

## The EthnoFolk Letters

Madrid, September 20, 1993

Dear CSMT/SCTM readers;

Well, it's certainly unusual to find myself in Spain twice in two months. No complaints, though. The first time was on my way to Israel for a Canada Council research trip, and during the prolonged stop-over my daughter, Tamar, and I gave a concert at a small folk-club in Madrid. At the end, a woman asked me whether I knew a certain Marcos F. Yes, I did, though not very well, and hadn't seen him in years; he was an amateur Galician (Spanish province just north of Portugal) bag-piper I'd met years before. "Well," said this new acquaintance, "he's my brother and you were in my house in Vigo hitch-hiking with a Catalan 20 years ago, except I wasn't there." I replied intelligently, "?????" Melisa went on, "And since you said tonight that you were Canadian, and my brother had told me about this Canadian woman 20 years ago who liked songs from different countries, I thought maybe you were the same Canadian."

And the "same Canadian" I was, or am. Melisa asked whether I could do a whole programme of Gallego traditional songs as well as the 12th- and 13th-century GalaŃco-Portuguese cantigas, which just happen to be among my marginal, but at times useful, specialties. Since it was a holy year in Santiago (St. James/St Jacques) de Compostela, she went on, if I happened to be in Spain again, she could arrange a concert. As it happened, York U. had just agreed to pay for my trip to speak at the European Seminar in Ethnomusicology in Barcelona, September — so here I am, heading for home after 10 heady days of conference and concerts, academia and performance, intellectual curiosity and nostalgia.

I was the only Canadian at the ESEM, a brain-child of the late John Blacking. Participants came from all over Europe, though several from the former Soviet Union couldn't make it, despite the Catalan government's generous sponsorship. Besides the intellectual stimulation of the presentations (given in several languages, with some simultaneous translation available), there was a good deal of public and private discussion about our responsibility as ethnomusicologists toward the people whose music gives us our careers. A Croatian ethnomusicologist working in Zagreb spoke eloquently of the interpenetration of Serbian and Croatian music cultures; a few hours after his paper, Zagreb, and his mother's village, were bombed. A very young English woman showed us slides of physically maimed Cambodian villagers she is working with, teaching them music on a volunteer basis. One of our Russian colleagues, during a particularly plentiful dinner, put down his fork and wondered aloud what his wife would be eating that moment. All this and more raised soul-searching questions that seriously competed with sessions on "quantum ethnomusicology", evening festivities featuring Catalan street music and dance traditions and even our very late night informal music-making sessions. Perhaps we could take up similar questions, seriously, here in CSMT/SCTM.

This is a long letter, but it was a complicated, though short, trip. After the conference, I gave a concert of Sephardic and medieval Catalan songs sponsored by Carrutxa, a hard-working group of folklorists/ethnomusicologists/performers in the Catalan town of Reus. Said good-bye to my Barcelona friends (the same ones I'd hitch-hiked to Melisa's house with 20 years ago!) and caught the plane across the country to Vigo — from sea to sea, in this case Mediterranean to Atlantic.

Among the many delights of these two enchanting days was the experience of singing the Martim Codax songs in Vigo. These are a little set of 7 songs by this 12th-century troubadour, surviving in one manuscript only, in the voice of a little girl, and with the pervasive rhyme Vigo/amigo (friend), and the "mar de Vigo", or "sea of Vigo", in each poem. I learned this repertoire a few years after that first unplanned stay in Vigo, and to return two decades later, stay in the house on the "mar de Vigo" and sing the songs to a

Vigo audience was deeply moving. A reunion with "Mimi", now a leading Gallego traditional singer, who back in 1973, together with his father, taught me several Gallego village songs at their kitchen table in the walled town of Lugo. Encounters with a group of women reviving a traditional village singing style with a tambourine and square drum ("pandeiro"); a trip to the instrument building workshop, twilight in the cathedral square of St. James of Compostela, whose medieval songs I've performed so often here in Canada.

And now, home. Two days running around Madrid, seeing friends, meeting with the 2-person shoestring company that produces my cassettes and dashes quixotically about Spain with a mobile studio, producing beautiful, low-budget albums of village traditions that will never make them rich.... Tomorrow morning, back to Canada, to the beginning of another academic (and Jewish calendar) year, uplifted by the past 10 days, musing as always on the scholar/performer connection, wondering as always where home really is — but, most of all, still deeply preoccupied by the non-academic questions that came up — and went down again — at the ESEM.

As always, I await your responses and ideas! Happy (Jewish) New Year!