

## Reviews/Comptes-rendus

### Concerts/Festivals

#### A Taste of the Maritimes

The first chill of Fall is upon us as the goldenrod silently sneak into the hues of pink and purple lupins that dot the New Brunswick highways. Memories of summer folk festivals are rapidly becoming the kindling upon which I will fuel my imagination through the endless Canadian winter that lies ahead.

Up until two short years ago, New Brunswick had no venue in which to showcase its regional performers and their diverse musical talents. Enter Brent Mason, a self-proclaimed neo-folk artist whose dreams became a vision he felt compelled to follow. And follow it he did to Poley Mountain outside of Sussex, New Brunswick. In the winter this is a ski resort, but in July for 14 hours it is transformed into a natural amphitheatre where quite literally the hills are alive with the sound of music and laughter.

The first year of the Festival was a learning experience for all concerned and was not without its share of tribulations as well as of triumphs. Spurred on by a desire to bring good music to the masses, the second Poley Mountain Festival preparations began in earnest as soon as the first one ended. The attendance record tripled this year, due largely to the greater variety of musical talent, word of mouth, and the promise of a national folk performer being brought in as headliner.

The festival is a one day extravaganza, offering many sorts of folk music, including country blues, medieval rock performed by Hemlock (for children of the Sixties, this group provides a real flashback), and traditional Celtic. The advance publicity billed the event as music "from noon till the cows come home," and the festival surely delivered, as the last band exited stage right at around 4:00 AM, and we all reluctantly headed for our tents. I remember drifting off to sleep to the sounds of a lone acoustic guitar and its master trying in vain to duplicate the alternate tuning techniques so effortlessly rendered by Garnet Rogers earlier in the evening.

Garnet Rogers is a well loved and respected artist, and we tend to think of him as one of our own. To no one's amazement, he stole the show. He is a superb craftsman,

passionate storyteller, and one of the most approachable entertainers in his musical genre. He sang soulfully, brought the crowd to his feet and then mingled with the masses and entertained us with his stories. Garnet says Maritimers are the only people he's met who "have a black belt in Party."

We do know how to have a good time. It always involves great music, good friends, both old and new, and of course, some form of liquid refreshment.

There were fourteen acts amid the wilderness setting of Poley Mountain. A number of the bands and individuals that took the stage are on the verge of releasing their first and nailbitingly important CD. They offered up some of the best original music that I have heard in a long time. Keep your ear tuned to public radio to hear the soon-to-be released blend of flawless acoustic harmonies of a group of three young men called Madabo. Gowan Brae, a Halifax group, satisfied the traditionalists in the audience with a very spirited Celtic set. This is a group with great potential. Brent Mason, the festival organizer, offered the audience selections from his previously released CD and his forthcoming one. Brent is a local celebrity. He offers folk music for the thinking man. It blends a number of musical influences and lyrically has a haunting quality that will draw you back to listen to it again and again.

This festival is not just about the music. It was about the ambiance and atmosphere. It was about the crafts and the food and the beer. It was about laughter and the sounds of a thousand or more voices singing together, both on and off key. It was about friendship, camaraderie, and a communal feeling that can only be attained when like musical minds join together.

So, for those of you who are saturated by the often polished and overproduced recorded efforts of many of our contemporary music makers and crave the spontaneity and passion that can only be achieved in a live performance, come on down to Poley Mountain, Sussex, New Brunswick. Some of us wandering souls need the music to inspire other aspects of our lives. We gather on the Mountain the first Saturday in July, and we sure would welcome your company.

