

Manitoba

by Gregg and Sheila Brunskill

The absence of a Manitoba review in the past issues of CFMB does not indicate a folk music vacuum in the Keystone Province. It's just that most of us are too busy picking and singing to write about something that is better alive and humming. Our review is biased by the finite circumference of our kitchen table and the limited number of chairs to accommodate various friends who have contributed to this article. Our kitchen table also defines our subject matter: We attach the adjective "folk" to the full spectrum, from traditional tunes and songs to recently-created music, that sounds good sung around the table after supper.

Without trying very hard, we have become aware of a great variety of folk music in Manitoba that is performed by Icelandic, Ukrainian, German, Scandinavian, Polish, Oriental, Jewish, and North American Indian people. *Folklorama* in Winnipeg highlights this culture diversity every summer, and features folk music in many of its pavilions.

The fine singers and players of traditional music living in and around Winnipeg are seldom heard in public performance. The best place to enjoy their magical harmonies is at house parties, but we'd rather not tell you where they are, because they would get too crowded and noisy, and we might run out of beer and food. Next best are the folk clubs, which usually have more room. *The Winnipeg Folk Club* meets the first Sunday of every month. Al Thomson (453-7724) is a nearly-comprehensible Geordie who allows blues, story-telling, and even cowboy songs in his sing-around of largely Irish, Scots and English music. Admission is \$1.00, which also gets you a ticket for the record raffle and free coffee. The music of Chile and other South American countries can be heard at *Al Cafe* (basement, 285 Balmoral St., Wpg) every Friday evening. Other local musicians are also invited in as guest performers. *Sunday Night at the Norwood* operates on a folk-club/pub format, with invited performers, a free stage, and supper included in the \$7.00 admission. Held at the Norwood Hotel, it is organized by the staff of the *Winnipeg Folk Festival* (284-9840). Musicians who have been heard over the past year

include out-of-towners Claudia Schmidt, Cathy Fink, and Steve Cormier & Jeff Cahill, as well as local blues singer Dave McLean, the Hoodoo Men; traditional groups Airs & Graces and Meadowlark, and the Chilean group Retaguardia. Other Winnipeg pubs and hotels occasionally feature folk musicians of local and international fame, and folk music can be heard at weddings, banquets and socials all over the province.

Very close to the nub of folk music is the dance, and the *Royal Scottish Country Dance Society* has an active Winnipeg chapter that sponsors instruction, demonstration performances, and their beautiful Christmas-New Year's Ball. The Society has their own band, *Scotch Measure*. Secretary is Audrey Turley, Box 175 Winnipeg. The *Village Green English Country Dance Society* is a Winnipeg organization led by John Trevenen (489-3743) which meets Wednesday evenings for instruction, and practice for demonstration performances. The *Village Green Morris Men* are a loosely organized group that perform Cotswold and Oxfordshire dances at local festivals, usually with live music. John Trevenen (489-3743) is Squire, and Ian Fillingham is Bagman (475-3684). They meet Saturday mornings in Winnipeg. *Les Danseurs de La Riviere-Rouge* perform French-Canadian dances in our area. Their office (233-7440) is in the Centre Culturel Franco-Manitobain in St Boniface.

Folk Music was brought into regional schools, hospitals, old folks' homes, prisons, and day-care centres by the *Folk Music Outreach Programme*, organized by staff of the *Winnipeg Folk Festival* Office. Two of the Winnipeg folkies they have sponsored are Larry Fisher, a fine traditional singer, harper, and piper, and Len Udow, who has the gift of inspiring children to write and sing their own songs.

