

Aug. - Sept.

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# CARAVAN

folkmusic magazine



Jean Ritchie

# Editorial

Here it is! The new photo-offset Caravan. And with this issue we celebrate the beginning of our second year. Just last August Caravan was a 15 page mimeographed 'zine with a press run of 200. Now here we are with a press run of 2000. At this rate of increase we're eagerly looking forward to our next birthday.

In answer to the requests for back issues of Caravan we don't have any left. But we think that Israel Young at The Folklore Center can supply copies of the May and June issues. The earlier issues are sold out. (If any of you have back issues you'd care to pass along, let us know.)

Regarding material, Caravan has a small staff which writes a portion of our stuff, but primarily we depend on you, the readers, to write. We can't give you money, but we offer you our thanks and the opportunity to get your ideas into circulation.

We need articles, news notes, ideas, songs, letters, photographs and line drawings (black on white please). We particularly want items and photographs from areas where we don't have coverage at present: photos of your folk song group and/or of individual singers, with explanatory captions, news about the folksinging activities in your area and the people behind them. If your material is used you'll receive a free copy of the issue in which it appears.

All letters are considered for publication unless they are clearly marked otherwise.

If you have friends who'd be interested in Caravan we'll be glad to send them each a sample copy. Just send us the names and addresses.

To all of you Caravan readers whose help and support have been responsible for Caravan's phenomenal growth during the past year, our thanks.

---the Staff

CARAVAN Folkmusic Magazine is published and edited by Lee Shaw

With the assistance of Billy Faier, Barry Kornfeld, and Roger Lass

and staff photographers Aaron Rennert and Ray Sullivan.

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New York 14, N Y

# Caravan

Folkmusic Magazine

August-September 1958

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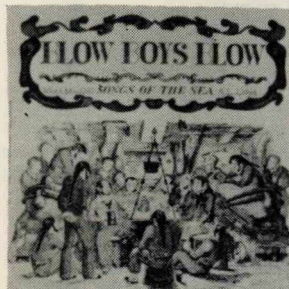
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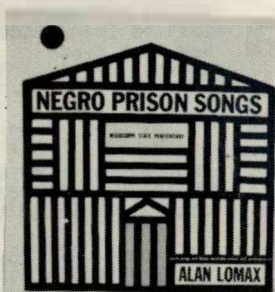
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--The Roslyn News

## Jean Ritchie

Jean Ritchie and her husband, photographer George Piskov, live in Fort Washington, L.I., with their children, Peter, age four, and Johnny, age about three months, and numerous quail-nests of varying ages. Their house is on a hill, surrounded by woods and even has its own little branch running below it on the hill, not to mention raccoons.

Jean is college-educated and have travelled in Europe on a Fulbright grant. She has lived in Greenwich Village, written three books, and recorded more songs than she can recall for almost as many companies. Nonetheless, she is probably the greatest traditional singer in America today. And her accomplishment is all the greater because, despite education, travel, a popular following, and all the manifold temptations of commercialism she has kept her style utterly pure.

She is literate and cultivated, but she has somehow preserved in her speech and writing and singing the unalloyed purity and flavor of the folk idiom; she is never condescending or coyly "folky", the idiom is a basic and inseparable part of her. She has assimilated a second cultural heritage without in any way losing or adulterating her original one, and this in itself, regardless of the quality of the art that such a mixture may produce, is a rather extraordinary accomplishment, and in this instance the art, by any standards, is of a very high quality.

Jean's natural feeling for her own folk idiom and her love of folk music have led her to explore other related idioms, and her performances of Scots, Irish, and English songs are as deeply rooted in the bedrock of tradition as her singing of the wealth of songs (over 300) which she has learned from her family and people in her native town of Viper, in Perry County, Kentucky.

Her family is one that has for a long time been famous for its singers and its songs--her uncle Jason Ritchie was among Cecil Sharp's informants when Sharp made his epochal collecting trip in 1916--and singing has always been an important part of life among the Ritchies. So the act of singing is as natural to her as breathing, and her sympathy is with traditional music. But she never consciously imitates a singer or a style of singing. "I just naturally sing a song more or less as I heard it."

For her, folk music is living, still being made, and primarily something to be done, not studied or theorized about. I saw her shortly before she left for California to take part in the University of California's Weekend of Folk Music on the Berkeley Campus (see Billy Faler's *Message From The West* in this issue), and she remarked that "I always approach folksong discussion with my tongue in my cheek". She feels that the essential element in folk music is the music, that everyone has his own ideas of what folk music is, how it should be sung, etc., but that the crucial thing is the song and the making of good music, however one goes about it. Her comment on discussion, standards, etc., is simply, "There aren't any rules".

Her attitude toward folk music is almost totally non-scholarly (which is a very healthy thing) and, in essence, purely hedonistic. She sings because she enjoys singing and she sings folksongs because they are meaningful and beautiful to her. She knows a tremendous amount about folk music, but refuses to be a scholar, and doesn't even particularly enjoy talking about it at great length. "I get tired of people who eat, breath, and sleep folk music."

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It is not only as a singer that Jean has utilized her background, but as a writer as well. She has published two collections of songs and a rambling and thoroughly delightful autobiography Singing Family of the Cumberland, which should be read by everyone interested in folk music and/or good writing. Her prose is as engaging as her singing, and simple, clear and full of a pure folk quality within the bounds of a disciplined and carefully wrought style. Singing Family is a book which can teach more about how folk music really functions in a folk society than all of the sociological and anthropological treatises in print.

In today's commercial, manipulated, and artistically impure society, the preservation of anything as pure and lovely as Jean Ritchie's music is a rarity, and quite possibly a brave stand in a losing battle. In the kind of world in which most of us, in retrospect, to be honest, would have to agree with Kenneth Patchen that "...we have not done much that is beautiful", her songs are a consolation and a gift to be thankful for.

--Roger Lass

#### RECORDS BY JEAN RITCHIE

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This is not  
A How-To Article on

## GROUP SINGING

by Barry Kornfeld

Much has been said on the subject of group singing and song leading. Some people dislike it because of certain images it conjures up, or on general principles; others think that it's great because it's so democratic, etc. I've been a song leader for many years and I'd like to try to "set the record straight" with an unmythical, un-starry-eyed, fairly objective view of this section of the folksong scene.

Group singing divides itself into many categories (I exclude performing groups). At one extreme there is the solo songleader who conducts the group; at the other extreme is the group which sings songs it knows without the prompting of a leader. In between are various shades of leadership and participation. Without a doubt for pure fun and real, unmanufactured solidarity the leaderless situation is the ideal. Obviously if there is no need to prompt then the group must be singing with real spirit, warmth, and full enjoyment. These are the very qualities that a song leader tries to instill in the groups that he leads. He must bring out (often it's manufacturing) what the leaderless group already has -- a group "momentum".

Rarely do you have a truly leaderless group (occasionally -- at a party, picnic, campfire, hayride, etc.). The fairly leaderless groups in Washington Square come closest to this for a consistent situation (i.e., they meet every week). The leadership here usually involves the picking of the songs, keys, and banjos --- from there the group can almost run by itself.

Note -- Many of the folkies put down the group singing in Wash Sq because it's too loud, not artistic, dull, etc. Sure, it's loud! It's a lot of fun to sing loudly and let off steam. I get a big kick out of this, personally. Sure, it's not art; it doesn't claim to be! It's fun, which is more than I can say for much of the self-conscious in-group jam sessions and round robins. As far as the dullness goes, that's only



because the folkies have been around longer than the West. So kids, therefore they have heard the same songs too many more times. Frankly I consider the folkie putting-down of the Square as simply snottiness, snideness, and unnecessary cynicism; all unfortunate folkie characteristics. End of note.

Songleading is a skill, not an art. There is no real aesthetic value in the development of group momentum. The aesthetic comes in after the group momentum has developed, at which point the songleader has completed his task and he may now become a song conductor.

He can weave his art with dynamics, different tempi, part and solo-group songs. He can easily introduce new and more difficult (more challenging) materials. I might mention here that some songs (Wynona, etc.) must be done with the group as a complement to the solo singer.

I have seen leaders develop their groups to this point -- Pete Seeger, Tony Balestan -- I have even done it once or twice myself. This is hard to achieve because most of the time a group will sit back and say, "Lead us." It is very difficult to develop spirit in a lethargic or semi-cynical group. The result is that by the time the songleader can start functioning as a conductor the session is over. Sometimes a group is so uninspired that the songleader must abandon his wiles and cajoling and resort to folksong subterfuge, a state wherein he screams, shouts, and commands the group in a very heavy-handed manner. This, however, is the necessity when people scream, "sing something we know", meaning "make us sing something we know". It's hard on us poor song leaders.

There are other problems that I have run into as a song leader. One of them is boredom. When you songlead as much as I do the songs start coming out of your ears. You can't keep finding whole programs of new material each week. It would involve full time research; it would be group-destructive to do a whole evening of new material--people generally enjoy singing the old songs. The solution to this is to dig up the old songs that you had put into note books because you had gotten tired of them. Six months of not singing a song will do wonders for its freshness.

Another problem is the cynicism of the ever-present folkies. They all too often have the power to dampen the spirits of a group. What is worse is that their unhealthy pressure can often dampen the spirit of the songleader as well. It happens to me. Of course you can tell me from today til tomorrow that I shouldn't let them bother me--but--frankly I'm not made of iron--nor is any other songleader. It is tough to have the courage of your convictions when your contemporaries consider those convictions criminal. Once again I put down the folkies because they are snotty. Their

personal, unfounded dislike should not be displayed indiscriminately.

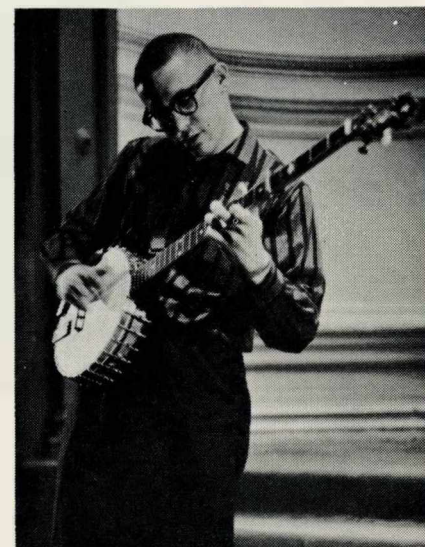
Another problem, though not too serious is a songleader's reluctance to do material which has become too much associated with a particular folksinger. Now, we all know that these materials are in public domain--but--one can't sing "Michael Row The Boat Ashore" without being tagged a Peter Seeger Jr. Incidentally to exemplify this song identification. Tony Balestan, who first introduced this song to Pete was singing it at a Hoot-enanny when a little pony-tailed girl behind me was heard to angrily exclaim, "He's singing Pete's song! Why is he singing Pete's song?" Not that Peter has placed any claim on the (or any other) song, but this is the way the mind of the public runs.

