

Newfoundland Report



Folk song and musical tradition remain a vital part of life in this province. As is typical and proper with such living traditions, they rarely manifest themselves in public contexts where there are mass audiences. Hence this report deals only with the special situations in which folk song and music have been brought to public attention in a special way.

A record number of folk festivals were held in the province during the summer. All involved a large number of local performers along with a smaller number of performers from other parts of the province who have become well-known and who appear frequently at such events. A few professional musicians active in the province sometimes participate also.

On the weekend of June 28-30 the St. John's Folk Arts Council again organized a Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival at Bannerman Park in St. John's. Good weather prevailed; audiences ranged from sparse to middling.

Two weeks later, the Conception Bay Folk Festival was sponsored by the Conception Bay Folk Arts Council. It featured some of the people who appeared in St. John's along with a number of newly discovered performers. This event was plagued by rain, so that only about half of the scheduled performances took place.

A similar festival, a one-day event sponsored by the Placentia Bay Folk Arts Council, was held in Placentia during July.

The largest festival of the season was presented August 2-3 by Les Terres-Neuviens Français on the Port-au-Port Peninsula of Newfoundland's west coast. Titled "Une Longue Veillée", it consisted entirely of performances by French Newfoundlanders and by

visiting performers from St. Pierre-Miquelon and various parts of Acadie. In addition to singers, there were dancers, instrumentalists, puppeteers and crafts workers.

The final festival of the summer was held over the Labour Day weekend in the Bay of Islands, near Cornerbrook on the west coast. It was successful both in terms of attendance and weather.

All these festivals received support from the Federal and Provincial Governments in various ways. They reflect a growth of activity on the part of the Folk Arts Councils on the local level in this province.

During the past summer a number of people were involved in folksong research in the province. Among the most noteworthy were folklorist Kenneth S. Goldstein of the University of Pennsylvania, who collected folksongs in a number of parts of the island for eventual release on disc; and poet-musician Des Walsh, who received a grant to collect songs written by and information about the Placentia Bay songmaker Peter Leonard.

The St. John's Folk Club met during the 1979-80 season at the Graduate House on Military Road. Because of declining attendance and a feeling that the venue was too specialized, the decision was made to move at the beginning of the 1980-81 season to the Ship Inn, a downtown pub with a lively old-time atmosphere. The move appears to have been a successful one.

- Neil V. Rosenberg



"Ow-oo!"