Calling All Ballad Lovers

Lorne Brown

It was a lobster dinner in Nova Scotia. I was talking with Anita Best and Jamie Morreira. Plates of freshly boiled lobsters were being carried past us, and people were loading up at the salad bar. Anita had just finished giving a workshop at the Storytellers of Canada Conference in Halifax, I was getting ready to host a storytelling concert after dinner, and Jamie and my Ballad Project were preparing for the Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival. Anita said to me, "We ballad singers have got to stick together."

It's one of those observations that linger in the mind. All the rest of that summer and fall I've been thinking about it: "We ballad singers have got to stick together."

As any reader of these pages knows, folk and traditional music is a sub-subspecies of music today. For reasons that I cannot quite fathom, practically every other form of music has huge public acceptance. Boy groups or singers have sports arenas because the initials spell CBC. (But I'm not married to that understatement-whose tunes "serious" composers have swiped for generations. Music that is, almost by definition, the most democratic music in the world. But if traditional folk music is so popular, why are we thinking of a title, Canadian Ballad Circle, because the initials spell CBC. (But I'm not married to that title.)

John Leeder told me I should do it through this bulletin and become a subgroup of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music. (There we are, a subspecies again!) I know nothing of the politics involved, or the procedures, but John and George and Judith are good people, and there is an organization in place. So here goes.

The first step is to get as many ballad lovers as possible together (speaking metaphorically). I use the term ballad lovers because it is more encompassing. Some of us may not sing ballads, but we can still love them. Some of us may be professionals, some of us amateurs—it matters not. If you love the traditional ballad, you qualify!

The next steps are deliberately undefined. (I'm a firm believer in starting something, not waiting around for some auspicious moment.) The direction(s) we take will evolve naturally from all our collective input. I see us acting as a support group, encouraging each other, and spreading the word. If one of us, for example, released a CD of ballads, we could all help promote it. If one of us needed information, someone might be able to help. And somewhere down the road, I see us all coming together for a Canadian Conference of Ballads. But all this is deliberately vague. The first job is to find each other—then we can stick together.

So, ballad lovers, please respond to me. Please spread this word—you probably know some others who might want to join. There are no fees, no contracts, no small print. While this bulletin will be a major way of communicating, there are other ways—email, snail mail, telephones, word of mouth.

Please help me set Lord Bateman free.