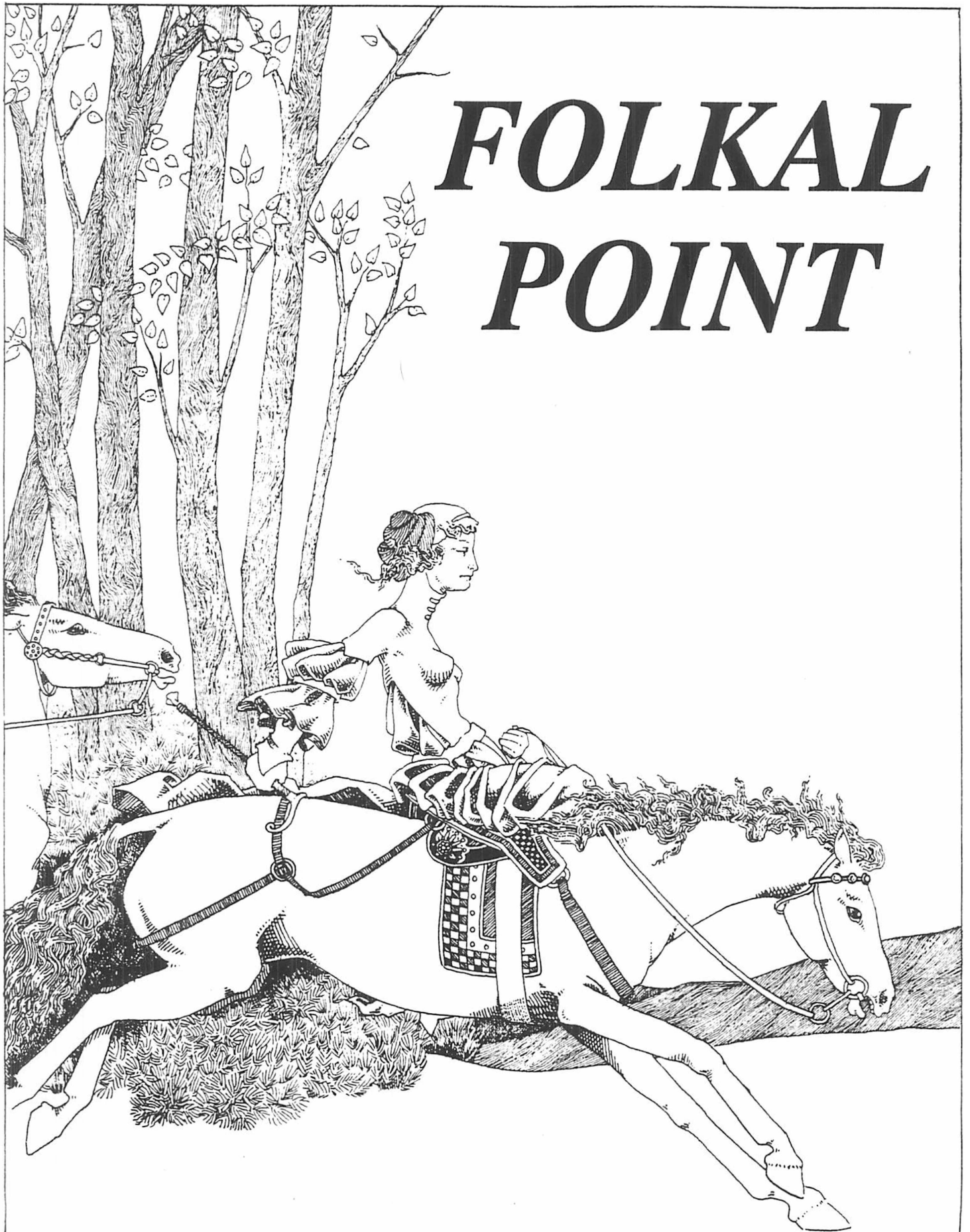


FOLKAL POINT



"Better Living Through Harmony"

• *Folkal Point* •

A Fanzine of Folk Music Opinion

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COMING TO THE POINT

an editorial by Stu Shiffman

Hey there, you with the sensitive cares-about-the-state-of-the-world look in your eyes and the telltale twitch of your typing finger! So — you're a person with a serious folkie habit, your sneakers are tied in Celtic knotwork, your computer has an Ogham font, and you think rumor is just part of the folk process? Think that Perlman fella plays mighty fancy fiddle? Always say that the latest pop rockers couldn't play their way out of a paper bag (if that was their idea of fun) compared to your fave Cajun or klezmer combo? OK, kids, let's put on a show!

It was with that paragraph that I announced my intention to do a "folkie fanzine".

In the original flyer, I'd mentioned that I was looking for someone to do a piece on fantasy novels that use folksongs as a touchstone: Ellen Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer*, Elizabeth Scarborough's *Song of Sorcery* ("The Brown Girl" meets "Gypsy Davy", etc.), and Delia Sherman's recent *Through A Brazen Mirror* ("Sweet William/The Famous Flower of Serving Men"), etc. That was my initial motivator for doing this fanzine, and all the contributors come to *Folkal Point* from science fiction fandom. A friend of mine, cartoonist Taral Wayne, once sneered that none of his SF fan acquaintances liked any music from after 1500. Despite this overgeneralization, Taral had focussed in on science fiction fans and their curious affinity for folk music and mediaevalist groups like the Society for Creative Anachronism. There is that same feel for an experience beyond the conventional and everyday, to be different and cherish the off-trail. Nothing is more annoying than for a special closet interest to become a crossover mainstream hit.

Whatever the conscious or subconscious motivation, I'm a folkie type of guy. Whether the drone of the pipes and synthesizer thrill of Battlefield Band, the lyrics of Christine Lavin or John Gorka, the jazzy honk of a klezmer Albert-system clarinet, or the California bluegrass women that my sweetie Andi Shechter has introduced me to — this is my musical meat and drink. What can surpass an evening at your local folk venue with an overpriced beer and petroleum product frozen pizza, and a dangerously over-amped "acoustic" group placed behind the pillars of the stage? Or those evenings when the solo guitarist, whether Dan Ar Bras or Leo Kottke, is practically in your lap as he shakes the body of his instrument to get the final notes to plop out?

I've lived now in three cities that possess strong folkie institutions. New York City, where I spent my first thirty-four years, had the Pinewoods Folk Music Club, which sponsored the usual round of song circles and public school auditorium concerts and a music camp weekend. Ted Greenstone, a bear-like fellow with a a denim guitar and piggyback mandolin case, was the one who made me aware of Pinewoods and its concerts at a Greenwich Village elementary school. It was there that I first saw the atonic Celtic group Rare Air, Touchstone (which led me to backtrack other Triona ni Dhomnaill recordings and groups like Skara Brae and the Bothy Band), Sally Rogers, and Beausoleil. Greenwich Village also had the late, lamented and legendary venue Gerde's Folk City, which closed about the time of its great anniversary concert and was never more seen in this world. Folk City was a terrible space for music, with uncomfortable seating, low ceilings and a continual hubbub from the non-folkie regulars at the bar. Still, history is history. It was there that I saw Boys of the Lough for the first time. The Kettle of Fish, formerly on MacDougal, currently occupies Folk City's space. Across the street, jazz mecca The Blue Note thrives.

Another venue that disappeared shortly before I left the City was the Speakeasy Cooperative, sponsoring a program on MacDougal Street behind what was an Arabic restaurant when I first began to go, and later became yet another MacDougal Street bar. That was a great intimate space for music, although they couldn't use the ventilation during a performance (thrilling during a NYC summer), with the best food I'd ever had at a folk music club until I got to Passim in Cambridge and to Johnny D's in Somerville. Speakeasy is where I first saw Tom Paxton, Dan Ar Bras, Phil Cunningham doing solo work, and many others.

The Bottom Line is still a major venue for rock and folk acts. It's much like the Backstage here in Seattle, but larger and sleazier. I first saw Steeleye Span there in 1976, on their Rocket Cottage tour. I was blasted away and that began my musical odyssey through British folk-rock and to trad English and Celtic folk. There I first went with Eli Cohen to see Anna and Kate MacGarrigle enchant an audience, years before the performance where the opening comedian was booed off the stage for sexist humor, and years before their recent comeback CD. It was at the Bottom Line that I introduced friends to Riders in

the Sky (it wasn't the easy way, but it was the Cowboy Way), to Battlefield Band, and Christine Lavin. They introduced me to Suzanne Vega, some years before her overnight success.

In December of 1988, I moved to the Boston area to be with Andi Shechter. Farewell to the Bottom Line, Town Hall (where Shanachie had sponsored a joint De Danaan, with Maura O'Connell, and Andy Statman Klezmer Orchestra performance) and the Beacon Theatre (where I'd seen the mega-concerts of Renaissance-Steeleye Span-Fairport Convention and Mimi Fariña-Leo Kottke-Steeleye Span). Farewell to J & R Music down by City Hall, and the best folk & international music and classical sections I'd ever seen. Farewell to Record Hunter and to other stores with selection of obscure imports.

Hello to the Cambridge folk clubs like the "Nameless" Coffeehouse (which I never got to), Passim, the Folktree concerts, and Sanders Theater in Harvard's Memorial Hall (blown up in a mystery by Jane Langton) where we would see Christy Moore, the *Sing Out!* show, Ronnie Gilbert and Tom Paxton. Hello to the Berklee Auditorium, where we went to see Michelle Shocked and the Oyster Band. Hello to radio's only commercial all-folk/singer-songwriter station, WADN — Walden 1190 in Concord, MA. Hello to Johnny D's and the Somerville Theater in Davis Square, both fine venues in that city nicknamed "Shumerville". At the Somerville Theater, we heralded the new year with Cajun food and a Beausoleil performance to end all such. We went to Johnny D's to hear the Washington Squares, singing "Cezanne" and "Riding the D Train Line", and Boiled in Lead raise the roof.

In October of 1990, Andi and I moved to Seattle. There was a new continuum of record store resources and music venues to discover: more California bluegrass performers like Andi's faves Laurie Lewis and the Good Ol' Persons to see in person at the New Melody Tavern, local western swingsters like Ranch Romance and the *Yiddishkeit* of the Mazeltunes. There was the Northwest Folklife Festival and Bumbershoot to explore.

I think this will do.

** ** *

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FOLK-RELATED FICTION

•Bull, Emma — *War For The Oaks* (Ace, 1987) Minneapolis rocker goes rock & reel in the middle of a Fairie civil war. Essential reading.

•Baudino, Gael — *Gossamer Axe* (Roc, 1990) Denver teacher of the Irish Harp is really an ancient Celtic woman bard, who spent a millenium in a fairy Sidh dimension. She seeks the power of an all-female heavy metal band and a blues rock guitarist to rescue her lesbian lover from the Sidh.

•de Lint, Charles — *Moonheart* (Ace, 1984) A Canadian fantasy — complete with ancient Welsh bard Taliesin, a native Canadian Otherworld and more. See also de Lint's *Yarrow* (Ace, 1986) and *Greenmantle* (Ace, 1988) for more of the mix of Celtic music, urban Canadian locales and fantasy twists. Charles de Lint is a folk musician, and often has reviews in *Dirty Linen*.

•Kushner, Ellen — *Thomas the Rhymer* (Morrow, 1990) A fascinating extrapolation from the ballad.

•Lackey, Mercedes and Guon, Ellen — *Knight of Ghosts and Shadows* (Baen, 1990) A group of LA-area Renaissance Faire musicians and old-time Hollywood animator get sucked into a battle between good and evil elves. Not *War for the Oaks*, but still worthwhile. A sequel to appear shortly.

•MacAvoy, R.A. — *Tea With The Black Dragon* (Bantam, 1983) A suspense and fantasy tale involving an Irish fiddler and an ancient Chinese dragon who knew True Thomas. Sequel is *Twisting the Rope* (Bantam, 1986). See also MacAvoy's Damiano fantasy series, whose lute-playing protagonist is based on Pierre Bensusan.

•McCrumb, Sharyn — *Highland Laddie Gone* (Avon, 1986) Murder mystery set at a West Virginian Scottish Festival, with an amateur detective with her heart too full of fantasies about old Caledonia and a Scottish scientist whose idea of Scottish music is Sheena Easton. See also her *Bimbos of the Death Sun* (TSR, 1987), a murder mystery at a science fiction & gaming convention, where a touring Scottish musician has also been booked into the same hotel. Also McCrumb's *If I Ever Return, Pretty Peggy-O*, a mystery centering around the arrival of a famous 1960's woman folk musician in a small town.

•Scarborough, Elizabeth Ann — *The Phantom Banjo* (Bantam, 1991), *Picking the Ballad's Bones* (Bantam, 1991), and *Strum Again?* (Bantam, 1992) The Songkiller Saga, about the demonic plot to destroy all folk music and the small group of singers and friends who oppose them. Funny and horrifying. It uses real-world INS policies and ASCAP procedures as background. See *The Song of Sorcery* (Bantam, 1982) for the first of her earlier fantasy series where characters and situations seemed plucked from "The Brown Girl" and "Gypsy Davy".

