But he was teaching that year, and he's a wonderful fiddler he's since put out a CD that you can get through Thirty Below—but he's a left-handed fiddler, and he doesn't reverse the strings or anything, he doesn't have a special fiddle; he just puts it in his left hand. He ends up playing a lot of really low stuff, because it's closer to his hand, that beautiful, beautiful playing. He is just amazing, just amazing. I don't know how old he is, but he was a wonderful, wonderful musician.

Bulletin: So you started off on the guitar, working up, banging chords; your Hank Williams teacher, did he teach you anything beyond chording?

Paddy: He was probably trying to teach me flatpicking, and I just couldn't do it, so I was actually learning—probably at that point I was into some of the music of The Mamas & the Papas, and kind of getting more to the folk thing when I was learning to play, so I would just buy sheet music and force myself to learn chords. At that point I was just strumming with no pick at all, and I did that for probably about five years, all the way through high school, and eventually, probably about 1970 or '71, I just sat down and learned how to fingerpick. Maybe it was later than that, I'm not really sure.

Bulletin: You had been aware of fingerpicking, just never done it?

Paddy: I knew it was there, but I just hadn't the time or the motivation to force myself to do it.

Bulletin: So in high school you were playing guitar and singing songs for yourself only?

Paddy: Oh no, I was performing a lot, and that's a whole other thing. I did learn to play the guitar. I would be performing with, sometimes, a little duo, with other women, usually, "girls," at the time, and we'd be doing stuff for our high school variety nights. That's how I started out with performing, for those kind of events; I was playing with my sister as well, but I don't think we ever did high school variety nights, 'cause she was two grades ahead of me, so by the time I was actually playing, she was just finishing, and then she was at university. But we ended up being The Tutt Sisters for several years. It was probably mostly her initiative as far as the repertoire; she managed to find really obscure people whose music people hadn't heard very much. I'm just trying to think of who; they were so obscure I forget their names.

Bulletin: Obscure in pop music, rock?

Paddy: At this point I'm out of pop music; I'm just into folk, as in the Folk Scare and Peter Paul & Mary, Judy Col-
lins, Joni Mitchell, Gordon Lightfoot, all of that influence was just right in there, you know, 1967, ’68, ’69.

Bulletin: Did people in your neck of the woods get a resonance from Joni Mitchell because she had been from there, or was that not noticed?

Bulletin: She was a home town girl who made good.

Paddy: Well, she was a Saskatoon girl, but we just heard legends about her, and then she finally played, about 1974, at the Centennial Auditorium, and I got to sit in the back row of the third balcony. She’s this big [gestures to general laughter] and by that time she was sort of into jazz, so it was a little disappointing. That’s the only time she’s ever played there, but she did borrow a dulcimer for the event.

Bulletin: So your sister was coming up with obscure people and that thing, like maybe Eric Andersen, or someone like that.

Paddy: I mean all that stuff, and she was certainly the better guitar player of the two of us, so she was doing all the lead stuff and all the stuff up the neck, and I was doing your basic rhythm guitar, and we would be singing harmonies with each other. Meanwhile, there was also a coffeehouse in Prince Albert when I was in high school. I was involved in the Prince Albert Youth Council, which started up when I was probably in Grade 10 or 11, I don’t remember, but I was very, very involved in that, I was involved in organizing events and just being around, and we would have these folk coffeehouses every week. So there was an opportunity to play, and that’s, you know, Number One of anything. When you have an opportunity to play, you can play. There’s nothing more depressing than seeing all these people right now—there’s a whole new generation of people that want to play music; they don’t have anywhere to play, for the most part.

Bulletin: We’re not all so new, either.

Paddy: The old guys, too, but there’s the 15-year-olds, and then there’s everyone else from the last 40 years who wants to play music, and there’s not really that many venues. But I was fortunate; I got to play at the Winter Festival in Prince Albert, there was the high school stuff that was happening, and there was the coffeehouse, which was in the community; all of the high schools were involved, it was in the rec centre owned by the city, run by the city, but it was real cool. The walls were all painted up. It was exciting, and we would bring in—I think we might have brought in Paul Hann once, and we brought in rock bands. So there was lots of music around when I was in high school in Prince Albert, and that’s really what kept me at it.

Bulletin: Could you buy the records you wanted in Prince Albert?

Paddy: Probably. It was more possible then, although I’m sure I remained ignorant of a lot of what was going on. All you can do is what you’re exposed to, right? All you know is what you’re exposed to, and if you happen to meet someone who happens to have a record of somebody that you never heard of, it becomes part of your world, and if you never get exposed to that, you don’t even know about it.

Bulletin: I’m interested in what you were exposed to then.

Paddy: Probably not very much.

Bulletin: So, what took you to the sorts of music you do now?