—Sheree Gillcrist  
Hampton, New Brunswick



*One of the dances, during the 1930s, at Apremont School, that I remember particularly well, was the night I lost my mother's three-setting gold ring. As I was dancing, I noticed that I had lost a stone from the ring, so as soon as that dance was finished, I ran to the cloakroom to put it in my purse, for fear another stone would loosen. The purse was hanging on a hook among the coats, so I quickly opened the zipper on the side, hastily put the ring in, closed the zipper, and hurried out of the cloakroom, so as not to miss the next dance. (It would have been terrible to miss a dance!) I continued dancing, without a care in the world, for the rest of the night. The next day I thought of the ring and went to get it out of my purse. I opened the side zipper, but there was no ring! I frantically looked through my whole purse, thinking maybe it had slid through the lining—but to no avail.*

*Thinking of it now, I wonder if, in my haste not to miss a single dance, that either I missed the opening in my purse, and the ring fell among the coats, and maybe onto the floor, or I slipped the ring into someone else's purse, similar to mine, that was also hanging on a hook in the cloakroom. This being the case, someone would be bewildered the next day, too, as to how this lovely gold ring miraculously got into her purse. I wonder who?*

## Sephardic & Yiddish Folk Songs



Photo by GWL

Judith Cohen may have been a little nervous about chairing her first Annual General Meeting as President of the Society for Musical Traditions. But she was not the least bit jittery before her Calgary concert, which was held at the Calgary Jewish Centre on June 2. Judith knows that she can delight and enchant an audience with her spirited renditions of traditional Sephardic and Yiddish songs, accompanied by her own playing of the oud, tambourine, derbukka, and recorder. And delight us she did. With Judith's skillful on-the-spot teaching, the entire audience was singing along to songs from Turkey, Morocco, and Eastern Europe. Mixing cultures in her Turkish-Greco-Ladino-Klezmer Uskudara Suite, Judith spread the message of world unity and vibrant multiculturalism that seems to guide her own life. A fitting finale to the concert was the sing-along tune "Ale Brides," translated by Judith as "And we all are sisters, brothers; we are family to each other, old and young."

—Nomi Kaston  
Calgary, Alberta

### Books

Peter Goodchild, ed. *Raven Tales: Traditional Stories of Native Peoples*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1991. 202 pages. ISBN 1-555652-101-4.

McCarthy, William B., ed. *Jack In Two Worlds: Contemporary North American Tales And Their Tellers*. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1994. 0-8078-4443-8.

A rather well known English folksinger, now residing in the US, was once asked to define the meaning of tradition. His answer went something like this: Well, to put it in its simplest terms, it is an attitude or process, which, if it did not exist, would feel wrong. As the late Richard Dorson, eminent folklorist, once mused, often traditions survive in spite of, and not because of, the world around them. In this regard, two books recently published may illustrate this concept as well as anything of which one might conceive. In their own illustrative manner, they show the hardiness, strength, and endurance of traditions even in a fast paced, often uncertain, world of high technology, changing life styles, and an often uncertain belief as to whether age-old beliefs have any legitimate place in modern society. It is a bit more than coincidence that both of these excellent volumes deal with traditions which exist, in their strongest elements, in the general geographic area of North America, although in the

case of the Raven beliefs, they exist just as strongly in eastern Siberia, and in the case of the Jack Tale, it is still prominent in certain areas of Scotland, especially some members of the Traveller folk.

In Scotland there is a tradition that any person who possesses knowledge of the Raven will be gifted with supernatural and otherworldly powers. In the Hebrides it is believed that if a man drinks from a raven's skull he will have the ability to discover long hidden corpses. In Brittany it is believed that for one to see a raven, either at a crossroads or upon a rooftop, three nights in a row, is a harbinger of approaching death and tragedy. In countries as widely separated as Wales and Austria, Finland and Serbia, it is as unlucky to kill a raven as it was considered a sign of ill omen to kill a swan in Ireland or a crow among certain American plains groups. Beliefs and traditions about the power of the raven can be traced far back into history and even beyond. In

classical Greco-Roman mythology, the god Apollo had many animal symbols as part of his worship, chief among these being the raven. In Norse legend, Odin, chief of the deities of Valhalla, possessed two great ravens, Hugin and Munin, Thought and Memory, who sat upon his shoulders and would fly about the world each day and bring him important tidings before breakfast. Similar beliefs about the raven can be found from northern Spain, Malaya, and Viet Nam to the Arabian Peninsula and from ancient Australia to the Baltic countries, Scandinavia, and the British Isles.