If you want a large, high-powered dose of wide-spectrum folk music, the *Winnipeg Folk Festival* has it all. This large-scale festival presented over 120 acts 7-10 July at Birds Hill Park north-east of Winnipeg to celebrate its 10th anniversary. An all-Canadian evening concert included Manitobans Bob King and Elias

Shrutt & Bell, in company with Margaret Christl, Folle Avoine, and the Jarvis Benoit Quartet. Big names on Main Stage (Vassar Clements, David Grisman, Valdy, Red Clay Ramblers, Steve Goodman, John Hartford, Jethro Burns) are made possible with gate attendance around 35,000 and scorchingly beautiful weather. The kitchen table folkies could find their favourite instrument or song tradition being enriched in more than 200 workshops on 10 stages. The scope of the music covered the usual ceilidhs, traditional ballads and instrumentals, as well as blues, country and western, Yiddish, ragtime, South American, vaudeville, jazz, hurdy-gurdy, white African and medieval Celtic and Breton music. Almost as amazing as the music are the 600 volunteers that make this event one of the biggest, smoothest, cleanest and happiest festivals in North America. Prominently featured were a large crafts area, films, a popular programme for children, and interesting food booths. Artistic Director Mitch Podolak Business Manager Bill Merritt, and Associate Director Rosalie Goldstein are the hard-core office staff for the *Winnipeg Folk Festival* (284-9840), and they put out an excellent 51-page programme booklet that includes biographical information on the musicians and craftspeople, discographies, recipes, photos, and some useful advertising. *The Folk Festival Book* (by Steve Johnson and Sheldon Oberman, photos by David Landy, Turnstone Press, Winnipeg) gives a taste of the history of the Festival. To the critics of this slick, show-biz, 12-metre-high-speaker-tower style of a folk festival: come and listen; it is possible to find an almost front-porch-session atmosphere with both obscure and well-known musicians.

At the opposite extreme of the folk festival philosophy are Steve Jackson (828-3471), Francine Adelman (248-2362) and Jack Cram, who are responsible for the elusive *Pumpkin Creek Festival*. This refreshingly small-scaled event was all acoustic, and drew about 700 people to hear 2 afternoon shows featuring Al Simmons and his travelling Chataqua show, Darcy Dea-ville, Jim Donahue, Roldo, Bobby Star, Southern Stage, and others. This year the event was held near the



Snow Valley ski resort west of Roseisle.

Numerous other festivals were held across the province. The *Thompson Folk Festival* on 18 June featured Heather Bishop, Bob King, Charlie Maguire, Don Freed and others. Phantom Lake was the site of the 4th annual *Flin Flon/Creighton Folk Festival* 30 July. Performers included Ken Hamm, Holly Arntzen, Crooked Creek, Run River Run (from Leaf Rapids) and locals Chuck Stenstard and John LeClair. A crafts display and children's area were part of the festival. Contact person is Deb Quickfall (687-3756). The *Call of the Wild Mountain Music Festival* was a bluegrass event featuring Whiskey Jack, The Dixie Flyers, Double Eagle Band, Bucke's Stove and Range Co., and others. (Contact Louis Kaselitz, San Clara, Manitoba) The *Plum Creek Jamboree* was held 17 July in Souris with bluegrass and country-flavoured music (Rick Neufeld, Double Eagle Band, Harvey Henry Band, and others). Many town fairs, rodeos, and celebrations featured folk musicians amongst country, pop, and rock music. Fiddle contests are numerous in Manitoba, with well-known events in Miami (around Thanksgiving weekend; contact Winston Simpson),

Emerson, and the University of Manitoba. *Festival du Voyageur* in St Boniface in February was host to Pierre Guerin, Eritage, and a south-of-the-border Cajun group. The *Winnipeg International Children's Festival Inc* held its first annual festival in Assiniboine Park 26-29 May. Some 26,000 children who swarmed over the site were entertained for free by roving musicians, games, a hands-on-crafts area, story-tellers, and a free stage which showcased such artists as Jim Donahue, Bob King, Karen Howee, Len Udow, Utah Phillips, and Gumboot Lollipop. Admission to tents on the site was by ticket only (\$3.50); here were concerts by Bob Schneider, Heather Bishop, Fred Penner, Eric Nagler, Pierre Germaine, and Valdy, among others: Success of the Festival exceeded all expectations, and spokesman Gord Oslund (475-3336) says plans are well underway for a 5-day event in May 1984. Gord was also part of *Summer is for Kids: A Children's Chatauqua*. This show, directed by Al Simmons, travelled throughout Manitoba, playing to an estimated 19,000 children, in towns from Churchill to Melita.