Paddy: Well, that’s another chapter. My sister and I ended up playing quite a bit at university as well; she was down in Saskatoon going to university; I was still in high school, and I remember a couple of times making special trips to sing with her at the Drama Department noon show. They had a Friday noon show, which was mostly little scenes from plays, but they would have little interspersed music, and we were part of that several times, and then when I got to university we actually played a lot as a duo the first year or so, and at that point she met someone, got married and said “We don’t want to play music any more,” I think probably at the end of that first year. It was my first year, it was her second year, I think. So I was left kind of slack-jawed and not knowing what to do next.

Bulletin: You had had a community of music in high school, so that it wasn’t just you going out and performing, but other people that you would trade songs with and learn new licks from.

Paddy: I was mostly probably learning all that stuff on my own. There wasn’t that much interchange. I do remember one particular summer, as a Youth Council member, hosting a Newfoundland group. Remember Young Voyageurs? There would be probably 20 or 30 high school kids that got to go to another area of the country, and it was one of these wonderful programs, probably under Trudeau, that were exchanging people’s cultures. So at one point there was a Quebec group that came and stayed with various families, and they had little field trips, and we’d go up and do stuff with people, and I just remember the Newfoundland people really well, and doing a wiener roast with them. Put a fire in front of a Canadian and what do they do? They sing. But believe me, these Newfoundlanders at this barbecue, it was just astounding, it was just incredible; they just didn’t stop, and they had so much material, it was all Newfoundland material, they were just amazing.

Bulletin: Different from Peter, Paul and Mary?

Paddy: Oh yeah, completely.

Bulletin: And did you recognize it as "folk"?

Paddy: I wasn’t sure at the time whether I liked it or not, but it definitely kind of imprinted on me; I certainly remember it really well. These people knew themselves, you know?

Bulletin: Did you see yourself as a Saskatchewanite?

Paddy: A Saskatchewanite?
In many senses I’m still looking for home, and certainly I was at that point. Most of the time I was in high school, after moving from Calgary, I was the city girl who got dragged away from the city, more like, into a small town, but you can’t really take that out of a person once they’ve been exposed to it. The thing about Saskatchewan that’s great is that the lakes are really close to Prince Albert. An hour north of Prince Albert is forest and lakes and beauty and all that. Bulletin: So the city came into Prince Albert, but also I’m hearing you talk about being a high school kid who goes and hangs out with university kids.

Paddy: I wasn’t hanging out with university kids. I would’ve just been coming in, doing the gig and leaving.

Bulletin: So you didn’t come away feeling a little bit sophisticated?

Paddy: No. But I did get myself there as soon as I could. I left high school, moved to Saskatoon, went to university, was enrolled in, kind of theatre, kind of drama and art, but I basically took a smattering of an art class and a drama class, English, the usual stuff, sociology, blah blah blah.

But I did kind of want to double major in theatre and art. Music wasn’t an option, because the way the music department worked at the time—and I’m sure this hasn’t changed—it’s a very formal kind of training. It wouldn’t have been anything that I could’ve done if I’d even wanted to, because I’m mostly self-taught; other than my five years of piano lessons as a kid, the rest is really self-taught.

Bulletin: So at the end of the first year, you were on a degree track?

Paddy: Actually, by the time I was into second year I decided to major in art, so I got my B.F.A. in visual art. Which is the same time as my sister went off and got married and said, "Bye!"

Bulletin: So what was the effect of that on your music? You didn’t have a partner to perform with, but were you thinking that was curtains for you, that you just simply had to refocus, or what?

Paddy: Well, that just kind of left me hanging for quite a while, figuring out what to do. So I didn’t do anything. I just focused on art and studying, and meanwhile I think I was on the road to getting married myself, so I actually got married about a year after that, and was just into fine art, art art art art. I picked up my guitar once in a while to try and figure out how to connect with other people in the community, because there didn’t seem to be much of a community, although there were a couple of venues to possibly play at, but at that point I couldn’t even go to them, because it was so depressing going and not being able to play, because I really wanted to be part of it again.

Bulletin: But what would’ve kept you from just standing up and—


Bulletin: But you saw people standing there and going [Sings quietly], "In Scarlet town where I was born..." You were afraid to do that?

Paddy: You can’t just get up and do it solo if you’ve never done it solo, right? You have to start somewhere. So I just eventually started.

Bulletin: And is this the time you’re working on finger-picking? Or does that come later?

Paddy: I don’t think I’ve done that yet! Well, I might have worked on it a little bit, but it was a slow process. If I was learning how to fingerpick, because I also learned how to do Travis-picking at one point. That might have come later too—that might have been about 1974, when my marriage broke up, and I got back into music the same day!

Well, a relationship ends, and then suddenly there you are, and you’re thinking, "Well, what was I doing before this? Where was I?" I guess it was quite gradual; it wasn’t quite the same day. Several dozen tears later. Getting over life, growing up a bit, you get back into music. I had been exposed to people like Pentangle in late high school and early university, and had some of their albums. So I had kind of started listening to that traditional stuff; my sister didn’t care for ballads at all, really. When I got back to the music, I actually considered—I was looking at different traditional musics, and just kind of latched on to the English ballads.