Nowhere, however, is this tradition more pronounced and prevalent than in the legends, myths, and traditions of the native peoples of North America and eastern Siberia. It is this most intriguing set of beliefs and traditions with which Toronto-based writer and naturalist Peter Goodchild deals in *Raven Tales: Traditional Stories of Native Peoples*. Goodchild's knowledge and researches into the lore and legends of Native Peoples is quite extensive and this comes to the fore in this excellent survey of myths and tales involving the figure of Raven, found all the way from the Pacific Northwest coast of the US and Canada to eastern Siberia. Goodchild's survey commences with the Tlingit of southern Alaska, proceeds east to the shores of Hudson's Bay, south into the continental US, and finally west across the Bering Sea to the myriad peoples of eastern Siberia. Goodchild begins his survey among the Tlingit, since they possess the largest body of Raven tales yet collected; of 45 chief tales, the Tlingit count 37 in their narrative cycle. From the Tlingit, Goodchild then proceeds to discuss tales collected among such other groups as the Haida of British Columbia, and such related peoples as the Kwakiutl, Tsimshian, Nootka, and various Inuit and Aleut peoples ranging to Hudson's Bay and southward as far as the northern California coastline. Travelling west, Goodchild finally analyzes tales found among such Siberian groups as the Chukchee, Koriak, Samoyed, Yakut, and Kamchadal and how the tales of these people compare with their North American cousins. In further chapters, raven beliefs from the Old World are discussed, the role of raven tales among shamanistic cults, and the overall theory of the origin of these tales.

Two principal types of tales are retold and discussed. In the first group, numbering thirteen chief stories, Raven plays the role of culture hero-transformer, but not necessarily creator, helping to shape the world as we know it today, ordering the affairs of birds and animals, bringing order to the cosmos, and being instrumental in the origin of everything from human beings and death to tides, fog, salmon, and even the very color of many birds and forest creatures. Raven is instrumental in bringing fire and light to the world, and the people owe their very existence to this culture hero. In the second group of tales, Raven is a typical trickster figure, stooping to play the role of seducer, thief, buffoon, and dupe, tricking one and all alike, friends and foes, standing alone against all order and discipline. Raven steals food, gains wealth, seeks lodging, and satisfies sexual gratification at the expense of anyone within reach. He makes war upon the South Wind, Thunderbirds, and even the Underworld itself; he kills

such travelling companions as salmon, whale, and deer and even turns himself into a woman to satiate his sexual lust.

Many of these tales have wandered far afield, and Goodchild ably demonstrates their far travels by pointing out similar traditions among such farflung peoples as the Cherokee of the southern US; the Blackfoot of the mountain west, and the Apache of the southwestern deserts. Perhaps the most dominant feature of this excellent survey is the continuing contrast of Raven's two dominant roles: from cosmic transformer to duplicitous trickster, from lord of creation to the king of cheats and dupes. As Goodchild points out, these tales have been told and retold for centuries, and they survive even into the modern world because Raven is such a linchpin of the traditional values and belief systems of First Nations people.

A tradition of a different sort still exists today in the southern mountains of the US, a tradition which has also come down to us, generation upon generation, from much older European and Anglo-Celtic heritages. This is the tradition of the Jack Tale, perhaps the closest example in America of the narrative known under the general category of Wonder Tale or *Märchen*, the variety of tale best exemplified by the stories collected two centuries ago by the Grimm Brothers in Germany. Often highly structured and formulaic in nature, these tales came across the Atlantic with the first European settlers in the US and found a home in the remote mountains, hills, and hollows of the Appalachians and stayed there until they were first collected three quarters of a century ago. The folklorist Richard Chase first brought these tales to the public in his 1943 collection, and even though some of his work was flawed in certain areas, it was nevertheless an important scholarly stepping stone in this field of endeavour. Principally recorded in the area around Beech Mountain, North Carolina, Jack Tales were a tradition held sacred by several old families in that part of the country. With the 1994 publication of *Jack In Two Worlds: Contemporary North American Tales And Their Tellers*, the world of the Jack Tale comes alive in all its magic, imagery, and scholarship. To put it simply, this book is about a fellow named Jack, the cycle of tales in which he is the chief protagonist, the tellers of those wondrous narratives, and the folklorists and other academics who have collected, analyzed, transcribed, and disseminated these narratives since the early 1920s. From Isabel Gordon Carter to Richard Chase and Leonard Roberts, from Charles Perdue to Joseph Sobol, these tales have been told and cherished by storytellers, past and present: from Council Harmon, Marshall Ward, and Frank Profitt to Ray Hicks, Jackie Torrence, Donald Davis, and Elizabeth Ellis, both before and during the ongoing storytelling revival in America since the early 1970s.

