

The
RAMBLERS

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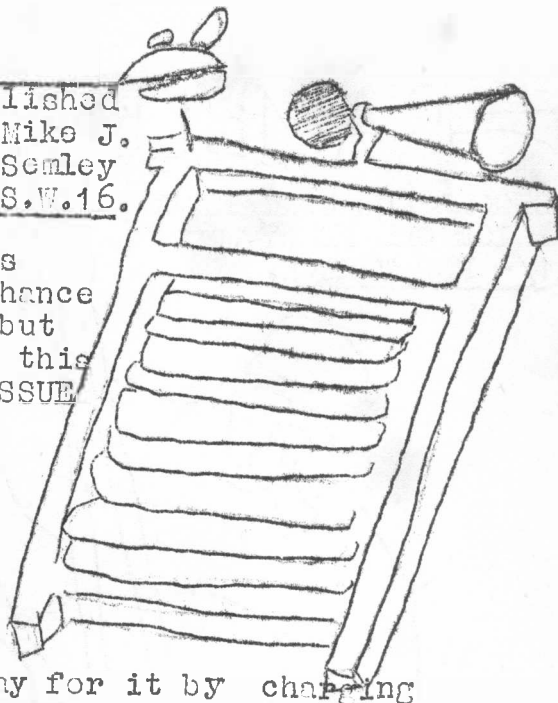


Ray Nelson

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PUBLICATION

EDITORIAL

RAMBLER is published and Edited by Mike J. Horecock, 36, Semley Rd., Norbury, S.W.16.



The reason for these last few issues being dated ahead is because there is a chance that an issue may not appear one month - but two may appear another month. To balance this I have dated this issue SECOND FEBRUARY ISSUE in JANUARY in case a MARCH issue doesn't appear.....

Recently, I have found it more and more difficult to scrape together the necessary cash for a cup of tea or coffee in the evenings. I decided that as RAMBLER was partly distributed in the places where I buy said tea or coffee, I could pay for it by charging a minimum price for RAMBLER. I think a penny is fair, don't you ?

RAMBLER has no regular columnists in the major towns of the countries where it is distributed. A LONDON, NEW YORK and SAN FRANCISCO (or thereabouts) correspondent to send in regular news is welcomed to send in a column. Ray Nelson is our PARISIAN correspondent as well as Staff Artist. All the work in this issue is by Ray - and I think you'll agree that it's damn' good. The cover scene, by the way, is called HEAD ARRANGING and is the first of a series of covers by Ray.

Sandy Sandfield contributes another article - this time on the jazz scene, Alan Dodd writes about THE GRAND OLD OPRY, Ray Nelson is back with his column - MAKING THE SCENE IN NORTH BEACH is worth reading. GETTING THE MESSAGE returns to its old style again with a variety of letters.

The HOOTENANNIES held at the PRINCESS LOUISE, Holborn on Sundays and soon at THE GUN, Croydon are well-worth attending, if you like good folkmusic from Britain and the States. BALLADS AND BLUES also present a new series (from 22nd January) called PERSONAL CHOICE.

Eric Winter's SING and Leeh Shaw's CARAVAN are worth reading, too and can be got from Eric at 38, Westbere Road, N.W.2 and John Brunner, 144, Fellowes Rd., N.W.3 respectively. One is English and the other comes from the States and is only 6d. a copy. Wonderful value. Eric Winter's magazine is on more professional lines and prints a lot of valuable material for folksingers. Both are strongly recommended.

Articles, artwork, letters and reviews on any aspect of the folkmusic world always welcomes.

See you around, *Mike*

NOSTALGIA

JAZZ ARTICLE

It is strange to realise, in one's middle thirties, how the music which one once embraced and boasted of as modern and as new as a new day has become part of the past, a solid and singing requiem for dead and everliving days.

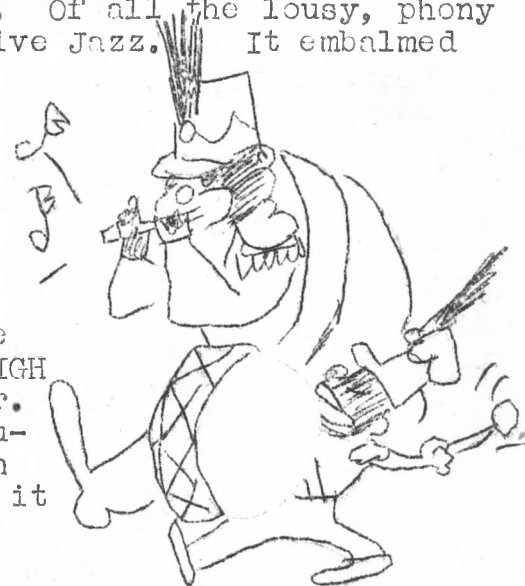
There is the rough urgency of Armstrong's voice, the strange new half-understanding of those single note riffs that tear the wax apart on his ST. LOUIS BLUES, recorded with the Luis Russel band before one knew that Jazz existed. Then the mellow Lang guitar that dug deep into one's soul and the wild majestic romanticism of Bessie's CARELESS LOVE.