•Sherman, Delia — *Through A Brazen Mirror* (Ace, 1989) Fine fantasy adaptation of the English ballad that I first heard on a Martin Carthy album, "Sweet William/The Famous Flower of Serving Men". With a twist, of course.

•Wellman, Manly Wade — *John the Balladeer* (Baen, 1988) An expanded version of the collection *Who Fears the Devil*. Wonderful stories of John, who wanders the Carolina hills and the Smokies with his silver-stringed guitar, searching out the true tales behind the old-timey songs and standing in opposition to the weird and witchery.

•Windling, Terri, ed. — *Borderland* (Signet, 1986), *Bordertown* (Signet, 1986), and *Life on the Border* (TOR, 1991) Shared-world anthologies in a city on the border between a near-future World as We Know It and Fairie, primarily involving the teenage runaways (both human and elfin) and the world of the music clubs. Plenty of rock & reel material. Stories by Emma Bull, Will Shetterly, Charles de Lint, Ellen Kushner, and more.

"Alien Ninja Folkies are invading the area. . ." — ad on WADN 1190 for the Minor Chord, a record shop. c.1990.

Balladeer Bunny

Bugs Bunny; June 25, 1949 release; Looney Toon series; Directed by Charles M. Jones; story by Michael Maltese; Animation by Phil Monroe, Ben Washam, Lloyd Vaughan, and Ken Harris; Layouts by Robert Gribbroek; Backgrounds by Peter Alvarado; Voice Characterization by Mel Blanc; Musical Direction by Carl Stalling.

Bugs Bunny is sitting in a hammock outside his rabbit hole, paging through an issue of *Hare's Life* magazine (whose cover promises the goods on the "Radish Diet: Nibble Your Way to a New You") while the soundtrack plays "Someone's Rocking my Dreamboat". Meanwhile, a few feet away the folksinger, the goateed Bull Chives, is nailing up a notice announcing the evening's benefit hootenanny contest. The rabbit is distracted by the hammering, and comes over to investigate. Apprised of the situation, Bugs allows as how "Poifect! The folks' moo-sic is like mudda's milk ta me..." Acquiring a banjo, moonshine jug and harmonica from out of nowhere, he proceeds to become a one-man . . . er, rabbit hillbilly ensemble performing "What Do They Do on a Rainy Night in Georgia". Chives, who aims to be the only winner, shoves Bugs aside and stomps his instruments. Chives exits, shouting his triumph. Bugs picks himself up and dusts himself off, swearing that "Of course, you know that this means War!" a la Groucho.

That night, the espadrilled throngs come to the grandiose Slobovian Fellowship Hall & Bingo Parlor for the big "hoot". Bugs has snuck in a side door with his banjo to discover Bull Chives interfering with his competitor's performances. The colleen Katie O'Poobah has her rendition of a piece of authentick Irish musical nonsense (rather like Gaelic gargling) interrupted by a trapdoor worked by Chives. Mumblin' Moe Filbert is hit by a sandbag while beginning his "Talkin' Social Inequality Blues". "Aha," says Bugs, "a case of diabo-lick-al sab-oh-taj-jee!" He prevents Chives from giving a hotfoot to Negro blues singer Blind Lemon Jello (in the tradition of earlier animated versions of Fats Waller and Cab Calloway) by pretending to be a besotted bobbysoxer fan from the Future Progressives of Tomorrow ("Pete and Alan Lomax are nuttin' nexta you!") and handing him a dynamite pencil for an autograph. Bugs is pursued by Chives through the understage storeroom. This allows the famous denim-clad trio, the Weevils, to sing their star number "The Iron Schleps Tonite" ("A Weevil wax, a Weevil wax" a la Elmer

Fudd) to thunderous applause. Bull Chives himself is beginning his own performance, of a "gen-wine railroad working song that I learnt off a Folkways record", when the the auditorium is filled with whispers and then shouts of "Woody", "It's Woody!" and "Woody's here".

Bugs enters, dressed a la Guthrie with a curly wig and wear-faded flannel shirt and denims, cigarette dangling out of his mouth. His guitar has a tag that reads, "This-a here machine tromps Nazzies". Chives is in awe, and yet refuses to retreat before the legendary performer. Bugs says *sotto voce*, "Okie, so ya wanna play it like dat, Doc?" He asks Chives to accompany him and gives the singer a cigarette. Chives has an exploding microphone, is hit by a falling sandbag, the cigarette explodes (blasting his clothes and exposing a "Joe McCarthy Fan Club" t-shirt), and he plummets down a trapdoor. The rabbit looks at the audience and says, "Ain't I a stinker?" Iris out as Bugs strums "Goodnight, Irene" on his guitar.

— description from *That Oscar-Winning Rabbit* (Henry Holt, 1990)

BUGS BUNNY in "BALLADEER BUNNY"



A LOONEY TUNE
Cartoon in Technicolor

My Road to Rock'n'Roll

by Jerry Kaufman



It all started with Minneapolis. I wasn't surprised. Back in the 1960s I loved delta and country blues as performed by Koerner, Glover and Ray, a trio of Minneapolis musicians, and promoted by such musical Minneapolis sf fans as Fred Haskell and Jim Young. In 1988 sf fans like Luke McGuff, Elise Krueger, and Emma Bull who introduced me to Boiled in Lead.

Luke, who'd typeset their album copy, praised them highly. Elise (who actually lives in St. Paul) also praised them when we first met at Wiscon. In addition, she recommended I read Emma's first novel, *War for the Oaks*, in which BiL played a supporting role. (The novel, a fantasy about a war in the "parallel world" of Faerie that spills over into contemporary Minneapolis, is full of local color about rock bands and venues.)

I read *WOak* and was intrigued; when I spotted a copy of BiL's album *Hotheads* in Victory Music's giveaway bin¹, I grabbed it. It turned out to be a review copy, and the jacket was stuffed with copies of posters and reviews. So I learned a lot about the group's history while I listened to something quite new to me. Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention had added rock instrumentation to old English ballads years ago, sounding traditional and energetic at the same time. Boiled in Lead made them sound polite and dull. They went further: further north, further west, further off the deep end.

Most of the music was derived from the traditional Celtic end of the British Isles: reels, jigs and the like, though one tune was American ("Texas") and another an original by Ewan MacColl ("Go! Move! Shift!"). Most of it was driven to levels of speed and intensity that surprised me, though nothing matched the "Atomic Drop"² they applied to "Gypsy Rover," a version that might faze even Queensryche. I liked playing that cut at parties, timing the wait until my victims recognized the tune under all the fuzz and feedback.

So I was somewhat prepared to hear BiL live in a little bar in Minneapolis called the 400 (or was it the First Avenue?). I was in town for another sf convention, Elise was my native guide, and the streets felt hot enough to boil water, if not lead. The 400 was like a lot of other bars I've been in, and the crowd was similar: t-shirts and leather jackets, stained and torn jeans, mostly younger than me but also a few artists and poseurs in grizzled mid-years. Everyone was sweating equally.

And onstage was a band ferociously playing an Irish jig at enormous speed and volume as though an Irish devil was about to pull the plug and they had to scare it off. I was instantly in love: full-blown folk punk! The album had only hinted at this. The Chieftains possessed by the Sex Pistols! I danced a lot, panted a lot, and teased Emma Bull, innocently watching the band without a clue who I was.

Also not suggested by *Hotheads* was BiL's desire to explore new avenues of music, but that night they were already beginning to add Eastern European and Middle Eastern stuff: I particularly remember their rendition of a Bulgarian polka. Unfortunately, I didn't know what other songs they played, but I did buy a t-shirt with "Boiled in Lead" emblazoned in gold Celtic knotwork, and a tape entitled *A & E: Demo and Live Recordings 1987*. One tune, "House-Husband's Lament," was also on *Hotheads*, but the rest were new to me. They continued the BiL power-picking approach to Celtiana on "The Pinch of Snuff," "Mick McGuire," etc., while casting about for other directions as in the Turkish "Oh Ya," and the story-song, "Step it Out Mary," with its mildly political message.³ (Many of *A & E*'s songs were given wider exposure on BiL's next release, *From the Ladle to the Grave*, in 1989.)

BiL seemed to me unique. I didn't know of another group like them in the world. Too bad. Their combination of primitive and precise excited me like few other bands. (I think my other favorite that year was the Cure.) Then one day I read

¹Victory Music is a Seattle-area musician's support group that publishes a monthly magazine of news and reviews. The "give-away bin" was at their booth at the Northwest Folklife Festival.

²That's what they call it. Remember, their record label was Atomic Theory.

³A very similar song, "Step it Out Nancy," can be found on Holly Near's *Watch Out!*

a newspaper review of a recent Seattle concert: Michelle Shocked⁴ and a British group called the Oyster Band. I remembered that someone had given us⁵ an Oyster Band record as a housewarming gift, but I hadn't really listened to it before.

Now I slid it out of its sleeve and slipped it onto the turntable. It opened with a dynamic version of an old British song, "Hal-an-Tow," which I knew from the Watsons' a capella version. In a few moments I was dancing along. "Bully in the Alley," "The Good Old Dance" (with a particularly biting fiddle solo) and "Gaol Song" rocked, too, while slower numbers like "Bold Riley" gave Step Outside a good variety of tempos. I thought it fitting that the label was Cooking Vinyl. It didn't go as far afield as BiL (probably because the Oysters had much more immediate roots in the Celtic tradition) but it still had something of the rebellious punk spirit. (I felt they probably had similar politics, too: left-liberal-radical anti-Republican anti-Tory.)

Eventually I was able to see the Oysters play. The first time was on a double-bill with local favorites Ranch Romance. What an odd coupling! Ranch Romance was an all-cowgirl ensemble that played honky-tonk, western swing, and tear-jerking Patsy Cline, with lots of yodeling thrown in (with great verve and style). The Oysters were five guys who looked like Manchester factory workers or Liverpool stevedores, led by a graduate of a 1930s Workingman's Circle discussion group. But the energy wedded them. The fans of one group found themselves digging the other, except that the Ranch Romance fans all said, "But they were so LOUD," after the Oysters finished. I saw them again at Seattle's Bumbershoot Arts Festival in 1990, in an arena six times too large for the crowd. It was the same summer I saw Boiled in Lead again, this time in an underpromoted Seattle show. Both groups gave powerhouse performances, of course.

The third time for the Oysters was some sort of charm. This time they were with June Tabor, performing songs from their newest recording, *Freedom and Rain*. Probably you knew about June Tabor years before me. You knew about the Silly Sisters, about the crown she reputedly wore as Queen of British Folk. I'd found out relatively recently, seeing her on tour supporting Aqaba and that album of torch songs and sad cabaret standards. The idea of Tabor teaming with the Oysters was intriguing.

The actuality was riveting. The Oysters opened the show with some reels and jigs, sawing at instruments, hopping around, grimacing. After three or four tunes, June joined them, dressed in a Harley t-shirt, black leather jacket and black jeans. Together they roared through some of the tunes from *Freedom and Rain*, including the title track, "Susie Clelland," "All Tomorrow's Parties" (a Lou Reed song from Velvet Underground's first album), "Dives and Lazarus," and Billy Bragg's "Valentine's Day," which June punctuated with an a capella version of "The Hills of Shiloh," a Shel Silverstein song (an anti-war song set in the years following the Civil War). The show built to an emotional climax with the encores: "New York Girls," "White Rabbit," "I Fought the Law." And "All Along the Watchtower," a song that always brings me to the brink of tears and makes the hair on my arms rise, though I can't say why.⁶ Tabor and the Oysters did a fine version. Pity that their recording of it (and "White Rabbit") only appear on a radio promotional cd.

Why did Boiled in Lead and the Oyster Band have such a powerful effect on me? Given that it's hard to explain why any piece or style of music (or indeed any art) moves us, I'll try a little: as I've suggested already, I liked the combination of passion, precision, and the primitive. Celtic traditional music seems to have a direct connection to the Celtic tribal past. There's something positively pagan in that elaborate, ritualistic pattern of notes and rhythms at the base of the music, especially when the boudhran begins to throb. The music is not simple, however, and calls for great skill in playing. I appreciate fine musicianship, but I don't have a trained ear, and good musicianship in itself isn't enough to keep my attention. This is where the passion comes in. I loved '60s rock and folk for its passion. Punk and New Wave (of the CBGB variety⁷) was intensely passionate (although sometimes not very musical). BiL and the Oysters take the energy (and the irreverence, let's not forget) and apply themselves to the primitive with precision. That's as close as I can get.

