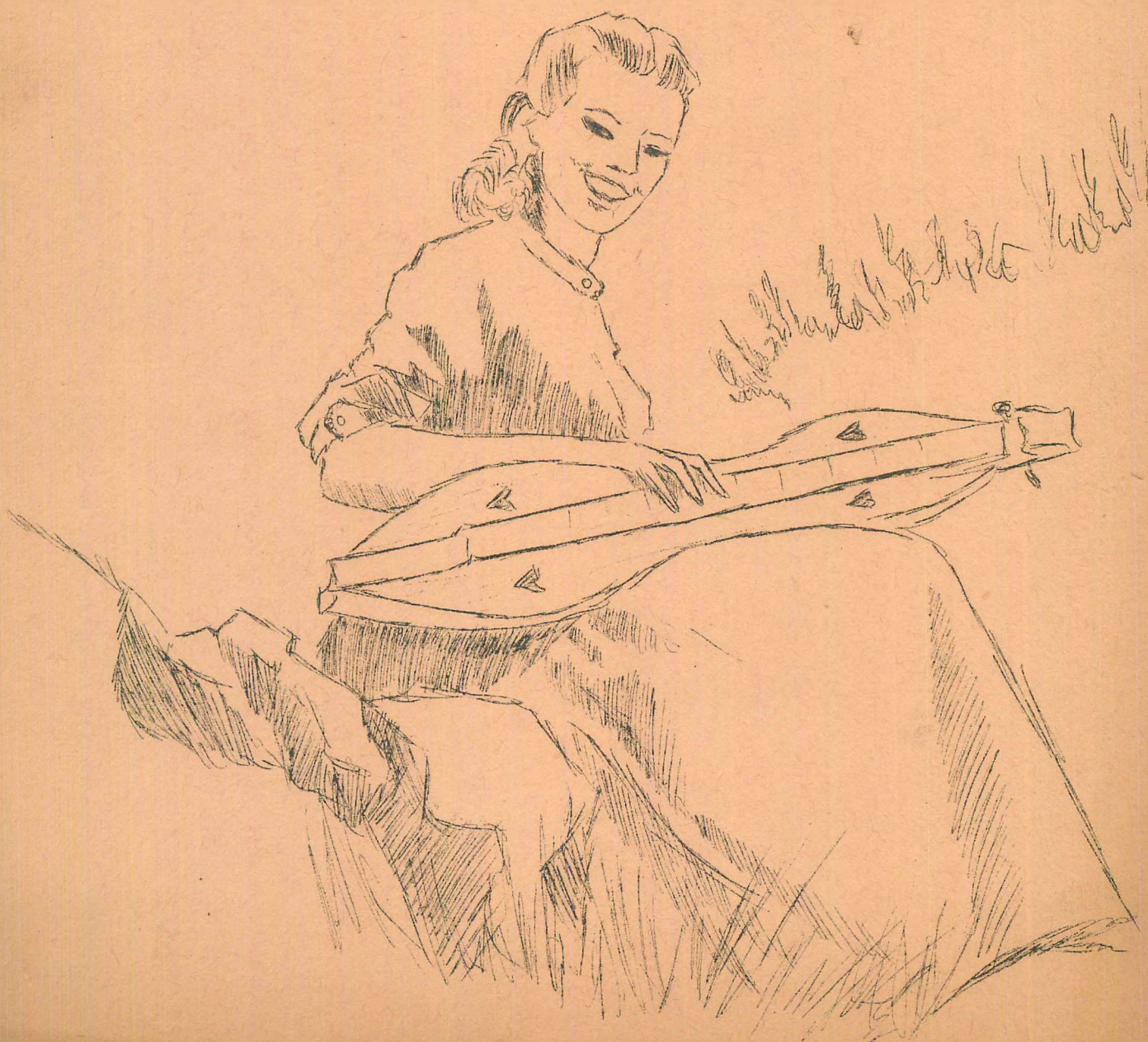


CHOOOG 2-5

Folkmusic Issue



chooog two-five

FAPA 80

Summer 1957

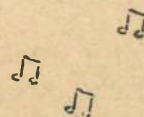
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The cover drawing is a crude sketch taken from the very nice photo on the jacket of SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY TOO by Jean Ritchie (Riverside RLP 12-620)

CHOOOG 2 - 5 is published for the FAPA, Summer 1957 mailing, and for distribution to sundry other interested people. Material in this issue is pretty much written or stolen by the editor. There is no copyright and no second-class entry. Mimeography is by Speedoprint Model L. Apologies again for inadequate obliteration.. it seems that this cheap corflu won't work on expensive stencils.

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No Matter How You Sing It...

There is a certain undeniable charm in the old, unconfirmed story that Rudyard Kipling wrote the song THE BASTARD KING OF ENGLAND, and subsequently was scratched in the race for position as Poet Laureate of England. But whether there is any truth in the story or not doesn't make the song any the less entertaining to those who like That Sort Of Thing, or any less shocking to those who are Shocked By That Sort Of Thing.

But is it folkmusic?

Well, before you start to decide that, you need a working definition of folkmusic. The American College Dictionary says, "Music, usually of simple character, originating and handed down among the common people. And in this discussion, I'll go along with that.