Bulletin: Were the records more widely available in Saskatoon?

Paddy: Probably. But even in Prince Albert I knew people who were just connoisseurs of music, who introduced me to that stuff. Even someone playing me a Steeleye Span album, "way before I was ready to hear it. So I was kind of exposed to that stuff. And all this time not playing music, just listening.

Bulletin: What did Steeleye Span sound like to you when you weren’t ready to hear it?

Paddy: Outrageous! It was probably ‘way too rocky, compared to Pentangle, which in a sense was jazzy, much more acoustic. But at this point, I relocated to Regina for a couple of years. I’d also heard that Regina had a folk festival; I’d heard these things, over the years. "Regina has a folk festival; Regina has a folk community." So I ended up just diving right in, getting totally involved in that society and that music scene down there. Meanwhile, I was finishing my art degree at the University of Regina.

Bulletin: Was music the main factor in your moving to Regina?

Paddy: That was part of it. There were a few excuses. I was wanting to do lithography, and Regina had a really good lithography department, so I could actually work on press. That got me there. That was a good motivation point. But once I was there, I got involved in that whole community of people who were very involved in traditional music, old-timey, English, Irish and just about everything else. It was quite exciting, lots going on, lots of workshops, and I got involved in
Anyway, a whole world of music opened up when I was in Regina. I learned a lot from the Mahood brothers, because they were totally into that music. They were into the English traditional stuff, their record collection was phenomenal. I owe them a lot, and other people around, the same thing. Just a lot of really exciting people, lots of people coming around teaching me stuff. I recall Danny Greenspoon coming through lots of times and teaching me how to play in C tuning on the guitar. Little things like that go a long way. I still play in C tuning on the guitar.

Bulletin: You played with the banjo. When did you start adding other instruments?

Paddy: Once The Barley Straw split up, I just went solo. That would have been early '76, late '75. It was just me and my guitar. I kind of wanted a dulcimer at this point; I may have actually ordered one. There was a musical instrument maker in Regina, Peter Sawchyn. He’s the man who made my guitar. I don’t remember if I actually ordered a dulcimer at that point. I also got a mandolin while I was in Regina.

Bulletin: Is Peter Sawchyn still around?

Paddy: He’s still in Regina. Always has been. It’s a nice guitar. It was made in '78 or '79. I think it’s 20 years old this year.

Bulletin: I remember you having that when it was fairly new.

Paddy: It was really white.

Bulletin: Dulcimer and fiddle...

Paddy: I actually spent a lot of time on the road just with my guitar, more or less travelling. I met Billy Walker in '76, and we ended up just going out on the road, travelling across Canada, spending a month in Newfoundland, a month in Ottawa. I was performing everywhere I could.

Bulletin: Getting paid?

Paddy: I was getting paid; we were taking public transport and hitchhiking and all that. Certainly the days before "product"! It was just me and my guitar. I had left my banjo at home, certainly left my mandolin at home. I ended up doing this for years. We spent some time in Saskatoon; I played a lot while I was there; then we went to Victoria for a year. I played a lot there. At that point I had a dulcimer, and I was learning to play it. Then we lived in Edmonton for about six months, and then we went to Britain for six months, and I decided I’d better leave my guitar at home, and took my dulcimer. I also had been picking up the fiddle since I was in Victoria. I decided to take my fiddle. Bad idea! Dragged my fiddle around, dragged my dulcimer around.

Bulletin: Why was it a bad idea to take your fiddle?

Paddy: I wasn’t really ready to play it in front of people. It’s a slow-going process. But going to Britain and taking the dulcimer was probably the best decision I made, in many senses, because it forced me to play it, to just zone in on what I could do with it, what was possible. I missed my guitar. I thought, "We’ll just go over to Britain, I can pick up a guitar at a pawn shop, no problem." It wasn’t possible. They didn’t exist! There weren’t guitars in pawn shops then. This was 20 years ago. We found lots of 7-stringed banjos, lots of fiddles, we found a really nice concertina at an antique store, that Billy bought—he was going to play the concertina while we were on the road—but no guitars.

Bulletin: Was he playing with you, or were you playing solo?

Paddy: He’s never performed. He doesn’t want to perform in public, so if he plays, it’s just at home. I always kind of wanted him to play with me on stage, but it became apparent....

Bulletin: So you’re just a couple of freaks travelling around.

Paddy: Yeah. I would play guest spots at
Bulletin: When you came to Britain, did you have contacts?

Paddy: Just a few. Very few. But for the first month we had a train pass and a folk club list and a youth hostel list, and just kind of juggled around, and there was so much going on. It was possible to just go to folk clubs, and we ended up meeting lots of people.

Bulletin: Did people welcome you?

Paddy: Mostly just, "Are you itinerants?" It was a much more conservative culture.

Bulletin: To your music or to your presence?

Paddy: Kind of, but it was a different culture, not quite as welcoming as Canada seemed to have been.

Bulletin: Even folk people?