Anti-climax time, I thought. What could I look forward to after that? Just playing Oyster Band and BiL albums (the former also have albums like *Wild Blue Yonder* and *From Leipzig to Little Rock*; the latter have the aforementioned *From the Ladle to the Grave* and the newer *Orb*), I thought. But I have run across a few more rock'n'reelers, and *Dirty Linen* has reviewed even more. They aren't as good as the Oysters or BiL, but they're there.

⁴I didn't listen to Shocked until afterward, either, but she belongs in a different article.

⁵"Us" is Suzanne Tompkins and myself; "someone" is John Berry and Eileen Gunn.

⁶Well, it's Bob Dylan and it's an eerie, Moebius-strip story. Paul Williams wrote an excellent analysis of it in *Outlaw Blues*, one of the great books of the Age of Rock Seriousness. "There must be some way outta here."

⁷The Lower East Side New York bar where Talking Heads, the Ramones, and Patti Smith got their starts.

For instance, on the strength of a brief description, I went to see Tempest, from San Francisco. Their leader was a mad-looking hairy Norwegian with a double-necked guitar (one neck apparently functioning as a mandolin) and they did versions of old familiar songs like "Gypsy River" and "Whiskey in the Jug." They also did fiddle-flavored and sorta-psychedelic originals. Sometimes fun (like the moment when they did an imitation of a multi-armed Indian God under strobe-light) and often tired-sounding, still they offered hope. Also hopeful was the opening band, Bedlam Poets, a Seattle group that plays reels and jigs, lots of Ewan MacColl songs, and a Led Zeppelin pastiche of "The World Turned Upside Down," which they thought was also by MacColl (rather than Leon Rosselson). They were more energetic than Tempest, and their lead singer was pretty wonderful. She brightened Tempest's set by joining them for a ballad.

An even better sign is another group's tape, *Keepers of the Flame*. The group is Phoenix, also from San Francisco. From the opening strokes of "Banish Misfortune" you're happy. But wait. There's only two cuts of traditional material here, the ones most like a traditional bands with drums added. The rest are originals that capture the trad spirit and sound while wedding them to modern instruments like the drum kit or the electric violin. Mark Under and Heather Alexander weave insinuating and convincing vocals on tunes like "The King of Elfland's Daughter." Some tunes rock, others (like "Voices of the Sea") slither. (Overtones of Boiled in Lead and another Minneapolis band, Cats Laughing, abound, including the allusions to fantasy themes.) Take the cover art in stride; it's like very good filksong cover art: certainly not bad enough to be embarrassing, but not good enough to be professional.

That seems to be the state of the art at the moment. I think we're about to see an explosion of rock'n'reel⁸ bands. And since I find rock'n'reel explosive good fun, I'm looking forward to it.

SOME PEOPLE JUST DON'T GET IT DEPT.

"... Luke and I went out and saw Boiled in Lead. Luke loves them. I saw Jerry Kaufman, Stu Shiffman, and John Berry there. I couldn't get all excited. I hear fiddles, etc. and my autonomic Grand Old Opry responses go into high gear. I start expecting to see people clog and I hear Minnie Pearl saying, "Hooowdyyy!" in my mind. So that puts a different spin on things for me versus other people." — Joe Wesson, *Joe Wesson Magazine*, 1992



⁸By the way, this term goes back at least to 1985, as an old Boiled in Lead Poster attests.

THE FOLK FESTIVAL AS SMORGASBORD

by Elise Matthesen

"You going to Winnipeg this year?"

"Yah."

"Winnipeg" said with that particular inflection means "The Winnipeg Folk Festival" to many of us here on the frozen tundra. Along about July, when most of the snow has melted, we saddle up the sled dogs and head north to that fabled city on the plains - Winnipeg, the jewel of Manitoba, site of Bird's Hill Provincial Park and the Winnipeg Folk Festival.

The festival lasts three days, more or less. More if you count the Thursday night concern and the Monday night wind-down show in town, and the other little concerts that have been stretching the whole experience out to a week or even two in recent years. Less, if you have to drive nine or ten hours to be at a job on Monday morning - you wind up leaving before the Sunday night mainstage show, which is a real shame.

Our version of W is centered around the music and supported by a firm foundation of camping skills and shared priorities. In case any of you are likely to sample one of the folk festivals at which camping is permitted, let me say three important words: Good Food Values. We've been known to begin the Thursday night session with lobster pate and caviar canapes. This particular band of folkies travels on its stomach as well as on its ears. (I know - bizarre mental image, but it's true.)

The musical fare is put together not so differently: lots of little dishes of really neat stuff, and every now and then a good solid bowl of one bank or other. The usual set-up is like this: the site has six smaller stages and a mainstage. The former are used during the day, and the latter is used at night or for an occasional midday concert during which all activity on the small stages is suspended. It's six track programming in the daytime with all the benefits and drawbacks thereof. There's almost always something that's a must-see, but more likely there are three conflicting must-see items. Either we make tough choices or we catch part of a workshop here and part of another one over there. The latter is a little like panel surfing at a convention, in that the person usually gets to one just after the really incredible stuff ends. It can be a good way to miss everything of note.

Small stages usually start up at 10:30 in the morning. Items last from half an hour (concerts by one act) to an hour and a half (large workshops with several bands, usually just before dinner time) with most items being an hour long. It's better to get there earlier than 10:30 to stake out a spot near the mainstage to hear the evening concern. People peg down tarps, spread blankets, put up poles with blinking lights so they can find their spot in the dark, and then go off to the day's events, secure in the knowledge that nobody will mess with their stuff all day. The stakeout "stampede", as it's called, happens about 9:30 in the morning. After the evening concert, everybody takes down their [his/her?] light-up flamingos, rolls up their pads and heads out, leaving the site bare for tomorrow's stampede.

Okay, enough logistics. What about the music?

Well, I've heard* every flavor of folk, blues, bluegrass, Celtic traditional modern urban folk, voodoo music, swing, gospel, protest rock, satirical folk, novelty folk, celtodelic [check - faint] world beat rock-n-reel, native American traditional, Greek electric folk, you name it, if it can possibly squeezed in under the titled "folk or folk roots", it's been there. I've heard Ellen McIlwaine and David Lindley jam together (at which point I finally "got religion": on the subject of electric guitars. I've heard Ashwin Balish on sitar jamming with Finhan, a klezmer band, and Boiled in Lead, a mad urban Celtic band, with Todd Menton in the middle banging a triangle with a big goony blissed-out grin, all of them on stage together making musical mulligan stew. I've heard a really punked out bagpiper who instead of cords and tassels has chains and fishing lures on his pipes. I've seen Light in a Fat City hypnotize a crowd with incredible didgeridoo and percussion numbers. I've heard mandolins and electric dulcimers, uilleann pipes and bodhrans, guitars of every manner and some with no manners at all, hamboning, trumpets, harps, sitars, tablas, wind chime hats, every whistle known to humankind, mouthbows, electric and acoustic, kazoos, full drum kits, washtub basses, fiddles, banjos and Eugene Chadbourne's electric rake played with the dustbuster. I've heard Eric Weissberg, Bill Keith and Bela Fleck collaborate on a triplicate version of a familiar song which they called "Dueling Dueling Dueling Banjos Banjos Banjos". I've been there at the Annabouboula/Fat City/Lead jam, and have seen Jan Childs boogie to the beat out in the crown. Many's the time I've looked around and listened and sighed, "Sell my clothes; I've gone to heaven!"

Yeah. It's an okay festival. If ya like smorgasbords. All the music you can eat. Oh, my.

*[Editorial note: Elise's original manuscript used "seen" throughout this paragraph. When Andi called her to ask if it was okay to change it to "heard", she bemusedly agreed that in fact, that was the right verb and yes, Andi could change it. However, Andi and Elise wanted to note that for the most part nowadays, due to continuing hearing loss, Elise does see the music and the performance a lot better than she hears it. The use of "seen" by Elise was completely unconscious.]

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

David Bratman is Mr. Library Guy. He is active in the Mythopoeic Society, the Amateur Long-Playing Society (ALPS, an amateur press association devoted to the discussion of music), Regency Dancing, science fiction conventions and the pursuit of Truth.

John V. Hedtke is a computer literateur, singer, and collector of bad (and often esoteric) jokes.

Andy Hooper is a true Renaissance type of guy. Poet, essayist, fanzine editor; with one hand he does fanzines, while with the other he tames the Western prairie. He recently moved from Madison, Wisconsin to Seattle.

Jerry Kaufman lives upstairs. He is a small-press publisher, film buff, and a dedicated dilettante of Celtic and other folk musics.

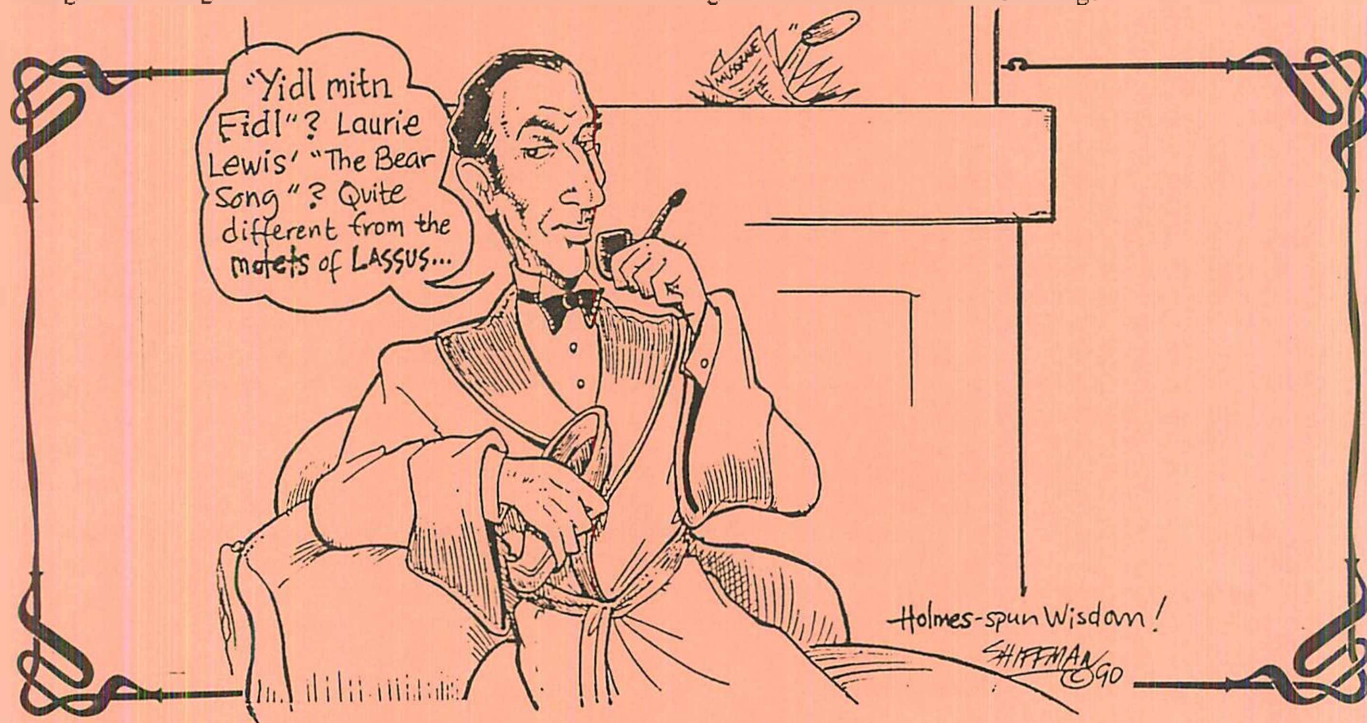
Elise Matthesen is a St. Paul, Minnesota-based writer and singer. She has been involved with the Society for Creative Anachronism, RenFaires and Minn-stf. She has pluck and savvy. Elise works behind the scenes at Minnesota Public Radio.

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Andi Shechter reads lots of detective fiction, likes to watch ballet and figure skating and is a politically left-leaning feminist. Her heroes include Joan Baez, Itzhak Perlman and Sara Paretsky. She values good conversation, good harmonies and fighting for what's right.

Stu Shiffman is a cartoonist trapped in a world he never made. He likes to alternately listen to klezmer, Celtic, and Goon Show recordings in his copious leisure time. He has an award designed after a rocketship hood ornament, the Hugo, presented by the World Science Fiction Convention at the Hague in 1990. Sometimes he wonders what the world would have been like if Woody Guthrie had discovered science fiction and become a writer or illustrator in the thirties or forties. Would Arlo be up for a Nebula this year? Would Jack Williamson sing the blues?

Craig Smith is another talented cartoonist trapped in mundania. OK, that's actually Bothell, WA. He is a large and congenial man whose interest in fanzines is great — but not all-consuming.