Folkmusic is turning into Big Business nowadays, with specialized recording companies springing up like toadstools, and everytime you turn around, you run into another Authority on the subject (including the self-appointed amateurs like me). A lot of them are spending a good deal of their time "proving" that item such as THE BASTARD KING OF ENGLAND, KAFOOZALUM, etc. are not real folkmusic. On a recent tape, Boyd Raeburn quoted to me from an article somewhere which claimed that "most of these songs were written in the late 1890's"*and that while they are generally attributed to well-known personages, they were seldom written by said personages.

Now, I'm not going to waste much time wondering just how these Authorities authenticated their information on the sources of such songs. Songs stand or fall in the singing, and not over the moot point of authorship.

It seems likely to me, and I work on the premise that at some time in its past every folksong was sung in some form or another for the First Time. This would imply authorship of some sort. Far be it from me to assume, as some Authorities seem to, that the only true folk songs are those which have existed from The Beginning.

* Oddly enough, the song about Jesse James which claims to have been written by Billy Gashade seems to be accepted among most Authorities as a folksong, even though it is quite unlikely that it was written before Jesse's death in 1882.

NO MATTER HOW YOU SING IT...(2)

Most likely someone sang it and taught it to someone else, who sang it to someone else. This is the accepted form for the carrying on of folkmusic. And according to some Authorities, to be real folkmusic, at least one of the singers who passes the song along has to change the words and/or melody. (Probably because he forgot the way he heard it.) If he gets two songs confused and splices them together or sections up one into pieces, so much the better. That is the "folk process". To be folkmusic, songs must be sung by the "folk", handed down by word of mouth, and changed in the process; to just by the Best of Authorities.

Then who are the "folk"? They are not necessarily the poorest, or least educated class in a culture. I say that they are necessarily the people who give its form to an ethnic group. And in a culture like ours, I say that the "folk" are the common people.

Up until the coming of the mass communication media such as radio and the phonograph (and even TV) I would venture that most people learned most of the songs that they knew by word of mouth, and passed them on the same way, if they bothered to pass them on at all. I can't be certain about the period between the mass production of printed sheet music and the phonograph. A lot of songs were written, sung, and forgotten. Some were written, sung, and are still remembered, and often these are claimed to be hovering on the indistinct bourne between popular music and folk music. But they are still directly tracable to the source and there are "official" versions. They don't seem to have done the necessary changing at the hands of the people to qualify by the given definition.

Radio and later TV and the Hit Parade situation have confused the folkmusic field considerably. There are still "folk" and they still sing, but nowadays they sing Pop Tunes, and commercial jingles. And maybe a ditty about something or another hitting the spot, or someone living modern, or something tasting good like whatever it is should, will be the folkmusic of our time to the Authorities of the future. In our culture with its mass communication, high percentage of literacy, etc. it is practically impossible for folkmusic to exist in the manner that it did a hundred years ago. Conditions just don't permit it.

Yet, there is one form of folk lore today that is passed along by word of mouth, from individual to individual in most cases, is changed in the passing, and is sung a great deal by the "common" people without benefit of radio or TV. And that is the dirty song.

I don't know when or where (other than in the Pornographic Amateur Press Association) the BASTARD KING OF ENGLAND, or KAFOOZALUM might have been published in unexpurgated form. But I am quite certain that, if these and similar songs have survived since the late 19th Century (even if not longer) they have done so in the fullest tradition of folkmusic, and in accordance with the rules of most Authorities. They change from singer to singer, and when like many acknowledged folksongs they show up on records, it is in bowdlerized form.

Still, the bawdy song is sung and sung by the common man...the modern "folk". And still the would-be authority asks, Is It Folkmusic?

Section 2

Some things are fitting and right. Some things aren't. Boyd Raeburn (again) was commenting on non-folk-type singers doing folk material, particularly some ghastly woman who he taped singing a Bessie Smith song. And he made an excellent point. There is a wrongness in a professional-concert-type singer in full tux standing on a stage singing songs like John Henry and Take This Hammer. But there is as much wrongness in the same character with the same tuxedo-voice singing the same songs, even though he wears a lumberjack shirt and denims. (Like Richard Dyer-Bennett in his tux at Town Hall singing John Henry in his clear British-troubador voice).

It's not just what you sing, but how you sing it. Witness Burl Ives and the Andrew Sisters singing GOING DOWN THIS ROAD (they recorded this item some years back). A song may be a fine folksong, but in the hands and mouth of a singer whose style is non-folk, it loses its folk qualities and becomes just another pop or art song (depending on who's singing).

For instance ON TOP OF OLD SMOKY, which Oscar Brand mentioned. On the Hit Parade, it was a folksong-turned-pop, and was presented in a Pop style, with pop accompaniment. It was recorded by the pop singers, and in most cases it was their recordings that sold. (The Weavers are Another Subject, and I won't be able to cover them this time. Maybe later.)

In my opinion, and concerning the stuff that I like and loosely label "folkmusic": it is not merely the song but the presentation, the singer and what he does with and/or to the song. Even the best singer couldn't possibly salvage some songs. But on the other hand, a great many songs that won't qualify by the Authorities' definitions as folk-music, make awfully good listening in the folk-style of many singers.

By way of amplification, I'd like to quote from the Forward to BEST LOVED FOLKSONGS (collected by the Lomaxes). In this Musical Forward, by Charles and Ruth Lomax, they say;

"one can do anything one wants with a folksong, but we feel any change not in keeping with tradition must be musically worth changing. Chromatic upholstering, overrichness of harmonic texture, modulation, and above all, 'cuteness' are to be avoided as well in the playing as in the arranging."