Paddy: Folk clubs were a bit of a straiter-laced world than what I had been exposed to. I think in Canada folk club movement came out of the coffeehouse movement, and that was almost an alternate, perhaps a hippie, movement. That’s certainly not the case any more, I don’t think.

Bulletin: That folk music is an alternate movement?

Paddy: Well, the folk clubs.

Bulletin: I have a hard time, because I come out of a pretty freaky background, originally, and my initial problem with the folk clubs in Calgary was that we were not on the same wavelength.

Paddy: Yeah, really.

Bulletin: The folk clubs in Calgary were never counterculture, because they came from English folk clubs.

Paddy: Exactly.

Bulletin: All of the other clubs in town patterned themselves after the Calgary Folk Club, so they’re all non-counterculture places. There’s a very heavy overlap between the Alberta Teachers’ Association membership and the folk club membership. But I don’t know outside of Calgary that well. So you encountered something different, and then went to Britain and hit on something yet different again.

Paddy: Before I went to Britain I hadn’t experienced the Calgary folk scene.

Bulletin: No, but other than Calgary, in Canada.

Paddy: The rest of the country was pretty neat. I don’t want to put down the Calgary folk clubs, but it’s just a different world. I played in Calgary many times, but never at a "folk club." I played at Sancious Coffee House, I played at Ambrosia, I played at the libraries, I played at Devonian Gardens, all these gigs, but I never played at a folk club. Never.

Bulletin: I seem to remember you at the Rocky in the early days, because I booked you.

Paddy: That would have been the very first folk club I played at.

Bulletin: I was doing the bookings then. I didn’t realize it was your first folk club!

Paddy: That would have been after 1979, after I got back from Britain.

Bulletin: It would be, because I was married in ’79. There was a little overlap between when I got married and when I stopped doing the bookings.

Paddy: All that time between ’76 and ’78 I was performing a lot, all over, I was touring a lot, I was playing in Montreal—

Bulletin: You gradually had a reputation, so that you would arrive in Victoria or somewhere—

Paddy: Well, I actually lived in Victoria when I played there! That’s the ironic thing about travelling around and staying somewhere for a while: you’re local. I was a local in Victoria, and I was a local in Regina, and I was a local in Saskatoon, and I was a local in Edmonton. I had spent quite a bit of time in all those places. Of course, it only lasts for a while.

Bulletin: I’m not really even sure when I would first have become conscious of you. After a certain point, I think, I can’t remember not knowing you were around. So you returned from Britain in ’79?

Paddy: Yeah, we were there for a winter, from October to April, and then settled in Saskatoon. Been there ever since.

Bulletin: Why settle in Saskatoon?

Paddy: I always kind of liked the place, and I went to university there, and there’s something about it I always liked. We had to land somewhere when we came back, and just ended up staying there. You have to be based somewhere, when you’re travelling, too, and it’s in the middle.

Bulletin: Do you consider it a base, or do you consider it home?

Paddy: It’s home, at this point. It’s home. My partner, Billy, is a piano re-builder, and pianos are heavy. He’s not about to relocate. It takes a long time to build up a reputation in a business like that. When you have something physical like that, you really have to stay in one spot.
Bulletin: A rebuilder? What happens, then? Somebody’s piano gets a crack in the soundboard, and they call him up? Or does he get them and rebuild them and sell them?

Paddy: Both. A lot of it is just taking a piano down to the soundboard, drying out the soundboard, fixing the soundboard, putting the harp back in, changing all the strings, sometimes changing the pinblock. You have to take it down and take the harp out, fix the soundboard, re-crown the soundboard, put the harp back in, put the strings on, put them up to tension, fix all the action parts that are broken.

Bulletin: Where do you learn to do that?

Paddy: Well, Billy really learned to do it; he got a job after we settled in Saskatoon, at a piano rebuilding factory, so he worked for another company for a couple of years, and then he ended up on his own. He’s just a wizard at fixing things, so we’re in the right business.

Bulletin: Do you do some of that as well?

Paddy: I work at the shop, now. I’ve worked at the shop part-time for seven years or so. I’m definitely involved in that now, more than I was in the past. I’m also travelling less than I was in the early ’90s, for various reasons.

Bulletin: Do you play less than you were?

Paddy: Yes.

Bulletin: What’s the scene in Saskatoon like?

Paddy: I used to be involved in running the folk club, which used to happen every Sunday. There were about seven people running it, and that lasted from about 1979, 1980, to about the late ’80s. It was running every Sunday, and there were lots of people coming through, and we were meeting lots of people. But things change. There was a Comhaltas chapter formed, so there was that kind of energy happening, and people wanted to do stuff there, and other people that wanted to have a private club, so they started a club called Twenty-Three Below, and so that happened, and at that point the Saskatoon Folk Music Association decided, "Let’s take a break. It seems our mandate is being fulfilled by everyone else." So we took a break, but it turned out that the Irish people were not really doing any concerts, after a while, and the club people just wanted to have their own private bar, and it was mostly not a listening room. They hired quite a few people coming through, and those people were usually a little bit disappointed, to be polite. It wasn’t quite like the old days. It’s not the Broadway theatre, where you get 500 people coming to listen, and it’s a concert, but in a folk club at least people are listening. So I’ve been involved in both sides, in promoting events and promoting myself, for a long long time. This time around 22, 23 years.