FOLK ART, LET'S DANCE!

by Andi Shechter

[The title doesn't have too much to do with the article - but I've always wanted to use it on something and this was as close as it gets! - AS]

Most people tell me they don't like bluegrass music, or something called country music. It's not like real folk music. My reaction to this is like my reaction when people tell me they don't like science fiction. Much of this point of view seems based on an assumption about the genre that comes from out-of-date views, an assumption that what something once was, it still is. Country music hasn't been what it was for years. You can probably still find songs about how "he makes me miserable, and he leaves me to go to the bar with his friends and then he rides around in his truck with his dog, but I love him", but there's also still a helluva lot of fifties-style space opera around.

I was raised with wonderful music in my house. I heard symphonies, show tunes, Dixieland and lots of the best singers. My parents, leftist-liberal-democrats, played Harry Belafonte (the closest to a folk singer I knew in my youth), Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan, Nina Simone and Lena Horne. I heard Danny Kaye and Garry Moore's humor albums. But I don't recall a single instance of a Pete Seeger record, or Leadbelly. I adopted them later as part of my musical heritage. And I never heard any bluegrass or country music.

I began to discover folk music about the time I discovered all the other music I was to love in the '60's and '70's - Jefferson Airplane and Janis Joplin and Big Brother were my favorites (both with strong lead female vocalists - watch out, there's a trend here). I started listening to Arlo Guthrie, Joan Baez (although her early stuff bugged me, seemed too shrill, and not very topical - ho, hum, Childe ballads), Judy Collins (remember when she was a folk singer?), the Kingston Trio, Tom Paxton, Phil Ochs, Peter, Paul and Mary, Jerry Jeff Walker, Seeger, you know. The gang. I decidedly did not like "country & western" music. My best friend Edie and I bought a Tammy Wynette album as a j-o-k-e. Somewhere along the line, however, I, er, well, I found out that I liked Dolly Parton. As far as I knew, she was a rarity in country music, a strong woman who wrote a lot of good songs and didn't whine. I wasn't thrilled with the way she looked, but I liked what she said.

Because of my leftist, feminist politics, I started listening to more and more women musicians in the later seventies - found "women's music" had a lot to offer. I still listen to many artists of that particular genre. But I was pretty much a total folkie by the late-seventies, early-eighties, when Larry Verre convinced me to go with him one night to the Red Vest Pizza Parlor in El Cerrito, California. Maybe he thought that since I liked Dolly Parton . . . hell, I don't know why. The regular performers at the Red Vest every Thursday were a bluegrass band called *The Good Ol' Persons*. The band had started out all female. At the time I first heard them, the band had one token male - Paul Shelasky, a fine fiddle player and the brother of Sue Shelasky, one of the original members. The band was otherwise all women - Kathy Kallick, Dorothy Baxter, Laurie Lewis, and Barbara Mendelsohn who played the hammer dulcimer like an angel. I fell in love. They didn't sing through their noses, didn't whine, certainly knew their instruments, sang terrific harmonies and most of all, sang real songs. They sang about love and caring and losing someone and sitting watching the day go by and wondering what happened to their lives.

And vegetables. "Rutabaga Boogie" is one of their classics. They sang in a way that made you want to listen. They didn't play coy and sweet and sing about being beaten up by the man they loved, standing by their man, divorce, or being left pitifully all alone to pine. No one mentioned trucks, jukeboxes, dogs, bars, or being drunk. The rhythms were infectious, the fiddle playing was great. They sang a lot of Kathy's songs and Paul's compositions. Much of the writing was consciously feminist.

From then on, I became a devoted *Persons* fan, especially when it came to Laurie Lewis, a demon fiddler and good vocalist whose style and personality I liked. I discovered, through Larry, *A Touch of Grass*, a four-man group who did Jerry Lee Lewis and the Beatles as well as some traditional bluegrass and *Sidesaddle*, another all female bluegrass band which included Evelyn Peyton, sister of erstwhile bay area fan Carrie Peyton. I discovered *Any Old Time String Band*, also an all-women group. This band had a surprise for me, as one of the members was someone I'd performed with in high school, during the YWCA summer musicals back in West Hartford, Connecticut. It was a pleasure to see that Susie Rothfield, who had once told me she wanted a career as a musician, had actually gotten there. *Any Old Time*, now defunct, also featured the angelic voice of Kate Bristlin and introduced me to cajun music as well. They did old raunchy blues, traditional cajun, and bluegrass. They introduced me to music I'd never heard before, that deserved not to be buried. (And yes, I now really do appreciate Joan Baez's recordings of the Childe ballads).

The groups enjoyed themselves. That's not to say other kinds of bands don't, but some are more interested in the spectacle they present or being "up there" on stage. Bluegrass is very close to the heart. It's just a few instruments on stage, usually acoustic (occasionally the bass is electric) and the melody line is clear. There's not a lot of fireworks, although there can be amazing speed and flash in the playing of the fiddle, banjo, or mandolin. It was clear by the smiles of the band members, the goofing around on stage and the rapport they had with the audience that these musicians shared a lot with each other and with the people who came to hear them. They were, to use an overused word, accessible. They'd always hang out afterwards to talk with people, they'd take requests, they shared the lead, and supported each other musically. They played their own and each other's music, written by other bandmembers or the work of other bluegrass groups in the area. Watching a band member playing while the rest of the band smiles at each other and looks impressed - there's something good about that. It's comfortable and friendly and everyone's having fun. And while the lyrics may not be all that fancy, and the tunes themselves often are not really complex, the feelings are real, and the words mean something and say things in a different way.

Doug Faunt encouraged me greatly by getting me a membership in the California Bluegrass Association, which sponsors two festivals each year in Grass Valley, California (no, I'm not making up the name). I attended three of the festivals over the years, and heard outstanding California musicians. My biggest delight has been in seeing Laurie Lewis, a 3 time California Ladies fiddle champion, start her own band, *The Grant Street String Band* and go on to headline all over the country. She also has backed at least 6 more other bands and performers - women, singer-songwriters, topical writers as well as bluegrass bands.

It happened in bluegrass and country music as it happened in science fiction - the women made themselves heard. There was always Maybelle Carter and Loretta Lynn, and happily there was Patsy Cline, just like there was always C.L. Moore and Leigh Brackett, but there's now a whole new kind of music.

Why do I like bluegrass? I find it worth listening to because I really like music I can move to. In recent years I've found I really love cajun music and what I know of the music of Africa, which makes me want to move. I don't quite get how people can just sit there, and not let a toe tap, snap a finger, get up and dance. Bluegrass and old time music is meant for moving.

It's also good for improvisation and jamming and virtuoso solos. One of the joys of the Grass Valley festivals, as well as Seattle's Northwest Folklife Festival is the chance to wander all over the place listening to pick-up bands jamming - three guitars, two fiddles, a banjo and someone over there playing spoons. The harmonies, in old-time, gospel, or new style bluegrass can give me the chills. (Sunday morning at Grass Valley always was a treat - I'd settle in early for the 2 hour gospel show - so much *a cappella* 3 and 4 part harmony.)

I think, though, that the modern bluegrass scene appeals to me because I always "look to the women". If you relied on older impressions of bluegrass, you wouldn't expect this music to be women's music, and there sure is enough of the old stuff around, there's plenty of the new, which offers wonderful songs like Kathy Kallick's "Easy Substitute" or the Spanish-influenced "Open Up Your Heart":

Open Up Your Heart/You know I could believe in you
If you let me be true to you/ I've been trying all day
And if you ask your heart/you know what I'm trying to say
On a night like tonight it's so hard to keep love away.

and Laurie Lewis' "Don't Get Too Close", "I Don't Know Why" or the beautiful waltz "Love Chooses You":

Tell me now if I'm wrong/Are you feeling the same?
Are your feet on the ground? Are you calling my name?
Do you lie awake nights?/Please say that you do
'Cause you can't choose who you love/Love Chooses You

Many of the bands play music which goes far beyond the limits of bluegrass. *Any Old Time's* version of the Bahamian tune "I Bid You Goodnight" and "I've Got What It Takes" with Susie Rothfield belting out a wonderful old Bessie Smith song are knockouts. And over the years, I've become aware of a particularly nice quality in the love songs written by many of the singer-songwriters involved in the new bluegrass: there is often no reference to gender in the song. Whether conscious or not, whether the songwriter did it deliberately, intentionally or not, the songs are being written so that a man or a woman singing the song can be singing *about* a man or a woman. It's not defined, which makes the song a little more universal. I like that.

While there are of course many wonderful male performers in folk music (try to keep me away from a Tom Paxton concert), I am for the most part more interested in women performers. And I prefer music by women, from Joan Baez to Sweet Honey in the Rock to Tracy Chapman. And in many cases, the music I was discovering in the last ten to fifteen years, California old time and bluegrass was dominated by women singers, musicians and songwriters.

It's no longer only about trucks and dogs and getting drunk, twang, twang, twang. It's heartfelt and real and creative and well-written, good music. Don't pass it by without listening to it for a while.

Discography:

Any Old Time String Band, Any Old Time String Band, Arhoolie Records 4009, 1978

Ladies Choice, Any Old Time String Band, Bay Records 217, 1980

Blue Rose, (Cathy Fink, Laurie Lewis, Marcy Marxer, Molly Mason, Sally Van Meter), Sugar Hill Records 3768, 1988

The Good Ol' Persons, The Good Ol' Persons, Bay Records 208, 1977

I Can't Stand to Ramble, The Good Ol' Persons, Kaleidoscope Records, F-17, 1983

Part of A Story, The Good Ol' Persons, Kaleidoscope Records, F-26, 1986

Anywhere The Wind Blows, The Good Ol' Persons, Kaleidoscope Records, K-38, 1989

Grant Street String Band, Grant Street String Band, Bonita Records 111, 1983

Singin' My Troubles Away, Grant Street String Band, Flying Fish Records FF 70515, 1990

Restless Rambling Heart, Laurie Lewis, Flying Fish Records FF 406, 1986

Love Chooses You, Laurie Lewis, Flying Fish Records FF 487, 1989?

Together, Laurie Lewis and Kathy Kallick (and about time!) Kaleidoscope K-44, 1991

A Touch of Grass, A Touch of Grass, Matador Records, 1981

All in Good Time, Sally Van Meter, Sugar Hill, 1991

Also worth noting:

The Arkansas Sheiks, The Arkansas Sheiks, Bay Records 204, 1975

A Little Tenderness, Sarah Elizabeth Campbell, Kaleidoscope Records, 1990

A Song That Will Linger, Jody Stecher & Kate Brislin, Rounder Records, 1989

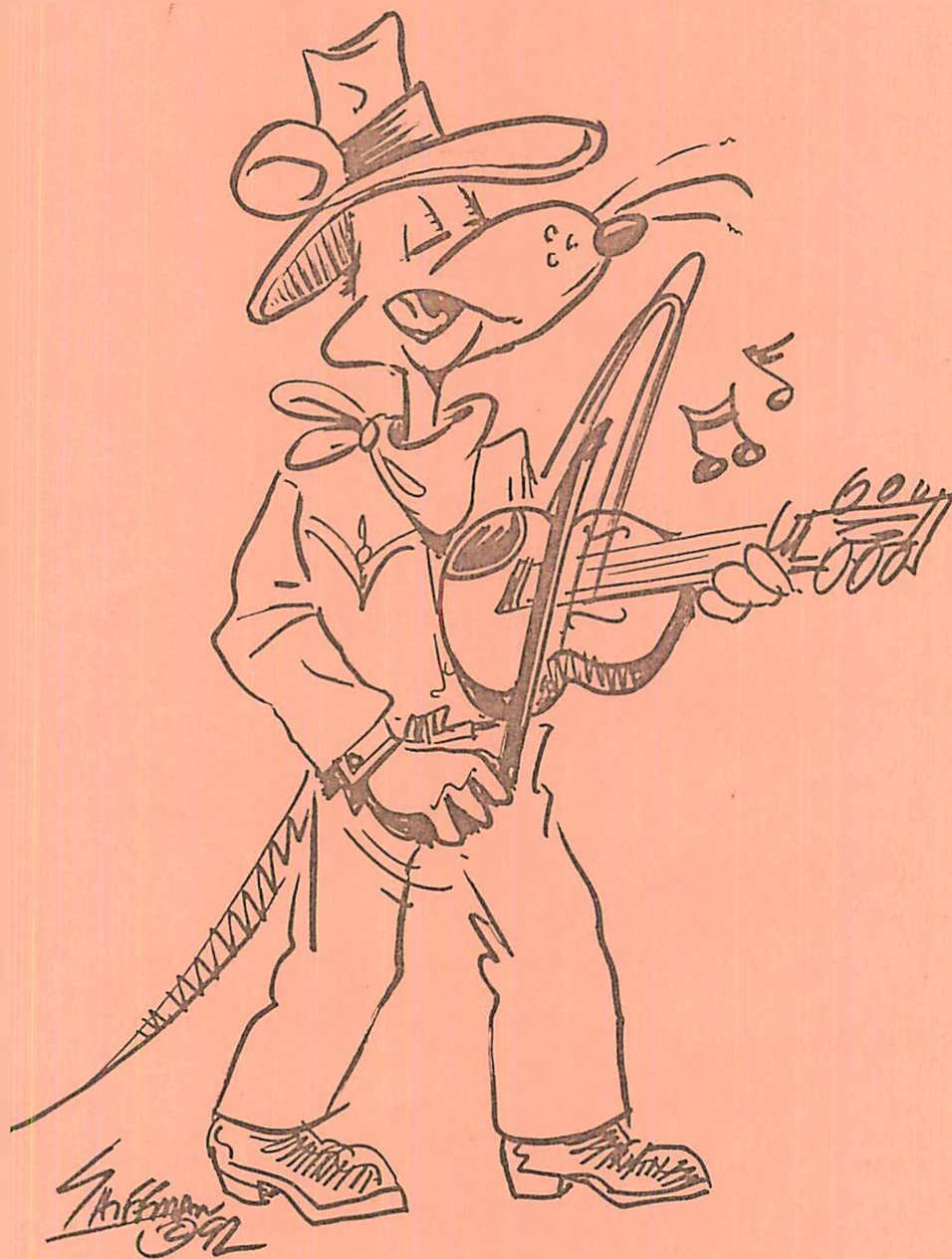
Blue Lightning, Jody Stecher & Kate Brislin, Rounder Records, 1991