Once again, a songleader should be able to transcend such pettiness--but--I usually find myself doing unassociated songs. Maybe that's just as well. It keeps an influx of material going. But occasionally people like to sing "Michael Row The Boat Ashore".

The foregoing was a Kornfeld's-eye view of songleading. What you read probably didn't amaze you, but it gave me satisfaction to put it down on paper. And maybe it will prompt less snottiness among the folkies--at least when they are around me.

--Barry Kornfeld

Barry Kornfeld



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Hinton, Summers, Marais, Warner, Ritchie

## Billy Faier's MESSAGE from the WEST

The weekend of Folk Music at the University of California Berkeley Campus, conceived by Barry Olivier, is the first of its kind to be held in the area. Seven concerts, four workshops and a barbeque and campfire sing all in the space of four days. The participating artists were Andrew Rowan Summers, Josef Marais and Miranda, Margarita and Clark Allen, Sam Hinton, Frank Warner, Jean Ritchie, and myself, as well as local amateur folk singers Miriam Stafford, Jim Stein, Robin Brown, Barry Olivier and Laura Rosenblatt Weber. See here is a run-down of what went on.

PRIME concert at 8:30, Hertz Hall - Andrew Rowan Summers, Josef Marais and Miranda, and Billy Faier.

I didn't get to hear Andrew Rowan Summers this concert because I was backstage waiting to go on after him. (See Sunday afternoon concert). When I did go on I found the audience warm and ready for anything which can only be attributed to Mr Summers' excellent performance. Hertz Hall is a brand new hall, scarcely two months old and is a wonderful place to perform. The hall seats over seven hundred people and no amplification is necessary because of the excellent acoustics. After the intermission Josef Marais and Miranda came on and gave a wonderful performance of folk music. The audience was completely taken by the way they performed together. They do more than arrange their songs. There is a total involvement in the way they work together that is a joy to behold. They sang mostly material that never appeared on their old 78 rpm recordings and did lots of talking about the songs which was enjoyed immensely by the audience. Toward the end they sang some old favorites. It was strange to hear these songs that I had heard only on records and that I had, in a sense, cut my teeth on.

## "a weekend of folk music"



The title of the first workshop (at 9:30 on Saturday morning) was, "The Form and Functions of Folk Song". The discussion was led by Andrew Hovan Summers. It was interestingly informative with many sung illustrations by the panel (Summers, Warner, Ritchie, and Faier). Toward the end the discussion became fairly warm when Jim Stein from the audience stated that he felt that "dirty songs" should have been included in the listing of "forms" (I do not agree. I think that "dirty songs" are a sub-category that appear under most of the main forms that were under discussion.) Mr Summers took the bait, however, and stated that in all his twenty years of collecting among the mountain people in Virginia, he had never heard anything that could be described as a dirty song, and therefore he didn't think that it could be included as a folk song form. The disagreement was fairly unanimous among the rest of the panel and Frank Warner suggested that the mountain folk of Summers' acquaintance neglected to sing these songs out of respect for him. At this point the discussion had to be called because of the time, which was a shame because it was just beginning to really get going, but we were all left with a foretaste of what was to come.

The free noon concert was well-attended. Barry Olivier with his deep, rich voice; Jim Stein with his intriguing habit of seeming to float around the stage while he sings; and William Stafford, who plays a banjo with real authentic country sound and style, and sings mostly religious songs and ballads; and last but not least, Laura Rosenblatt Weber, whose Harzail book "Know Where I'm Going" has long been a favorite of guitar and recorder players.



Jean Ritchie

"Have All Folk Songs Been Collected?" was the title of the afternoon workshop. Frank Warner, the discussion leader, started the ball rolling by reading off a list of the best known collectors and the fields they specialized in. The discussion soon touched on such topics as: What Are Folksongs?, Are They Still Being Created?, And If So By Whom?, Why Do We Collect Them?, Some of the Techniques of Collecting?, etc. We really got to know Frank Warner in this discussion. His statement, "I collect folk songs because getting to know people and their songs has enriched my life", became, for me and I'm sure for many others, the keynote of the rest of the weekend. In this discussion everyone (Warner, Clark, Allen,

## Frank Warner



Hinton, Marais, Ritchie, Summers and Faier) had interesting anecdotes and stories concerning our collecting experiences which the audience responded to by contributing their own stories and questions.

**SATURDAY CONCERT:** Sam Hinton, Frank Warner, Clark and Margerita Allen.

Anyone who doesn't know Sam Hinton's work should trot right out and buy "The Real McCoy" or any other one of his Decca albums. Sam combined scholarship with humor in his stage presentation that is delightful to all who behold him. His guitar technique is the first original style that I have seen since I lived in N.Y. (Of course, he has been using it for years.) On the other hand, it never obtrudes in the song, but is perfectly suited to the song, and the non-folk-singer in the audience is unaware of anything but a wonderful, rhythmic framework behind the song, which is all important to Sam. Hinton is one of the many folksingers who divide their time for other occupations. He is a Oceanographer at Scripps Institute of Oceanography, in La Jolla, California. (Clark Allen is an artist, Frank Warner is a YMCA Secretary, Andrew Hovan Summers is a lawyer, furniture designer and builder). Hinton has appeared at least two times in the Journal of American Folk-Lore.

Frank Warner was the hit of the weekend to me. His stage presentation is concerned mainly with the people he has met and collected songs from. He makes these people live on the stage with him by the use of pictures of these people and (mainly) by his dynamic and unforgettable descriptions of them. Frank claims to be just a "reporter". He sings his songs exactly as he heard them, something I think very few of us would care to attempt. He carries this off by virtue of his tremendous vitality and sincere belief in these people as the "Builders of America".





Josef Marais

singing Kentucky mountain dulcimer. He utilized his trained tenor voice in a straightforward style, never leaving his seated position or removing his eyes from his left hand when playing. Here is the master of the Art of Ballad Singing. His remarks are made and his songs are sung with an air of complete confidence which keeps his audience relaxed enough to accept and listen to the songs undisturbed by any tricks of staging.

I will go into the subject of Clark and Margarita Allen in greater detail than the others because they have never performed and are probably unknown to any but their West Coast audiences. Their specialty is Spanish folk music and dance. Songs from Mexico, South America, Spain and other Spanish speaking countries make up Clark's repertory and his beautiful wife, Margarita does the dances of these places. They use guitar, flute and drum, bagpipes, tambourine, and lute. I can't make up my mind whether I like Clark's singing of Flamenco songs or his singing of ancient Spanish songs better, but it makes no difference because they are both wonderful. Margarita uses at least three complete costume changes, for the sake of authenticity, in one 45 minute program. Her dancing is superb.

I hope you haven't tired of all these superlatives I've been using because there are more to come.

The Sunday evening barbeque for participating artists and series ticket holders was followed by a community sing around a campfire in a large Eucalyptus grove on the Campus. Why try to tell you what happened? It was all a campfire sing should be--

I didn't get to the Children's Concert with the Allens, Marais and Miranda, and Sam Hinton, because it was held at the same time as the Saturday workshop.

The SUNDAY afternoon concert was the only thing in the entire weekend that was a little disappointing and this was only because of the programming. Despite their obvious differences in appearance and sound, Jean Ritchie should never precede or follow Andrew Brown Summers unless it is before an audience of true devotees of their art. Jean was the same old Jean: simple in presentation and beautiful in voice. Her singing of "Glide Me a Thou Great Jehovah" was exquisite. Jean can do things with her voice that are no less sweet than the sound of birds.

Andrew Brown Summers was a great surprise to me. I had heard, as far as I could remember, none of his recordings and had never seen him before this event. He sings only the songs from his home region and accom-

panied himself with a four stringed dulcimer. This improved the atmosphere no end....

I can't begin to remember all the things that were said at the Monday evening workshop on "How To Sing A Folk Song" led by Sam Hinton. One thing I will say is that there were no illustrations sung by the panel (Hinton, Marais and Miranda, Ritchie, Summers, Warner, and Faler) with perhaps one or two lines sung in passing by way of making a point. The discussion dealt with fundamental issues of authenticity pro and con and was punctuated by frequent and intelligent questions from the audience. There was one major digression when the subject of the use of racial terms in folk music came up. In general the two extremes of opinion were held by Andrew Brown Summers who feels that a folk song should be sung in its most traditional manner--and by Josef Marais who feels that it makes no difference how you sing a song as long as you are sincere and truly feel what you are singing.

The stage of the noon concert on Monday was shared by Harry Olivier and Noble Brown. The previous three days' activity were making themselves felt and Harry Olivier sang an unaccompanied song (Golden Tanager) for the first time.

The Monday afternoon workshop on "How To Accompany A Folk Song" led by Sam Hinton, was to be the high point of the weekend (see below). Unfortunately Andy Summers was not present because he represented the extreme view that folk songs should never be accompanied because it is simply not traditional; if he had been there the discussion would have been much livelier.

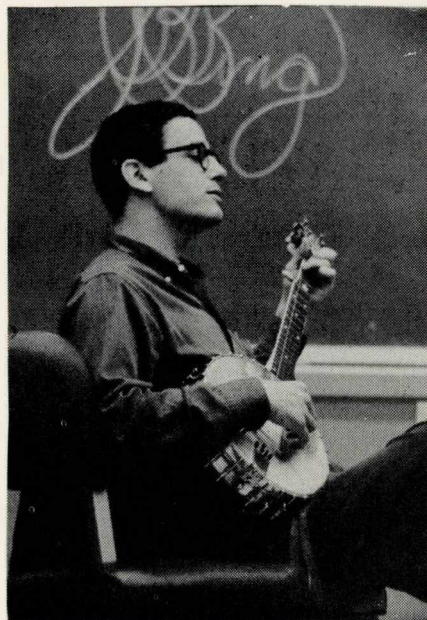
(This subject did come up in the morning workshop and the more experienced collectors in the group stated that practically none of their informants had ever used instruments. Frank Warner said that all of the people he had heard sing, very few of them had used any accompaniment, and Jean Ritchie said that they couldn't be bothered picking up an instrument to accompany themselves while they were washing dishes but the boys used a banjo on the store porch.)

