



Alan Mills during one of his final recording sessions; Bram Morrison reports that it was a favorite of Mills's wife, Bernie. We're fond of it, as well.
Courtesy of Bram Morrison

Alan Mills—Collaborator and Friend

Edith Fowke

Alan Mills was very important to me both as a collaborator and as a friend. When I started *Folk Song Time* in 1950, he already had his own program, *Folk Songs for Young Folk*, which ran from 1947 to 1952. He wrote to congratulate me on my program, which led to a lively correspondence about Canadian songs.

Soon we began collaborating on radio series: I wrote the scripts, and Alan narrated and sang the songs. In 1956, we prepared 13 quarter-hour programs entitled *The Song History of Canada*, and the next year we condensed the series into four programs for CBC's International Service Transcriptions. In 1958, we presented a slightly different version of the historical songs for the CBC School Broadcasts under the title of *Come All Ye Bold Canadians*.

Meanwhile we'd persuaded Moses Asch to issue a Folkways record, *O Canada: A History in Song*, which the *New York Times* chose as one of the hundred best records of 1956. We went on to prepare the book *Canada's Story in Song* in 1960, and Folkways then issued a two-record set with that title.

We'd done 13 half-hour programs of *Songs of the Sea*, which also led to a Folkways record. When it was listed as one of the hundred best records of 1957, Alan sent me the clipping with the note, "Well, what-d'ye-know? We've done it again!"

Then we had a series of 143 programs titled *Ride with the Sun*—folktales drawn from 13 different countries around the world.

Alan toured Europe and gave concerts throughout North America, often accompanied by Quebec's famous fiddler, Jean Carignan. During those American concerts, he frequently sang a children's ditty I'd collected, called "Going Over the Sea"; as a result, several American publishers have used it in their school music books. When he recorded "I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly," it became very popular, and I sent it to Burl Ives, who also recorded it.

He was an actor as well as a singer and appeared in many English and French radio plays, including a series of legal dramas on which he played the judge. His gruff-sounding voice and strong interpretations made him particularly effective on the air.

Alan was the only professional singer who concentrated on Canadian folk songs, and he did a great deal to make them better known not only in Canada but also in the United States and Europe. His contribution to Canadian folklore was recognized when he was awarded the Order of Canada in 1974. Shortly after that, he developed the cancer that killed him.