



***In which our intrepid correspondents give us news from one coast of Canada to the other and to the other ...***

## **The Grand River Folk Music Cooperative**

*By Jean Mills*

## **A Mari Usque ...**

**H**ere in my neighbourhood of southern-southwestern Ontario, the folk music scene is booming with concerts, sessions, song circles, folk clubs, special events (most often connected to significant people, seasons or fundraising efforts) and regular meetings. Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge are all within a half hour drive of each other, and Toronto, London and Brantford are easily accessible as well. And of course smaller communities such as Fergus, Arkell and St. Jacob's among others are tucked into the fringes of this larger area. You could spend an entire weekend and some weeknights sampling the folk music offerings from any one of these locations, and still miss something. It's a cornucopia of folk music: sounds like heaven, doesn't it?

In fact, it has become a bit of a problem. There's only one Saturday night, after all, and if three different groups decide to hold their event on the same Saturday night – well, there are only so many paying customers to go around. Someone is going to lose out.

To address this problem, Brad McEwen, artistic director of the Mill Race Festival of Traditional Music, has approached members of the local folk community to suggest the formation of a cooperative effort. If folk music groups and organizations in the Grand River region have a common calendar, newsletter and marketing strategy, then it will be possible to avoid some of the conflicts in scheduling that are currently diluting local folk audiences.

Groups such as the Old Chestnuts Song Circle, the Black Walnut Folk Club, the Mill Race Folk Society, the Grand River Dulcimer Club, and concert venues such as the Button Factory, Folkway Music and the St. Jacob's Schoolhouse are some of the potential participants in this enterprise. The idea is to produce a regular calendar and newsletter to keep everyone informed of upcoming events, as well as to promote concert and special event planning among the different groups.

There are two goals here. One is to try to avoid conflicts in scheduling (not always possible, of course) and the other is to improve the promotion of folk music events. A single, common calendar of events is a simple thing to send off to local media every month, along with contact names and event information. Instead of ten or twelve individual announcements arriving on the Arts and Entertainment editor's desk, there will be a comprehensive package with easy access to further information.

It's a great idea that can only benefit an already thriving local folk music scene.

## Merrick Jarrett Tribute Concert

*By Jean Mills*

A special event coming up in April is worth special notice. On April 28, 2002, a tribute concert will be held in Waterloo in honour of Merrick Jarrett, performer, teacher and all-round folk music guru. During his long career, Merrick has performed at folk festivals (including the very first Mariposa), on the CBC, in libraries and schools, and on concert stages. He introduced thousands of students to folk music through his two courses at the University of Waterloo. As performer, teacher, mentor and friend, he has influenced the lives of many folk musicians and folk music students. (I know he changed *my* life when he introduced me to the mountain dulcimer!) This afternoon concert will include performers such as Sharon & Bram, Rick & Judy Avery, some of the Travellers, John Allan Cameron, the Jarrett Family, the Muir Family, Cathy Miller, and a few surprises. It will be hosted by *Bulletin* editor Lorne Brown. All proceeds will go to HopeSpring Cancer Support Centre in Waterloo. No doubt it will be a wonderful afternoon. Watch for a report on this significant event in a future issue of *The Bulletin*.

*Jean Mills is a Guelph, Ontario, dulcimer player.*

## From Saskatchewan:

Paddy Tutty will be performing in the Discoveries Prince Albert Children's Festival May 21 and 22.

In August, she will be appearing at the 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival.

Soon, weather and climate permitting, folks from Saskatoon will be out hunting the prairie crocus and dancing a circle dance around it.

## From P.E.I.

The Larry Gorman Folk Festival will be held again in 2002! Editor/publisher Laurie Brinklow informs us that one of the best-kept folksong secrets on the continent is now an established annual event with its own shape and traditions.

Larry Gorman (1846-1917) was a man notorious for his biting satirical songs.

Sandy Ives, who wrote about Gorman in his book *Larry Gorman: The Man Who Made the Songs*, has helped organize this festival, which features traditional and contemporary folk music from the Island. A highlight is the bus tour of Gorman country, with the walking encyclopedia of PEI folklore John Cousins on board, along with Ives and others.

## From Yellowknife, NT:

*By Moira Cameron*

It hasn't been too busy in Yellowknife the last few months as far as traditional music is concerned. Around thirty locals gathered together to sing in the New Year at the annual New Year's Eve Ceilidh. This is always a fun event, where people from all sorts of musical backgrounds share their music and stories in the relaxing atmosphere of someone's home. The Ceilidhs have been going strong in Yellowknife for over eleven years now. Often times, when the Ceilidh falls near a special event, like Robbie Burns Day, the music and stories will hearken to a theme, but the gatherings are never so rigid that one feels the need to stick to that theme.