Jean Ritchie broke up laughing at my singing of the New Wildwood Flower (Buddy Starcher version) for which she later apologized, and for which I heartily thanked her because it taught me a very important lesson; to wit - it is always easy to ignore



Sam Hinton





## Billy Faier

song was without the banjo. My head is still in a whirl from what I think will be a new found freedom.

The consensus of opinion was that many songs are better sung unaccompanied.

Sam Hinton said that the reason he uses the guitar on many songs that he feels should be sung unaccompanied is because he does not have the voice to carry the songs alone. Frank Warner says that the banjo actually gets in his way sometimes and he will lay it down if it does. Andrew Rowan Summers says that the only reason he uses even the dulcimer is that he doesn't think an audience could stand a whole program of unaccompanied singing. I don't think any of the people present think that instruments should be dispensed with. There was no summing up at the end of the workshop but if there had been, it would probably have gone something like this: Give the song itself more attention before you make the accompaniment part of the song. You might find that the song needs no accompaniment. I can say from my own experience that it takes guts to stand up in front of an audience and sing without an instrument after ten years of never singing without it. I sang the Evan MacCall version of "Lord Rantall" unaccompanied at a concert last January and my knees were really shaking through the first two verses. When I was through I felt like a man that had successfully soloed an airplane for the first time. Great---

MONDAY Evening Concert: Frank Warner, Jean Ritchie, Marais and Miranda.

Warner dealt mainly with "York State" songs on this concert. He sang the "Blue Mountain Lake". That and "Hold My Hand Lord

the laughter of an audience that "doesn't understand" or is "insensitive to the beauties of folk music" but if Jean Ritchie laughs (and who knows better when to laugh than Jean Ritchie?) then my singing of the New Wildwood Flower must be funny, and since I didn't mean it to be, then it's time to do some re-evaluating of my approach. Thank you, Jean.

One other thing that happened that gives me tons of food for thought---it was mentioned that certain types of songs or singing could not be accompanied by any rhythmic patterns on an instrument because the rhythm of the instrument would not allow the singer to be completely free. I mentioned that my playing of "Pay Day At Coal Creek" (a steady rolling strum on the banjo) did not, as far as I could see, interfere with my vocal embellishments and I illustrated with a couple of verses. Then Frank Warner suggested that I try it once more, this time without the banjo. I didn't need anyone to tell me how much better my singing of that particular

Jesus" which the entire audience sang with him, were the high points of his program.

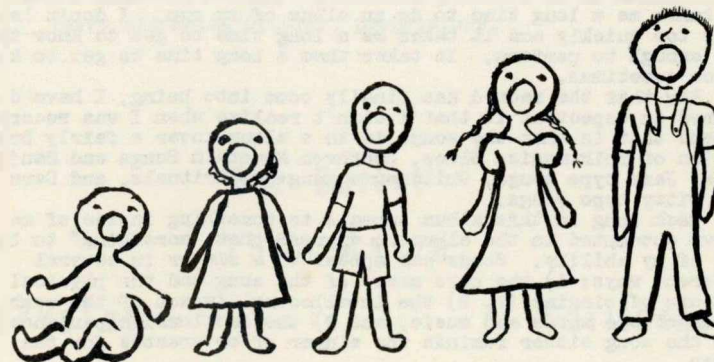
What I said before about Jean Ritchie really applied to both concerts. At this writing I find it hard to remember what she sang in one or the other. I can only say that her second performance was as fine in every way as her first.

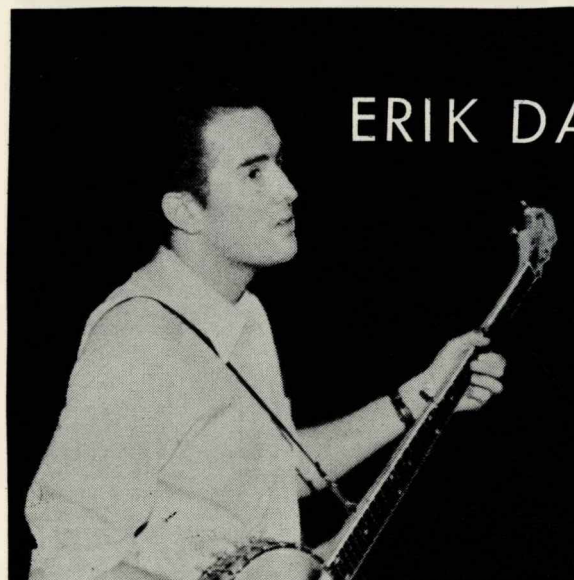
On the other hand Marais and Miranda's second performance was as different from their first as it could be. On this concert they sang very little but went into song after song with almost an urgency, and by the end of their program I think most of the house was slightly drunk from their magic.

This weekend of folk music was the most exciting musical event of my life. It is difficult to explain about the Fraternal spirit that I felt among the singers and the audiences. It is due, I believe, mainly to a complete lack of any competitive spirit between the various artists. With one exception, all the folk singers involved in the four main concerts were completely at ease, knew precisely what they wanted to say, and how to say it. The exception, of course, was myself. My original feeling of exaltation at being presented in concert with Frank Warner, Andrew Rowan Summers, The Warais, Jean Ritchie, Sam Hinton and the Allens soon gave way to a fear of not being able to measure up to them, especially in the workshop discussions. When the "weekend" got rolling, however, I found that the feeling of competition that I had always found (and contributed to) among singers of my own immediate generation was completely lacking here. My own competitive thrusts, finding no resistance, quickly dissipated themselves, and I was left free to concentrate on the matters at hand -- namely Folk Music.

In closing let me mention the great debt we owe to Barry Olivier for he and his committee did all of the dirty work that made all the participating singers sing a pleasant one.

--Billy Faier  
July 1958





## ERIK DARLING

### RECORD REVIEW OF "ERIK DARLING" Elektra EKL #154

I decided the best way to write a review of one's own record was to put the record on and listen to it objectively once through, and then sit down and write. Well, I got as far as half way through the first band and that didn't work. So now I'm sitting at the dining room table looking at the record lying there as big as life and twice as natural, and attempting to write down a few thoughts, relative to the experience of making an album, as they come to me.

To begin with, I feel that each song in an album should be an important song to the singer. It should be one he is specifically fond of and has learned to know from living with the song .....none of this dating business. This is one reason why it has taken me a long time to do an album of my own. I don't learn songs too quickly and it takes me a long time to get to know them well enough to perform. It takes them a long time to get to know me too sometimes.

Now that the record has finally come into being, I have discovered an aspect of it that I didn't realize when I was recording it, and that is that the songs in the album cover a fairly broad section of folk music: Blues, Southern Mountain Songs and Ballads, Blues, Jazz type songs, Children's songs, Spirituals, and Darn Folk Ditty type songs.

Each song in this album appeals to something inside of me. I have attempted in the album to express that "something" to the best of my ability. Songs can appeal to a singer in several different ways: 1) the pure music of the song and the physical pleasure of singing it, 2) the intellectual impact of the combination of the words and music, and 3) the emotional experience that the song either reminds the singer of or creates for the singer.

The best possible song is one that appeals to all three things at once. The best singer is the one who can make any song he sings appeal to all three things.

I feel it quite necessary for a singer to let anything happen to his imagination when working on or singing a song. He should let the song run wild in all directions, being afraid of no direction. After this he must choose which direction suits his feeling about the song, and attempt to arrange the song so as to create the desired and controlled emotion he specifically wants.

No person who sings exactly like someone else is being true to himself. Every person has such different emotional experiences to choose from. Of course there are many things a particular singer may do with a song that cause you to like the song. Some of these things are bound to stay with the song .....this I feel is good and also friendly.

This is the way I feel about singing and playing and also I guess about the album. I have not sung enough and I don't know myself well enough yet to know whether I have done well or poorly in making this record. I do feel that it has a right to exist and I feel it is worth its list price.

--Erik Darling

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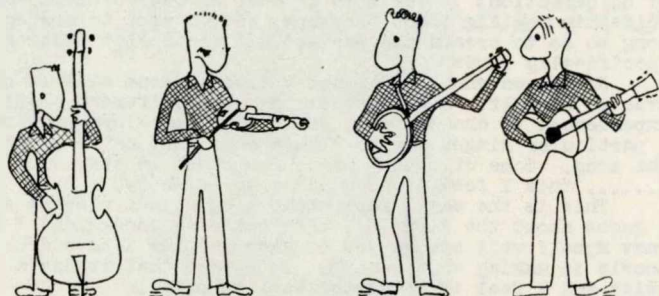
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# BLUEGRASS



by Roger Lass

I

Of late, we have been receiving numerous rather perplexed letters asking about "Bluegrass", asking what it is, who plays it, and where it can be heard. Since Bluegrass is a significant part of the folk music scene, and is becoming increasingly popular and widespread, I think it a good idea to say a few words about it.

This article is intended to be merely the briefest sort of introduction, but it should be helpful in guiding the interested reader to recordings of Bluegrass, and in helping him determine what it is and what it isn't.

First, what it isn't. It is not shuffle, and it is not Hillbilly music in general, and it is not traditional mountain folk music.

Bluegrass is one aspect of that portion of Hillbilly or Country music at the opposite end of the spectrum from Eddy Arnold, Hank Thompson, Faron Young and Co. In other words, it is oriented more toward the primary folk sources of commercial country music than toward Tin-Pan-Alley. But so was Roy Acuff, in the early days, and so was Jimmie Rodgers. And they were not Bluegrass. So we need a more specific definition, to distinguish among the various kinds of Country music which are close to folk sources.

Bluegrass might be defined as a stylistically close-to-folk Hillbilly music instrumentally dominated by 5-string banjo picked Scruggs style, vocally characterized by a tight sound and stylized manner, and rhythmically predicated on a strong even 2/4, 4/4 or more rarely, 3/4 beat, with the emphasis on the normally assumed beats.

This actually says very little, and there are numerous exceptions, as there are to any system of categories or descriptions, but it will do for a start.

First, a look at a typical Bluegrass band. Point number one, and very important: no electrified instruments. The instrumentation would be, minimally, banjo, guitar, string bass, and one or two fiddles.

However, the mandolin is also quite commonly used, and the dobro (un-amplified 'steel' or Hawaiian guitar) is becoming increasingly popular. This covers the range of instruments used

in Bluegrass music.