Twisted Fiddle, Hollis Taylor, Gleeful Music (Portland, OR), 1991

Western Dream (Ranch Hand Records, 1989) and *Blue Blazes* (Sugar Hill, 1991) by Ranch Romance, who play what is called "Western Swing" (not exactly bluegrass but a close relation)

Anything by the late, and sorely missed, Kate Wolf

If you like what you hear, try Nanci Griffith, Mary-Chapin Carpenter and Emmylou Harris



BOYS WITHOUT BRAINS

by Andy Hooper

What did you ask? Do I remember The Fabric Indicators? They were the best post-folk close-harmony science-fiction balladeers of the age. They started in the green room of the Theater and Drama building at the University. All three were theater majors. For some strange reason, everyone decided to skip out of class on a Friday afternoon. Charlie — the one with the guitar — had been trying to write some twisted music for Mike Christenson's radio program. Eric - the bald one (also known as the short one) - and Tim Gadzinski were in the room running lines for some godawful senior directorial class one-act, about terminal leukemia patients in the Dells, or something equally cheerless. The dialogue was too dumb to do without laughing.

As things degenerated, Charlie - the one with the guitar - whipped it out, and began to work the changes for his new song, "Boys Without Brains", at top volume, with lyrics shrieked accordingly.

(Con Molto Brio y Demento:)

Primero Canto:

"Boys without Brains —
they go to business school
they wear argyle sweaters!

Segundo Canto:

"Boys without Brains —
they go to business school
they wear argyle sweaters!
AGAIN!

"Boys without Brains —
they get drunk and talk obnoxiously
to nice girls!

"Boys without Brains —
they get drunk and talk
(obnoxiously) to nice girls —
AGAIN!

(Mezzo piano como Margaret Dumont)

Boooyyys with-ooooout Brains —
They're dating your sister,
and eating your scrod!

Boooyyys with-ooooout Brains —
They're dating your scrod
and eating you — OHMIGOD!

THANK YOU!

That THANK YOU was important. With it, Charlie — the cute, blonde one — established the performance ethic of The Fabric Indicators. Whatever your response to the music, it was business as usual for the band. They were there to entertain themselves.

The three of them went out on to the library mall at 3 in the afternoon and sang the four songs they all knew, and made almost \$20.00 in tips. That was good enough for beer money, and that was good enough to keep them performing and writing songs together, albeit intermittently, for over six years now.

What do they sound like? Well, I often describe them as The Kingston Trio crossed with Screamin' Jay Hawkins or Captain Beefheart in collaboration with the Notre Dame glee club. Most of the time it was just three fairly harmonic voices and a single guitar, playing songs with titles like "Big Hair", "Demon Frog", "Agent Orange" and "(Will I ever own a) Fruitstand on the Mall?" And man, did they sing about Fabric! Songs like "Fabric Boy", "Fabric in the USA", and a cover of "Pink Cadillac" that included the line "indicatin' fabric on a Saturday night!" What a sound! What a fury!

Huh! Man, I was their manager! For almost a full week. How did that happen? Tim Gadzinski — the fat one — and I ran into each other downtown on the Staatstrasser, and he told me that they had finally gotten a real gig for themselves, and were going to appear at *Bunky's*, the undead nightclub. And they were headliners, man! We were so happy that I had to let Tim buy us a jug of Michelob Light, and while we slobbered through that, he gave pertinent details, including the fact that they didn't know when they were expected to go on, whether the club wanted to mix or let the band mix themselves, what the cover was, or how much low-grade yellow beer was per bucketful. I suggested that the band needed some sort of manager or at least a roadie, even if the only piece of equipment they had was Charlie's guitar.

And Tim said, "Why don't you do some of that for us, Hoop?"

Bunkys was this club that opened and closed under four or five managers in a fifteen-year period. I saw Tom Paxton there. I saw the Tannahill Weavers, the Boys of the Lough, Pat McDonald and the Essentials, Barbara Kooyman, Elvis Costello, Warren Zevon and Margie Adam perform there. In their last year, they ran "lingerie shows"; which ended when all the models were busted for prostitution. I got arrested there once too; there was a cop at the door who wouldn't let my sister Margaret in because she was underage, and I tried to make some calls, and got so frustrated that I smashed the pay phone to flinders and was heavily fined by the civil authority for it.

But, back then, they were eager to book local bands, so it took one phone call, to the bartender at the place, to set up the show time, load-in, cover, lots of lovely lager for the lads, everything.

The show was fantastic. The opening act was a deranged band with a thing for songs by The Plimsouls. They ground to a halt when they ran out of songs around 10:15. Then the Indicators appeared, Charlie in Rod Serling black and white, Tim Gadzinski — the fat one who could really sing — in jams and a Hawaiian shirt, Eric — the bald one (also known as the short one) — in his deck shoes and Hooper's Club sailing shirt. They tore through a rolling cover of "Minnie the Moocher", segueing halfway into their own song, "Yuppy Puppy". The crowd, mostly other theater students, was wildly approving and sang along lustily on the High-de-high-de-high-de-high parts.

Originals "Demon Frog", "Big Hair", and "Let's do it on the beach" (Chorus: Do the Pogo and the Twist/Miss the Sunday Eucharist") led to an engagingly mumbled cover of Tommy Tutone's "867-5309" which was transformed by several beers into "egg-sig-seven-ex-chee-ohnigh-yigh". Eric then began their tribute to Gordon Lightfoot, donning a yellow slicker hat to tell a tale of maritime adventure, as meanwhile Charles — the one who was a blond guitar hero and magnet for art students with lots of hairtoys — put a flashlight on top of his head and turned slow circles making foghorn noises. Tim crooned in the background, "Lake Michigan — lake of dreams/ Home to seagulls and floating alewife". The crowd was spellbound.

A barrage of their hits followed: "Get a Room", "Fabric Boy", the always string-snapping "Boys without Brains", "Reagan's Penis", and a cover of Swamp Thing's "The Mileage Song". Finally it was time to hit the top end: "Agent Orange", about an intelligent white-tail deer that learns to wear blaze orange and fire a hunting rifle. "Fruit Stand" wherein the narrator chooses to abandon an academic career in order to sell kiwi fruit in the howling rain, and, most popular of all, "The Scrod Rap".

The last item was a prolonged sales pitch by Tim — the one who could really talk — for scrod, the fish of the future, and The Scrod Squad (tm), an organization which promised to bring piping hot fish to your door within 58 seconds of your placing the order, OR ELSE. Or else what? Or else they would bring poached scrod to your door by the truck and hovercraft-load for the rest of your life. At the climax of this wild ranting pitch, Tim would turn purple and begin to lapse into unknown tongues, and the others would come back with:

"What'cha gonna do for dinner? (Doo-wah, doo-wah)
What'cha gonna do for brunch? (Doo-wah, doo-wah)
What'cha gonna have leftover for breakfast?
COLD SCROD!
Oooh, baby, you bet!
We got the fastest, quickest, thickest,
bestest, oileddest, boileddest
GOURMET SCROD - in the world!
We got SCROD with butter, SCROD with Nutrasweet,
And SCROD with Aunt Jenima too,
Oooh, BABY . . .

It was a hell of a show, and I can't do it an inch of justice just by telling you about it. In between songs, they were giving away old romance novels and boxes of crayons, 45 rpm singles discarded by a local radio station, and cubes of Jello from the Gordon Commons cafeteria. There was primitive and rather rude puppetry. Repeated cries from the audience of "Freebird! Freebird!" Indicator trivia. Four Tops-style (if the Four Tops had been three drunken theater students) spinning and dancing. Public Service Announcements ("The most dangerous place to drive/ is in a shopping mall parking lot/Don't drink and shop!") Wonders undreamt, until the club owner turned on the lights and cut the power to the stage, thirty seconds before bar-time.

They were all three terribly happy with the way things had gone. They had made good money, had a happy, accepting crowd, and got to sneer at the opening band. What else was there to the business? In a fit of generous euphoria, the three of them huddled and asked me to be their official road manager and liaison-to-record-company weasels. They gave me 10% of the gross, which was \$14.00. I went home with plans to call Bill Graham in the morning.

Unfortunately, within a week I had driven them up the wall with suggestions for new songs, places to play and changes to make in the act. What a fool I was! If I had just left well enough alone, I might have made enough for bus fare to New Orleans. Instead, I made them crazy, and they staged a fight at Student Union Rathskellar, and pretended to break up so I would leave them alone. But that afternoon, they were back at the mall, playing and singing their hearts out.

Of course, it was always supposed to be just fun to them. In between they were studying hard, rehearsing for minor roles in unendurable German expressionist plays, getting married, road-tripping to Athens, Georgia and losing a long series of security deposits. I eventually left the Theater Department behind to go into the writer's program and they went on to a fabulous career of playing for change in the vestibule of The Third Avenue in the Twin Cities. My brush with greatness became little more than a memory.

A few years later we were all reconciled at one of heir thousands of reunion shows. They needed someone at the door to collect the cover charge, and buttered me up by letting me start their second set by playing my impression of Hendrix' version of "The Star Spangled Banner" on the kazoo. I also got to introduce them: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Tacoma Dome is proud to welcome them back from their worldwide "Safe Sex is Swell" tour - please put your hands together for your favorite Kaffeehaus Kommandos... THE FABRIC INDICATORS!"

And they were still doing tributes to Gordon Lightfoot, Charles — the one who sold out and works for Apple Computer — still turning around with the flashlight on his head, chanting "Beeeeeeeee-yohhh," Eric — the one who was approached at Dulles International last year by some stranger who said "Hey, didn't you used to be a Fabric Indicator?" — still squinting and pretending to be a sailor of no fixed accent, and Tim — the one who does a lot of commercial work for companies that make jackhammers — strumming idly on Charles' guitar and making seagull noises.

I guess if you ask me to categorize them, I'd have to say they were folk musicians. They played mostly for their own amusement and that of a small group of friends, on the street as often as anywhere else. And it was impossible not to sing along with them, to make some of the demented things they said part of your own personal folklore. They made their own tradition up as they went along, and gave away useless trinkets as they were doing it. I don't know of any other band that has handed out crayons to their audience lately, do you?



The Afterlife of Steeleye Span

by David Bratman

Steeleye Span's eleventh official album was released by Chrysalis Records towards the end of 1978; I stumbled across it early the next year. The title, Live at Last, was a pun. After ten years of existence, and as many LPs, this was their first live album, and as such a notable event. And it was to be their final album, as well, or so it stated. A liner note by Tim Hart, one of the band's two surviving founding members, stated baldly that "Steeleye Span amicably disbanded ... for reasons that are irrelevant here" on March 12th, 1978. The main reason was the members' desire to pursue individual projects, but nobody with an interest in electric folk music could doubt the importance of their recorded legacy as a group. To this day, old folkie fogies will get together for friendly arguments over whether Hark! the Village Wait or Parcel of Rogues was their best album; "King Henry" or "Long Lankin" the finer epic ballad. As I write, Shanachie has issued CD editions of the first six albums; let us hope they continue. (There are also a few CD compilations: The Best of Steeleye Span, which unfortunately isn't, The Best of and the Rest of, which I suppose speaks for itself, and Portfolio, which does a somewhat better job. There are also a lot of surplus copies of a 2-LP set, The Steeleye Span Story: Original Masters, floating around in used record stores. This covers their first nine albums and is an excellent survey, making it a fine bargain for the curious.)