Bulletin: When did you get into recording? How many have you done?

Paddy: I’ve done four. The first one was ’83. I worked with Ken Hamm on that one, as co-producer. I came to Calgary at his suggestion, and worked with Richard Harrow at Living Room Studio, and we just did a cassette, at Ken’s suggestion, because he said, "Vinyl’s dead." He was smart!

Bulletin: In ’83 he said that?

Paddy: Yeah, he was a little bit premature, in a sense, because the second album I did, I did vinyl, because I just really wanted to make a record.

Bulletin: Of course! A record’s a record!

Paddy: So my second album was ’86, and I had David Essig produce that, and we went back to the same studio, and at this point it was still really simple, just me and my instruments, and I overdubbed a couple of things, and I overdubbed a few harmonies, which was great fun. The second album had a couple of original tunes by other people on it; the first album was all traditional. The third album was ’92, and the new one is ’98.

Bulletin: Where did you make the third recording?

Paddy: The third and the fourth were both recorded in Ottawa, with Ian Tamblyn producing. It was a change; it was really neat to work with Ian. It was strange for me, and a little scary, to go away from that really safe, "just sounds like me and my dulcimer," and we just sneak in a few instruments. We had some other musicians on that album, and this last album we also had some other singers, because I wanted some other voices. I was ready for some other voices, because I had been working with other people by this point, and it’s nice to have other colours of voices. The "Paddy Tutty Choir" is great, because I always know the harmony, I’m always in tune with myself, whatever that is, at least I blend with myself, but it’s a challenge to add other singers. Doing that is just so much fun in the studio.

Bulletin: How did you do it? Were things done in real time, or did you lay down different tracks?

Paddy: Those are separate questions. On the very first album, for instance, we actually separated everything. I would lay down a guitar track, then sing on top of it. All of this is a learning experience. In fact, I wasn’t prepared for that when I went into the studio, so in a few cases I couldn’t separate me and my guitar—I had to do it together. A couple of bits here and there I’m still unhappy with, because it’s just a it awkward. On the second album, David Essig said, "No way, you have to be live. It’s the performance that counts." We did that, then we added other tracks.

Bulletin: Whose decision was it to separate the tracks? Was it Ken’s?

Paddy: I think it probably was Ken’s.

Bulletin: Is that how he works?

Paddy: I don’t know. Maybe he just decided it was the best thing for me at the time. Or it may have been partly Richard—I don’t know.
Bulletin: Strange attitude for a blues singer! You can't always tell, on recordings. But sometimes you can tell. My son sent me a recording of a French recording. But sometimes you can tell. My son sent me a recording of a French singer! You can't always tell, on re-
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Paddy: Yeah, and there's some things on that album I'm still not happy with. I think in many senses my voice suffers when I'm working at the dulcimer or whatever. There's a few things I'm really not comfortable with on that album. But there it is, it's me. But it was a record. It was the last of the vinyl, and it was probably a bad decision to not make a CD out of it, because I've still got vinyl left. Don't we all, right?

Bulletin: John doesn't, because he never got suckered into doing it! But James Prescott's basement has cases and cases of the last CSMT vinyl, or CFMS, Sui-
vant l'étoile du nord. Not a hot sel-
er... So you have not translated either the first tane or the second LP into CD.

Paddy: haven't.

Bulletin: But, whenever we get this done, if somebody wants to buy one, and sends you $15 or $20, you'll happily put it into cardboard and send it to them.

Paddy: Oh, yeah. I'll send vinyl. I have tapes. My first tape, I have to do something about. I have to make more of them, or decide what to do with them, or kiss them goodbye, one of the two.

Bulletin: Then we won't say that you've got them available.

Paddy: Well, they are available through the CSTM Mail Order Service. But I'm saying I still have it. Some day I'll have to sit down and think, and make decisions. I probably could make a CD of the two, or the best of the two, or whatever.

But it's more money. The two projects I did with Ian, I guess they cost me more, but so did everything else, more, so did butter cost more, so did bread, it was years later. Maybe time-wise it wasn't

Paddy: Fund them? Personally. I just don't spend much money; I save it. I did apply for a FACTOR grant for the second one, and actually for the second portion, when I added that extra studio time, and I got a matching FACTOR loan. So it's amazing to actually get a little bit of money to help that out.

Bulletin: But you said a "loan." So you have to pay it back as you sell the discs, or do you have to pay it back by Thursday or else, or what?

Paddy: It's very weird, because it's kind of a forgivable loan. If you don't pay it back in two years, I think they say, "Nyeaah."

Bulletin: But then maybe if you ask for another, you don't get it?