In these tales, Jack is always the youngest of three sons, as is Ti-Jean in Quebec, Kelloglan in Turkey, and Per in Norway. He manages to outwit giants and other supernatural adversaries, win a wife, often but not always a king's daughter, or win his weight in gold after besting a king in verbal duels of skill and wit, and always gets the better of his two older and often nasty brothers. In this latest and by far most excellent example of Jack Tale scholarship to date, eight traditional tales are included side by side with ten informative

and brilliant essays to create a wondrous mosaic of a traditional world of magic, wonder, and enduring verbal poetry. Some of the tales are here printed for the first time; others are transcribed in original versions, which were often much more sexually explicit and violent than the more prettified versions Richard Chase included in his 1943 collection. The book is divided into two sections. The first deals with the tales and tellers from the perspective of their generation-old home on Beech Mountain, while the second section deals with Jack Tales which have wandered far afield since the storytelling revival began: wandering to such diverse places as eastern Kentucky, northern Pennsylvania, and even to rural Ontario. Of the tales included, personal favorites are Jack and the Three Feathers, told by the late Stewart Cameron of Sudbury, Ontario, Hardy Hard-ass, told by Beech Mountain's master raconteur, Ray Hicks, and Ragcliff, Jagcliff, Tetarliff Poll, retold by Leonard Roberts of Kentucky. Several

of the accompanying essays deserve mention, including Winnipeg storyteller and folklorist Kay Stone's piece on Stewart Cameron and what happened to Jack up in Toronto, W.F.H. Nicholaisen's excellent historical analysis of Jack Tales in the current storytelling revival and how modern tellers have shaped Jack Tales to their own performance styles. If this volume is any example, Jack Tales are very much alive and well.

Each of these two books demonstrates that good traditions die hard. Raven lives and thrives in the Pacific Northwest, interior Canada, and eastern Siberia, and his tales are still eagerly told and enjoyed by peoples from California to Siberia. Jack Tales are told, not only in traditional settings as in generations past, but far removed from their traditional home base. Both Raven and Jack will continue to live as long as people revere and cherish them. So may it always be with the best of stories.

—Robert Rodriguez  
New York City

## Recordings

Bandaline. Bandaline. 149, rue La Vérenedrye, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2H 0B5

I was delighted to discover that there are Franco-Manitobans performing traditional music. Judging by the liner notes, Bandaline is not the only group of its kind in Manitoba—evidence perhaps that there is a healthy, culturally vibrant Franco-Manitoban community to support these groups.

This cassette contains fourteen selections of mostly traditional music. The songs and liner notes are all in French, and the tunes are mostly French-Canadian along with a few Scottish and "Down East" tunes. There are some chestnuts such as "À la claire fontaine" and an instrumental version of "The Skye Boat Song" as well as some composed songs.

I am particularly fond of French-Canadian traditional music and was looking forward to hearing the tape. Unfortunately I was disappointed in it. It didn't move me or energize me the way this type of music usually does. Traditional music is generally sung and played by one person or small groups. The story and impact of a song are very direct.