I shall always remember Spanier's fiery vehement horn in the DIPPERMOUTH solo and his wonderful rich RELAXIN' AT THE TOURO built to a fire-rich climax by Brunis' gruffly singing tram. This was of a truth THE jazz band of all time. Nick Cainasa's full-bodied tenor richly filled the middle register of the ensemble and gave us a new jazz sound. Spanier's group ointed the way that the Jazz revival should have gone, the building of something new and good upon the foundation of the New Orleans ensemble, and sensitive professionals like +Harry Gold and Freddy Randall followed the path they knew to be right. Man, when I heard that Randall horn singing across the grass outside Cook's Ferry Inn, then for the first time I heard Jazz in it's true medium - the open air.

Yet what happened? Even after the promising start of the George Webb band, what did the British traditionalist do? Raced away down a false path after the nasty elephantine gambolings of the Yerba Buena Band. This third rate copyist group was the absolute negation of all that a Jazz ensemble should be. Where the horns should have sang, they grunted and barked. The whole lousy banjo and tuba laden ensemble could do nothing but grunt and bark. Of all the lousy, phony set-ups, this was the worst. It did not revive Jazz. It embalmed it.

Line this horrible group's discs, any one of them, against an old King Oliver disc, and hear the Oliver's sheer rhythmo-melodic fluidity make the Yerba Buena sund bungling and inept.

The affect will be the same if you line it against such a lovely thing as Morton's HIGH SOCIETY or the Bonano disc of the same number. And when compared with the Mezzrow-Ladnier quintet.... well, the YB is somewhat worse than insignificant. The Bob Crosby BobCates make it look silly.



So over twenty years perspective things that seemed to mean something at the time they happened assume their true place. And it is possible, too, to see how the present day trad bands have dragged themselves free of the dead weight of tubas and in many consist of the clanging and selfish banjo, although this has its place. Properly played, it can be very effective.

And so one's nostalgia turns into appraisal. The Mainstream movement is showing somewhat disquieting symptoms, the ensemble is being lost again.... it seems that instead of putting jazz back on the rails, and giving it a fresh start, the British jazzman is merely repeating what has been done before.

This doesn't seem right. The revival started out with the avowed intention of setting Jazz back on the right track, and here are the men who lead the revival over here merely repeating the mistakes - if they were mistakes - made in the late twenties and early thirties. It seems that the aim must have been wrong for a start. It would have been better, surely, to have gone back to New Orleans and used the old jazzcraft to build a British style on, something distinctive.

Well, it isn't too late yet. Many of our own folk songs are useful for a four in a bar ride, and that's a start. Retain the lovely trombone and moving clarinet used the tenor as Mugsy Spanier did and move the melodic bias of the music into the mainstream so that motif (riffing) can be thoroughly integrated with the melodic aspect of the music. Now this will enable one to combine the richer harmonies which are available to dance bands with the flexibility of the Dixie ensemble and give us a new sound worth hearing. All the instrumentalists must be fully conversant with the mainstream and Dixie styles and believe wholeheartedly in Jazz. Among us now there are many coloured people from our Commonwealth and with their help, the British jazzman could really strike a new note rhythmically. Combining the steady throb of the guitar with the complex cross rhythms available from the various hand played drums a music of wonderful rhythmic complexity could be evolved. With this wall of rhythm to lean on, the front line men could learn to relax and blow uninhibitedly, as the Americans do. And the lovely music of New Orleans would have given the people's music of great Britain something we could really call our own.

But we won't do it by slavishly following the big or the small swing bands of the thirties and we haven't succeeded in doing it through the development of trad bands.

There are some very fine trad bands in Britain today, and all musically conscious people are aware of folk music as they never have been before, aware of it as a living force in their artistic lives.

Jazzmen, it's up to you.