Paddy: Right. So that's kind of the game, I think. Originally I was applying to them just for promotional and market-
ing funding, and the people who were helping me with the application in Saskatchew-

Bulletin: A lot of the things you choose

Bulletin: How many days?

Paddy: Well, we ended up having to do two weeks in the studio, and then I went back for another week and a half. But that was also mixing time, mastering and everything. But it was an extra expense to add to the budget, to go back to Ottawa a second time.

Bulletin: How do you fund them?

Paddy: No, I'm not a part of any or-

Bulletin: A lot of the things you choose have to do with magic and ancient reli-
gion. Do you have that in the rest of your life as well? Or is it just in the music?
Bulletin: Wicca?

Paddy: No. Although I discovered one day that I must kind of worship trees, in a back-handed, off-handed sort of way. I’m now involved in SOS Elms, which is a coalition in Saskatchewan to try and save the elm trees. I’m on the board, and doing that kind of stuff.

Bulletin: Coming from Southern Ontario, I know dead elm trees!

Paddy: Magic is just magic. I’ve always been fascinated with those elements that are underlying currents and possibilities. I like reading fantasy, sometimes.

Bulletin: What fantasy authors do you recommend?

Paddy: I like Charles de Lint a lot. His last book is quite exceptional. The one that I just read was Someplace to be Flying, which is all about the old mythology of animals, the raven and the crow. It’s just hilarious! What was neat about this book was that it used the whole idea of storytelling on mythology, as in “the book.” In one of his early books, about the time I was recording Who Liveth So Merry?, he was into this whole thing about the Celtic culture and the Indian culture being kind of one, and I was really into that too, and that was the whole thing that recording “The Land Knows You’re There” in the middle of all this British stuff was all about. It was all the same thing. It’s not that I’m not into it now, but I really focussed on it at that point.

There’s been an environmental focus in my life, off and on, depending on the current issues. There have been lots of nuclear scares in our province, they’re wanting to build refineries, and bury it all up north. And forestry issues. There was one recording I was involved with, after Prairie Druid; we did a live cut of “The Land Knows You’re There,” just me and the trio I was working with, which actually is a really nice version of it, because it’s live. But it’s all forestry issues.

So the forestry thing is kind of a round. They wanted to open up this mill and clearcut everything. A bunch of Native elders set up a blockade north of Meadow Lake, and actually camped out for the entire winter, trying to block this road so that the big trucks wouldn’t go up and clearcut. They did a project called Spirit Rise, mostly songs to do with trees or forestry. It was these focussed little events that would happen in Saskatchewan and area. I did another project with a woman named Joyce Dancer, who was also in that other project. She did all of her own songs. I went up with five or six people for a weekend, and we just recorded live, in a log cabin, all their stuff, some of it outside, some of it inside. It’s pretty rough, but it’s quite beautiful. I have a hard time getting objective about it; because I was there, I don’t know what it’s really like. I just get back into the experience when I hear it. So with all these little projects I get involved in, I get away from my own music for a while. I’m still playing music, but I’m not necessarily focussing on what Paddy Tutty’s doing, and I am touring less.

Bulletin: Are you able to get distributed? What’s the situation?

Paddy: I don’t have a distributor right now. I did have Festival for quite a while, and they had me. I think Festival’s—what are they doing? They’ve turned down several people I know, they’ve turned down Barry Luft, and some other people. They’ve been focussing on global marketing or something.

Bulletin: What about CBC? Have they been helpful to you?

Paddy: Probably in little bits and pieces. I know lots and lots of people who the CBC never plays, so it’s hard to complain. But I’ve never really done much with them. I’ve done a little bit of work in Regina, once in a while, with a live kind of thing, but because budgets are cut so much, it seems if you’re really in there with the CBC, and you’re a friend, it’s almost like a family thing; suddenly you’re family, and you’re in, but that’s never happened with me and the CBC.

Bulletin: Are CDs like I.P.s. in that you have to get a whole bunch at once?

Paddy: Oh yes. Minimum 500, but you might as well get 1000, because the price difference between 500 and 1000—it’s so outrageous, getting 500 done. So it’s expensive, plus you have to do the graphics. Then you have to give a lot away to festivals, and possible gigs, and radio. I send a bunch to folk radio in the States, and to Canada, when there is folk radio. If there’s any folk radio I’ve missed, I’ll send it, but it’s hard to get hold of the lists. I have been getting played, in the last couple of months, which is really heartening. It’s a lot of work, because I’m doing the distribution myself, and trying to get the gigs myself. It’s the typical one-person craziness. I guess all of us are doing it. Maybe some of us have distributors, and some of us have managers. But most of us don’t. It’s more and more aggressive, too, the festival scene and the club scene. And that I am not.

Bulletin: Almost an hour and a half ago you said something about being shy.