I agree.

DEPT. OF COMPARATIVE FOLKMUSIC

ON TOP OF OLD SMOKY
from BEST LOVED AMERICAN FOLK SONGS
by John and Alan Lomax
Grosset & Dunlap, New York

verses 7 thru 12 as given.

"It's a-rain', it's a-hailin',
The moon gives no light,
Your horses can't travel
This dark, lonesome night.

"Go put up your horses
And feed them some hay,
And seat yourself by me
As long as you stay."

"My horses ain't hungry,
They won't eat your hay.
So farewell, my little darling,
I'll feed on the way.

"I'll drive on to Georgy
And write you my mind.
My mind is to marry
And leave you behind."

"I'll go up on Smoky
On the mountain so high
Where the wild burds and the turtledoves
Can hear my sad cry.

"As sure as the dewdrops
Fall on the green corn,
Last night he was with me
Tonight he is gone."

THE WAGONER'S LAD
from American Folk Tales and Songs
by Richard Chase
Signet Key Book

I am a poor strange girl whose fortune is bad,
Who's a long time been courted by the wagoner's lad,
He courted me duly by night and by day,
And now he is loaded and agoing away.

Your horses are hungry, go feed them some hay,
And set you down by me as long as you stay.
My horses ain't hungry, they won't eat your hay.
So fare you well Nancy, I've no time to stay.

Your wagon's to grease, your bill is to pay,
Set you down by me as long as you stay.
My wagon is greased, my whip's in my hand,
So fare you well Nancy, I've no time to stand.

He mounted his horse, away he did go.
He left this girl weeping as you very well know,
But when he returned she crowned him with joy
And kissed the sweet lips of the wagoner's boy.

So early next morning as he did arise,
He crossed the deep waters with tears in his eyes,
To think he must leave her and see her no more.
He left this girl weeping on New River's shore.

Some say that I'm wicked, some say that I'm vile,
Some say that I'm guilty of many bad crimes.
I'll prove them all liars by the powers above,
For I'm guilty of nothing but innocent love.

Your father doth hate me because I am poor,
And thinks me scarce worthy to enter his door,
But I hope he will rue it--it all is in vain--
For love is a killing and a tormenting pain.

How hard is the fortune of all womankind!
They're always controlled and always confined--
Controlled by their parents until they're made wives,
Then slaves to their husbands the rest of their lives.

FARE THEE WELL, POLLY
from the singing of Pete Seeger

My horses ain't hungry, they won't eat your hay,
So fare thee well, Polly, I'm going away.

Your parents don't like me, they say I'm too poor,
They say I'm not worthy to enter your door.

My parents don't like you, you're poor I am told,
But it's your love I'm wanting, not silver and gold.

Then come with me, Polly, we'll ride 'til we come,
To some little cabin, we'll call it our home.

Oh, sparking is pleasure and parting is grief,
And a false-hearted lover is worse than a thief.

They'll hug you, they'll kiss you, they'll tell you more lies,
Than cross ties on a railroad or stars in the sky.

CLINCH MOUNTAIN
from American Folk Tales and Songs
Richard Chase
Signet Key Book

Verses 5 thru 7 as given:

Oh, Lulu! Oh Lulu! Oh Lulu my dear!
I'd give this whole world if my Lulu was here

Her parents don't like me; they say I'm too poor.
They say I'm not worthy to enter their door.

My foot's in my stirrup, the bridle in my hand.
Fare-well my sweet Lulu, I'm leaving this land.

SINGING FAMILY of the Cumberlands
by Jean Ritchie
Oxford University Press
New York 1955

I wanted to write something of my impressions of this book, but I find that I can't. I just don't know how to put into words the way I've enjoyed reading it. But I do want to tell you about it, in hopes that someone else, hearing about it here, will read it and be glad. So I'll take the liberty of quoting a good part of the jacket blurb:

"Nestled in the Cumberland mountains of Kentucky, on the north fork of the Kentucky River, is a tiny village called Viper, supposedly so named by one of Jean Ritchie's hardy ancestors in honor of the many crawling inhabitants found there by the early settlers. There, over endless dishwashing, in the cornfield, or on the front porch at the edge of dark, Mom and Dad Ritchie and their fourteen children sang hundreds of the Elizabethan ballads and songs brought to Kentucky by the first pioneers and treasured down through the generations. There, too, the Ritchie children went to the one-room school, helped make the crop in the steep hillside field, and danced the traditional Saturday-night singing games and sets with the neighbor boys and girls.

"In the Ritchie family singing is as necessary as speaking--as each child learned to talk, he learned to sing. The family resting at the end of a row in the cornfield might break into 'Little Devils,' to make the work go lighter, and always, if the weather was fine, everyone would gather on the front porch and sing the moon up with such favorites as 'John Riley,' 'Fair Ellender,' and 'The Cuckoo She's A Pretty Birl.' The melody lines and lyrics of 42 folk songs appear naturally and spontaneously throughout the book.

"This is a new kind of history, and an important kind, showing one family's unique part in the building of America. It is a biography of the Ritchies' pleasures and troubles growing up together as a large family in an isolated pocket of mountains, Almost completely shut in from the rest of the country--recollections and memories of a family fireside on a winter's night, summer twilights on the front porch, childhood troubles, of fall days, harvesting and stir-offs, marriages, births, and deaths. The family is a real one, the stories are true, written not by an interested observer but 'from the inside looking out,' by the youngest member of the family."