((Comments welcomed))

GETTING THE MESSAGE



GEORGE L. CHARTERS of BANGOR,
Co. Down, Northern Ireland,
writes:

"There is not much chance that I can do anything for you in regard to your query for I.R.A. or rebel songs. As you probably know, "rebels" are nearly 100% Roman Catholic, while the North, especially Armagh, Antrim, Down, and Londonderry are mainly Protestant. So any rebel songs would be known by your Eire friends most likely. But I'll make some enquiries anyway and write you again soon.

"I am not musical, but I cannot see what use the words of a song would be without the tune. Should you not be getting them on tape, the way Dick Ellingston does ?

"To take an example: I lived in the Free State (actually before it became known as the Free State) from 1910 to 1922. A blacksmith there called **Johny McKeown** became very well known because of his successful exploits against the Black and Tans, etc. He is now Major-General Sean McEacain, a member of the Dail Eirann. There were a couple of songs about him, and we Protestant kids used to get a kick out of singing the words. One of them went like so:

I became a Black and Tan as a sequel to a plan -
Mother wished for my promotion, so did Dad.
As they'd loyally agree, Mother whispered unto me,
"Go to Ireland, shoot the rebels there, my lad."

With my rifle and my kit, I felt well prepared and fit
To shoot any rebel youth I met alone.
But 'twas all the other way - 'twas no longer childish play
When I met that Irish hero, Sean McKeown.

In a gorgeous Crossley car, we set forth from Mullingar,
Through Bronbrusna, Ballnalack and then Rathowen.
But our spirits dwindled down as we passed through Edgeworth-
For we heard the signal, "Rally to McKeown". /stown,

At a well-known spot, Clonfin, we were ambushed by his men,
Bombs and rifle-fire opened front and rear.
And many more like me, friends nor homes no more would see
If that noble Sean McKeown had not been there.

((Goes well to 'Maggie May' tune, George))

PTO

"That is all of it I can remember, which is not bad after the lapse of so many years. As for the tune, I haven't the least idea.

"But, as I said, what's the use of that without the tune? Or do you make up a tune to go with it? If so, why not go the whole hog and make up the words, too, sticking in a few mavourneens machrees and a little old grey-haired mother for authenticity (!!)? I'm not kidding ((No?)). I'd do it myself if I had the skill, and divil a one would know the difference! ((No?)).

The best-known rebel songs are THE SOLDIER'S SONG, KEVIN BARRY and Kelly the Boy from Killan, and I don't know the words to e'er a one of them. Sure an' it's meself that ought to be ashamed, or should I?

I brought my recorder in to work one night (when things were slack) and asked the boys to sing any Irish ones they knew. What I got: THE ISLE OF INNISFREE, THE OLD BOG ROAD, PATSY FAGAN, HILLS OF DONEGAL, LITTLE GREY HOME IN THE WEST, DUCKS OF MARALIN, OUL8 MAN OF KILLYBURN BRAE, GREEN RUSHED, OUL' LAMAS FAIR, RAILWAY PORTER, MACUSHLA, BIDDY DONOHUE, LITTLE OL' NUD CABIN ON THE HILL, MCCARTHY'S PARTY, NORA MALONE (1 verse), MOONLIGHT IN MAYO, GALWAY BAY, MOLLOY (?), all mixed up with a lot of everything else."

((You say you're not musical, George? And you play a recorder?))

PETE SEEGER, New York State writes:

"I think you can say definitely that I won't be over in the near future with Woody Guthrie. He is in hospital and we don't know when, if ever, he will be out again. I go to see him every few months. As for me, whether or not I can get a passport depends partly on how this present legal entanglement unravels. Our State Department has a habit of refusing to give a passport to those of whom they disapprove of their politics."

((Well, Pete, I'm sure that everyone over here looks forward to you coming over - and I hope the State Department lifts their own particular Iron Curtain to let you through. If my opinion's worth anything, it seems to me that the States, far from being a Democracy, is developing into a sort of Uni-Dictatorship - using the same pattern as the Soviet, what with the FBI dragging Guy Carawan back to the States this week and your sister expecting to be hauled back at any moment.....))

ALISTAIR GRAHAM "Somewhere in Europe":

"I am greatly disappointed to hear that Lu Watter's band is not the Peppermint Thatched Tea Band, but simply the San Francisco band. I am completely disillusioned. Life is made up of such bitter disappointments. Ah well.....

"Peggy Seeger's my new pin up girl. She plays a real folk instrument - and her singing's not bad either. Was surprised to hear real cowboy yells coming from her recently....."