Folk musicians are presented in concert by several

organizations. *The Southern Manitoba Folk Music Society* is run by Bob Crossman (822-5804); he featured mostly out-of-province acts in a September to March series, in Morden, including Red Clay Ramblers, Valdy, the late Stan Rogers, Barde, and Manitoba's Heather Bishop. *The Tiger Hills Arts Association* held a summer folk concert series, with Loreena McKennitt, Folle Avoine, Shirley Eckhart, Jim Post and Bob Carpenter. Contact Beverly Murray, Holland Manitoba for details. Winnipeg entrepreneur Dick Finkel (475-1742) organized a city-province-funded summer concert series on Portage Avenue called *Encore 83*, which presented folk music as well as jazz, rock and ethnic music. The *Winnipeg Folk Festival* office ran a September-May concert series, bringing in such groups as the Red Clay Ramblers, Barde, Queen Ida and the Bon Temps Zydeco band, as well as the late Stan Rogers, prairie lady Connie Kaldor, Bryan Bowens, and Raffi.

If you can't find live music, records and the radio help a little. Two well-known Manitobans released new albums in the past year. Winnipegger Fred Penner is heard on his 3rd children's album, *Special Delivery*, by Troubadour Records. *I Love Women* is the title of the latest from Heather Bishop of Woodmore, on her own Mother-of-Pearl label. Folk music is played on Bob Crossman's *Picking with a Friend* on CISV (Morden-Winkler) 8-9 pm Wednesdays. This station also presents the *Old Time Saturday Night Barn Dance* (7-12 pm Saturdays) which plays some fiddle tunes and bluegrass amongst the country and pop singers. *Winston Simpsons Old Time Jamboree* on CFAM (Wednesday, 10:30 pm) features Don Messer-style fiddling and the occasional stringband or Irish/Scotts fiddlers. Despite its name, the programme *Bluegrass Express* on CKDM (radio 630) from Dauphin plays much Celtic and other folk music, Wednesday evenings, from 10-11:00.

For those who wish to learn more about the origins of folk music, Kay Stone teaches an introductory course called *Folklore Mythology in Canada* at the University of Winnipeg. Local singers are often invited

into the classroom to participate in sessions on ballads and folk songs.

Homemade Music is a small shop at 218 Osborne St in Winnipeg (284-5150) managed by Ernie Miciak, who carries most of the supplies we need. A wide assortment of local, North American, and imported records of folk music, as well as strings, picks, capos, instruments, books, tickets for concerts, and gossip is available. Mail-order enquiries are welcome. Acoustic instrument repairs are done by John Weier (474-0000), a Winnipeg luthier, and the shop keeps a stable of teachers who give lessons on most folk instruments.

To summarize, may we say how pleased we are to be able to fill in the prairie pothole that has existed in CFMB. There *is* life in Manitoba after the Winnipeg Folk Festival! We were amazed at how much folkie activity we were able to amass once we started digging, and we know this compilation is not yet complete. Unfortunately, those who administer folk music programmes in the province struggle for recognition of folk music as an art form that is as equally deserving of government and public financial support as other cultural institutions such as the symphony and ballet.

We must also echo a plaint heard often around our kitchen table: there are a fair number of well-paid jobs for well-known, commercial performers from other provinces, and even other countries. But the many excellent local performers have to scramble for relatively few, obscure, poorly-paid gigs. While we enjoy hearing the famous and the exotic as a special treat, we wish there were more steady opportunities for local musicians to perform.

Folk music is performed by young and old in Manitoba, and there is an increasingly intelligent and receptive audience wanting to learn about their own music. Folk music *is* alive and well in Manitoba.

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