Jean Ritchie impresses me as a very lovely person.

Come All You Fair And Tender Ladies

Come all you fair and tender ladies,
Be careful how you court young men,
They're like a star of a summer's morning,
They'll first appear and then they're gone.

They'll tell to you some loving story,
They'll declare to you their love is true;
Straightway they'll go and court some other,
And that's the love they have for you.

I wish I was some little sparrow,
That I had wings, could fly so high;
I'd fly away to my false true lover,
And when he's talking I'd be by.

But I am not a little sparrow,
And neither have I wings to fly;
I'll sit down here in grief and sorrow
To weep and pass my troubles by.

If I'd a-known before I courted,
I never would have courted none;
I'd have locked my heart in a box of golden,
And pinned it up with a silver pin.

--BEST LOVED AMERICAN FOLK SONGS
John and Alan Lomax
Grosset & Dunlap, New York

LOLLY-TOO-DUM

from BEST LOVED AMERICAN FOLK SONGS

by John and Alan Lomax

Grosset & Dunlap, New York

As I went out one morning to breathe the morning air,
Lolly-too-dum, too-dum, lolly-too-dum day,
As I went out one morning to breathe the morning air,
I heard a dear old mother saying, "Oh, my daughter fair,"
Lolly-too-dum, too-dum, lolly-too-dum day.

"You better go wash them dishes and hush that flattering tongue,
You know you want to marry and that you are too young."

"O pity my condition, just as you would your own,
For fourteen long years I have lived all alone."

"Supposing I were willing, where would you get your man?"
"Why, Lordy mercy, mammy, I'd marry handsome Sam."

"Supposing he would slight you like you done him before?"
"Why, Lordy mercy, mammy, I'd marry forty more."

"There's doctors and lawyers and men of high degree,
And some of them wants to marry and some will marry me."

"There's peddlers and tinkers and boys from the plow,
Lordy mercy, mammy, the fit comes on me now."

"Now my daughter's married and well for to do,
Lordy mercy, boys, I'm on the market too.
Lolly-too-dum, too-dum, lolly-too-dum day."

In response to the millions of requests for more, we are bringing you another installment of that sterling series;

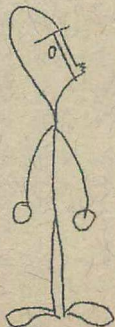
OSCAR BRAND (as seen by me)

It was unthinkable that two such close associates as Oscar Brand and Jean Ritchie should sing in competition with each other. Yet there it was in the paper; while Oscar would be singing a midnight concert of folksongs at 100 7th Ave S, Saturday night, Jean would be singing a midnight concert of folksongs at 99 7th Ave S. And competition can't get much closer than that. Larry and I were shocked. We were also somewhat perturbed since we're keen to see each of them sing.

A thin haze of disappointment at having to miss Jean's performance followed us to Manhattan Saturday. We picked up the tickets we had reserved for Oscar's performance, and then wandered aimlessly around the Village for a while. A little before midnight we started accumulating in front of Actor's Playhouse. I suspect the producer of the concerts wants to gather a queue to impress the passers-by. So we cooperated and queued.

Across the street at 99 7th Ave S, a similar lot of people were lining up for Jean's concert. They eyed us as suspiciously as we eyed them. I speculated on how long it would be before we began salvo-ing rocks at each other. But there weren't any rocks convenient, so I gave up that idea.

99 7th Ave S



Finally they let us in to Actor's Playhouse. And, after speaking a kind word to a man who seems to be the manager and who seemed to recognize us from our previous calls, we traipsed on down the aisle to the front of the house.

Since the last Brand performance, it seemed there had been an additional row of theater seating installed, in place of the

100 7th Ave S



I looked agand at Oscar Brand (2)

paint-spattered chairs. So we sat ourselves down in the front row on the aisle.

The entire aspect of the theater had changed. The scrim had been flown. Or rather, it had been rolled up like a window blind and hung from the low ceiling. And several paces behind its line hung a wall of apparently opaque legs. Alas, I thought, if Oscar wants to stand behind the curtain and observe the audience the way he claims he does, he'll have to find a moth-hole to look through this time. Would it be worth the trouble?

In front of the drapes was the customary table. As before, it was of the two-legged sort. It looked scarcely sturdy enough to support its own weight, nonetheless the weight of a folksinger plus guitar (12 strings).

A foursome took the seats behind us, two youths who were familiar to some extent with Oscar's work, and two girls who weren't. One of the fellows had been at the McMillan concert where Jean had joined Oscar for a couple of songs. He told his girl the story Oscar had told about Jean's son. (It seems that whenever Oscar's version of a song is difference from Jean's version, the young Ritchie accuses Oscar of singing it wrong, even if the young Ritchie is seated in a concert audience at the time.)

They also speculated quite a bit off the evening's big Brand-Ritchie competition, and one boy concluded to his satisfaction "they both have agents who do these things. They didn't even know about it. They wouldn't compete against each other this way."

One of the girls asked her date what Oscar Brand is like. His reply, and I quote in full, was: "He does a very lot of talking and he's very very dry. Flat-bottomed bargemen." * It stuck me as a pretty apt description.

I remembered again Oscar's crack about watching through the scrim and I thought that it was a shame he couldn't eavesdrop in the audience before the show, the way I do. It can be quite interesting/amusing.