In the tunes the voice of each instrument is heard clearly. Bandaline is an ensemble of nine people playing together, and with double tracking some of the selections have up to fourteen instruments playing at the same time. The result is muddy. Gone is the directness, clarity, and openness that to me is central to traditional music. What you hear is a "broad band" musical sound within which is hidden the melody.

As I listened, I asked myself, "Does this mean it's impossible to present traditional music orchestrally? This in essence is what this tape does. Don't I listen to Vaughan Williams?" The difference is that Vaughan Williams's orchestrations shed new light on the traditional tunes. His music surprises you. Bandaline's arrangements are very clean and precise—there are obviously some very skilled musicians in the group—but there are no surprises. It does not succeed as orchestral music and it has lost the immediacy and "voice" of traditional music. Who is it for?

—Rika Ruebsaat  
Vancouver, BC

Bob Bossin. Gabriola V0R1X0. Nick 007. Distributed by Festival Distribution.

It's hard to believe that before he entered the studio to make this album, Bob Bossin had not recorded for fifteen years. Speaking for myself, Bossin (and Stringband, his varying partners in music since the early 70s) has never lost his place in Canadian music or my own attention. Songs like "Daddy Was A Ballplayer," "Dief Will Be The Chief Again," "Newfoundlanders," and, yes!, "Show Us The Length" don't go out of style. As before. Bossin has gone to the musical

community of Canada for help—both as sidemen and as a financial source—and has offered a digital updating of his music and activities.

The set gets opens vigorously—no, angrily!—with "Sulphur Passage," a musical declaration inspired by a sign erected at Clayoquot Sound during one of the many demonstrations there: "No pasaran!" Bossin's anger at the despoilers of the environment is as palpable as his delight at

the multilayered history of the song's refrain, which came from the Spanish Civil War: "They shall not pass!" In the best star-along style of recent years, Bossin is joined for this cut by Ann Mortifee, Valdy, Veda Hille, Rick Scott, Raffi, Stephen Fearing, Jennifer West, and Roy Forbes, all of whom sing their guts out, even if some of them are short a name or two.

Bossin's capacity for delight fairly puts the lie to those who like to claim that political commitment spells tedium in song or boredom in private life. As an "old hippie," as he calls himself in "Ya Wanna Marry Me?," he knows that politics and life can't be truly separated, and shouldn't be. During the 80s, he used the subterfuge of Dr. Bossin's Medicine Show, nominally peddling his bottled "Bossin's Home Remedy for Nuclear War," but, of course scoring esthetic points against the nuclear escalation of the time, whose effects may yet be fully felt, though the Cold War has been declared over. Bossin's whimsical slogan for that show could serve as the epigraph for all of his work: "Just 'cause you're saving the world it don't mean you have to have a bad time." (Yippie!)

Consider the first verse of what is probably my favorite song on the disc, "Madelyn's Lullabye," presented in a rag-time arrangement, but which could happily be sung *a cappella* to sack out one's own anklebiter:

If your Dad was a millionaire,  
You'd have a diaper service,  
A bunny and a Barbie and a nanny to care  
And comfort you when you're nervous;  
And if your daddy was a lawyer,  
You'd ride in a shiny car.

But you've got the dad that sings this song,  
And that's just the way things are,  
Go to sleep,  
That's just the way things are.

The message, gently offered, even self-deprecating, is unmistakable. And highly appropriate: it's one of the peculiar notions of capitalism that childhood can (*or should!*) be isolated from social, economic, and other difficult realities in which they live. Kids know which side of the tracks they live on, especially if it's the poverty side.

Not all of the songs are political, not all are Bossin's. In addition to a couple of items for which he shares credit, Bossin includes Pete Sutherland's "1800-And-Froze-To-Death" and Greg Brown's "Our Little Town," and finishes the disc with Si Kahn's anthem, "People Like You." He also includes a new version of "The Secret of Life According To Satchel Paige," a fantasy taking baseball history and Dick Justice's old hillbilly song "Cocaine" as starting points, which he did with Stringband some time ago. I was at first puzzled by this—sure, the new performance is jazzier than the old one and has the benefit of all that new recording pizzazz (hoping for airplay, Bob?), but the original wasn't *bad*, you know—but this morning it hit me how important it is that baseball not be left to W.P. Kinsella's right wing vision.