Fairport Convention's Liege and Lief (1969) is considered the album that founded electric folk music, but in the following years it was Steeleye that most diligently followed the path of producing "trad. arr." music. Just about everything on their albums sounded like it was based on folk songs, and most of it actually was, though the band did more writing and extensive arranging than is sometimes realized. For instance, "Gaudeie", the Renaissance-era Christmas carol on Below the Salt (1972) that became Steeleye's theme song is, in the original 16th-century manuscript, supplied with a melody only for the chorus. Steeleye had to write their own tune for the verses. Sources for folk ballad words are more plentiful than for the music, so there are a fair number of newly-minted tunes on Steeleye's records, including, if you believe the label credits, half the songs on Commoners Crown. The lyrics for gruesome numbers like "Alison Gross" and "Little Sir Hugh" were tightened up considerably from the folk sources, making them much punchier songs. Look them up in Child (Francis J. Child, English and Scottish Popular Ballads) if you don't believe me. There's an article in that ... A pair of stage numbers by Berthold Brecht and Kurt Weill turned up on Storm Force Ten (1977) as showpieces for Maddy Prior's highly expressive soprano. That album also contains "Awake, Awake", a beautiful song, loaded with botanical symbolism, all about premature ejaculation; but I mention it here because it's apparently the first Steeleye song since the opener of their premiere album to have words and music written by the group themselves.

Clearly there was a measurable amount of original songwriting talent in Steeleye's membership. The imagination and genius that went into the rock arrangements, a topic I haven't touched on, should alone prove that. Also, the use of Brecht/Weill and an original song on Storm Force, the last studio album before the breakup, imply that the band felt they'd mined out the folk music vein. They may also have felt uncomfortable about continuing under the Steeleye name without folk material. Two of the members had definitely written enough songs to be worth sending out into the world. And that gets us to the actual topic of this article: the recorded works of Steeleye Span, individually and collectively, since the 1978 breakup. The 13 years since have not been as prolific as the ten before, and the recent works are not as well known, but there's some interesting stuff in there.

Steeleye had thrown off associational items before, of course. I'll run through the highlights briefly for completeness' sake. Tim Hart and Maddy Prior had worked as a folk duo for several years before Steeleye's founding and during its early years before it became a full-time band; during that time they released two pristine folk song albums -- just two voices and an acoustic guitar -- titled Folk Songs of Old England, volumes 1 and 2, as well as a more soupy concoction with backup band called Summer Solstice. In 1975 Maddy teamed up with June Tabor for a purist folk album called Silly Sisters, which quickly became legendary. All four albums are wonderful examples of the unelectrified neo-folk art.

Martin Carthy, lead electric guitarist on four of Steeleye's albums, is in fact better known for his unplugged folk albums. There are maybe a dozen of these, recorded over the years, of which my favorite is Crown of Horn (1976, between his two Steeleye stints). Ashley Hutchings, Steeleye's grey eminence and its first bass guitarist, had been a founding member of Fairport Convention, and after leaving Steeleye in 1972 embarked on an endless series of folk and electric folk recording projects, many with an ensemble of highly variable membership known as the Albion Band (often with the word "Country" and/or "Dance" inserted). Guitarist Bob Johnson and fiddler Peter Knight were Steeleye mainstays who left the band early, in 1977, to work on a massive album project which eventually emerged as The King of Elfland's Daughter, based on Dunsany's novel. Though they got Christopher Lee to do the narration, this album did not make much of an impression on its listeners. I've only heard it once, and though it's actually a post-breakup work rather than an earlier spinoff, I don't have anything else to say about it. Folk accordionist John Kirkpatrick, the last new member to join Steeleye before the breakup, has done his own solo albums and played in the Albion Band; Terry and Gay Woods, a folk duo who were the first departures, made three albums of mostly unexceptional original songs in the '70s. Both have since served time in Irish bands: Gay was in Auto-da-fé in the early eighties, and Terry is now a member of the Pogues.

So, on to the post-breakup period. I don't pretend to utter completeness. I have no intention of tracking down every bit of session work done by any Steeleye or ex-Steeleye member since 1978, and the solo careers of the Woods, Hutchings,

Carthy, and Kirkpatrick are too complex, and separate from the general milieu, to follow here. But unless I've never heard of it, every album with any other Steeleye member's name prominently displayed is at least mentioned here somewhere.

Hard on the heels of Live at Last appeared three solo albums: Maddy Prior's Woman in the Wings and Changing Winds, and Tim Hart's, which was just called Tim Hart. Each, like the last 8 Steeleye albums, King of Elfland's Daughter, and Silly Sisters, was a Chrysalis release; each was dated 1978. Each was totally unlike anything either had done before, though so typical of what was to come that they no longer seem as surprising as they did at the time. Almost all of the songs on each album were written by the principal performer: basic 1970s pop-rock songs, with definitely individual styles but without a touch of folkie quaintness, a lack underlined by the studio bands hired to perform them. Steeleye had been a stage-oriented 6-person rock band; guitars and drums with rare keyboard, with fiddle and occasional mandolin or woodwinds to add a distinctive touch. The credits on Hart's album list 11 instrumentalists; Prior's list 9 and 14, not to mention string and brass sections. Given the firepower (three bass guitarists?) they probably didn't all perform on each track, but they sound like it. Prior's albums sound particularly grandiose at times. She gave over most of her arrangements to a pair of keyboard/synthesizer players, David Palmer (on Woman in the Wings) and Richie Close (Changing Winds). Palmer, a member of Jethro Tull who brought along several of his Tull mates to play, is the more restrained arranger, but unfortunately he got to work on the inferior album. Close conducted a genuine string section which was stirred, a la mid-period Beatles, into the mix. The point is not that the assembled forces were unusual for solo singers' albums of this or any other period. They weren't. Rather, I'm trying to point out how totally unlike Steeleye these albums are.

I confess to a fondness for these albums, especially Changing Winds. This is a slightly embarrassing statement, because the Politically Correct position would be to berate Prior for deviating from the True Electric Folk Faith. (Much as she was berated for leaving Pure Folkiness on joining Steeleye, but I digress.) Also because it's rather syrupy. (All those strings, you know.)

At first glance, Woman in the Wings is simply a pop album, nothing more or less. This would be less of a surprise if it hadn't marked a sudden shift after twelve years of folk tending towards guitar-oriented rock. One of its less distinguished cuts, "Rollercoaster", was unexpectedly plopped in the middle of a later Steeleye retrospective called Recollections, where it sticks out in an almost embarrassing manner.

But once Steeleye fans overcame their surprise at hearing this sort of music on an album with Maddy Prior on it, they might have noticed a few distinctive touches which were to become characteristic of her solo work. Most notable were the lyrics, which expressed an interesting view of the world and a flair for expressing it. (Unfortunately, this album, unlike its followup, Changing Winds, does not have the lyrics printed on the jacket.) "Mother and Child" is particularly arresting. It's a quiet song for naught but voice and piano, in the form of a question-and-answer dialogue in which the child (at first you might think the child is juvenile, but she's clearly an adult) evades her mother's questions with gnomic responses and flat refusals to answer. Prior's talent for creating interesting lyrics hasn't left her, and her tunes have retained a similarly distinctive sinuousness of line.

A somewhat folky style on "Long Shadows" and "Rosettes" looks back to later Steeleye work (or perhaps to Jethro Tull), but most of the other songs look forward. The catty anti-romantic lyrics of "I Told You So" were to find echoes in certain later songs, such as "Good Job" on Happy Families. "Catseyes" is a precursor of the reggae rock songs on Hooked on Winning. "Deep Water" has a touch of the chill that so infected "The Sovereign Prince" on Changing Winds. And "Gutter Geese" has a bit of the cheery nonchalance that Prior would someday bring to singing Christmas carols. The campy "I Told You So" and more lounge lizardly "Baggy Pants" look both forward (to a pair of similar songs on Changing Winds) and backward to Prior's family tradition in show business stretching back to vaudeville days.

In the end, really, it's only "Rollercoaster" and the title song, along with a couple of the songs on Changing Winds that really fit the overorchestrated pop stereotype that these albums are unfortunately saddled with. Even so, it's not a standout album. Some debuts are outstanding because the artist has a long backlog of songs to choose from. Others are less so, because the artist hasn't really hit her stride yet. This is one of the latter.

Changing Winds, issued later the same year, is to my ears a better album than Woman in the Wings. The first song, "To Have and To Hold", is not promising. The subject is "the have-nots": famine victims and lonely lovers. Not a promising juxtaposition, and those sappy strings throb mightily through the chorus. Nice tune, but it doesn't help. But there's only two other syrupy songs on the album, and they're both much more successful. "Canals" is a pretty love-song, not too pretentious; and "The Mountain" (written by Sarah Deco, a pianist on the album) packs a subtle wallop. The music, mostly ruminative piano with strings hovering in the background, tugs at the heartstrings most effectively, while the lyrics tell a different sort of love story. The Mountain is where the lady lives, separated from her lover. "He calls to her," but fails to realize that "the mountain is of his making / And she is still waiting for his love."

Subtly clever, and the point is emphasized by the following song, "In Fighting", which sounds quite unlike "The Mountain". A sort of preview of The War of the Roses, "In Fighting" has witty lyrics about a warring couple who've forgotten what they're fighting about, and bright, snappy instrumental parts. I liked the song because it reminded me of the couple I was sharing a house with at the time. (They're still happily married, strangely enough.) Musically, another song like it is "Bloomers": more snappy instrumentals, and lyrics using plants as metaphors for types of women. "Accappella Stella", as the title implies, is unaccompanied, with lots of double tracking. It was written by Rick Kemp, Steeleye's bassist

(who plays on both this album and Hart's, and whom Prior was soon to marry). A couple songs are more campy: "Ali Baba", a modern-day sheik depicted in a vamping 20s style, and "Another Drink", in which Prior uses her remarkable talent for vocal characterization to depict a lush. "Pity the Poor Night Porter" ("when the band comes to town", you know) and "The Sovereign Prince" (a minor epic contrasting cross-Atlantic travel in the days of the galleons and the days of beach vacations) complete the lineup of this quite respectable album.

Tim Hart, in his eponymous album, fared less well. In fact, this is a downright miserable collection, which I've kept for only two reasons: in case I ever wanted to remind myself how bad it is, and because I liked the cover. It's a surrealistic landscape by Adrian Chesterman (who also drew the cover for Storm Force Ten), with the shapes of female nudes hidden in the trees and ponds. That about describes the lyrics, as well. Hart definitely wants to expound the male chauvinist view of life. The opening song, "Keep On Travelling", is actually a paean to the "love 'em and leave 'em" philosophy. It does have something going for it musically: a fast, complex instrumental rhythm coupled with a broader, catchy tune. This is a combination I've always had a weakness for, so I like to listen to this song as long as I ignore the lyrics. The other songs don't even have that much going for them, though some of them try and fail miserably, notably a "trad. arr." song called "Come To My Window". "Hillman Avenger", the first-person cautionary tale of a roving Lothario who almost gets caught, is particularly memorable for sheer awfulness. Hart's peculiar diction, in which the plosives come out as nasals, doesn't help.

In 1980, the folk world was more than casually surprised by the release of a new Steeleye Span album. There were no notes on the cover of Sails of Silver to explain the change of heart since Live at Last, but it would appear that the members of the band felt that, although Steeleye was dead, there was no reason the corpse could not twitch spasmodically once in a while. (Fairport Convention, which disbanded in 1979, came to a similar conclusion a couple of years later.)

John Kirkpatrick and Martin Carthy had gone back to folk singing, and the prodigal sons Peter Knight and Bob Johnson had returned to the band in their place. This is the last studio album with the full six-person mid-period Steeleye lineup, and it sounds like a mid-period Steeleye album. The same group dynamics and style were there for the last time, and they sound good, albeit a bit watered down. When I first listened to the album, with some anxiousness, it was the little pause at the end of the introduction of the title track which said to me, Yes, this is genuine Steeleye. They're back.