Paddy: I can push myself a certain amount, but I’m not a naturally aggressive personality, that can just push and push and push. Besides, We Are Canadian. It’s all in there, you know. We don’t want to brag, and we don’t want to be too aggressive, we just want to be nice. It’s all part of growing up in Canada. It’s like being told to do something, and you can’t. You can force yourself to do it a certain amount, but it comes right down to who you are. Which is why people get managers, I guess. If they can afford to. But who can afford to?

Bulletin: Probably not someone who sings ballads to a dulcimer.

Paddy: The past year, I did the recording in April and May, released it in October, meanwhile I’ve been trying to figure out the computer, e-mail, put a website together—I’ve been doing all this stuff, trying to figure out how to maneuver my way around and find some other on-line stores that will sell my product, if that
even ever happens. Do people actually buy things on the Internet? Or do they just surf and surf and surf?

Bulletin: I guess some people do. I don’t know that much about it. I guess it does happen. I’m trying with the idea of phoning up Elderly Instruments to buy some strings, and reading my credit card number over the phone, which I’ve never done before.

Paddy: I’ve given it over the phone, but I guess I’ve punched it in once into a computer, then I went to the bank and took all the money out. Transferred all the money into another account.

It took me about three years to get over denial. I did not want to have anything to do with the Internet, or computers, or any of that, because I thought, "Folk music? I just want to go to the woods and play folk music!" It seemed totally bizarre that it was such a strong element of the folk music business, which it comes down to. I finally got over denial and went on the freenet for a while, and looked around.

Bulletin: Bob Bossin said something like, "A folksinger’s best friend is his or her database."

Paddy: There are some really neat things; the Mudcat Café digital database [Digital Traditions] is amazing!

Bulletin: The piano stuff is a large part of the income, right now? Fifty-fifty with music?

Paddy: It’s much more than that. You can’t make money playing music. I have to survive. So I have a job.

Anyway, I have a new CD out, and I’m trying to promote it. I have to get it out there, and the only way to get it out there is to play. So I’ve been trying to book some gigs. Unfortunately, because I’m a one-woman operation, I’m trying to do too many things at once. I should have booked my tour before I released my album.

Bulletin: Why should you have done that? I don’t know, and I expect the readers don’t.

Paddy: Because there’s at least six months to a year timelag to get gigs.

Festivals, for sure, six to eight months. Folk clubs are getting harder and harder to get gigs at a year in advance.

Bulletin: How about house concerts, like you did last night?

Paddy: That was delightful! It was put together on very short notice, a couple of months ago. It was just lovely. I’m still actually working on booking a tour in Ontario right now.

Bulletin: Are there more of those now? That is really picking up a bit of the slack, is it?

Paddy: I guess it is, but you still have to have people who are willing to do it. It usually comes down to one person, anywhere.

Bulletin: John Bunge last night said that on Cathy Miller’s upcoming tour, she has something like 21 gigs, and 15 of them are house concerts. That’s a big percentage!

Paddy: Yeah, and Cathy’s a bundle of energy. She’s just really well-organized. She’s got the right personality for this business, and I don’t, in many ways.

Bulletin: I guess when we were talking about the ‘70s, right—a couple of freaks on the road with their axes. And now it’s business. But at our age, in order to be able to do as much as you did when you were a kid, something has to give.

Paddy: Maybe. I suspect there’s a whole new generation who are doing almost the same thing, right now. Your son, right? You’ve got one!

Bulletin: Barry Luft and I were commiserating last night on having offspring who are professional musicians. They have these great tours, with wonderful gigs, and come home broke.

Paddy: I still do that. I still come home broke. But when you’re 17 or 20, it’s a little easier to do. You just get so serious about it. I guess it’s a bit easier if you can just kind of go into a basement and record an album live DAT and then make a bunch of CDs, and you’ve made an album for not very much, whereas I’ve got a big commitment of funds that I have to make back. It’s crazy, but it’s not something you do to make money. It’s something you do because you want to do it. That’s what music comes down to. If I wanted to make money making music, I wouldn’t be doing this. I wouldn’t be doing traditional ballads on my dulcimer, or playing the concertina. I would be doing something else. It’s crazy, it’s almost schizophrenic. Here we are trying to fool ourselves into thinking that music is a business in a sense, and there’s always that dichotomy between music and business. I go to the Fiddle Tunes Festival in Port Townsend, and it is so lovely, you
Paddy: No, and they’re not Breton.

Bulletin: Well, you’re sort of that way too.

Paddy: I’m painting myself into a corner! [Laughs]

Bulletin: No, no, I don’t think you are, Paddy, because you have a day job.

Paddy: Well, now I do. It’s a part-time day job.

Bulletin: What I hear is somebody who’s trying to balance and juggle, and trying not to drop the ball, because if you became Celine Dion you’d drop these balls, and if you became someone else—even Jean Carignan, driving a taxi all day, every day—then you’re going to drop some other balls. That’s one of the things that’s neat about someone like you, that you’re in that process.

Paddy: [Melodramatically] You like to watch me juggle! [Laughs] It’s the music that’s the important thing. I guess I’m important too, as a person, and I have to kind of balance my life. You don’t want to go through life and totally waste it.

