

Folk Music and Education: 1983

by Lois Choksy

The past year has been a very encouraging one to those of us dedicated to the principle that Canadian children should be taught music first through Canadian folk music. Across Canada there is evidence of every increasing interest in making what is, after all, a national heritage, the property of children.

In my work I have opportunity to address groups of music teachers in most provinces each year. Four years ago I found that the *only* Canadian folk song I could expect audiences to be able to sing without music and text in front of them was "Land of the Silverbirch," and more than a few were insecure with the words of even that. In contrast, this past Fall, I found teachers in various parts of Canada were beginning to know a common core of Canadian songs: "I Gave My Love An Apple", "Un Canadien Errant," "Lukey's Boat" (several variants), "I's The B'y", "Peter Emberly", "Blood On The Saddle" - songs representing East and West, French and English; these are becoming familiar to more and more teachers and, through them, to more and more children. I believe that this very positive development is largely due to the continuing spread of the Kodaly concept in Canada with its concomitant emphasis on the use of quality Canadian folk material.

On a brief tour from West to East let us see what is happening in and around the schools.

On Vancouver Island, in the town of Nanaimo, is one of the oldest Kodaly programmes in Canada, under the direction of Alistair Hight. The core of songs used in those schools and in other schools in Victoria and the southern end of the island includes an increasing number of Canadian ones. There has been a concerted effort to find and incorporate such material in teaching here.

On the mainland the school districts at Langley, at Prince George, at Kamloops have instituted similar programmes. In Vancouver, Yurgen Ilaender received a Canada Council grant to do research on children's spontaneous playground singing games, chants and rhymes. The volume resulting from his study could

well be of great use to teachers in that area.

In Alberta 1983 marked the graduation of the first students in the Kodaly Diploma Programme at The University of Calgary. Twenty-one teachers from five provinces have completed three Summers of folk music study with Tim Rogers and Edith Fowke; these teachers will be rich resources to the school districts in which they teach. Dr. Rogers has also instituted a course in folklore, available during the Fall and Winter terms at the University.

The continuing Kodaly project in the Calgary Catholic Schools, the new provincial French-language Kodaly curriculum being developed under the direction of Sr. Therese Potvin at La Faculte de St. Jean in Edmonton, and Kodaly-based teaching on-going in numerous small towns of Alberta ensure that children in that province will have a familiarity with Canadian folk song they would not have had only a few years ago.

One hundred and twenty teachers took the Summer folk music course offered at The University of Calgary by Tim Rogers in July 1983. Guest speakers included folk performer Barry Luft and folk music collector Phil Thomas. The newly-issued record album by Rogers and Luft: *Songs of the Iron Trail* [Sefel Records, SEF83IT01] has been used in numerous Canadian classrooms this Fall.

In the Master of Music degree programme at this same university two students are engaged in folk music related theses: Luisa Izzo on Hispanic folk song in North America and Sharyn Favreau on an analysis for teaching purposes of the French-Canadian collections of Marius Barbeau.

At Brandon University in Manitoba a similar programme for folk music centered teacher training is in place.

The Western Ontario branch of the Kodaly Institute of Canada commissioned a composition by Canadian composer Nancy Telfer, based on Canadian children's folk songs and to be performed by children. The work, *Child's Play*, was performed at a provincial confer-

ence in the Fall of 1982 and is expected to be published in the coming months. It will be a welcome alternative to the American-produced American-oriented performance programme materials so often used in Canadian schools.

It was from Ontario also that the newest song text series MUSICANADA (Holt, Reinhardt and Winston) emerged for use in schools in 1983. With a name like that I had expected that the series would contain a significant number of Canadian folk songs. Unfortunately such is not the case. These books, which will surely be widely used in the schools, contain three times as many American folk songs as Canadian, and an even greater number of contrived songs - "Canadianish" rather than Canadian. The series is an opportunity lost; the more to be regretted because it will no doubt be in Canadian classrooms for many years to come.

New from Ontario, but of far better quality, is the third book in a series of choral arrangements of Canadian folk songs for children. The series was produced under a grant by the McLean Foundation, Toronto, Ontario. This third book: *In the Moon of Winter Time* has been authored by Jean Anderson, Kenneth Bray and Nancy Telfer.

It is, of course, in Ontario that Edith Fowke holds forth - at York University - for those fortunate enough to study folklore there with her. The school system with an exemplary Kodaly and Canadian folk song based curriculum in Ontario is at Middlesex County, under the able guidance of John Barron, while the University of Western Ontario continues to train teachers to enter this and other Kodaly-based systems.

In Quebec the outstanding work of Gabrielle Letourneau and Miklos Takacs with children and at the university level must be mentioned. Their beautiful album: *Au Jardin de Mon Pere*, while not new, is nevertheless a rich sampler of French-Canadian children's songs, performed by children.

Moving on eastward we come to the oldest and one of the best Kodaly programmes in North America in

the Halifax (Nova Scotia) schools, under the direction of Kaye Pottie. Here, in a long-established curriculum and in cooperation with the teacher-training programme at Dalhousie University, Canadian folk music constitutes a large part of the musical material used in the schools.

Finally, there is Newfoundland. It was in Newfoundland in 1983 that I found what I hope to find one day in every province of Canada. At a province-wide meeting of more than 300 music teachers I discovered that I had only to sing the first line of any Canadian folk song to have it picked up and lustily carried forward, often with verses I didn't even know. It is surely in Newfoundland that the tradition of folk song in Canada is most alive and well; and it is not too surprising to find that it is in Newfoundland that the first *provincial* curriculum is being written which is truly dedicated to the Kodaly philosophy and is based on Canadian folk music.

Amid all this renewed folk song consciousness and activity in the schools from coast to coast I do find myself with one concern. Those of us who *teach* music are first and foremost musicians, usually classically trained. We have not generally acquired our folk songs in oral tradition, or even from radio, television and record. We have acquired them from the printed page. I believe that *before* we teach a song we have learned from a printed page we should ascertain whether the children we are teaching already know the same song in some other form. If they *do*, it is *their* version we should be using, not one we learned from a book.

We have come in the last few years to recognize the value of Canadian folk songs in education. We must now begin to discover and value the *differences* in the same song that may occur from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia or even from one area to another within the same province. If we do not do so we may accidentally wipe out the interesting regional variations that are part and parcel of any live folk tradition. I would sincerely hope that as an accidental by-product of all our work we do not end up with an "homogenized" Canadian folk music.