Buy this recording. The politically hip will be tickled and supported in these trying times; right wingers—well, in the words of Utah Phillips, you need to get this stuff somehow, and like everyone else, you'll enjoy the music.

—GWL

Tanglefoot. *A Grain of Salt*. ORM11-1192CD. Tanglefoot Media Ltd. Box 2263, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7Y8. 45:24 min.

After a few listens to this album, I'm still hard-pressed to come up with an easy description of the Ontario-based band Tanglefoot. I want to say they're like a Canadian version of the Clancy Brothers—they have that same earnest mix of serious and humorous story songs, sung with a similar gusto—except that Tanglefoot pens most of its own material. Maybe because they couldn't find enough traditional material they liked, or because they've already covered it on their previous albums which I haven't heard? *A Grain of Salt* is made up of mostly chorus-songs—by which I mean the sort of song that has a chorus the audience can join in on—with a couple of instrumentals thrown in for good measure, although

frankly, their instrumental expertise isn't their strong point. It's not that they're bad; one simply doesn't get the idea that any of them are virtuosos on their instrument. No, their strong point is their songs, the clear, simple melodies; the stories they tell from history, often highlighting obscure anecdotes and issues from the past; and the strong blend of their voices. And while I'm still hard-pressed to find an easy way to describe their music, I can say that if you enjoy the sort of ensemble singing typified by groups such as the Weavers, the Clancys and their like, you will thoroughly enjoy this album of Canadian histories put to song.

—Charles de Lint  
Ottawa, Ontario

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*On winter nights we had lots of fun dancing at our place and at the Grass home, with music supplied by the CFCN radio in Calgary. There were never enough women for partners, so we put aprons on some of the men so every one could get a chance to dance.*

Annie Mills, Munson and District (Munson, Alberta)

*[Nowadays there are usually too few men who are—willing? able?—to dance. Most contra leaders will probably keep a supply of neckties to turn women into "men," rather than aprons to do the opposite! —GWL]*

Dave Foster. *On That Christmas Day*. Stormwarning CAF01. Available from the CSTM Mail Order Service.

I have to admit to not being at arm's length with this recording, as Marge and I got to sing on a couple of choruses. Also, Dave (no, not David) Foster is a longtime helper with CSTM (this very copy of the *Bulletin* may have been mailed by him!), and a longtime fellow member of the Calgary Singers' Circle. Which doesn't mean I'm less than objective when listening to the recording. Sure, I like it! I like Christmas as well (no "Bah, humbug!" from this reviewer), and Christmas songs in general (I'll have to tell you about Hell's Elves sometime), and the prospect of a recording of newly-written Christmas songs from a folk music enthusiast whom I knew to be a solid songwriter was welcome. It turns out that I'm not disappointed with the finished product.

Let's face it—every Christmas a rash of new material is churned out by pop and country hacks looking for a quick fix, and most of it is unmemorable and cliché-ridden, and doesn't last the year out. How are the songs on this recording different? For one thing, Dave frequents folk clubs, knows what makes a chorus singable, knows what makes a song memorable, and knows how to craft genuine emotion and real situations into his songs. In some cases he deals with topics which most Christmas songwriters conveniently overlook, like homelessness ("The Other Side of Christmas") and children of divorce ("Is This the Real Christmas?")—the "issue" songs are few but present. He also sings about "Prairie Christmas," the old-fashioned celebration which is a dream to some of us but a memory to others—it does, or did, exist! "Lollipops and Candy Canes" captures the visual glow of decorations as well as the visceral glow of the traditional fête. "At Our Christmas Polka" reflects customs where Christmas is a community event rather than just a family or a personal one.