As usual the house filled slowly and noisily, but after a while the houselights dimmed, the followspot flashed on, and Oscar entered.

He galavanted on stage in an aura of unsupressable exuberance. He was dressed more casually than he had been at previous performances: he wore a open-necked black-and-red-plaid shirt (the kind we used to call lumberjack shirts) over a dark blue turtleneck. And no jacket. He seemed completely delighted over something and more relaxed than usual. He had more the air of being host at a party than professional entertainer at a concert.

* "The song was one created in the days when flat-bottomed barges floated the busy and prosperous Canal--manned by flat-bottomed bargemen. The singer should sound as if he were looking at the world through rye-colored glasses." programme note on The Er-i-e Canal from AMERICAN DRINKING SONGS, Riverside Recording.

Oscar Brand and Cockeyed Looney (3)

Settling himself on the edge of the table, he told us that he wanted to do a program of songs of Laughing America. But he wanted to include requests as much as possible. When he asked what we wanted to hear, the cry went up, "See Them Buzzards!" There were other songs called for, including Lowlands Away, which would have been somewhat out of place in such company. Oscar chatted back and forth a bit with the audience before he started to sing.

In a moment of weakness I asked for Cockeyed Looney.

Oscar peered into the darkness in my direction, and I suddenly felt very conspicuous in the front row. He claimed that, with the spot light blazing into his eyes, he couldn't see a thing past its limits. For an instant I wondered if that were so. "Where did you hear Cock-eyed Looney?" he demanded with an astonished grin.

"You sang it, " I answered hesitantly, although I'd decided that he couldn't possibly see me. I hoped.

"I sang it? Here?"

"Yes."

So, during the evening, he sang it again. Or at least the chorus, which is all of it he had sung before. Herewith an approximation from memory (a very bad memory--mine) of it. The melody is pretty much that of Were You There When They Crucified My Lord, the way Homer and Jethro might do it:

"Was you there when they strang up Cockeyed Looney?
Was you there when he soul rize to the skies?
Was you there when the noose set his mortal spirit loose,
And damn near straightened Looney's eyes?"

Oscar told us about the big competition between Jean and himself. It was a mistake, he explained, a terrible mix-up. And to make up for it, he was going to cut his program short and take us all across the street to hear the last portion of Jean's program. Then he and Jean would sing a few numbers together for us. It was a delightful idea and was greeted enthusiastically by the audience.

He sang us some fine songs that night, including Lydia Pinkham. (If you want to know who she was, ask Mr Bloch.) This, he explained, is one of his more strenuous songs, like the Er-i-e Canal. It seems that the fellow he learned it from stomped up and down while singing it, so Oscar stomped up and down across the stage area, shouting, "Have you heard, heard, HEARD about Lydia Pinkham, and her love for the whole human race? How she sold her vegetable compound and the papers published her face?", meanwhile playing the guitar as if it were a bass drum.

Suddenly, in mid-chorus, he discovered that as he crossed the stage, the followspot was following him. In great delight, he stomped on toward the wall, reversed, and stomped back again. The light follow

Oscar Brand, 3-D Folksinger (4)

Gleefully, he stomped on to the other wall, all the while shouting the praises of Lydia Pinkham.

He sang some very good songs that night. And told some fascinating stories. He told us some of his adventures in the Army, which led into the marching version of Old King Cole (not that one, the other one) which he sang with great animation and characterization.

All too soon, he told us that it was one-fifteen, and that after one more song, we'd break and run for 99 7th Ave S. Run, because there might not be seating enough for all of us.

One more song, he promised, so we shouted out our requests, the same guy calling for Lowlands Away again, not unlike the voice in Red Ingle's CIGARETTES, WHISKEY AND WILD, WILD WOMEN who keeps asking, "Sing Temptation".

The popular request was, of course, the Er-i-e Canal, so Oscar moved his capo into position for it. He fingered the guitar, then paused thoughtfully, and swung the instrument around so that it was dangling from his hand, facing us. "This is my 3-D position," he told us, "Capo at the third fret and I finger the key of D. It doesn't come out D, of course. This is the way I play it for the Er-i-e Canal. I play the One-Eyed Reilly the same. I even play the right hand the same." He made a quick pass at the strings with his right hand. And then he sang the One-Eyed Reilly, following it with the Er-i-e Canal.

I never get in my share of hollering on the choruses of the Er-i-e because I get too interested in watching him as he sings it. It is a lively item.

The lights went up. We grabbed our coats and dashed for the door. It was rather a slow dash, since everyone else had the same idea, and it was a narrow aisle. But finally we got through, and ran headlong across 7th Ave S, barely managing to block some line-crashers who wanted to squeeze into the cabaret ahead of us.

Still under the impression that there might not be room for us all, we grabbed at the first empty seats we came to, just inside the door.

99 appeared to be a cross between a night club and a theater-in-the-round. The center of the room was open enough for dancing, but lit with spots from the ceiling in the manner of an area stage. Around the sides of the floor were tables, and also loose chairs, such as the ones we'd grabbed. And on the other side of the doorway from us was a bar.

Jean was off-stage when we came in, and the houselights were up. Barmaids dashed around taking orders. In a few minutes Oscar came in wearing a light jacket and carrying his guitar case. He set the case down in the corner and began talking to someone at a table.