MAKING THE SCENE IN NORTH BEACH

RAY WILSON

In San Francisco, there is a sort of artists and writers quarter called North Beach. It is there that all the marijuana smoking poets, abstract impressionists, cultured gangsters and whores, anarchistic longshoremen, dope addicts, homosexuals, sketch artists, and plain bums, gather to talk about the higher things and steal money from tourists.

It isn't a hard place to find - it's on Grant Street, bounded on one side by wealthy residences, on another by Chinatown, on another by a row of strip-joints called the International Settlement and on the fourth by the docks.

In the cellar of one of the more gaudy of a number of circus-style buildings is the Hungry I, a bar which features a covers type folksinging quartette, one of the finest now playing.

A few months ago, I was down at the Hungry I exchanging songs with them and trying to get them to use some songs I had written. They had just brought out an album on LP, "The Gateway Singers" (God knows what they will call themselves if they ever go on tour) and everyone was congratulating them on their success. They, however, were inimpressed.

"We're bringing out another album, soon," one of them said, "That will really sound like us. The record company rung in a big orchestra and chorus on us and man, it may have sounded okay to them, but it just wasn't us, it just didn't sound folk, if you know what I mean. It's selling pretty good, I'm sorry to say. The company asked us to do another LP on the strength of the sale of the first one, but we told them 'No', we wouldn't play unless they let us do it our way, just like we do it at the I. They stalled and argued, and promised more money, but we said to hell with the money, we are going to do this right or not

at all. Finally, they gave in - we just got back from cutting an LP that will really set the folksong fans on their ears. Take my advice, if you ain't bought the first album, save your money and get the second."

It was sort of a sad occasion that night. It was the last time their string bass player would be with them. Beginning next week he would be replaced by the fellow who did the left-wing propaganda LP "Mr. War" - a guitar player of great skill and good voice, but lacking the droll sense of humor of his predecessor. The bass man was leaving to go back to teaching. I did not get to hear the new combination, but I suspect that without a string bass, the group will sound a little top-heavy in pitch and lose the solid beat a string bass gives to any group - folk, jazz or, for that matter, classical.

I stayed to hear them do a set. Their best numbers were a calypso called "Rum-come-see-Jerusalem" written and popularised by Blind Blake some years back, and "Doctor Freud", a satire in jump-spiritual style written largely by Science-fiction author and folk guitarist of the Chicago Folklore Society, Larry Glasser (The 'Guardman' series in ASF). Sometime I'll tell you about the Chicago Folklore Society, a wild bunch if ever there was one.

Everyone cheered themselves silly and called for encore after encore as the bassman played his last few bits. When it was finally over, some people, to whom the Gateway Singers had become almost an institution, were on the verge of tears. I said to the bassman as he left the stand "Do you think you can leave all this for the grind of a square teaching job?"

"I can try," he answered.

Not far from the "Hungry I" is another North Beach bar called "The Cellar", largely because it is also in a cellar. It usually specialized in improvised jazz of the cool school, but recently they featured something really off-beat, poetry read by its authors to a jazz accompaniment. The poets were Kenneth Rexroth and the Ferlingette of North Beach's CITY LIGHTS BOOKSTORE. I can still remember the stunned silence which followed Rexroth's reading of his anti-war poem "THOU SHALT NOT KILL". What an ending that poem had!

"You killed him!"

"You!"

"In your goddam Brooks Brothers suit."

"You sonofabitch!"

My friends in the States tell me this performance is available now on a Fantasy LP. Give it a listen if you can and tell me what you think of it. I think it is the wildest thing since

Edith Sitwell's FACADES or Stan Kenton's THIS IS MY THEME.

Speaking of Ferlingette, he is at present involved in a legal action over a little book he published and sells in his City Lights Bookstore, half-way between the "Hungry I" and "The Cellar". The book is HOWL by Alan Ginsberg, available in England from Villiers Press and in America from City Lights Bookstore. The police of San Francisco, operating under the influence of the idea that no books may be sold which are unfit for children (also unfit for children and available from the same sources was THE MISCELLANEOUS MAN", a literary little magazine of which I am asst. editor) confiscated the books and put Ferlingette in the clink.

The trial will probably be over by the time this reached print, but at the moment it looks as if Ferlingette will get off. Around seven or eight well-known writers and critics have gone on the stand to plug for HOWL and free speech. One of them, Kenneth Rexroth even compared HOWL to the Bible. Towards the end of the last session to date, the prosecuting attorney got up and said:

"You know, I've got a batch of law degrees, but I don't know a thing about literature. Tell me, what is HOWL all about?"