The genesis of the record was songs which Dave wrote for his elementary school students, and thus some of the tracks are

aimed squarely at this age group. A chorus of children—not cutesy, not trained, just kids who obviously like to sing and do so unself-consciously—join him on these tracks, including "On That Christmas Day" and "Hey, Hey, It's Christmas." And the wistful quality of "Where?" evokes bittersweet memories of childhood fears banished—some of us still remember what it's like.

Many of the songs are overtly Christian, as is their author, and to my mind these are some of the most memorable, even to one like me who has managed to secularize the traditional myth. "A King is Born" introduces the album with dignified but powerful rejoicing, "Winds Through the Olive Trees" ends it on a melancholy note. These are the signature songs of the recording, and would not be out of place in church hymnbooks.

A couple of instrumental medleys of well-known carols played on the hammered dulcimer, with numerous other instruments slipping in and out of the mix, provide variety. The hammered dulcimer sound is absolutely right for these tunes, and I'm surprised that it isn't used more often on Christmas material. To me it brings to mind the psaltery playing of the Beers Family in their Christmas concerts in Toronto in the 60s. Another, less dignified, contrast shows up in "Sliding Down the Roof"—throwaway rhymes and wacky images to the tune of "The Old '97".

Dave's singing is clear, workmanlike and entirely appropriate for the material. He communicates, rather than showing off. Richard Harrow's production has to be admired—that gold record on his wall was come by honestly! A recording which could have been "vocals and guitar" in less imaginative hands ends up packed with treats.

JL

Nancy White and Bill Johnston. *Homely for the Holidays: Songs from the Charlottetown Festival's "Lovers in Bedeque"*. Mouton C-8. Campbell Webster, 181 Water St., Charlottetown, P.E.I. C1A 1A9 (cassettes and CDs available from 1-800-JOE RADIO).

Back in the days when I was singing at festivals and folk clubs all across Canada, every now and then I would share a workshop stage with Nancy White. Her songs were mostly very funny, some serious, but always carefully crafted and worth listening to. She had a great voice and handled it well. She provided her own accompaniment, which enhanced the melodies without drowning them. Because of my memories of those days, I was very excited when I was asked to review this cassette.

Alas, it was a disappointment. I'll discuss the disappointing aspects first to get them out of the way, and then consider what for me are the high spots. In her covering letter, Nancy said this was "a cast album from a show I did in Charlottetown earlier this summer." She also said, "It's a little regional, but it may be of interest." The fact that it is a "cast show" and "a little regional" partially explains my complaints. Too many instruments (including drums and piano), too many

voices, smothering the words, so that words and even lines are unintelligible, too many references to places Westerners are not familiar with. It would have helped considerably if printed words had accompanied the cassette.

The title song, "Homely for the Holidays", suffered from too much instrumentation, shouted choruses, and a long, repetitive and boring ending. Also, I failed to see anything clever or amusing about the use of the word "homely" in this song.

Bedeque is a place on Prince Edward Island. "Lovers in Bedeque" is the third song on Side One, and I can't figure out if it's a soberly sentimental piece, or cynically humorous, or satiric. And there are so many place-names that are unintelligible, like:

Lobsters from Rustico (that's what it sounds like),

Brandy from Quebec,

And a car she can't trust to go;

She's got furs from North Alaska,  
And oysters from (can't make it out) [*Malpeque?* —JL]  
But the best is lovers,  
Yes the best is lovers,  
Oh, the best is lovers in Bedeque.

Fourth on this side is "Gold Cup and Saucer Girl Number 9", which was co-written by Bob Johnston, and is sung by Nancy and the chorus. The title may refer to some eastern ritual that is familiar to the residents of Prince Edward Island, but means nothing to me. The last line sung by the chorus is repeated eight times at the end, which is carrying things a little too far.

The second song on Side One is "Barnacle Betty and Psycho Pike", which Nancy explains is based on some real-life happenings. There really was a 13-pound lobster named Barnacle Betty who vanished from a fish store in Nova Scotia. And there really was a video crew in Ontario shooting an epic called "Psycho Pike" about a fish who goes crazy because of toxins in the lake and starts attacking cottagers and snowmobiles. What's more, the mechanical head they were using for close-ups of Psycho Pike really did disappear just when Betty did. Nancy, being a romantic (she says), likes to think they ran away together. I have only two misgivings about this song. The references to Don Getty seem unnecessary, but, as Nancy says at the end,

Or did I just find Betty and poor Don Getty  
In my rhyming dictionary? Mais oui!

