

6. FOLKMUSIC APPRECIATION IN BRANT COUNTY

This is the story of an idea - one that really offered little in the way of acceptance when it was first presented, but which, with a little public relations and a little support, like Topsy, grew.

Some of you may be familiar with the Mariposa In The Schools (MITS) project. Very briefly, for some time now, the Mariposa Folk Festival in co-operation with the Toronto Musician's Union has been sending performers into the schools in Toronto and environs to introduce the students to various types of folk music. We were indirectly associated with this programme for a year or two, but because of our not living in Toronto and holding jobs elsewhere, we were never able to actively participate. We therefore decided that we would approach the Brant County Board of Education to see if we could initiate a similar idea in Brant County.

Our first contact was the Supervisor of Music for the County. His response was very positive but we were then passed on up the line to an Area Superintendent. He too liked the idea and as well as speaking to the Director of Education for us, arranged for us to address a principal's meeting from one of the three areas in the County. They, as a group, reacted enthusiastically, and at their next meeting we illustrated - through performance to a class of students - how the idea would work. The project was then given the green light by the administration and our next task was to acquaint

the teachers with the idea, which we did by visiting each school during a staff meeting or a professional development meeting. That all done, the programme got into action in the school year 1973-74, in one area in the County on an "experimental basis". We have not looked back since. The reason I go into all the detail regarding the organizing of the project is to give you an idea what anyone wishing to try the same thing might have to go through.

Our programme differs from the MITS project in that all of our workshops are related to the curriculum that the students are studying. For example, a teacher working on a particular theme - such as The War of 1812, or Colours (to name only two) will call us and ask us to do a workshop on that theme. If it is a large group we prefer to do several small workshops, although we have sung for school assemblies on special days, or when a school was following a particular theme. We hope that the workshop will be used by the teacher either as an introduction to a unit, as a supplement, or as a conclusion. Naturally folk music falls most easily into such subject areas as English and History, but we have done several workshops in other disciplines as well.

We passed our "experimental" year successfully and the next year we were allowed to expand the programme to all areas of Brant County. The response has been most gratifying.

In our first two years we averaged in excess of 30 workshops/year and are well on our way to passing that mark this school year (75-76). The main problem we have faced is making the classroom teacher aware of the project; but as time progresses and the programme is used more, it sells itself.

It has meant a lot of work in learning songs for the various themes (but my how our repertoire has expanded) and a certain amount of inconvenience as we both hold down other jobs, but we are in agreement that it is worth it. One of the very positive features from our point of view is that we have been able to use a lot of Canadian songs in our workshops and we find that more and more teachers are asking for folksongs from Canada. So, if you are interested, why not try our idea in your own area - you never know, it may just go.

Gary & Everill Muir.