Now, the part played by each of these instruments varies from band to band. Flatt and Scruggs use a great deal of dobro, often as a lead instrument, but some of the others of the "Big Four" of Bluegrass (Hens & Bailey, The Stanley Bros., Bill Monroe) use it at all. Monroe normally uses mandolin as his lead instrument, with the banjo a second or third lead. Actually, in most Bluegrass outfits, even those in which the banjo is the lead instrument, about half of the breaks are normally taken by the fiddle. The guitar is not often used as a solo instrument in the normal course of events, although Lester Flatt and Bill Clifton do take occasional breaks, and I have heard only one solo bass break, in Flatt & Scruggs' Poggy Mountain Special. In most Bluegrass music the guitar and bass are strictly backing instruments.

But the thing that gives Bluegrass its unmistakable and characteristic sound is the instrumentation, and its quality is largely determined by the banjo, even when it is only in the background. The instrumental texture is sharp, astringent, and quite contrapuntal, and the banjo with its high register and penetratingly percussive sound is ideally suited to projecting a descant or a countermelody against the smooth and non-percussive sound of voice or fiddle.

II

The banjo in Bluegrass music is almost invariably played in Scruggs style, which is a complex brilliant type of picking perfected in the '40's by the banjoist Earl Scruggs, who first introduced the style while playing with Bill Monroe's "Bluegrass Boys" around 1945.

Scruggs-picking owes a good deal to traditional styles of banjo playing, but goes far beyond any of them in complexity, difficulty, and flexibility, and in its harmonic and melodic resources. It is not a folk style, but in its inception and greatest use a commercial one, strongly influenced not only by mountain banjo-picking, but by Ragtime and jazz, by blues, and by many of the melodic and harmonic devices of other kinds of commercial hillbilly music. It is a highly developed and professional kind of technique, and though it is admirably suited to improvisation, it requires a well-developed and disciplined knowledge of the instrument, and more than anything, technique.

Scruggs-picking is a three-finger technique -- that is, the picking is done with the thumb, index finger and middle finger of the right hand, with one finger at a time, usually, playing melody, and the others playing either drones or parts of a countermelody. Melody is usually played on the inside strings, with the two outside strings (1st and 5th) functioning as drones.

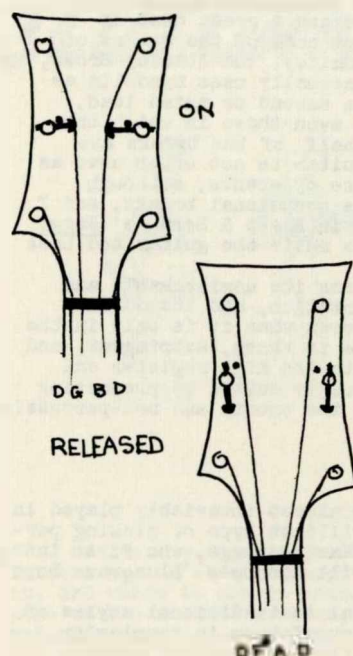
Of the many tunings of the banjo, only two are usually used in Bluegrass, the open G (gDGBD) and the open D (DADF#AD). Since Scruggs is primarily a melodic style, and one in which drones or pedal-points are extremely important, tunings in which melody can be played with a minimum of chording are naturally used.

III

The subject of tunings brings us naturally to the discussion of a piece of gadgetry which plays a fairly important part in much Bluegrass banjo-picking -- Scruggs pegs.

Scruggs pegs are used to permit the banjo player to change tunings while he is playing, and to obtain certain melodic effects which would not otherwise be practical.

They work as follows: Two extra pegs are inserted in the tuning head of the banjo, one between the tuning pegs for the 4th and 3rd strings, and one between those for the 2nd and 1st. Then



a screw is run through each of the pegs pointing inward, toward the middle of the peg-head. The screws are arranged so that the 3rd and 2nd strings are each run against the head of one of them. Now when the Scruggs peg is turned the screw moves against the string, tightening it. The lengths of the screws are then adjusted so that when they are not touching the 3rd and 2nd strings, these strings are tuned respectively F# and A, and when they tighten the strings, G and B.

Screws or nails or some similar objects are then used as stops so that the screws will only tighten on the strings the requisite amount.

Thus, the tuning with the pegs engaged is G; with the pegs disengaged, D. In playing in the

D tuning, the lowering of the pegs puts you into the key of the dominant (D) and in D tuning, the raising of the pegs puts you into the key of your subdominant (G).

Recorded examples of the use of the first are Scruggs' Rocky Top and Mountain Chimes; of the second, Reno's Home Sweet Home and Smiley Hobbs' Rosebud Casket, on Folkways' American Bluegrass Style album.

#### IV

Most of the material used by commercial Bluegrass bands falls into two categories; it is either new material written especially for commercial performance, or it is somewhat older not-quite-traditional folk material. The new music ranged from pretty terrible mudlark hillbilly songs of the worst sort (Scruggs' On My Mind, Reno's Sweetheart in Heaven) to good instrumental, novelty and gospel songs (Scruggs' Poggy Man Chimes, Reno's Sawing on the Strings, Scruggs' God Loves His Children).

The older material is often rather faulty (Scruggs' Jimmy Brown), older instrumental tunes (Stanley Brothers' Orange Blossom Special), or pre-Bluegrass Country music and true folksong (Monroe's Rocky Top and Tenbrooks, Whitehouse Blues, and such widely distributed songs as Please Come Back Little Girl, Wildwood Flower, etc.).

But in Bluegrass the material itself is not so important as the style, for Bluegrass is not a body of music, it is a method and a style, and a great deal of non-country music is admirably suited to performance in Bluegrass style.

Scruggs picking has caught on wherever there are banjo players

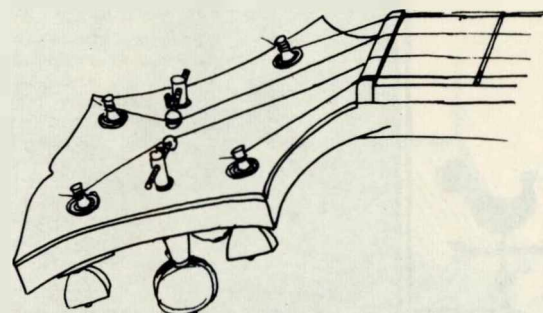
and, especially, in the cities, a great deal of music originally foreign to the idiom has been adapted and transformed.

Examples of the expansion of Bluegrass style to cover many other types of music, sometimes with success, sometimes at the expense of all musical values, are to be found in Washington Square on any Sunday, and on a professional and musically much more accomplished level, in the work of Roger Sprung with The Scanty Boys.

Sprung is an accomplished and imaginative banjo-player, and in the course of working with his group has adapted Scruggs style to such seemingly unlikely items as The Midnight Special and Little Boy Blue.

Bluegrass has also found its way back into its original mountain sources and the marks of Scruggs style are quite apparent in the playing of people like George Pagan and Obay Ramsay.

--Roger Lass



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# WITH MY



to the

# GROUND

In my last column I made brief mention of a book which was published here recently - not so recently that this review is not belated, I'm afraid. I refer, of course, to James Reeves's *The Idiom of the People*.

The review, though, is not nearly as belated as the book! I think it was the first time A.L. Lloyd had visited the Princess Louise; it was then still a skiffle centre, and had not gone over to the out-and-out folk music which is now its main offering. If I recall aright, it was in fact at a Nanny Whisky club session, several months ago.

Bert was brought forward and introduced; he looked thoughtful (in a certain way he has which one might almost call mischievous, were he not so essentially dignified), and then he addressed the audience.

"Well, everyone seems to have been singing American songs, so I'm going to sing some English songs. And they're going to be love songs."

The audience composed itself to listen; one could see an attitude which indicated they were prepared to look politely interested but reserved the right to feel bored. And Bert sang about seven bawdy songs in a row -- "My Husband's Got No Courage in Him" was the best -- and the audience loved it.

For too many people for far too long a time, an English folk-song has implied a group of slightly eccentric people -- the women with glasses, out-of-fashion dresses and incredible buns of hair, the men with a slightly glassy-eyed, dedicated look -- trolling out inferior late Victorian verse adaptations to a tinkly piano accompaniment.

As one who suffered ri-fol ri-fol in my school days, I can sympathise with the enormous potential audience for English folk-songs who have a mistaken impression that it is dull and tends to lapse into nonsense. Take, for instance, the R. Brimley Johnson collection of ballad texts put out in the Everyman Library in 1912. Along with good (or at any rate, recognisable) texts on such fine items as "The Two Sisters" and "Eppie Morrie", one finds "How We Beat The Favourite, A Lay of the Loamshire Hunt Cup". The trouble was that the genuine songs, the -- this is no exaggeration -- the great poems which had been fined down to a standard of English which one can compare with scarcely anything else in the language but certain inspired passages in the King James version of the Bible for effectiveness and purity of impact, were simply not available to serve as a measure of comparison.

And yet collectors were at work, distilling the fine spirit of the traditional English song. There was stuff, particularly, in Cecil Sharp's notebooks which might be broad, or bawdy, or

unsmooth, or in a non-received kind of English, but which was to these bastardised folksongs as gold to brass.

Well, we've had the tunes for a long time. Most of them, we're assured, haven't been materially doctored, except insofar as proved necessary to make them conform to the canon that a tune intended to be sung to several consecutive verses must be the same for each (here it is rather our method of musical notation than the collectors who must take the responsibility, of course). And some of them are indisputably marvellous.

But because we have learned to associate them with poor, hack verses instead of the exciting and virile traditional poems for which they were originally used, we have been unable to see them in their true perspective.

The Victorians were victims of their social circumstances; in the William Chappell collection, "Old English Ditties", to which I have referred once before in a *CARAVAN* column, one finds this unashamed statement:

"In (certain) cases the old words were thought unsuitable to the drawing-room, and new songs have been substituted. In writing these Mr Grenford [Chappell's assistant] has admirably retained the character suggested by the air."

If you will pardon me coining a phrase: "Oz yeah!" What about this one, then?

"Oh, well do I remember That lone but lovely hour,  
When the stars had met and the dew had wet each gently  
closing flower;  
When the moonlit trees waved in the breeze Above the  
sleeping deer,  
And we fondly stray'd thro' the greenwood glade In the  
springtime of the year!"

If you have guessed to what "air" this is intended to go, you must have prior knowledge. It is in fact fitted to "The Poacher", otherwise known as *The Tailor's Boy*.

If that farrago of nonsense retains the spirit of the original, I'm a Dutchman's monkey's great-uncle.

Against that background, then, imagine the astonished and delighted surprise with which certain well-known newspaper reviewers have opened Reeves's collection. *The Idiom of the People* contains 115 texts, collated from Sharp's original notes, together with an illuminating appendix giving samples of the inferior "contrived" songs with which the bowdlerised late-Victorian and Edwardian texts have often been muddled.