The houselights went down and Jean came on. It might have been the lighting, but she looked a little pale and tired, despite her bright frock and pleasant smile. She had company from Off Somewhere, whom she

Oscar Brand: silenced in mid-strum (5)

introduced to us. The girl sang, and then her husband played the bagpipe (a striking instrument, if ever there was one).

After Jean had finished her part of the program, she called for Oscar. He made a quick grab for his guitar and rushed into the stage area. They talked a bit and then introduced their first song.

Mostly they sang courting songs which they'd recorded together. One of the most entertaining of these was an item which Jean knew (and sang) as the Pretty Little Reckless Boy. But Oscar claimed he'd learned it as the Pretty Little Lipless Boy, and at one point he insisted on singing it that way, demonstrating.

It is Oscar's wont to strum at the guitar while he makes conversation during his programs. So it was natural that he fill in a little background while Jean was talking. But her voice was small and the room was big, and noisy what with barmaids tripping about in the dark delivering orders. Suddenly she reached out, clamping a hand over the strings of the guitar, silencing Oscar while she finished what she was saying.

After a excellent lot of singing, they brought the program to a successful close and left the stage area (by simply walking into the audience). Then Oscar came back on and asked us if we wanted to do some more group singing. We did. (Someone called out for him to sing Lowlands Away.) So he led us in several popular folksongs, while Jean seated herself in the audience. He gave us the impression that he was carrying on the program because he wanted to sing more, for the pure fun of it.

This is one of the features that makes Oscar Brand as a singer-performer. He puts across the impression of being so thoroughly enjoying singing that it is nigh onto impossible not to enjoy it along with him. He is the happiest-sounding singer I've ever heard.

He lead us in the singing of ON TOP OF OLD SMOKY again, after commenting that a song could survive for over five hundred years, and then in six months tin pan alley could kill it.

We were in good voice, and Oscar knew a mess of verses, but it all had to end sometime. Before he left though, Oscar told us he'd be doing another program with Jean in two weeks, at Kaufmann Concert Hall.

So, naturally, we went.

Oscar Brand: accident prone (6)

Kaufmann Concert Hall is where we started this whole round of attending folksong concerts. We saw Richard Dyer-Bennett there way back when (when we mentioned it some time ago, to be exact). It is a very nice theater, part of the YM-YWHA, and located up on 92nd Street. It is a big, proper theater with air-conditioning, a PA system, acoustics and all that.

Chet Cohen went along with us. Our seats were in row H in the center, and we settled into them as soon as the theater was opened to the audience. The show was scheduled for 8:40.

The first part of the program went by without any apparent undue incidents, but things got pretty lively after that. They opened simply enough. Jean and Oscar came out and sang a couple of courting songs, which are generally question-and-answer songs in which both parties can take part. And then they went off while the houselights were brought up and the late comers seated.

As the seats around us were filling up, I could hear someone in the row behind us saying, "Oscar Brand is a shock to me. He's much younger than I'd pictured him." (He's around 37 but looks closer to 27). I think she was the same person who kept finger-drumming and humming during the performance. This annoyed me no end. When a performer, like Oscar, asks his audience to join in, I believe in doing so with all the enthusiasm one feels. But when someone like Jean Ritchie is singing something like the Merry Golden Tree in a lovely unaccompanied voice, it is most annoying to have someone in the audience making a racket. There are times when it is for everyone to sing out, and there are times when it is for people to listen. And anyone in the audience who think he can hum well enough to be entertaining to the guy next to him (who paid \$2.50 for that seat) should engage a hall and let the world have the opportunity of hearing him sing. Says I.

Jean did a section of the program alone, singing some songs like the Merry Golden Tree (a variant of the Golden Vanity) unaccompanied, and singing others to her guitar or dulcimer. She'd taken one dulcimer on her lap, and as she went to put it back on the table, she brushed it against the mike stand, knocking loose a peg.

When Oscar took over the portion of the show that he was doing alone, he got off to a jimdandy start by giving a long introduction to the song, KANSAS BOYS, hitting a good lick on the guitar, and singing instead MY LOVE IS A RIDER. Obviously as startled as we were, he stopped and began again, this time with the right song.

The next unscheduled incident came off when he tried to raise the mike. The mike itself came up but the cord stayed where it was, having come loose at the connector. He fumbled with it as if trying to poke the cable back into the connector, but that was no good. The silence was oppressive. The audience was growing restless. So he thrust the whole thing behind the curtain where a pair of hands accepted it, and he went on with the program, unamplified. He called out Jean

Oscar Brand:matinee idol (7)

and they sang together again.

Oscar would push the capo into position and strum the guitar. "That's too low," Jean would tell him. "Too low?" He'd shove the capo over a couple of frets and strum again. Jean would hum to try it, and after a little experimentation he'd hit a key she liked, so they'd sing. And pretty soon the hands gave back the microphone which had been re-stopped.

During the intermission, Chet, Larry and I had moved into a bank of empty seats in the front row, partly to get away from the drumming woman. From here we could see quite a bit of what was happening on the stage. A lot was happening. Oscar was teasing Jean unmercifully. But it was he who forgot the words, while singing A PAPER OF PINS. He ad-libbed something passable while Jean glowed with delight. So he sang at her:

"I'll give to you some billiard cues,
That's one thing you can't refuse,
If you will marry me....."