Speaking of themes, Mary and Friends Tea Room celebrated Valentines Day over two weekends with the help of Yellowknife folk entertainers Ceilidh Friends and Ron Kent. Ceilidh Friends, so named because its members met at the House Ceilidhs, perform a variety of traditional and contemporary folk songs. Ron Kent is a long-time Northerner who now resides in Yellowknife, but has lived and worked in other northern communities. He has a knack of putting odd Northern stories into song. He has recorded one solo album ("The Last Campfire", 1999.)

The well-known ballad-writing band, The Gumboots, is in the studio again recording their 4th album. Bill Gilday, the longest serving member of the group, anticipates the album will be finished by next Christmas. "We are happy to report," he solemnly avows, "that there are as yet no songs

about dead guys, as has been the case on our previous albums." But he goes on to say, "I'm sure we can come up with a few before the completion of the project." The Gumboots: always striving to please their fans.

Northerners everywhere are beginning to feel affects of the return of the sun. Soon, the celebrations will start. Communities across the Northwest Territories host little festivals every year in and around March and April. Snow and ice is still all around, but the need to come out of our shelters and play is too great. There are many unique competitions held during these festivals: tea-making races (whoever lights the fire, boils the water and makes the tea first wins), ice sculpting, jigging to traditional fiddle music (a very exhausting dance requiring much stamina), and of course, dog sled races.

Unfortunately, we still have a couple of months to go before we can truly feel the sun's return. In the meantime, we shall have to content ourselves with indoor song circles and Ceilidhs.

*Moira Cameron is a ballad singer from Yellowknife.*

## From B.C.

*By Phil Thomas*

Singing of folk songs in formal gatherings started in Vancouver in the summer of 1959. At that time two small singing groups started formal evenings presenting folk and topical songs. One group called itself 'The Tree-Toppers', and was headed by the then recent arrival from England Paul Phillips (not the Victoria-born singer of labour songs and professor of economics at U. of Manitoba with the same name.) Another quartet responding to the spirit of the times simultaneously announced it would present an evening of songs at the Alma WMCA. They dubbed themselves 'The Highriggers', using the real B.C. loggers' name for the fellows who, as part of their jobs, stripped and topped tall Douglas fir trees to be fitted as 'spar trees' for high-lead moving of cut logs in the West Coast logging. The proper term evoked the image of the heroic loggers way up those formidable trees, not to be confused with gardeners who tidy up city lots where trees have grown too tall. There was obviously some good-humoured rivalry between the singing groups, but there was a point to be made: newcomers should be reminded that the local 'folk' have their regional lingo, e.g. we have 'loggers' here, and no 'lumberjacks'. The evenings with The Highriggers continued and became The Folk Song Circle. This coming summer will see the 42nd anniversary of the Folk Song Circle, first and third Wednesdays,

now at the Friends' Meeting House. As announced in the last *Bulletin*, in response to changing times and tastes, the Vancouver Folk Song Society has added the second Wednesday VFSS Traditional Songs. I do not know if they follow the old Folk Songs Circle custom of arranging themselves with presenter(s) and audience.

Three of the people who started what became the Folk Song Circle in July '59, Al Cox, Hilda Thomas and myself, meet in a real little circle in the downstairs kitchen/dining area of the Friends' Meeting House. Our evening is titled 'Traditional Singaround' and meets monthly at 8 p.m. on the last Thursday. Recently Dick Clements, a long-time singer from Summerland in the Okanagan, joined us. You are welcome too!

*In this 'legendary' issue we have another legend: Phil Thomas, folk song collector, singer, and, well, legend.*

## Folkus on Sudbury, Ontario

*By Dianne Cameron*

The monthly house ceilidhs around the region have continued through the winter, keeping us all warm as we share music, stories and hot mulled wine, which has become a tradition at our winter gatherings. They usually happen the third Saturday every month, and anyone passing through Sudbury at the right time is encouraged to attend - just check with me for directions to the hosting house.

We started off 2002 with a flurry of house concerts and special folk events, following a wonderful concert in October with Pierre Schryer and his band. In January, we had a wonderful ski and potluck ceilidh on the lake in Chelmsford, Burns celebrations, and the return of weekly Scottish Country Dancing and Irish Dance classes.

Performers on tour have been visiting Mother Cameron's Home for Wayward Folkies on their way from gig to gig. There is always homemade bread and a pot of soup for short stops, or a place for an overnight sleep and laundry catchup. We can often get a house concert going on very short notice to help subsidize the journey.