Some of them, of course, are not materially different from the ones we know. Among these is one of the most beautiful songs in English -- "The Keeper". But in the published versions, by very little more than a shift of emphasis, the whole theme, the extended simile which makes the real text so effective, is lost.

"The fifth day when she visited the brook,  
The keeper fetched her back with his long hook,  
And what he done at her you must go and look -  
For she's among the leaves of the green - O."

Others are totally different:

"Madam in your face is beauty,  
In your bosom flowers grow;  
In your bedroom there is pleasure -  
Shall I view it, yee or no?"

"Oh, no John, no John, no John, no!"



'O take me to my father's house  
And you may sit me down,  
And you may have my maidenhead  
And fifteen thousand pound  
And it's aye the dewy morning,  
Blow the wind I-ho,  
Blow the wind of a dew morning,  
Now sweet the winds do blow.

Some show illuminating parallels; most of the finest and most poetic stanzas from "Dink's Song" (Folklore 1911) occur in these texts - which reminds me that the verse of "On Top of Old Busby" which speaks of "cross-ties on the railroad And stars in the sky" was current long before railroads; I've found it at least once in a broadside text of the late 18th century.

But it's not merely that these songs are lusty compared to the emaciated published texts - previously published, that is. Infinitely more important is their genuineness, their truly poetic lack of self-consciousness. I mentioned above the way in which they make the same impact as certain passages in the Authorized Version of the Bible; they achieve it the same way, by hammering monosyllables, clean-cut phrases shorn of fuss and of frills. Take this:

"But Holland is a cold place  
A place where grows no green;  
But Holland is a cold place  
For my love is wonder in.  
But money had been so plentiful  
As leaves grow on the tree,  
And before I'd time to turn myself  
My love was stole from me."

Christopher Logue, one of our better young poets, reviewed this book for the *New Statesman*; he demanded to know where today were the poets who could match this incredibly effective economy and directness. The answer, of course, may be that there have never been poets who could match it; that it has taken a long process of filtration to discard everything which is not essential from these songs. One might compare the long, and in parts extraordinarily fine, "Yve Sisters" which has the "Bonnie Saint Johnstone Stands upon Tay" refrain, with the West Country "Farmer's Daughters" and then with the American version I've heard from Sandy Paton in which the whole story is condensed into four verses; of them all, the shortest is the most powerful. This is an extreme case. But the principle stands: where the deliberately "poetical" circumlocution and the fancy phrase goes out, the true poetry comes in.

Now we have finally discovered this rich fund of traditional verse, we have no more excuse for letting people think that folk-song is not as much, perhaps more, a part of the cultural heritage of anyone who speaks English as the plays of Shakespeare.

--John Brumder  
London, England



Israel G. Young

# The Folklore Center

by

Berry Kornfeld

On MacDougal Street, in Greenwich Village, about two thirds of the way from Third Street to Bleeker, lies the Folklore Center. Four or five steps up from the street level is its rather unimpressive facade. A sign painted on the front window says "Folklore Center"; near the door is the lettering "Israel G. Young". Behind the window is a simple display of books, instruments, and (mostly) record jackets, set off by a background of pegboard.

Inside is a long, narrow shop lined with ceiling-high shelving. On the right wall are books and periodicals dealing with all phases of folk music, lore, and dance, plus just, some Elizabethan music, and whatever else may have struck Mr Young's fancy. On the left wall, front, is a display of concert announcements, local notices, and business cards of guitar and banjo teachers. A row of posters just below the ceiling gives a chronological history of Folklore Center sponsored concerts. The left rear wall is piled high with folk and jazz records. The back room, which was usually a shambles, has recently been taken over by a concern called Vocal Centre, dealers in sheet music of classical and semi-classical nature, and has lately been in good order.

The variety of people to be found in the store is amazing -- for it is my theory that at one time or another everyone drops into the Folklore Center. Any tourist passing by will drop in out of curiosity -- mere to browse than to buy. The uneven sound of a banjo being tried out announces the presence of one of the young Washington Square set -- more to try than to buy. Invariably "folkies" (to quote Iszy) are present, for this den is the meeting place and home address for New York's up and coming folksingers and hangers-on. Occasionally there is a large flurry when one of the "big boys" in folksiein (again to quote Iszy) drops in. The Center's fame has spread

to the colleges, resulting in crowds of these intelligentsia during vacation periods. Oh, and let us not forget the many fresh-looking pony-tailed young girls whose presence testifies to the personality and charm of the proprietor.

The object of these affections is the tall, somewhat disheveled man who stands toward the rear of the shop. There is a very gentle quality about Israel Young, although when pushed too far he develops an anger quite ungentle.

He will raise his voice and shout, "Come on now! Stop playing that damn banjo!" or "Hey! Come on! He smoking in the store!"

Izzy's famed New York accent screens many of his qualities from people, but to know Izzy is to see through this screen. He has a warmth and integrity which is hard to find in many people. His amazingly large heart encompasses the friendship of many many people, and still he has room enough left to fall in love two or three times a week.

A friendship with Izzy is not hearty or backslapping; it is easy and gentle. Make a funny comment and he will chuckle softly. His greeting is an even, "Oh, hi, Barry". Ask him to do you a favor and he'll say, "Yeah, sure!" Do a favor for him and he will want to do one in return -- out of gratitude -- not because he doesn't want to be "in debt" to you.

A business man, Izzy is not. He's too honest to use even the subtle subterfuges that the modern business man uses. He won't sell something that he doesn't believe in without stating this to the buyer (in no uncertain terms). He will lower the price on an article after he had sold it because he knows that this customer can't really afford it. He would rather run a good folk music concert than a financially successful one (and they usually work out that way).

Recently I was discussing with Israel the lack of success of his concerts. It truly makes him feel bad that he can't get 150 people -- in a city of 8,000,000 -- to see these productions, many of which are damned good. His publicity may not always be good, but it is never that bad, says he.

I don't think I've ever heard of any something that he didn't think true. He's very frank -- no cajoling or false-ness in him. Go to Izzy if you want an honest, scrupulous opinion.

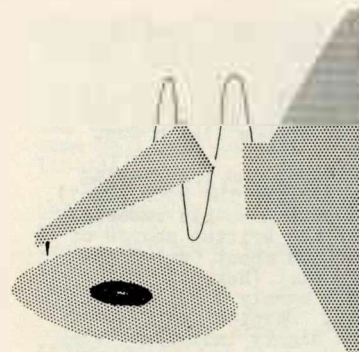
Of course Izzy isn't perfect, but he will never foul you up by an act of unscrupulous shrewdness. You may get fouled up by his frequent lack of dependability. Izzy operates by fits and starts. You are as likely to find his store closed as open at any given time. At 3 PM, you may find the door locked and a sign in the window saying "Back at 2."

He'll schedule a concert for five days hence, even though his chances for success will be low. He often makes frequent tempests in teapots as with smoking in the shop. But even there irrationalities add to his charm by making him a more interesting person. You never know what he'll do next.

You'll pardon me if I've spent much more time on Izzy than on the shop itself, but for me the Folklore Center is primarily an expression of the personality of Israel G. Young, bookseller.

"Stop shouting, Izzy. I'll put it out -- where's the ashtray?"

--Barry Kornfeld



## RECORD REVIEWS

Staff reviewers: Lee Haring, Barry Kornfeld, Roger Lass, and Dave Van Monck

**ERIK DARLING** (Elektra EKL-124): Erik Darling, well known as an accompanist and group singer, makes his first solo appearance on this record. The record offers the work of one of the most gifted and sensitive musicians in the folksong field, who has absorbed all kinds of musical influences. The eclecticism is puzzling sometimes: *Balty Dog*, the first number, is a kind of vaudeville piece, incorporating jokes, scat singing and kazoo playing into the song text. *Can't Men*, the last number, wildly erotic in at least its first stanza, is treated as a children's game, sung by Darling and his wife in a grotesque falsetto.

The rest is better. Analyzing the elements: Erik Darling appears on the record as a banjoist, guitarist, singer, and arranger-composer. His melody for *Svannano Tunnel* (Scarr, *English Folk Songs of the Southern Appalachians*, II, 42) is an attempt at a folksong-like tune which fails to keep to the Dorian mode it implies. Darling may also have composed a nameless banjo piece, part of a medley here, which seems remembered from parts of other tunes. These are not conscious efforts at composition, but rather part of Darling's worthy attempt to "extend and complete the original textures".

As a singer Erik Darling makes his effect with musicality rather than with vocal gifts. The voice is small, husky, and uninteresting except as it communicates his musical intentions. His extensive work with groups (from *The Song Swappers* to *The Weavers*) probably indicates Darling's awareness that he is not a solo singer.

It is as a banjoist that Erik Darling is most celebrated. The sound of his banjo is light and sparkling, not like the firm precision of Tom Paley. But, like Paley, he uses a variety of banjo styles. The variation in picking seems most successful in *Fred's Folly*. In Darling's banjo medley there is a kind of musical joke at the end -- one of his specialties -- which doesn't quite come off. The interpolation of a phrase of Prokofiev into the *Seegerism* of the *Chamberlain Mountain Bear Chase* should bring a chuckle to anyone. Some people will condemn Erik Darling's *Bear Chase* as being Pete Seeger's exclusive property. They said the same thing about his singing of *Vimmin* years ago. But Darling gives credit to his source; and if he is the most like Seeger of the Seeger-influenced, the similarity is in values rather than the way he holds his head. The story line of *Bear Chase* is still the same, by the way, the hunters still go round in a circle.



The best element on this record is the guitar playing, most often in a Travis-derived style which Darling has really mastered. Because of it J.O. Holmes is especially fine. On The Ball, Woody Erik Darling plays two guitar parts by means of multiple recording and produces the most fully developed musical work on the record. It sounds like a duet between Freddie Greene and Tal Farlow.

Technically the recording is excellent; the programming is good; the cover picture is mystifying (why the STOP sign?). The notes illuminate Erik Darling's approach to his material. But he should have been specific about the written source of his Pretty Polly. And he seems confused about Carl Sandburg's use of the phrase of "Lovely People" (Negroes) in The American Songbook. That chapter is not merely a collection of fragments, as Darling's notes imply. Despite the flaws I have noted, however, the record is the highly individual work of an outstanding musician. --LM

SONGS OF A RUSSIAN GIPSY, Theodore Bikel. (Elektra EKL-150): In a relatively short time as a performer of folk-song material, Theodore Bikel has become the object of a personality cult. For these people he can do no wrong; they will buy this record regardless.