The relationship between the original and folk material on this album is even more nebulous than on Storm Force Ten. According to the credits, only one half track, a one-minute group acapella piece titled "Harvest Home", was "trad. arr."; the rest were credited to Steeleye corporate authorship. Nevertheless there are traces of folk origin in some songs: "Tell Me Why", a riddle song which is one of the album's punchier numbers, was clearly based on the very first song in the entire Child ballad collection. In general, however, the non-folk influence is stronger. Familiarity with later, better-identified Steeleye output can provide basis for some good guesses as to who wrote what. The three male singers are probably each responsible for their solo turns. Tim Hart does "My Love", a quiet little tune with amazingly bitter lyrics of betrayed love. (If this reflects anything in Hart's personal life, I don't want to know about it.) Peter Knight's "Let Her Go Down" has the content but not the style of a ballad about a sinking ship. Bob Johnson's "Longbone" is a gruesome giant, but as a song it pales next to "Long Lankin" or "The Wife of Usher's Well". Prior sings the rest, and probably wrote them, too. The lyrics of "Senior Service", a fast witty pop number, and the heavy but gutsy "Where Are They Now" betray the same quirky mind that wrote the solo albums. "Barnet Fair" and "Gone to America" are less successful. They bear the same relationship to cheery "come-to-the-fair" folk songs and mournful 18th-century "lost love" ballads (he's been wrongfully convicted of poaching, and transported to a penal colony), respectively, as "Let Her Go Down" does to maritime ballads. One couplet in "Gone to America" wins my nomination for the most dorky lines Steeleye ever uttered: "They said that they had sent him where poachers go / I asked if I could see him, and they said, 'No.'"

Despite that, Sails is a good album, which has continued to stick with me. However far it may be from the group's folk origins, it's at least as successful as the very uneven Rocket Cottage or Now We Are Six.

After Tim Hart's previous solo album, I was completely unprepared for the one which came out in 1981: My Very Favourite Nursery Rhyme Record, billed as by "Tim Hart and Friends". I admit I had some misgivings about this album before I bought it. Nursery rhymes (when they have tunes) are a kind of folk song, to be sure, but I would have thought them rather skimpy inspiration to build a record from. The combination of nursery rhymes and Steeleye people led me to expect something like the filler material by children's choirs that marred Now We Are Six.

I shouldn't have worried. It was love from the moment the needle hit the disk; this is one of the best electric folk records ever made, and nearly everyone I've played it for has adored it. It is made with such spirit and imagination as to put life in the hoariest of clichéd songs. One of my most cherished memories is the expression on the face of a friend of mine as we were listening to this album, when she realized that we'd both actually just been singing along to "Old MacDonald Had a Farm", of all things.

Hart's "friends" are an equal mixture of Steeleye alumni and other names familiar to followers of Maddy Prior's solo albums. Prior herself shares principal singing chores with Hart, with contributions from Bob Johnson ("Humpty Dumpty" as a production number), John Kirkpatrick (a "Little Bo Peep" which could have come off one of his own albums), and one Melanie Harrold ("Bobby Shaftoe" and some harmonies with Prior). They all collaborate on "Oranges and Lemons", passing off lines to each other. Other performers include Rick Kemp, bass, Gary Wilson, drums, and Andy Richards, synthesizers.

The instrumentals, in their variety, eclectic approach, and general "extended dance band" style, remind me more of the similarly grab-bag Sydney Carter album, Lovely in the Dances, than anything else I know. The variety keeps the whole thing fresh.

The sound is definitely not over-processed. The problem of skimpy material is solved with a lot of verse repetition, and by keeping the songs short (there are 19 tracks, none over 3 1/2 minutes).

A word on the tunes. Some are very familiar: "Old MacDonald", "Nick Nack Paddy Wack", "Oh Dear What Can the Matter Be", and so on. "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" has been modified with a slightly dotted rhythm. "Hush-a-Bye Baby" is "Rock-a-Bye Baby" with a completely different (and very beautiful) tune from the one familiar to me. A few, "Mary Mary Quite Contrary" and "Humpty Dumpty" among them, are rhymes that I wasn't even aware had tunes.

Unfortunately, this album, which appeared on a small, obscure label, is almost impossible to find. Rumor says that it, along with a second Hart nursery rhyme album about which I know nothing, have come out on CD together, but this apparition has not manifested itself to me.

A collaboration that deserves to be mentioned among Steeleye apocrypha also appeared in 1981: Lovely in the Dances: Songs of Sydney Carter. All the current members of Steeleye except Tim Hart participated, as did John Kirkpatrick, and several Maddy Prior accompanists. The arrangements were all by Vince Cross, the third keyboard player to mastermind a Maddy Prior project. Sydney Carter is a talented English songwriter of Christian bent, best known for "Lord of the Dance", his own words set to the traditional Shaker melody "Simple Gifts". His song "Julian of Norwich" (inspired by the 14th-century mystic of that name) has also been picked up by the folk circuit. Both are on this album, and they exemplify its variety: "Lord of the Dance" is sung by Maddy Prior in a jazzed-up quasi-reggae arrangement (they keep cropping up in this article) that should raise the eyebrows of people who only know the tune from Aaron Copland's Appalachian Spring, and "Julian" is a slow, quiet piece, sung by a woman named Shusha with a voice like a cello to the accompaniment of Cross's piano and an extremely subdued rhythm section made up of Messrs. Kemp and Pegrum. Pegrum (Steeleye's drummer and woodwinds specialist) pulls out his handy oboe briefly, an example of the mid-period Steeleye sound that keeps cropping up. In fact, if Cross, by virtue of his keyboard work on Back in Line, is considered an honorary Steeleye member, two of the songs are pure Steeleye. "Bitter Was the Night" features Johnson and Kirkpatrick, who don't appear together on any canonical Steeleye albums, trading vocal parts back and forth over Cross's keyboards, and "Friday Morning" is a fine characterization by Johnson (accompanied by Cross, Kemp, and Pegrum) of the thief hanged on Calvary. The lyrics are deeply ironic, and contain Carter's best lines: "It's God they ought to crucify instead of you and me / I said to the carpenter a-hanging on the tree." Another most excellent album.

The next Steeleye studio album wasn't to appear for another six years after Sails of Silver. Festival Records, the Australian Chrysalis licensee, filled the gap with Recollections, an anthology album released in 1981, and On Tour, a live album from 1983. To my knowledge they were never released in America; my copies, were acquired from Down Home Records, the best domestic source for folk imports. Because of their obscurity, I'll describe them in particularly painful detail.

Recollections is a compilation album designed to do for middle-period Steeleye what another obscure album called Individually and Collectively did for the early Steeleye. It contains 17 songs dating from 1972 (the year I&C came out) to 1980, some chosen for their obscurity (which in one case backfires), and some merely to be representative. The packaging is nice, with group photos of both incarnations of the band from the period, and informative program notes on the inner sleeve. The sound is clear, but is recorded distressingly low, in a determined attempt to cram 58 minutes on the album. In approximate chronological order, the contents are:

- ° From Original Masters, the two-album compilation: "Bonny Moorhen", a useful place to have this song which was never released on a regular Steeleye album. It's a quiet, appealing song, and the notes say it was recorded at the Parcel of Rogues sessions in 1973. The style fits, but since it's more placid than anything that actually appears on that album, it's too bad it couldn't have been fit in there.

- ° From Commoners Crown: "Elf Call", advertised here as being a "special edited version", but all they did was cut the instrumental fadeout.

- ° From All Around My Hat: "Gamble Gold/Robin Hood", which epitomizes the unusually clean sound of that album; and "Cadgwith Anthem", chosen as an example of Steeleye acapella.

- ° From Rocket Cottage: "London", a perfect example of how pure rock can sound just as muddy as early electric folk; and "The Bosnian Hornpipes", one of Steeleye's shortest songs and the first one I ever memorized the words to (it hasn't got any). The unique quality of these versions is that they come from a promotional edition of RC that prefaced each song with an introduction by a band member. Maddy Prior babbles and tells where they found "London" (in a book called The New Academy of Compliments), and Peter Knight delivers a surreal discussion of "Bosnian" ("nothing at all," he says, "to do with the joke about bees that are very very big").

- ° From Storm Force Ten: "Seventeen Come Sunday", one of the weak points of an album that's far too sedate outside of Maddy's sizzling solos.

- ° From Live at Last: "Hunting the Wren", my favorite track from the album, a fast-moving dialogue song. "Montrose", which really is a special edited version. Festival put it out as a single by cutting down this 15-minute monster to 4 minutes, essentially by throwing out the instrumental solos. The cutting is very clean, and it actually improves the

song. "Rag Doll" is the one where the desire for obscurity backfires. The British and Australian editions of LAL didn't have this old Four Seasons standard, but something called "Bonnet So Blue" instead. So Festival has put "Rag Doll" on Recollections so the Aussies can hear it. Nice of them, but I'd like to hear "Bonnet So Blue" sometime. Incidentally, the notes say that Steeleye recorded "Rag Doll" in 1972.

° Sails of Silver: "Harvest Home", a one-minute acapella half track that has the only "trad. arr." credit on the album.

° Hart and Prior solos: "Lass of Loch Royal", Maddy's only solo from Silly Sisters, very beautiful if you like that stuff, which I do. "Roller Coaster", from her Woman in the Wings, not really a bad song, but its pop sound comes across very oddly sandwiched between "Seventeen Come Sunday" and "Gamble Gold". "Overseas", which doesn't represent Tim Hart as favorably, and gives the same sense of culture shock by being tucked between "Cadgwith Anthem" and "The Bosnian Hornpipes".

° Songs issued only on singles: "The Boars Head Carol", the gem of the collection, worth the price of the album for all that it's only 3 and a half minutes long. It's an English/Latin mix traditionally performed at the Christmas feast ceremonies at Queens College, Oxford. (The text is in the Oxford Book of Carols.) It's sung by the Storm Force lineup in a rich, rich acapella, with a full instrumental breaking in at the very end, then a reprise of verse 2 on top of that, fadeout over the chorus. Magnificent! "The Holly and the Ivy", which was Side B when "Gaudete" was released as a single, is another carol. A rather muddy recording, with a heavy-handed organ accompaniment, sounding as if it was taped for this release off a rather worn copy of the single.

° Non-songs: A brief interview with Maddy Prior, with traffic sounds in the background. She tells how she gradually drifted into becoming a full-time performer, and how Steeleye was initially intended to be a part-time band. Some silly verbal Christmas greetings, recorded in (what sounds like) a small room in 1976. The band hums "The Holly and the Ivy" in the background as various members speak. If you've ever wanted to hear Tim Hart talk in falsetto, here's your chance. And last and not least, the "Camptown Races" nonsense from off Rocket Cottage. The compilers seem unaware that that actually got on the album. Or maybe it was mercifully excised in Australia.

"Recorded live at the Opera Theatre, Adelaide" is what it says on the hideous front cover of On Tour. The back cover group portrait comes from the same photo session that produced the strangely lighted back cover of Sails of Silver.

Recording quality is always crucial on live albums, and while the editing is good, the engineering gets mixed reviews. This is recording in the rough, and the vocals in particular do not blend. The contrast with the studio albums in that respect is really marked. It's actually interesting to hear an acapella song like "The King" taken apart, as it were, with all the lines hearable, but it's less artistically pleasing. The low point is in "All Around My Hat", the finale, where Maddy Prior wanders All Around The Stage, fading in and out on the microphone. Much of the blame for the vocal roughness, though, can be laid on Peter Knight, who must have had slight laryngitis. He sounds awful, and only manages to pull off a good job on his solo, "Let Her Go Down". The best vocal job is done by Bob Johnson, who sings "Alison Gross" in a delightful style, as if he's having great fun portraying evilness and can barely keep from breaking into giggling. Prior, as usual, does most of the singing, and is in fairly good form, especially on "Gaudete".

The instruments are just as roughly recorded, but it doesn't make as big a problem. To a certain extent, the bones stick out here too: in this case it's mostly Nigel Pegrum banging away on the cymbals in an uninteresting fashion. Knight keeps his fiddle well under control, and plays piano on "Gone to America" and "Let Her Go Down". Pegrum pulls out his handy flute only on "Thomas the Rhymer", passing up other opportunities where his woodwinds were double-tracked on the studio albums.

The overall style of the instrumentals is of course quite uniform, and not surprisingly the songs which sound most like the studio versions are those from Sails of Silver. The arrangements are mostly rather heavy (Johnson's blaring electric guitar is always detectable), but the performing style keeps the overall effect from being too thick. And since you asked, no, they don't try to blast out the stereo system at the end of "Alison Gross".

Tempo is rather odd on this album. "The King", the first song, wavers in tempo, and "Black Jack Davey" is lugubrious until suddenly at the words "Then I'll kick off my highheel shoes" it picks up with a small vengeance. The rest of the album sounds at a fine speed in context, but when I listen to the songs individually they seem a bit slow. The really odd thing is the tension level. First off, none of the particularly highly-tensed moments in the studio versions come off well here. I'm referring to points like the pause at the start of "Sails of Silver" and the chilling unaccompanied chorus at the end of "Little Sir Hugh". They don't fall flat, but nobody seems especially excited about their possibilities. And second, there are places, often repeated, in several songs, in which the normal tension level momentarily vanishes. The words "she must be" in the chorus of "Alison Gross" and some of the shorter bridge passages of "Longbone" are examples. (This doesn't mean that Steeleye's lost it, because both later studio albums are full of fine tense songs like "Edward" and "Following Me".)