February highlights included:

Feb. 2: Our own Tuba Boy in concert at Tin Pan Alley, featuring wonderful old-time music

Feb. 5: Wonderful music at a house concert with Tamarack and Duncan Cameron on the tail end of a northern tour

Feb. 7: A packed house concert with Ron Hynes from Newfoundland, sponsored by Northern Lights Festival Boreal (NLFB)

Feb. 14: Irish traditional music with Spraoi in a house concert in Onaping

Feb. 16-17: Irish dance workshops, and a great dance ceili with *Spraoi* sponsored by our local branch of *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*

Feb. 23: NLFB house concert with Tannis Slimmon and Charlie Sohmer

March is just as rich, with lots of events around St. Paddy's:

Mar. 2: House ceilidh in Onaping

Mar. 8: NLFB house concert with Winnipeg singer-songwriter Steve Schellenberg

Mar. 9: Annual Celtic music concert in Sault Ste Marie, with Pierre Schryer, Duncan Cameron, and lots of great guests

Mar. 9: 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Irish Celtic Fair, a wonderful day for the whole family, filled with Irish food, Irish dance groups (adults and children) and an all-day progression of musicians and singers

Mar. 15: St. Patrick's Gala Dinner/Dance

Mar. 16: Lots of Paddy's Day Irish bands and musicians around town

Mar. 23: Post-Paddy house ceilidh

Mar. 22-23: Earth Dancers 2002, a showcase of modern dance

*Diane Cameron is a folk musician and house mother to Ceilidhs.*

## From Here and There:

*By Lorne Brown*

**B**.C.'s singer of songs of the sea, **Tom Lewis**, is busy touring. March and April will see him in England and the Netherlands, then returning to Vancouver schools and a Columbia Basin tour before heading to the east coast of the U.S. in June.

Speaking of touring, **Tanglefoot**, the Ontario folk group, is on the east coast of the U.S. also in March, and in June will be touring England.

**Eileen McGann** will also be touring Britain this spring. Her fifth CD, "Beyond the Storm" was a Juno nomination.

**Rick Fielding** is appearing with **Tom Paxton** in March at the unCommon Coffee House in Framington, Massachusetts. In April he will be appearing at the **Merrick Jarrett Tribute** (See above.).

Congratulations to **The Travellers** who are celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2002!

Old friend and founding member of BC's Rogue Folk Club, **Stephen Fearing** will be playing a concert at the WISE Hall March 15. In April **Garnet Rogers** will be appearing there, too.

**Diaspora**, a newly-formed Greek folk ensemble, performed at Toronto's Hart House in March. **Jayne Brown** (no relation), a singer in the group, received a Canada Council grant to go to Athens to collect and preserve Greek folk songs.

"Singing is a method of storytelling," she says, "It is the telling of stories that is central to the music rather than the musicianship." Does this qualify as Canadian traditional music? In multi-ethnic Toronto, I think it does.

Halifax's **Clary Croft** has just released a new CD, "Still the Song Lives On", which is a mix of traditional songs from the Helen Creighton Collection, and new ones, including some he wrote. "If I Were a Blackbird" is on this disc; it is one of the most beautiful of all Canadian traditional songs, but, strangely, is not widely known.

Saskatchewan-born **Connie Kaldor** will be appearing in the Sleeping Giant Folk Music Society in Thunder Bay, Ontario, in April.

P.E.I.-born **Nancy White**, "Darling of CBC Radio-Freaks", is currently recording a new CD she'll probably call "Stickers on Fruit". She's playing a comedy festival in Winnipeg in March, the Mariposa Folk Festival in Ontario in July, and the Ottawa Folk Festival in August. But her really big project is attempting to de-clutter her house; she thinks our readers won't be interested in that, but I find it particularly fascinating, since I'm not only trying to de-clutter my house but also my mind.

There is a new folk music venue in Toronto called **Hugh's Room**. Its 200 seats make it a definitely needed link between the church basement venues for folk clubs, and the large auditoriums such as Massey Hall (where **Gordon Lightfoot** plays) or even, gasp, the Air Canada Centre (where **Bob Dylan** played). Performers at Hugh's Room have included **Tom Paxton**, **Jesse Winchester**, **The Travellers**, **Connie Caldor**, **Ian Tyson**, and **Odetta**. In March, **Sandy McIntyre and Steeped in Tradition** will be bringing their traditional Cape Breton music. **Richard Carson** is the man behind this concept of providing a mid-sized venue for folk performers. The venue has a first class restaurant and is situated in Toronto's Roncesvalles district (a few blocks where I lived as a child). It is named after Richard's late brother **Hugh**, who was a folk music enthusiast and was involved with the wonderful **Eaglewood Folk Festival**.

Richard lives in the area and has done a wonderful job in creating a warm and friendly atmosphere. At first, the neighbours were skeptical, but he has won them over. Performers love the venue and love performing in front of highly respectful and enthusiastic audiences. The audience can feast on good food and has guaranteed good sightlines. It's an ambitious project for Richard, filling a 200-seat venue night after night. *The Canadian Folk Music Bulletin* wishes him well.