A few words to the others. Theodore Bikel is a performer, an entertainer, a dependable professional. His records and appearances offer you entertainment using folk material, not authentic folk music. He is magnetic, warm, happy-sad, and energetic -- hence well suited to Russian Gypsy music. Musically his great facility in imitating heard performances produces fitting effects here.

The charm of this record is that Bikel and his instrumentalists are having a laugh at the emotional excesses of the music (for example, Karabli on side B). The listener is drawn into the fun. It will be a useful record at parties. Nichnev, sung by Bikel in the film Pravda, is a good selection.

The instrumental backing, by musicians experienced in the idiom, is excellent, with a fine performance by Leona Polinoff of Jyvetit Nysta, known from performances by The Weavers. Like many long-playing records, this one has too much of the same thing. No matter how much you like the molto-espressivo-accelerando-a-crecendo pattern of gypsy music, you tire of it when it is repeated. Theodore Bikel's notes to the record are aimed at the personality cult: the first-person pronoun is used sixty-three times. Technically excellent. The record is entertaining and enjoyable. --LM

ODETTA AT THE GATE OF HORN (Tradition TLP 102): In reviewing this record I feel redundant for singing praises to a chorus of praise-singers. The greatness of this artist seems more to be fact than opinion. Even those "folkies" who dislike any un-ethnic folk music are flipping over this woman's trained voice and concert approach. She seems to have found an ease with her blues and gospel materials that few trained singers can equal. Here is an art based on folk music, embodying its good qualities, and adding those concert qualities which make her renditions so fine.

This record is a good display of Odetta. One wouldn't buy it for the songs themselves; most of them are known in folk circles. One would gladly buy this record for Odetta's singing of these songs. There are many records of The Willows Tree (Hangman Slack Your Rope, Gallus Fole, etc.) but Odetta's rendition is close second only to Leadbelly's. The beautiful guitar work combined with the full commitment of the singing make it almost a masterpiece. Tinney is another very exciting number in a real shouting

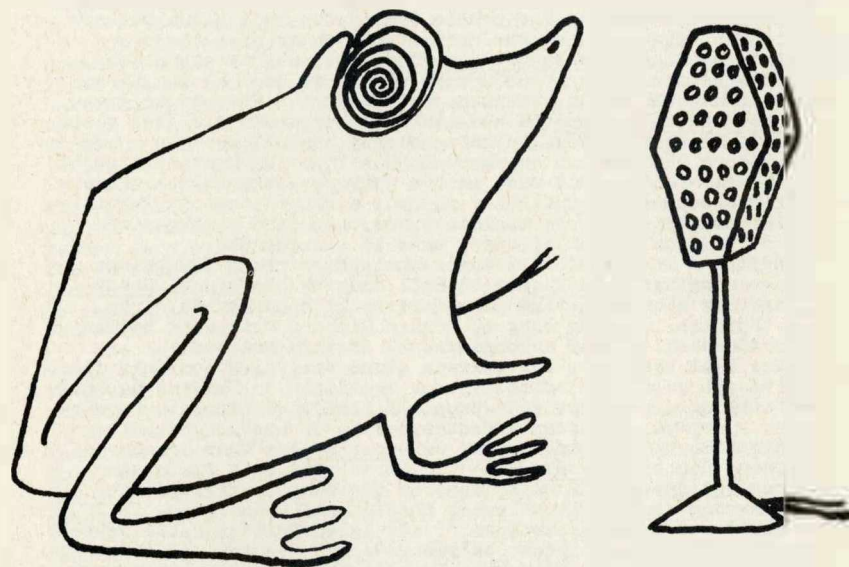
vein, which is literally one of Odetta's fortes. Softer, but equally as well done is the riverboat song Lowlands.

Odetta's style -- her inflections, guitar work, and most of her material -- is blues and gospel. She uses this approach on all of her songs, which results in such interesting things as her blues version of the Ohio Riverboat dance tune Sail Away Ladies. Unfortunately this approach is a limitation.

This limitation causes the only real flaw on the record. Less From The Low Country, Greensleeves, and Devil's Mary are too delicate and airy to be done by Odetta, unless she uses a different approach. Obviously this is not to say that this approach is bad, but that it is inappropriate for these particular songs. This inappropriateness is accentuated by the impeccable taste shown in all of the other songs on the record.

A few words about Odetta's guitar playing: although most instrumentalists will tell you that her picking is not so fantastically complex or varied, there's no question that it is flawlessly played and perfectly integrated. Simple beauty and taste have it over complex technicalness any time.

Other things which add to the record: the bass player is unnamed but he does a beautiful job. I like the cover. Odetta's song notes are witty, charming, and very characteristic. --LM



BOB GIBSON CARNEGIE CONCERT (Riverside RLP 12-816): According to the notes on this record Riverside has attempted to put out a record which will give "the excitement of a first-rate live performance by an artist whose personality reaches out to spark his listeners". For Bob Gibson this is the ideal kind of record. Bob's stock-in-trade is his performance-ability

and showmanship. I've seen him perform and he's damned good at it. He knows the ins and outs of getting an audience eating out of his palm, but for some reason or other it doesn't come across on this record.

The record isn't bad, nor is it good. Bob's performance is all right, but in all fairness to him, I've heard him do much better. For instance his running commentary with the songs is witty and interesting, but not too smooth or natural sounding. At times it is contrived, irrelevant and unoriginal.

The material presented is a nice mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar (a Gipsy specialty). The performance of the songs and the banjo picking are, for the most part, competent but not inspiring.

If the performance were first-rate, as the notes would give us to believe, then the experiment of presenting such a thing on record was not too successful. At any rate I'm not sparked.

**THE WEAVERS AT HOME** (Carnegie VHS 9024): After many years of recorded silence the Weavers came out with three LPs: The Weavers At Carnegie Hall, The Weavers On Tour, and The Weavers At Home. The order of release of these albums coincides with the order of deterioration.

The first album is, in my opinion, a masterpiece. It has all of the freshness, excitement and beauty that made the Weavers the truly great folk quartet that they were. The selections on this album were the best renditions from the Carnegie concerts given by the Weavers. The public demand for this album was so great that it had to take the rest of the songs from the two concerts and make The Weavers On Tour. Since this album contained second choices it naturally wasn't as good as the first. Still it had the basic qualities that made the Weavers so great.

The Weavers At Home is the latest album and it is just plain bad. To those who feel I'm being overly harsh I reply -- were this record the work of any group other than the Weavers I might be more favorable. But this is the Weavers -- the mastersingers of folk groups -- and when they put out a record that is partially mediocre, partially in musically bad taste and mostly poor from a technical point of view, this is inexcusable.

Before I leave I will state that there are a few things that are worthy. Aunt Rhodie is well done by the group. Santy Ano is very nice with some nice effects with harmonica. Eyes Alta (Spanish love song sung by Ronnie Wilbert with Fred Hellerman's classical guitar accompaniment) is very beautiful.

Now I'll leave in. The Weavers sound very tired on this disc. They've got no energy, vitality, or solidarity. They're no longer a singing group, but four people filling out harmonic requirements. They've played up affectations never before present (Ronnie's southern twang on The Johnson Boys). They've started to become "cute" (You Old Fool). Worst of all is their poor musical interpretation on so many of the songs. Tina is an African song from Batsutaland. The literal translation is "We are firm, we burn, we burn." It is definitely not a calypso (although there are African calypsos) as the Weavers would have us believe. My only reaction upon hearing this rendition with calypso sounding bongo drums and trumpet is to laugh. (This is the same reaction as most of the people for whom I've played it.) They also "drag" (languorate?) the rhythm at a certain point which I can't care for.

Bury Me Beneath The Willow is under the section "Awfully Sad Songs" but all that comes across is very jolly sounding -- particularly Seeger's rollicking banjo sound "in the holes" of the song. While I realize that this is a dead-on kind of song and should not be as mournful sounding as its words imply, it

just ain't rollicking.

And who dug up that harmonica (except on Santy Ano)?

I can understand why this record is so poor. The Weavers were going through a great deal of change (and trouble I imagine) at the time of recording. Pete Seeger resigned from the group during the cutting and was replaced by Erik Darling\*. They were not fully prepared for many of the songs, etc. However, public demand, money, or no, great artists always make a mistake when they put out a poor work. It prostitutes themselves, their work, and worst of all for the artists, it destroys their name and popularity.

\*Erik sings in five songs (out of 17) on the album. He has large shoes to fill as Seeger's replacement, however I feel that he is a very fine replacement. The group will no doubt have a different sound though not necessarily an inferior one. I would like to hear them well rehearsed with some real Weavers-quality arrangements.

**THE SINGING HERITAGE** (Vol 1) (Elektra EKL 1511): Elektra Records, a company which was under attack for over-commercialism in the early issues of Caravan, has made a wonderful innovation in folk records: an anthology of traditional songs done mostly by young urban folk artists. In the past traditional folk anthologies have been done by traditional folk. This ethnic kind of anthology is a valuable thing. It is of historical significance; it is a kind of living collection for the folk artist to delve into and learn from; sometimes it contains very artistic ethnic work -- sometimes it doesn't. Invariably the ethnic folk anthology is too far out for any but the far out folk singers and musicians.

The folk artist anthology reaches many more people. The urban folk artist is not an imitator of the ethnic singers. He is an artist who interprets or uses the ethnic materials as a basis for his art. His interpretation is artistically valid and is closer to the non-ethnic comprehension. Therefore both kinds of anthologies are important. Yet we had only one kind in the past. Thank you, Elektra Records.

Now to the merits of this record in particular. I like this record. It has, on the whole, very interesting material and performances. Of the ten performers (counting Pegram and Parham as a unit) all but two are urban. I might as well list the performers here -- Peggy Seeger, Paul Clayton, Lee Charles (accompanied by Walter Egan), Pat Foster, E.G. Huntington, Lori Holland, Dave Van Ronk, Myra Ross, George Pegram & Walter Parham, and Ellen Stekert.

The choice of materials is very good. Some of the songs are usual songs in usual versions, most of the songs are usual songs in unusual versions, and some are altogether unusual. This makes for a well programmed combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar. I might as well list the songs here (commonly known versions in parenthesis) -- Jack Went A-Sailing, Strawberry Roan, Rich Old Lady (Eggs & Marrowbone), Little Big Log Cabin in The Lane, Gypsy Lover (Gypsy Davy), Roll On (Roll On), Hammer, House Carpenter, Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out, Who's Gonna Shoe Your Pretty Little Foot, The Lanes Of (one strain), Froggie Went A-Courtin', Goodbye Little Bonnie Goodbye, John Riley, Johnny Runkins, What You Gonna Call That (one strain), Yellow Rose Of Texas, and Love Henry.

