

Ali's Corner

by Alistair Brown



Folk club activity in this area has pretty well died down for the summer. In London, the Cuckoo's Nest finished its season in early May with a superb concert with Martyn Wyndham Read. Fiddler's Green in Toronto wound up in typical style with a ceilidh dance, featuring Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann. Their dances have been running regularly all winter, and have proven to be an enormous success. While the padlocks may be on the door for a month or two, the regular participants certainly aren't taking it easy. What with festivals taking place in the area, as well as many social (and musical) gatherings that come about as a result of morris and country dancing, there will be no shortage of music and song. There's an interesting point here. Whenever our local morris teams have ventured off to morris ales, or tours with other teams, (the last foray was to Marlboro, Vermont in May) people have always been struck by the large part that singing plays in our apres-dance social activities. Not just one or two stars holding the floor either, but with contributions coming from many people, good singers or not. We've left many's the good chorus behind on some of those jaunts. The reason, of course, is obvious. These morris teams grow out of a couple of folk clubs - the dancers were already regular attenders there, and hold in common a love of folk song, as well as dance. As most American groups arose out of country dance societies, there is no guaranteed group of singers in any one team - one or two, certainly - but not enough to make a party! It works both ways, of course. While many US morris teams envy our ability to throw together an evening of shanties and big ballads at the drop of a bottle top, we look a little wistfully at the ease with which they assemble a scratch band and a caller and hold a very successful and spontaneous country dance.

What is interesting is that neither the Cuckoo's Nest nor Fiddler's Green are folk song circle-type clubs. They are both performance oriented, with a guest artist each week. There are also frequent guest spots and singarounds, and the audience is invited, and encouraged to join in at every opportunity. My point is this. Popular singing as a social activity owes a lot to example as well as to the opportunity to get up and sing. For a folk song circle to do what it is supposed to do - encourage singing for fun as well as recreation, help people select songs appropriate to the occasion, increase repertoire - it should work in conjunction with a club featuring regular guests.

Several interesting publications have come my way recently. One is a list of folk music and dance societies across North America. It is intended to be a periodical, and the editor requests frequent updates. A very useful list for performers, as well as regular travellers looking for an evening's company, it certainly could benefit from some communication from Canadian groups. For the whole of Canada, only 8 organizations are listed, including one folk club and one festival! To get yourself included, and to get a copy, write to:

Sol Weber,
25-14 37 St.,
Astoria, NY 11103

Toronto's Mariposa Mainland is changing its format. Programmer Tim Harrison concedes that the social club atmosphere originally envisioned did not work, and a regular clientele did not build up in the way organizers had hoped. Accordingly they have moved to medium to high profile folk acts, presented on a more flexible bi-monthly basis. Potential customers, watch the entertainment pages.

I recently received a copy of the Rendezvous Newsletter put out by Hey Rube, an organization of performers dedicated to "fostering the growth of traditional performing arts as a trade." Their stated purpose is to reach the public through personal contact in performance, to perpetuate through the artist the public's participation in the folk traditions, and to create and maintain a good working environment through the exchange of information and mutual support. They have some good controversial articles, a good line in trade advertising, and the newsletter is a good medium for keeping performers in touch. For US members, they also organize health and instrument insurance. Write to:

Hey Rube!
PO Box 9693
Minneapolis, MN 55440