Another important thing I learned from you was that one doesn’t have to be a star in the music industry in order to be an authentic musician. I need to remind myself of that from time to time as a performing folk musician, especially when gigs are scarce. I recall that your prediction for singers is that if one sticks with it for a long time, one will have had a wealth of experiences, met lots of great people, and in the process made a contribution to the local community. Sounds like good results to me.

Many of us performing musicians get out of focus and all mixed up at times because much of our scene is controlled (over-controlled) by artistic directors, producers, and agents of every description. If I had a hammer, I’d gently pound them back into line and reduce their power somewhat. You seem to be one who has transcended the negative aspects of the business and industry aspects of music and who has maintained some semblance of fun, joy, and love of music. I hope all of us musicians can turn, turn, turn towards these virtuous positions in our musical lives.

Also, Pete, many singers owe gratitude to you for illustrating the importance of getting ourselves, the singers, out of the way of songs in order for them to shine and really be heard. It’s more of a mystical skill, but not impossible to develop. Thanks loads for this one, Pete.

Now, this has been a lengthy epistle, and a letter to Eve or Adam would be a lot shorter. But a note to you, a modern creative originator has to be a little longer and of some substance. Besides, I may not have the opportunity to write again.

You’d better face it, Pete, at 80 years old you are now considered one of our elders and prophets in music. You have arrived at this stage in your life because you’ve learned your lessons well from your own elders as you travelled the journey. I suppose that your message is To sing and make music is to live, and to live is to be a responsible human being in a tough and troubled world.

Well, precious friend, my birthday wishes to you include the following: 1) that you will know soon that the last train to Nuremberg has really had its last run—no more war crimes and indeed no more wars, 2) that well may the world go even when you’re not that far away, and 3) that you continue, while frailing the banjo, to keep that thumb popping off the 5th string on the dy beat of bumm-tiddy, bumm-tiddy.... Remember, though, to rest your thumb on the 5th string on the tid beat preceding the dy, so it can really snap when you sound it.

Take it easy but take it,
Barry Luft,
Another Incomplete Folksinger.

Barry Luft's Pete Seeger Song Contest!

You probably noticed a number of the Seeger song titles lurking about in Barry’s open letter to his mentor; we suspect that there were quite a few others that you have not noticed. (I myself was skunked on about three of them, and I got two by sheer guesswork—GWL.) We are offering a copy of Barry’s CD Lean a Little to whoever can locate all of these titles. If we receive more than one correct entry, the winner will be drawn from Barry’s hat on the opening night of the CSTM annual conference in Calgary, October 29. Entries must be received in our Station C post office box by October 25. The winner will be announced in the December Bulletin. The contest is not open to Bulletin editors, Barry Luft, Pete Seeger, or their relations. Good luck!

August 11, 1999: GWL—I’m not sure I do that. I’ll have to pay attention next time I’m practicing. Do you do that?
BL—Sure. You can’t play fast if you don’t.
GWL—I can’t play fast, anyway.
BL—I know. [Laughter]
Pete Seeger is undoubtedly the only non-Canadian performer to receive or merit the degree of attention to which the Bulletin has given him over years. Barry Luft represents hundreds of Canadians (thousands of people globally) who took up music under the influence of the lanky banjoist. We might add that Seeger embodies the nexus of academic, performer, and fan which we hope this publication to be—indeed, Past President Judith Cohen has often spoke of the Society itself as a crossroads where these three approaches to music intersect and fertilize each other. As the son of perhaps the first eminent ethnomusicologist, Charles Seeger, Pete’s interests have always been wide—all the while, he’s remained intensely North American.

We recommend to our readers Jim Capaldi’s fine Pete Seeger Appreciation Page on the internet: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JimCapaldi>. The site includes some really lovely pictures, as well as discographical commentary, and a transcript of Seeger’s courageous testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee on August 18, 1955.

Regular readers of the Bulletin will certainly recognize Barry Luft’s name. His several records have been happily reviewed in these pages, and with fellow Calgarian Jim Dauncey, he interviewed Max Ferguson for our December issue (32.4) last year. Barry was featured in our House Concerts issue (29.2, June 1995), in an article by Richard Scholtz describing the recording of “What’s the Life of a Man?” by a group of Calgarians led by Luft for his subsequent CD, Lean A Little. With Lyn Luft, Barry had previously written an article on house concerts for the Bulletin 20.1 (March 1986). Like Pete Seeger, Barry is a master teacher as well as a fine performer. His illustrious students include Cathy Fink, who credited him as “the man who got me started on banjo” in the notes to Banjo Haiku.

Barry also has a home page: <http://www.nucleus.com/~xpc/music/luft> where you may learn more about his career, availability, and discography.