The author was not there to explain. As a matter of fact, Mister Alan Ginsberg is here in Paris, just back from the Exotic East with a sun tan and a lot of plugs for ON THE ROAD, a new novel by his friend, Jack Kerouac, just published. He was in the Mistral Bookstore, a little island of the English language on the Left Bank of the Sienne, just last week to inquire what was jumping.

The book itself ?

Well, it is easy to see why some people call it obscene, but if you like big, rambling, beautiful phrases a la Henry Miller and Thomas Wolfe, then this is the book for you.

I have never read anything that sounded quite so good out loud - trying reading it at the top of your voice in a crowded pug and you'll see what I mean. You're sure to keep everyone spell-bound until the coppers arrive.

- RAY NELSON, PARIS, SEPT. 57.

"PERSONAL CHOICE" the latest BALLADS AND BLUES presentation was a great success last Wednesday (22nd) with PEGGY SIEGER giving us an evening of American folksong. Next Wednesday Ewan MacColl will give us the second PERSONAL CHOICE at the Princess Louise, Holborn. After this come several more well-known folklorists and singers to give us their 'Personal Choice' They start at 8 pm. so be early. Tickets are 4/- each.

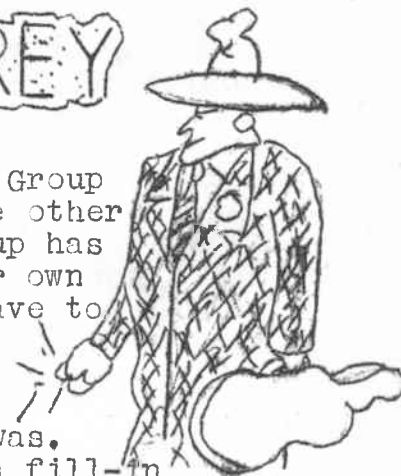
DOMINIC BEHAN has promised a column for RAMBLER - anyone else who wishes to contribute (especially on BRITISH folkmusic) please send 'em in - we have very little material to keep going. At present I'm worrying about the NEXT issue. So roll up in your thousands....

ALAN DODD

THE GRAND OLE OPRY

Watching Lonnie Donnegan and his Skiffle Group in "The Lonnie Donnegan Show" on television the other night, I had to admire the polish that the group has put on during the past year. And whatever your own opinions on his style or brand of music, you have to admit he's a top entertainer.

Why then do you suppose he was so badly ignored on his recent American tour? And he was. No top of the bill organisation here but just a fill-in act which played at the same stadiums as the Harlem Globetrotters Basketball team who always carry a series of variety acts to pad out the intervals in their programmes.



The fault was not Donnegan's but in the music he played. "skiffle" is a new and recent phrase here, but in the U.S. it has evolved from a type of music they have had for many years. A type of music personified in the noted GRAND OLE OPRY programme which has been running on radio for many years now.

The basic music of the programme is true hill-billy music, spirituals and semi-cowboy numbers which, one will realise, is the main field from which the skiffle groups take their basic tunes. The old railroad numbers like MIDNIGHT SPECIAL all originated here along with spirituals and folk tunes like I SHALL NOT BE MOVED and the inevitable IT TAKES A WORRIED MAN TO SING A WORRIED SONG, possibly the very first of the skiffle numbers now perpetrated regular by such noted skifflers as Bob Cort or the Duke of Bedford.

Interspersed between the music is the homespun 'cornball' comedy of country characters like Rodd Brassfield and Cousin Minnee Pearl. The guitar pickers and fiddlers range from lesser lights such as Little Jimmy Dickens and Hank Williams to top liners like Tex Ritter and the late and great Hank Snow who first put over the poignant numbers like NOBODY'S CHILD since taken over, on almost the original basis, by Donnegan and Co.

THE GRAND OLE OPRY and hill-billy skiffle are 'old hat' to the U.S. listeners which explains why even under a new name and a new polish of the word 'skiffle', it just never went over there with the exception of odd numbers like FREIGHT TRAIN. You see, like hydraulics, the U.S. had it years before us.

If you happen to possess a radio capable of picking up the American Forces Network from Germany at seven o'clock every Saturday evening, then you too can check on the GRAND OLE OPRY ever week and you'll see that the programme really does deserve the title of ----
GRAND OLE OPRY!