The second problem concerns the very first verse, which is otherwise terrific:

Barnacle Betty was the pride of the fair,  
People came for miles to admire her there;  
She didn't swallow fire or build a pyramid,  
She was big—that's what she did.  
Barnacle Betty was a great big lobster;  
If she lived in Sicily she would have been a mobster.  
She grew up never knowing that she wasn't even kosher,  
Deedly deedly deedly deedly down in Nova Scotiar.

I object to that "deedly deedly deedly deedly". I suspect Nancy was rushing to finish the song, and intended to fill in the proper words later, but why did she never do so? It's still a great song, with many wonderful lines. Like:

Barnacle Betty was a lobster with luck;  
Some little lobsters know when to duck;  
She never got caught, she grew bigger and bigger,  
'Cause a little lady lobster doesn't worry 'bout her figure.

And:

One day I think that Psycho Pete and Betty must have  
met,  
And made a pledge to honour, love and keep each other  
wet;  
They were never quite together, she would follow and he  
led,  
'Cause no matter where they traveled Psycho Pete was  
just ahead.

Side Two opens with "Are We There Yet?" Again, my inability to understand certain words and some references handicaps my enjoyment. What is "the place where we spend

our GST"? When Nancy sings  
I want to go on a guided tour  
Of the building everybody hates;  
I want to get my picture took  
Outside of the bullet-proof gates.

what is she talking about? However, the chorus of kids on this one is delightful as they sing about their trip to Summerside.

The next is "Take Back Yer Link," which concerns plans to build a bridge to link Prince Edward Island to the mainland. A couple of comments in this song leave me mystified, like the statement that "to be an isthmus somehow fills us with dismay; It'd be like dating Don Messer's roadie...". But apart from that, this song is Nancy at her best, making incisive comments:

We think a link is a mistake; our fine tradition this will  
break;

We built our lives around delay and scorning people from  
away;

And now they will invade our turf, put filthy toes in our  
pristine surf,

Canadians, you know it's true, we want your cash but we  
don't want you;

Build it if you must, but be sure you do it right,  
Put gates at either end and keep them closed at night,  
And in the daytime open them just every hour or so,  
So we'll still have our line-ups and our cherished status  
quo.

Number 4 on this side, "Ram 'Er In", is also based on an event that I assume actually took place, where a boat was built in Nova Scotia but the dock where she berthed in Prince Edward Island was built too small to hold her. I couldn't make out the names of some of the islands where she was to sail. Worse yet, I couldn't make out the name of the boat, which is given in the last line and should be a climax to the tale. It sounded like "Ambican Federation". Apart from this, it's a rousing song that any choral group will delight in.

Finally, my favourite on the whole cassette is Number 3 on Side Two, "Les Moutons." On this one Nancy sings in French (throaty, emotional, in a minor key), and after each line Bob explains in very matter-of-fact, unemotional spoken English what she is saying. She sings, "Je ne sais pas," and Bob's flat, dispassionate English tells us, "She doesn't know." Not "I don't know," which would be a direct translation, but "She doesn't know," in so neutral a tone that the contrast is hilarious—especially when she reaches the second-last line of the verse, "Les moutons," and Bob tells us "Dustballs. She doesn't like them." In the next verse we learn they are "sur le plancher" (on the floor), "sous le lit" (under the bed), etc. Dustballs. She can't cope. In the final verse she assures us she is a good housekeeper, she's honest, she's clean, she's English, but she can't bear all this fighting with dustballs, and she loses. Only a completely bilingual listener will get the full effect of this song, but even I was knocked out by it. It's brilliant! The cassette is worth buying for this song alone.

—Vera Johnson  
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