The singing is mostly well done (as I previously stated) though occasionally one feels that the songs don't flow as smoothly as a more experienced and polished artist's rendition would. I'm not quite sure that this isn't a blessing rather than a fault, because it makes for a more exciting and fresh-sounding record.

\*If he is an artist and not a hack.



A few loud asides that occurred to me while listening: it's nice to hear Ellen Stekert on a label which can accurately portray her voice (most of her previous recordings were on Stinson). I've heard Peggy Seeger sing better. Dave Van Ronk, too, has done much better. He's "pushing gravel" too much on "Nobody Knows You" and his guitar ain't in tune. A few words about the more authentic performers on the record: Pegram (banjo and singing) and Parham (harmonica) turn out two good songs up to the par of their other recordings on other labels. Pegram's driving double thumbing banjo and drunken, leering voice have a vital sound which transcends any song that they might choose to do, no matter how sorry. E.G. Huntington is the major fallacy on this record. Here is an example of the recording of a singer because he is a folk, not because he is good or even interesting (unless this is a very poor recording of him). He has an uninteresting and quavering hoarse voice with simple guitar accompaniment. Fortunately his two numbers (one of which is the usual version of "When I Was Single") are not representative of the other sixteen.

The title of the album is OUR SINGING HERITAGE, an interesting album to release at a time when instrumental albums are all the rage. Except for Peggy Seeger, George Pegram, and Dave Van Ronk, the instrumentation is very simple. For the most part it is adequate, though in some spots I felt that a somewhat fuller instrumental background would have added to the performance. At some points the balance between instrument and voice did not sufficiently play up the instrument (though the reverse is more commonly the case).

This album is Volume One of a projected series of OUR SINGING HERITAGE albums. I, for one, look forward to Volume Two.

--BK



I would greatly appreciate hearing from anyone who can furnish me a tape or the loan of a recording of the following:

Stan Wilson - Scarlet Ribbon  
 Evelyn Knight - Less With the Gentle Air

E.R. Plunkett  
 1115 Wilbur Ave  
 Barberton, Ohio

# LETTERS

To the Editor

## THE BAY AREA PEOPLE AND PLACES

Mike & Jo Vernham  
 San Francisco, Cal.

Dear Lee,

You have probably heard a great deal of what goes on here in the Bay Area from Billy Faier, so I just want to add a few comments of my own. There is no highly organized folk music center, although a young lad named BARRY OLIVIER has done a great deal in that particular direction. He has been organizing small concerts in Berkeley for the past three or four years which, if they have not been smashing box office successes, have nevertheless given a few very talented young people the opportunity to exhibit their wares. He has monitored a live broadcast over radio station KUTV-FM, for about four years now. His store, the Barrel, in Berkeley, which is in the midst of this university town's fast rising "Little Bohemia" is an excellent meeting ground for folk singers, dancers, instrumentalists, and musicians of all kinds. He has an excellent collection of tapes, books, records, instruments, and little goodies which he makes available to us.

In San Francisco, there are many places where the itinerant folk musician might find people and atmosphere. I recommend SARAFINA & CHAPIN, a music store run by an extremely nice person, Mr. HARMON McFARLAND, who is also a craftsman of the highest order. He repairs instruments and makes classical guitars which, to my discerning eye and ear are of the best that I have heard. He also will extend the neck of your old Kay banjo, attach a fifth string capo, clap on a set of Duggs tuning pegs (since we do not have ready access to the services of Roger Sprung) and have the whole mess come out sounding quite like the best Blugrass special.

Also recommend the ALMA Music Company. There are my find guitars, banjos, lutes, recorders, and one of the most complete stocks of classical and flamenco guitar music available in this area.

GRACE WHEAT, a charming woman whom I have known since my first experiences in folk music, has a small shop in North Beach, which provides the epicure with music, records, guitars, banjos, the accessories thereto, and classes in guitar, banjo, mandolin, recorder, and folk dancing.

In Berkeley, besides the already-mentioned BARREL, dwells a young man, CAMPBELL COE by name, whose craftsmanship on banjo is undisputed. There is nothing this man doesn't know about the banjo and about banjo-players. His shop is also a meeting place for the elite of folk music in Berkeley. He also does beautiful repair work on guitars and other stringed instruments.

In Oakland there is JOHN ARROW who is also an excellent

instrument repairman --and who does superb work.

I certainly could not leave out ROLF CARM, whose name and work is certainly not unknown to you. He teaches flamenco and folk music guitar, and has done a great deal to keep the music on a high level of appreciation. He recently presented a series of concerts in the Bay Area for the benefit of radio station KPFA which were quite successful. My wife and I had the pleasure of appearing with ROLF in these concerts, together with an outstanding young guitarist, CARL GRANICH, who hails from New York.

I will say nothing of BILLY FAIRER, because his excellent work is known to all of you. Just let me say that his coming to the Bay Area was one of the best things that could have happened here. Billy is, along with Rolf, proving that there is music in folk music, and long may he continue to do so.

There is little else I can say, except that my wife and I would like to open our modest doors to anyone arriving here from the outside world.

Mike & Jo Wertham  
12123 Pine Street  
San Francisco,  
California

#### ROBERT DE R.S.

Dear Lee,

Washington Folk Music activity on the "ROCK" scale is temporarily suffering from early-summer doldrums. However we have just enjoyed the long-awaited appearance of PAUL CLAYTON and TOM PALEY who charmed a goodly audience with their plaintive, yet sometimes gory renditions of old (and not so old) American folk songs and those of the long ago and far away from across the sea.

They performed separately (Tom leading off), but at the conclusion of the second half of the program, they teamed up together with astonishing and pleasing results. It was a fitting finale for a delightful evening, featuring such old favorites as John Henry, The Boll Weevil, Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss, The Old Gray Goose, Shenandoah, Bully of the Town, Jesse James, Little Mattie Groves, Springfield Mountain, Soldier's Joy, The Three Nights, Down By The River, and Don't She Rock Did-I-O --- in which the audience joined their lusty voices, and the party was over.

Both artists in their own right, they supplied us with two distinctive styles--Paul with his easy relaxed manner equally at home with the guitar and the Kentucky three-string dulcimer; Tom was (as usual) superb on both the banjo and the guitar; instructive and entertaining simultaneously. His machine-gun wit and repartee, interspersed with frequent "tunings up" of the banjo at unexpected moments, kept his audience in stitches much of the time.

For managerial genius demonstrated in getting these two colorful personalities together on the same stage at the same time, we are deeply indebted to that paragon of brevity in Masters of Ceremonies, John Dillman.

Virgil Sturgill

Virgil Sturgill  
Washington, D.C.

#### Perplexed Banjo Picker

H.L. Gordon  
Los Angeles, Cal

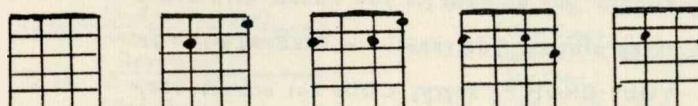
Dear Lee,

I have heard about an "open C" banjo tuning, but it is not given on Pete Seeger's instruction record or in his book. Can you tell me anything about it?

H.L. Gordon

The open C tuning is one in which the banjo is tuned to a C major chord. The strings are tuned, reading from the 5th to the 1st, G-D-G-E. Thus the open strings are, in the context of the C chord, in the relationship 5-1-3-1-3, giving the same effect as the C chord in the standard C tuning. Open C has the advantages of any open tuning, flexibility, ease of melody playing, simplicity of chording, plus the sound qualities of a C tuning with the 3rd on top and the tonic as a bass note, as distinguished from the open G and D tunings.

Here are the most commonly used chords in Open C tuning:



C F G7 G Am

A barre at the 2nd fret gives D; at the 5th fret F, at the 7th G --- etc. --RL

#### ODD-BALL BANJO

Dear Lee,

I have just recently acquired an H.F. Bacon Professional Concert Model 5-string banjo from a banjo collector out in Berkeley with an oversized head and shell size without a hard shell case. I hope in your new format there is a place where requests for information can be inserted so trading and hard-to-find articles and accessories for these odd-ball instruments can be located.

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Burlingame, Calif.

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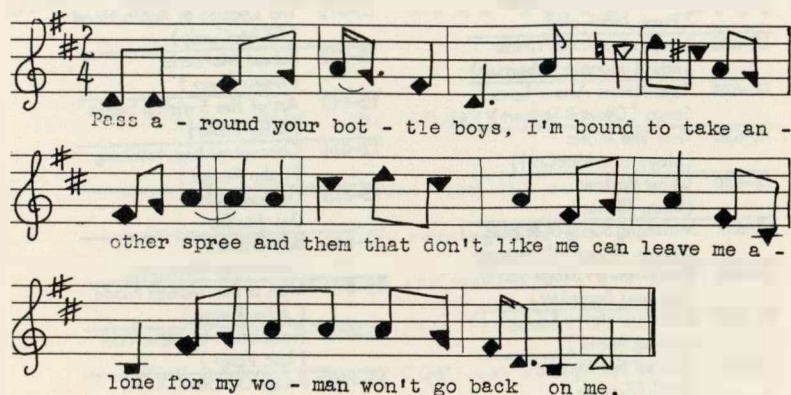
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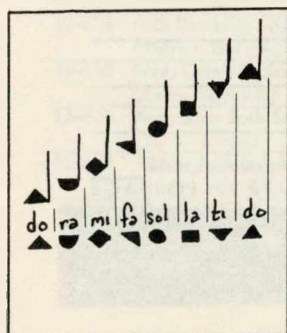


My clothes are all rags to my back  
My shoes won't cover my toes;  
My old black hat is going flipity flap  
Just a-tipping the end of my nose.

I laid my head on my true love's lap  
Receiving many a kiss,  
I never saw nothing in this wide world  
That was equal to this.