Jean hummed a couple of bars, contemplating retaliation, and then sang back at him:

" I will accept you_r billiard cues,
But what on earth are billiard cues,
And I won't marry you...."

The audience cheered. With admirable restraint, they withheld suggestions to the effect that she bat him one.

Oscar laughed. "And now back to the song," he said, before wallowing into his next verse.

It occurs to me that I'd love to see these to do A HOLE IN THE BUCKET.

When it came to curtain calls, the audience was quite insistent. So they came out to sing an encore. They introduced NO SIR; NO (which is THE SPANISH MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER or NO JOHN, NO.) Oscar located a key to Jean's liking, strummed away and stood there grinning, while Jean automatically launched into the first verse, which is the boy's part. She realized suddenly what was happening, stopped, and gave the song to him.

On their last curtain call, Oscar took the dulcimers from the table with him when he went backstage again, as if symbolically telling the audience that it was the last call. I think, tho, that they'd have kept on cheering while he struck the whole works, if he'd done that.

A small crowd gathered afterward in the lounge which was just off the stage door, to accost them for autographs and the like. We were bunched around the water fountain, when I heard a cry of anguish. I

Oscar Brand: Exits (8)

looked up in time to see the girl who had uttered it. She was an attractive, well-dressed young woman, who added to her cry (in a tone of bitter disappointment) the explanation, "Oscar Brand is married!"

In a few minutes Jean, and then Oscar, came out. A small boy with a small notebook and the stub of a pencil, stopped him and asked for an autograph. The boy's mother fluttered behind him, saying, "He takes guitar lessons. Do you know where he can learn folksinging?" Oscar made a noncommittal sort of reply.

And pretty soon everyone was leaving. As we started for the door, there was loud crash. We wheeled and saw George Pickow holding a handle. The guitar case to which it had been attached was lying on the floor. We sincerely hoped nothing inside had been damaged. It had been a pretty accident-fraught evening already.

--LeeH 23 May 57

A CHECKLIST OF OSCAR BRAND RECORDS

LPs 12"

SONGS AND POEMS OF THE SEA - Audio Masterpiece LPA 1220
SHIVAREE (with others) - Esoteric ES-538
BAWDY SONGS & BACKROOM BALLADS - Audio Fidelity (Vol I) AFLP 1906
(Vol I originally released on 10") (Vol II) AFLP 1806
(Vol III) AFLP 1824
AMERICAN DRINKING SONGS - Riverside RLP 12-630
LAUGHING AMERICA - Tradition 1014
BADMEN AND HEROS and PIRATE SONGS - Elektra EKL-129
(this was originally released as two 10" disks on one of which Oscar sings two bands.)
COURTIN'S A PLEASURE and FOLKSONGS FROM THE SOUTHERN APPALACHIANS
(Elektra EKL-122 (this was originally released as two 10" disks, on one of which Oscar and Jean Ritchie sing courting songs.))

10" LPs

BADMEN AND HEROS (see above) - Elektra # 16
COURTING SONGS with Jean Ritchie (see above) - Elektra #22
BACKROOM BALLADS - Chesterfield Music Shops, Inc. CMS -101 (out of print)

45 RPM

THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER - Old Town Record # OTP 301
I'LL NEVER FORGET YOU

LPs scheduled but not released as of this writing are:

NONSENSE SONGS

ONLY WHEN I LAUGH (Tradition)

BAWDY SONGS Vol IV (Audio Fi.)

G.I. SONGS

NAVY SONGS

VAUDEVILLE SONGS

(sorry I haven't any more data on these yet.)

"And A Bottle For The Chanteyman..."

Almost everybody knows about the work songs of the sailship seaman. Most of them know that these songs are called "shanties" and spelled "chanties" and that folk authorities are generally disagreed as to the origin of this term. But it is generally agreed that a good shantyman was worth his weight in whiskey, to set the pace for pulling and various shipboard duties, and for keeping the men in the fo'c'sle entertained between watches. (According to one of the authorities I've read, the sailor's fo'c'sle songs were usually quite proper, suitable for the ears of women and babes, although there were seldom either of these in the fo'c'sle, because -according to this authority- no matter what the seaman was on land, at sea he was clean of word and deed. I shall leave it up to you whether you're willing to accept this writer as an authority.)

One thing is pretty sure, when the shantyman sang, he had a chorus of willing voices to join in where called for. And it is at this point where the average recording of folk sea chanties loses its impact. I make no claim toward having heard all of the records of sea chanties that have been made, or even to having heard a representative collection of them. But I've heard a lot of singers sing a lot of sea songs on commercially released disks. Maybe the ideal record has been released and I've missed it, I know that a lot of far-from-ideal recordings have been released, and I've heard 'em.

In the specialized field of folk recordings there are a number of releases by fine folksingers accompanied in most cases by guitar. The instrument is well in order. Shantymen, they say, carried guitars, concertinas, fiddles and other portable instruments. Fo'c'sle songs in particular might have been well-accompanied when sung at sea. And it is not difficult to visualize a sailor alone on duty, entertaining himself with a bit of a song.

My favorite of my collection of sea songs features one man with his guitar, singing a variety of items. My favorite song on it is Shenandoah, a capstan chanty, which he sings with a gentle loneliness. It is sung with the vast emptiness that I feel the sea must be at times, the way a sailor might sing to himself on a still moonlight night, becalmed too far from everywhere. In this rendition it isn't a work song, any longer. It is hard for a song, sung by one man alone, to feel like a work song.

