

Editorial

I want to highly recommend an article in Geist 8.32. (I'm writing in July and hope the issue is still on the stands when this comes out.) Actually, you may have already encountered it: "Songs My Father Taught Me" was an Ideas program on CBC some time last year. In it poet Norbert Ruebsaat discusses growing up in a singing family—a specific sort of singing family. The Ruebsaats were German immigrants to BC in the 50s, and Norbert's father grew up in the singing political culture which included the Hitler Youth—and the Hitler *Older Folks*, as well. Of course, Hitler did not invent singing; Ruebsaat explains the role of music in family and social life in 19th and early 20th century Germany. (Some of this material overlaps Rachel Anderson's "Traditional Folk Music in the Context of German Fascism," read at the CSTM AGM last year.) As people typically do, the elder Ruebsaat assumed that, save for the obvious major cultural differences, what could be assumed about daily life in the old country held here. Consequently, for instance, he attempted to get scout troops on hike to march in unison to songs they weren't even very interested in singing; you can imagine the results.

But the foolishness doesn't end there, and Norbert's father isn't the only fool. At the end, Ruebsaat notes that the revolution of our youth has died as effectively as did Hitler's, that "The Times They Are A-Changin'" is as unavailable to him as is his father's "Schönste Rosemarie."* Considering that large numbers of North Americans who raged against the Viet Nam war seem to have toed the line about Iraq and Yugoslavia quite happily, it's hard not to forget now the quip about 60s people, that they (too many of whom were *we*) were nonconformists who all nonconformed in the same way. In a sidebar added to the magazine version of the essay, Ruebsaat notes that when an editor commented that he looked very happy as a child in the ac-

companying photos, he responded, "It was enforced happiness." Living in the capitalist boosterism of Calgary, I don't want to forget that happiness was enforced in Nuremberg (1934, not 1946) and at Woodstock (both years) and that music can be a powerful enforcer, as well as an educator, seducer, and assistant.

While "Songs My Father Taught Me" is a self-contained memoir, it is also a challenge to readers to think carefully about the role of music in their lives. Consider, for example, this challenging statement: "...there is also a way in which the pleasure of ... music is insensitive to its surroundings." Or: "It is vital now for us in consumer culture to understand how unbridled pleasure can produce madness and incredible violence." I think Ruebsaat intended to open a discourse; I've listened to my dub of the program now several times and have read the essay about one and a half times, and I'm still wrestling with it. See what you think.

* One frequently hears the claim that topical songs are inherently boring and do not outlive their issues, sometimes with the added implication that sensitive, intelligent people will not find them of particular interest even while the issues are current. Working on the feature on the songs of Odell and Stansbury for this issue has reminded me of the patronizing attitude many people take towards topical song. I acknowledge that these items are not "great poetry," whatever that is, but I nevertheless find in them some moments of pleasure and insight, two centuries after the fact. It strikes me that the pain Ruebsaat (along with many others) feels over "Times" also demonstrates that political songs are boring only to those who are predisposed to find them boring. [GWL]



Corrigenda: In the Paddy Tutty interview last issue, we failed to give her sister's name; it is Leslie. Paddy won her guitar from CBC TV in Calgary, not CFCN. Paddy had sent us these corrections to the interview, but they were lost in the maze on my desk. [GWL]

Also, the review of Michael Jerome Browne (p.27) named the record label as "Disc Brothers"; it is in fact "Les Disques BROS," now distributed by Fusion III, 5455, rue Paré, suite 101, Montréal, Québec H4P 1P7.

Finally, the address given for Ingold Records (p.27) is no longer extant; MacCrimmon's Revenge can be reached c/o Korvus Sound Explorations Inc., 22 George Street, Lower Sackville, Nova Scotia B4C 2M7; email <finnigan@ns.sympatico.ca>.



It's been shown quite convincingly that step dancing, along with fiddle music (and the two go very closely together) has survived in Cape Breton while it has been largely lost in Scotland. There were, however, much more complicated dances, Gaelic dances, in Cape Breton, which are not now generally known, but which have been recorded by collectors both here and in Scotland. One such dance I saw demonstrated by a man in the extreme north of the island, By St. Lawrence, was called the "Duck's Reel," and it involved two people hunching down with a broomstick going behind the knees and in from of the elbows, and step dancing across from one another, trying to upset each other at the same time by working a small stick under the shoe of the rival dancer; whoever kept his balance would win.

John Shaw Canada Folk Bulletin 3.3 (May-June 1980)



I can promise you will learn more about how to play music that means something by visiting the scratchy old fiddler down the street than you will by immersing yourself in the new Kevin Burke record, beautiful as it may be. The main reason it is beautiful is [that] Kevin Burke spent a lot of time listening to old players who lived down the street from him who had likewise listened to their neighbours and grandparents when they were young.

Anne Lederman Bulletin 19.3 (September/septembre 1985)