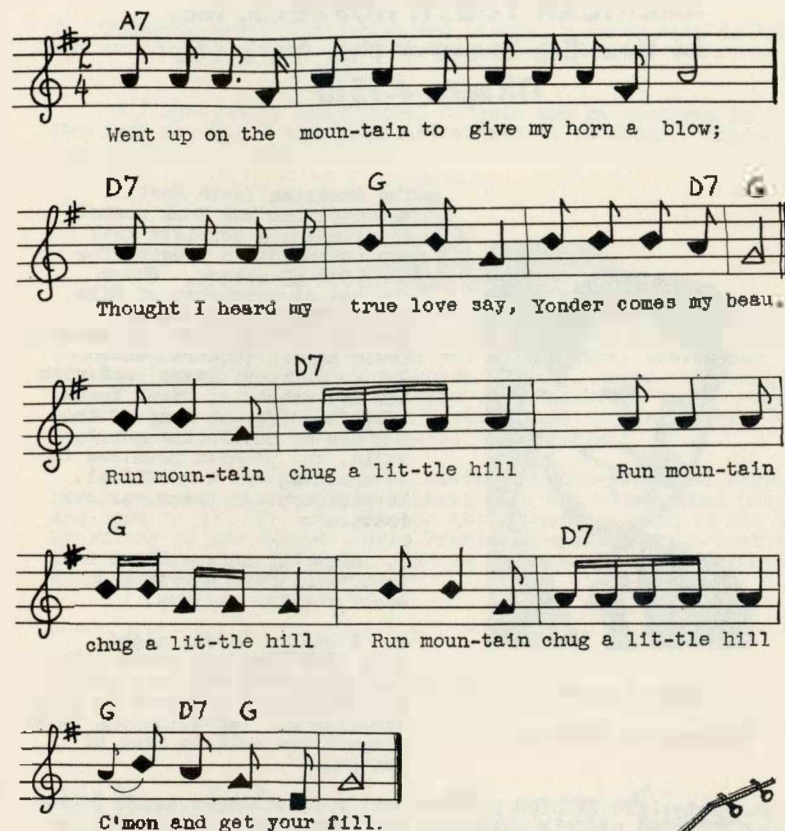
I will cuss and swear I'll rip and I'll tear,  
They may all say what they will;  
But I have reserved the balance of my life  
To drink corn liquor that was distilled.

Text and tune from Kentucky as deposited in the Manuscript Room of the University of Virginia Library. Supplied to Caravan by Paul Clayton.



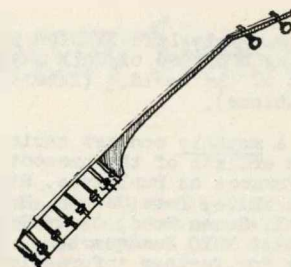
In future issues we plan to bring you more unusual folk songs, some previously unpublished and unrecorded. If you can contribute to this department we would be most happy to hear from you.

## Run Mountain



Once I had a yellow girl,  
Got her from the South;  
Only thing was wrong with her  
She had too big a mouth.

Took her to the blacksmith shop  
To have her mouth made small,  
She turned around once or twice,  
Swallowed shop and all.



This song, like most breakdown tunes, can be filled out with almost any of the standard breakdown verses, such as verses from Bile Them Cabbage Down, Old Joe Clark, etc. Supplied to Caravan by Roger Lass.



**METROPOLITAN NEW YORK COUNCIL  
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**Mike Cohen**  
Executive Director

The American Youth Hostels Metropolitan New York Council is planning a complete folk and square dance program for the 1958-59 season. Under the new directorship of Mike Cohen (Shantyboy), Barry Kornfeld (MNYC Folksong Leader), Irwin Harris (Square Dance Caller Extraordinaire) and with the assistance of Oscar Brand, Art D'Luoff, and many of the members of the Folksingers' Guild, the program promises to be exciting and educational. It will contain these various features:

1. A weekly square dance featuring Irwin Harris and other popular callers.
2. A weekly Sunday night song fest campfire style with Barry Kornfeld and many guests. Everybody gets a chance to sing and listen. Participating folksingers are welcome free of charge.

3. A weekly LATE EVENING professional folk artist concert introducing a myriad of folk musicians from around N.Y. City and the rest of the world. (Interested artists contact Mike Cohen for auditions).

4. A monthly concert series featuring the outstanding professional folk artists of the present day will also be presented. Such performers as Burl Ives, Richard Dyer-Bennet, Marais and Miranda, Josh White, Pete Seeger, Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry, Theo Bikel, Susan Reed, Oscar Brand, etc., are expected to appear. Contact MNYC Headquarters, The Folklore Center, or the Village Gate for further information.

5. Group guitar and banjo lessons will be available weekly to AYH members as will individual instruction

6. Square dance and Folksong Leadership workshops will be held intermittently as well as folk instrument workshops (Banjo, Dulcimer, Guitar, Recorder, etc., run by experts on various folk styles

for each instrument).

7. Folklore weekend trips to local hostels will be available to AYH members and guests. Songfests, Dances, Outdoor Activities, etc., will be the order of the day.

8. Folksong collecting trips and visits to areas rich in American and European folk culture will be available to AYH members.

All age groups are invited to join and participate in the New York Council's Hosteling activities in folklore. Discounts are available to MNYC members.



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New York 14, N Y

## New York Scene

The New York Folksingers Guild is a young organization. Its most evident contribution to the field of folk music as yet is the series of concerts it has presented every month at Sullivan Street Playhouse. This series has included two of the best concerts given in New York this season: in March they presented Paul Clayton, Gina Glaser, Roger Abrahams and Dave Van Ronk in a program of ballads, blues, songs and sea shanties that was really fine -- a concert that was notable for its beautiful staging and production as well as its excellent singing; in June they presented Tom Paley, John Cohen and Roy Berkeley in a program featuring American traditional material and emphasizing the excellent instrumental work of Paley and Cohen. This concert was notable not only for its fine music, but also for the extremely entertaining patter. Paley and Cohen are a fine team, both as musicians, and as entertainers.

The Guild's August concert (look for it near the end of the month) is scheduled to feature The Kossoy Sisters and Billy Faier, who is expected in town, as of this writing, any day now. For complete information on this and all Guild concerts, drop your name and address to: The NY Folksingers Guild c/o Caravan.

Aside from the Guild's concerts and Wash Sq, the NY folk music scene has been a quiet one lately. A concert featuring George Lorrie, Jimmy MacInnald, Rock Weiss and Barry Hornfield was almost rained out. AYH closed its 1957-58 season of Sunday folksings on June 28th. (That was quite a session with Mike Cohen leading and such people as John Cohen, Ben Rifkin, Dave Van Ronk, and Rock Rosmini singing and playing.) The Spring St Scene is quiet. And the Gate has been forcibly silenced by the police until such time as it obtains a salaried license, or as we're informed.

Some good singing and picking has been going on around the Folklore Center though. John Hasted, the well-known British folk singer and skiffle, drifted into NY and naturally gravitated to the Center. Roger Lass, Lee Haring, Perry Laderman and I wandered into the store in time to get in on a baritone session where John was bringing all up to date on the state of folksinging around London, with examples. Lionel Kilberg and Jerry Silverman came in and joined in.

A few days later, in Mr Hasted's honor, I've scheduled an informal session in the store, featuring Tom Paley and John Cohen, Fred Gerlach and Jerry Silverman, and John Hasted. A most enjoyable session.

Doris Stone and Pat Forster have teamed up and are playing the resort circuit. Pat is flashing around a handsome new 12-string guitar which he had built by Carlton.

Anita Shearer, Glenn Yarbrough and Alex Hassilev will be playing at the BAC ROOM (Sixth Ave and 55th St) through August 2nd.

A new songbook is POLK SONGS OF THE CARIBBEAN collected by Jim Moore and published by Bantam at 50¢. It contains music, words, notes and chords. It's available at the Folklore Center.

Speaking of books, the magazine RECORD FINDER features info for collectors, not just folk records but all kinds of stuff. For details write to Don Brown, 803-D Princeton, Santa Monica, Cal. The Weavers, with Erik Darling in the lead spot, are playing Crystal Lake, NY through August 2nd.

Look for the new Folkways record featuring Guy Carawan, with John Cohen on guitar and Ollie Phillips on bass.

Washington Square Scene: Roy Berkeley, Marv Beinstock and some others attracting a crowd by playing a steady G chord for

four minutes straight. The first performance was so successful they repeated it later.

**SOCIAL NOTES FROM ALL OVER:** Barry Hornfield is now the proud possessor of a motor scooter... Lee Haring is off to San Francisco, expected back in late August... NYers leading folksinging at summer camps include Barry K at Bucks Rock, New Milford, Conn., Happy Traum at Lincoln Farm, Roscoe, NY, and Dick Weissman heading the new folk music dept. at Indian Hill, Stockbridge, Mass... Country Dave Sadler is in town, on leave from the Army. He was seen in Wash Sq picking guitar, along with John Cohen (guitar) and Harry Sprung (banjo). A fine session... Paul Clayton is back in town, making tapes for Elektra, but will be gone again soon, to New England and then back to Brown's Cove, Va... What famous banjo player has "a lovely Grecian profile"?... Gina Glaser, whose presence in town has been sorely missed, is summering in NY... Winnie Winston asks us to include the following in this issue: "NY fingerpicks are the only original gold finger picks in New York -- everyone else has swiped my idea without my permission."... Rock Weissberg and Marshall Brickman have both turned up picking in Wash Sq this summer... Also a welcome addition to the local scene: Frank and Ellen Desso... Cortezano Inst. Co. has completely remodeled its store at 106 MacDougal... Two new measure records: Dick Rosmini's "Art of the 5-Stringed Leica" and Tom Paley's new, "Time For No Time"... Seriously, Tom is recording for a company in D.C. We're eagerly awaiting the finished disc... Roger Lass is looking for a home for five perfectly matched black Vittens.

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He hates to break up the set... Al Kahn of The Boulevard Book House in Los Angeles, happened into NY for a couple of days... Is that Mark on the jacket of a new Elektra jazz disc?... Harry and Jeanie who are expecting an addition to their family... trilogy at a recent concert (mentioned in detail above): Roy Berkeley. "I learned this song from Roger Abrahams, and forget a lot of it, so I changed it." John Cohen, "That's alright, Roger isn't here." Tom Paley, "But there are spies! You'll read about it in Caravan!"... "One knows anything about Windsor" banjos? Made in Birmingham, but Birmingham where?... Caravan figured extensively in an article by Ben Botkin in the recent NY Folklore Journal. Several of our writers were quoted, and Barry K's "Means Scene" was cited... Bob Brill was 2nd Honorable Mention in the British Chess Problem Tournament. He is said to be the world's foremost kazoo-playing chess problemist... Lee Haring reports having travelled safely as far as Kansas City, Mo... Paul Clayton, who only arrived in NY half a page ago, is gone again, back to Brown's Cove... Roger Abrahams reports all is well in Central City, Colorado. --gardyloo!



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