On the other hand there is Leonard Warren, who covers the back of an RCA disc with "Sea Shanties" (The accepted spellings of the word are numerous: chanty, chantey, shanty etc. etc.) According to the jacket this is "Leonard Warren, baritone. The Robert Shaw Chorale, Robert Shaw conductor. With Orchestra"

And Whiskey For My Johnny (2)

This is a very nice record for listening, what with the leader and chorus and orchestra and what the jacket calls "something of the authentic atmosphere of the sea, even though it be of a poetic rather than purely realistic nature". In this it succeeds. It is as much of the sea as are the fine oil paintings and old prints of the Flying Cloud, stuns'ls set, billowing over a deep green sea. It has the splendor of Byron's poem, the majesty of a tall white ship, and the same impersonality. All poetry and splendor, and nothing of the men who sailed the ships.

To capture the yielding, alive quality of a ship at sea, a record needs to capture the individuality and humanity of its men. To sing with the raising of an anchor or sheeting home of a foresail, a record needs to sing with the voices of men. Not the carefully pitched and directed voices of a professional chorus, but the singing of men who have been brought together regardless of their particular skill as vocalists, who can sing out like working men at a physical job, singing for the beat and for the joy of singing.

If there is poetry in the sea, and in life itself, certainly there must be poetry for many people, not merely in the idealizations but also in the reality of life. Say what you will about the land-lubber, about the press gangs, and the shanghais, and the miseries of the sailor's life, there must have been men who sailed before the mast because they wanted to, just as there are merchant seamen today who'd rather ship out than come ashore. Idealize the sea of the sailships, or debunk it, it was a big sea, and life upon it probably ran the gamut from the wildest idealizations to the cruelist debunkings. Leave Leonard Warren and Lord Byron for the people who want them.

Give me a chorus of singers who sound as if they could man a capstan, if necessary.

-- LeeH 16 May 57

HOME, DEARIE, HOME

a chantey of the North-country sailors,
collected by Laura White in the late 19th Century.

Solo--Oh, Amble is a fine town, with ships in the bay,
And I wish with my heart I was only there to-day;
I wish with my heart I was far away from here,
A-sitting in my parlour, and talking to my dear.

Cho.--And it's home, dearie, home! oh, it's home I want to be.
My topsails are hoisted and I must out to sea,
For the oak, and the ash, and the bonny birchen tree,
They're all a-growing green in the North-countree;
Oh, it's home, dearie, home! oh, it's home I want to be.

Solo--Oh, there's a wind that blows, and it's blowing from the West,
And all of the winds that blow 'tis the one I like the best;
For it blows at our backs, and it shakes the pennon free,
And it soon will blow us home to the North-countree.

Cho.--And it's home, dearie, home! oh, it's home I want to be.
My topsails are hoisted and I must out to sea,
For the oak, and the ash, and the bonny birchen tree,
They're all a-growing green in the North-countree;
Oh, it's home, dearie, home! oh, it's home I want to be.

Solo--And if it be a lass, she shall wear a golden ring;
And if it be a lad, he shall live to serve his King;
With his buckles and his boots and his little jacket blue,
He shall walk the quarter-deck as his daddy used to do.

Cho.--And it's home, dearie, home! Oh, it's home I want to be!
My topsails are hoisted, and I must out to sea;
For the oak, and the ash, and the bonny birchen tree,
They're all a-growing green in the North-countree;
And it's home, dearie, home!

FINNEGAN'S WAKE
from IRISH STREET BALLADS
collected by Colm O Lochlainn
and published at the
Sing of the Three Candles in Fleet Street
Dublin, Ireland

Tim Finnegan liv'd in Walkin Street,
A gentleman Irish mighty odd.
He had a tongue both rich and sweet,
An' to rise in the world he carried a hod.
Now, Tim had a sort of a tipplin' way,
With the love of the liquor he was born,
An' to help him on with his work each day,
He'd a drop of the craythur every morn.

Chorus: Whack fol the dah, dance to your partner.
Welt the flure yer trotters shake,
Wasn't it the truth I told you,
Lots of fun at Finnegan's Wake.

One morning Tim was rather full,
His head felt heavy which made him shake.
He fell from the ladder and broke his skull,
So they carried him home his corpse to wake.
They rolled him us in a nice clean sheet,
And laid him out upon the bed,
With a gallon of whiskey at his feet,
And a barrel of porter at his head.

His frields assembled at the wake,
And Mrs Finnegan called for lunch.
First they brought in tay and cake,
Then pipes, tobacco, and whiskey punch.
Miss Biddy O'Brien began to cry,
"Such a neat clean corpse, did you ever see,
Arrah, Tim avourneen, why did you die?"
"Ah, hould you gab," said Paddy McGee.

Then Biddy O'Conner took up the job,
"Biddy," says she, "you're wrong, I'm sure,"
But Biddy gave her a belt in the gob,
And left her sprawling on the floor;
Oh, then the war did soon enrage;
'Twas woman to woman and man to man,
Shillelagh law did all engage,
And a row and a ruction soon began.

Then Micky Malony raised his head,
When a noggin of whiskey flew at him,
It missed and falling on the bed,
The liquor scattered over Tim;
Bedad he revives, see how he rises,
And Timothy rising from the bed,
Says, "Whirl your liquor round like blazes,
Thanam o'n dhoul, do ye think I'm dead?"