There's no audience noise, except of course for the applause at the ends of songs, and at the beginnings of "Gaudete" and "All Around My Hat", the two last songs and apparently the audience favorites.

There are spoken introductions to four songs. I don't think it's a coincidence that they're the four from Sails of Silver; rather, I think it's a confirmation of the theory that the band turned to writing original material because they wanted to speak in their own voices (even if they don't really have much to say). Prior, who is frankly no good at this, muddles her way through the intros to "Sails of Silver" and "Gone to America" (where she embarrasses herself by momentarily forgetting that America was not the only British penal colony). On the other hand, Peter Knight is amusing in the intro to "Let Her Go Down" telling of being perpetually seasick on his fishing expeditions ("I tried the seasick tablets, the pills ... they made

various noises as they hit the deck"), and Johnson begins "Longbone" in an utterly delightful fashion: "All those silly songs about fairies and elves -- I've given them up. I've had enough. 'Cause I've grown up now, I'm much bigger, I've moved on to bigger things. (Pause) Giants! I'm going to sing about giants instead. One day they're going to carry me away, you know .. but until they do, I'm going to sing about giants."

The best songs on the album are the two openers on side 2. "Thomas the Rhymmer" is done in a longer version that Steeleye frequently performed live, and it's a vast improvement over the studio version on *Now We Are Six*. Structurally, the earlier version's 4 verses of type A ("True Thomas sat on Huntley bank ...") and the 1 of type B ("Don't you see yon bonny bonny road ..."), with choruses after verses 4 and 5, have been expanded into 3 of type A, 2 of type B, chorus, 3 of A, 3 of B, choruses. There's also some additional instrumental bridge before each appearance of type B. The additional words make the story much clearer. And, as a final touch, one of the closing choruses is done acapella, a la "Little Sir Hugh". Being unexpected, it works much better.

It's followed by something called "I Have a Wish". Credited to "Unknown", this acapella jeu d'esprit muses over how nice it would be to hear "a folk-rock punk-beat boogy-woogy reggae with a barbershop harmony" on the radio. Sung by the whole band in basic unison harmony, this song is unexciting but fun.

Complete list of cuts: "The King", "Black Jack Davey", "Sails of Silver", "Little Sir Hugh", "Let Her Go Down", "Alison Gross", "Bach Goes to Limerick" (just the fast second part, with Knight's violin line slightly rewritten), "Thomas the Rhymmer", "I Have a Wish", "Longbone", "I Live Not Where I Love" (a Hart guitar- Prior vocal off of *Summer Solstice*, done here absolutely straight), "Gone to America", "Gaudete", and "All Around My Hat".

(To be continued in FOLKAL POINT 2)

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A Few Comments on Scurrilous Songwriting; or How to Be a Bard in a Gilded Cage and Live to Tell About It

by John V. Hedtke

Many things may be said for scurrilous verse, most of which are not polite. It takes but little talent to write (or "wrong," as some have it) a scurrilous song, as a great number of scurrilous songs extant testify. If you have written a good limerick or perhaps a verse for "Old Time Religion," you've probably got enough ability to have a shot at a full-scale song.

What Is Scurrilous Verse?

Like goatees and spiral staircases, it is far easier to describe scurrilous verse by pointing to examples than to define it in words. Most or all scurrilous verse qualifies as filk (even if it doesn't identify itself as such), but not all filk is scurrilous verse. Scurrilous verse may be nothing more than the retelling of an event, such as any of dozens of songs about conventions. It may be a song of praise, although this is rare; straight praise doesn't usually have a punch line. More often, scurrilous verse is satiric (such as "Bouncing Potatoes") or it may be one of the "add-your-own-verse" compositions that grow continually, such as "Old Time Religion."

Scurrilous verse tries to make its point with humor. This humor can be cynicism, parody, satire, or even a tacky pun, but there must be a "tee-hee" or a "ha-ha" or even a "Ghod, no!" in scurrilous verse somewhere. This humor is moreover very human. Behaviors or personality types are brought up and exhibited to the world at large, either on an individual basis or on a somewhat larger scale.

Scurrilous verse deals strongly with the backhanded compliment and is often used very effectively for political sniping. But above all, the best topic for scurrilous song is pointing out the drastic lack of competence, wisdom, tact, or perhaps just plain luck that caused someone to be stuck in a horribly embarrassing situation about which they could do nothing.

Types of Scurrilous Verse

Presuming that you do indeed wish to exercise your talents and have a go at scurrilous songwriting, you will have to make an important decision: is this thing going to be a parody or an original? Parody is easy to write because you already have the framework of the original song to work against. It uses the tried and true vehicle of a popular song or a poem. The audience will already know at least the flavor of the original, which can add resonances to your own lyrics. A good example of this is the many versions of the song "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," originally from "Cabaret." There are at least a half-dozen parodies of this song commonly heard, including SCA, Dark Horde, furnish "to-the-stars," and others.

As the above example shows, a parody doesn't have to be funny; it simply must copy the original. However, most parodies are for the quick laugh, the one-liner, the fast snipe. Many times, a parody will come into being as a natural outgrowth of a single joke that develops for the alliterative puns, such as "Having a Knife from Toledo Guerrido Is Like Having No Knife At All." Almost all of Weird Al Yankovic's work is parody, and alliterative parody at that. "I Think I'm a Clone Now" and "Y-O-D-A Yoda" need no further explanation to anyone who's heard the original tunes.

Parodies tend towards hack writing, though, and use only a minimum of creative ability on your part. The glory of the finished product is lessened. When the applause comes, it is not all yours; half of it goes to Tom Lehrer or whoever wrote the original. If you write an epic ballad with an original tune, you have achieved something great. Moreover, when you work from scratch, you don't have to tailor your thoughts to someone else's scansion. But writing from scratch also means that you have to come up with your own tune, rhyme scheme, and rhythms, and that's work. (If you don't believe it, try to come up with a tune that isn't insipid, identifiable as anything you've heard before, has merit as a piece of music, and can stand up to a set of lyrics that meet the same criteria.)

Writing a good original song is a true accomplishment. I recommend that you try for the whole enchilada whenever you can. I take far more pride in the handful of original songs that I have written over the years than in the dozens of parodies. On the other hand, I have a lot more fun with the parodies. Oh, well, so much for unadulterated greatness....

Writing Scurrilous Verse

Parody or original, there are three things you must do whenever you write scurrilous verse:

- Gauge your audience
- Grab your audience's interest
- Keep your audience's interest

Gauging your audience. When you write something, examine it continually from your audience's viewpoint. Is the theme or topic of the song acceptable to them? Is it relevant? Are the puns too subtle or broad? Can your audience relate to the cultural or historical background you're talking about?

If there are any "no" answers, several courses of action are open to you. The first and most obvious is to change the focus of the song. You can also sing it to a different group of people than your normal audience. You can even give an introduction to the song when you perform it and explain the parts that may need explaining. Done effectively, this last course of action is the most effective.

Grabbing your audience's interest. Your audience will stick with you to about the end of the first verse. After that, it's up to you to keep them from walking away. Let them know as soon as possible that your song is a masterpiece. Many songs use a snappy title (which may double as the first line) to set the tone, such as Leslie Fish's "Carmen Miranda's Ghost Is Haunting Space Station Three."

You might want to wait until the last line of the first verse to set a trap, so as to soften up the audience, lull their suspicions, and give them background material to fill in the song. One parody of "Waltzing Matilda" dealing with Wagner's Ring Cycle played it straight for a while until you get to the couplet "And we'll all go to Valhalla, and we'll wait for Gotterdammerung//You'll come a-Volsung Brunhilda with me!"

Keeping your audience's interest. Always space out your laughs. Gags should be placed evenly throughout the song. There is no need for two puns on every line. If you can get away with it, fine, but this is overkill. You run the risk of lousing up your *scansion* and the sense of the song to achieve your ends. I don't want to discourage you from writing truly exceptional stuff because it might be too funny, but I caution against humor at the expense of the singability (and intelligibility) of your finished product. If you have a line or concept that is all you could want, try to make it work for you; you may be able to get away with it. But don't force it if it doesn't fit. I have had to discard gorgeous puns simply because they didn't scan well, curse though I may. In such cases, all you can do is sigh and try again.

By the way, a chorus has much to recommend it. A chorus allows the audience to sing along with part of the song, it fills out otherwise brief or sketchy compositions, it can give a musical and/or lyrical break, and most importantly, it gives the singer a chance to remember what the next verse is.

Try to save your biggest boff for last. Remember that good scurrilous verse is basically a joke or shaggy dog story set to music, so there should be a punch line to make it all complete.

A Few Final Notes

In keeping with the principle of maximum result from minimum effort, I recommend that you have a rhyming dictionary on hand. This will help you avoid the "Junemoonwithloveabove" syndrome. Rhyming dictionaries are also very helpful when you're trying to make a tight alliterative three-syllable rhyme. The best is *Clement Wood's Unabridged Rhyming Dictionary*. Go buy it.

Before you get up in front of the entire world and sing this newborn ditty of which you're so proud, consider how fast you can run and from whom the greatest threats may come. Bear in mind also that anything above a bilingual triple pun is grounds for justifiable homicide anywhere. You may also want to think about the political ramifications of the song you are writing. Slamming the ConCom for their continuing inability to get a good con site may be fun, but it won't get you invited back to the con, either.

Finally, remember that scurrilous verse is supposed to be fun. This isn't Great Literature. This isn't Art. This is entertainment, with a small "e." Remember that, and you'll always have an appreciative audience.

"The Abduction Song"

by John V. Hedtke

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(Note: *Qui custodiet ipsos custodes?* is a mangy bit of Latin that means "Who shall guard the guardians?" Now you know. The other piece of Latin in this song you can figure out for yourself.)

Once upon a time, it was not so long ago
Lords thought their ladies safe with honor guards, but even
though
This kept the horny troubadors from knocking up the queen,
"*Qui custodiet ipsos custodes?*" was not foreseen.

It happened once there was a lady more than passing fair,
With creamy alabaster skin and flowing auburn hair.
She walked along so beautifully, all men did bend the knee,
And swore her presence was a gift God gave them all to see.

A fairer maid was nowhere to be found in all the land.
And many knights and noblemen did seek to win her hand.
But all who tried had quickly died, a failure in their quest,
For her lord appeared invincible; all said he was the best.

Her lord was not a brilliant man and lacked in common sense.
And thus he made a great mistake from overconfidence.
He forged his lass a belt of steel to save her chastity
And then pondered through the night the safest place to hide
the key.

The belt was made from all the finest steel that could be
bought,
But should someone find the key, his well-wrought plan would
come to naught.
It wouldn't be secure concealed beneath a tub of lard
So the lord then did a foolish thing: he gave to his guard.

The guards our lord had picked to watch his lady were a
shock.
Their ancestry was bastardry of lowest peasant stock.
The lord maintained all four on less than what you'd give a
page,
For the lord was rich, but also cheap; he paid a sinful wage.

The guards were well aware their lady really was a gem
And late one night amidst their cups, a plan did come to
them.
With what I've told you so far, it's easy to infer:
They had the key, they'd set her free, then work their will
on her!

It came to pass one morning, it was scarcely even dawn.

The maid was there one minute, and next thing you know, she's gone!
The lord did not awaken when they dragged his lass away
For he was a bit hungover and refused to face the day.

"Awake, awake! Calamity! Misfortune smites us all!
"Our mistress has been kidnapped!" you could hear the heralds call.
"So armor up, you lazy sods, and win her back again.
"Both lady and abductors may be found in yonder glen."

The noble lord and righteous men-at-arms did gird their thews
And swore a mighty oath the blackguards soon would pay their dues.
They set about to tracking the false knaves that did them wrong
And they rode with speed unto the deed they'd do before ere long.

Straightway into the day, they came upon the glen.
The lady was nowhere in sight, and neither were the men.
They searched high, they searched low, they searched all around,
And then someone cried "They've killed her, for there's blood upon the ground!"

They redoubled their efforts and the part soon convened
On bloody carnage, like of which, no man had ever seen.
The guards were dead.
One lacked a head.
Amidst them stood the lass
Who gave no second glance at all the bodies on the grass.

The lord did not do anything but look upon his wife.
His lady did return his gaze, then glanced down at her knife.
She wiped the blade off on the cloaks of bodies on the loam,
Then she sheathed it, saying "I think it's time for breakfast; let's go home."

This story has a moral, as all good stories do.
A simple little bit of truth that I'll relate to you:
A maiden may be beautiful, or lustily inclined,
But *abducto ad absurdum* is mostly what you'll find!

ARLO AND JANIS / JIMMY JOHNSON





FAREWELL to Anglay
and Celtoid tunes -
Hadda consult m'
Musical Runes -
Find a way to really
shed my Woes -
Do it with a Crede
o' Cajun FAIS DO-DO!!

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