

Reviews . . .

The following reviews by CMFS members Jay Rahn and Edith Fowke appeared in the 1977 Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council. They are reprinted here for the interest of the CMFS general membership.

Sandberg, Larry and Dick Weissman, comps., The Folk Music Sourcebook, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976. 40 x and xiv, 260 pp; photographs, music examples, bibliographies, discography.

Scholars and laypersons disagree about the precise meaning of the term "folk" music. For the former, the phrase might imply "oral transmission", for the latter, "pop music with a soft melodic sound and guitar accompaniment (p.255)." It is to the credit of Larry Sandberg and Dick Weissman that they employ both types of definition in their selection of material for this volume.

The Sourcebook might be described as the Whole Earth Catalogue of the Folk Music Revival. In subject matter it is largely restricted to North American music, including indigenous, English-, French-, and Spanish-speaking groups. Also treated are musical traditions of the Caribbean and Britain (especially Ireland).

The compilers have grouped their material into four sections corresponding roughly to discography, bibliography, organology, and institutions. In the discography are listed commercial and rare recordings; in the bibliography scholarly monographs, collections of music, and pedagogical materials. These entries are annotated and supplemented with short passages which describe the traditions, performers, etc. referred to. The organological section treats the selection, maintenance, availability, and performance practice of several traditional instruments. The institutional part lists organizations, periodicals, festivals, archives, etc. devoted to "folk" music. Within the vast area covered by the book, Black music, Anglo-American traditions, the Folk Song Revival, as well as the guitar, banjo and mandolin are treated most fully.

For what was a large undertaking the compilers wisely enlisted the aid of ten specialists, among whom Edith Fowke, Joseph Hickerson and David McAllester should be familiar to readers of the Yearbook. Throughout the work, one feels the steady hands of a dozen experts who are not only judicious in their selection of materials but also enthusiastic about the subject matter. Such an approach has its advantages and drawbacks. For example, some selections appear to have been casually "tossed in". Noteworthy among these are personal reminiscences of guitarist Gary Davis and a snatch of oral history dictated by Jerry Ricks. The prose style is inconsistent and the annotations to books and records vary widely in detail. The latter range from no comment at all through a tantalizing phrase such as "Appalachian songs, many well-known, with banjo accompaniment (p.103)", to an entire paragraph of description and evaluation.

Nevertheless, the compilers' enthusiasm appears on every page. The book could well be recommended to those who have just begun to be excited by the field, or who want to explore North American "folk" music in all its richness. The work would also provide an excellent complement to a standard textbook on North American traditional music such as Nettl and Myers' Introduction to Folk Music of the United States.

Jay Rahn

Taft, Michael, comp., A Regional Discography of Newfoundland and Labrador 1904-1972. Preface by Herbert Halpert, St. John's, Newfoundland: Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive, 1975, 102 pp., illus., indices, paperbound. (Bibliographical and Special Series, No. 1)

As Dr. Halpert points out, this is the first comprehensive regional discography to be compiled for Canada and it is of particular interest because of Newfoundland's unusual musical traditions. Partly because of their geographical isolation Newfoundlanders have preserved a remarkable number of old British folksongs, and have composed an equally remarkable number of local songs set to traditional tunes. However, they have also been influenced by the mainland through songsters, records, sheet music, and radio programmes, and this discography effectively demonstrates the varying relationships between folk music and commercial popular music on the island.

Mr. Taft points out that records were made for two markets: the island and the mainland and this affected the selection of songs. Many of the records mixed folk and popular items, and many show the influence of country music.

The discography contains two parts: the first, "Newfoundlanders on Records," aims to list every record made by native Newfoundlanders, whether commercial or private up to 1972; the second, "Newfoundland Songs Recorded by Non-Newfoundlanders," is less comprehensive, intended as a checklist to indicate which Newfoundland songs have been most popular outside the island. Each citation gives the name of performer or performers, accompaniment, place and date of recording, matrix number, song title, composer where known, label and issue number. The listing is alphabetical by the main performers, and song titles and accompanists are indexed.

Edith Fowke