Bulletin: We put a guy on the cover of the Bulletin about 12, 13 years ago; he wrote some letters to me as he was dying of melanoma out in BC, and one of the comments that he made became the title of the article: "My life wasn’t wasted in useless things."

Bulletin: [Looking at clock] Do you still have time to get your business done in Calgary?

Paddy: Yes, I’ve accomplished quite a bit, actually. I left some CDs on consignment at Fidelio’s, and at another store I got them to move my CDs to the "folk" section! At one store in Saskatoon, I couldn’t find my CDs because they’d filed them under "P" for "Paddy"!

Paddy: Paddy," is that short for "Patricia"?

Paddy: It’s short for "Patricia," but it’s been "Paddy" from Day One, because my dad’s name was Paddy, and he wanted me to be called Paddy, and I was the last kid, so.... My dad died of cancer when I was about one. I guess he knew I was the last. He would have probably been ill by the time I was born. So that’s my legacy—"Paddy Tutty the Second."

It was very bizarre going to Ireland, when we were over there, and visiting second cousins, and great-aunts and -uncles, because they hadn’t seen my father since 1939, when he had visited the cousins for the last time before going off to the Second World War, to "fight the Jerries," and I look exactly like him. When I was there, it would have been 20
years ago, so I would have been about the same age, maybe a little older. It was very uncanny, especially meeting a couple of my great-aunts. It was just wonderful. Kind of amazing. I’ve always kind of been fascinated with my past, which is kind of foggy. We had a pretty small family. My father’s only sister is in New Zealand, and went there with her father back after the War sometime, so I had no contact with that side of my family at all until we went over to Ireland, and I just sort of researched these people.

Bulletin: Your father’s family was Irish; your mother’s was English?

Paddy: My mother’s family was English and Welsh, and my father’s family was Irish and English.

Bulletin: So when you talked about being unique in your neighbourhood as a kid, you spoke of the English—was it the English part?

Paddy: Oh, yeah, that would have been the only influence, and my English grandmother lived with us. She did all the cooking. For much of my growing-up, it was me, my mom and my grandmother, and their traditions. Very different from the average kid whose dad worked in the oilfields or worked in the oil offices at the time.

Bulletin: Another of my questions was how you find repertoire. The person who was with us was really fascinated by your choice of material, where you find things, and so on. Is there anything systematic about that, or do you just hear something, and like it?

Paddy: I can’t claim to do any heavy-duty research, much as I try. I look for stuff, I look through books, but I end up learning a lot of stuff from other people, from other revivalists, maybe some from the sources of the sources of the sources. "Bonny Portmore," for instance: I learned that song from a book that I bought when we were travelling in Ireland. That was one of the few songs that I’ve ever learned that I picked up off the page.

Bulletin: Did people learn it from you?

Paddy: Yeah. I think so.

Bulletin: Were there other sources, or did that come from you?

Paddy: The only other person who might have recorded it—an album by someone from Fairport Convention, or maybe Bert Jansch, or one of those guys, called The Ornament Tree, probably has that song on it, but I’ve never heard it. Eileen McGann thinks that she learned it from me, and Loreena McKennitt learned it from Eileen. &c., &c. Who knows?

Bulletin: Have you done any collecting from source singers, non-professional singers?

Paddy: It’s hard to find them! It’s really hard, where I am, to find anyone. I would love to be able to do that. I actual-ly considered studying folklore. We spent a month in Newfoundland, and I was considering: should I study this? I was sitting in on one of Kenneth Goldstein’s classes, and it was quite exciting, but at that point—that would have been about ‘76—I couldn’t tear it apart. I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t tear the music apart, which is what they were doing in the folklore department. They were tearing it into little pieces, and analyzing it, and I just wanted it as music. I was much younger, but I still can’t tear it apart. But the opportunity to collect from people would be great. But it seems like you almost have to have letters after your name to do that these days. And then, going to Britain, it seems like everything has been so collected. It’s a frustrating thing, like, someone got there before I did, anyway. Even if you think you’ve collected something, someone else collected it as well. It really becomes kind of a hopeless exercise.

Quite a bit of what I do I’ve actually learned from people, and I’m not sure of their sources. It’s a neat process; it makes a song very special when you can learn it that way. Songs like "Woad" I learned orally, but it’s written down. Songs like "The Wild Hog" I learned from a person, at a camp, but I’m not sure what his source is, so it’s kind of a source of embarrassment for me, to not be able to say, "I learned this song from this person, who learned it from this person," because I don’t know who the second person is.

Bulletin: But it’s the same process that would go on in a community, way back.

Paddy: Tunes are very much like that, too. Learning tunes from people, they have a meaning in them. I hope I’ve given you something of use in this interview.

Bulletin: I think you have, Paddy

* FACTOR—The Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent on Records (125 George Street, Toronto M5A 2N4) offers a variety of grants, loans, and programmes to assist Canadian musicians.