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FAST FOLK
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THE FAST FOLK MUSICAL MAGAZINE WAS ESTABLISHED IN1982 TO DOCUMENT THE WORK OF CONTEMPORARY SINGERS AND SONGWRITERS. *FAST FOLK* IS A NOT-FOR-PROFIT CORPORATION WHICH REGULARLY PUBLISHES A COMBINATION CD + MAGAZINE FEATURING THE WORK OF SONGWRITERS FROM ACROSS THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE. THE COMBINATION MAGAZINE AND CD IS AVAILABLE BY SUBSCRIPTION:

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Please ask for our back issue catalog which lists all the songs and performers from all of the 64 CooP and FAST FOLK records. Many are in stock (LP only) some in very limited quantities.

Letters to the editor are always welcome

When The CooP was founded in February 1982 by Jack Hardy, one of his policies was that the magazine not feature articles on him. Although he wrote a fair number of editorials, before stepping aside there was no forum to discuss his work or his views of the scene. Many of the village institutions are in large part influenced by him. He has released eight albums on his own, all difficult to come by, in addition to the numerous FAST FOLK and CooP cuts and two Swiss CDs. He continues his prolific output at the weekly songwriter's exchange and has been writing plays of late. In addition to his status as a writer Jack has often been a controvercial figure in the village and beyond. His performing schedule has been limited in the states. In fact he tours more overseas than he does domestically. I felt that since we are initiating the new CD format for FAST FOLK that it might be appropriate to reintroduce it's founder and first editor to the magazine's readers. This extended interview took place at the legendary Houston Street Hilton on a lovely afternoon three days after the war in the gulf began.

--Richard Meyer

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SUBMISSIONS OF MUSICAL AND/OR LITERARY MATERIAL ARE WELCOME (PLEASE ENCLOSE SASE). WE ALSO WELCOME LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

An Interview With Jack Hardy: 1/18/91

By Richard Meyer

FAST FOLK: There are striking individual lines in some of your songs. One keeps coming back to me that might capture one of your attitudes: "All of the people are quite warm, except the few who gather fuel" (from *The Cauldron*). What do you think about this?

JACK HARDY: That's from "The Wren" on *The Cauldron*, and that would sum up my attitude towards the social conscience of folk music- that those of us who are endowed with certain gifts have a certain *noblesse oblige* to use those gifts for the betterment of humanity. In a culture such as ours when ninety-nine percent of the people are quite warm there are still a few who have to gather fuel, and we can't forget about them. It's also somewhat of a metaphor for the fact that ninety-percent of the people are not at all creative, and the one percent of those who are creative have to make up for it.

FF: Most people don't think about the ones who go and gather...they take it as a given that things are going to be provided for them. People have forgotten how to gather for themselves.

JH: In this country. In other countries and cultures that's not the case. But here we do have a problem in that you'll have a kid in a school class who will say, "What do we need the farmers for? We can just go to the grocery store or the supermarket and buy milk." And they're serious.

FF: Most people don't make things anymore. The whole factory structure of the country is falling apart too. People don't know how to repair their own things.

JH: But everything that's being created now is not being created to be repaired. It's created so you have whole components that you just throw out and replace with a new component if something goes wrong, or you throw the whole thing out and buy a new one.

FF: Even songs. They're just pre-made...

JH: They're very disposable.

FF: There are lots of good writers around the Village, but you seem more determined than most to use songs for something more than casual expression.

JH: Well, I've always looked at what we do either consciously or unconsciously as part of a larger tradition, as part of the folk tradition itself, which is part of a very old tradition. It's sort of a musical collection of the total knowledge, expecially the emotional knowledge of mankind. If we are successful as writers, we add a song or a part of a song to that tradition. We will not be around to see whether we are successful or not, but that is what we are actually doing regardless of our motives. That's why I say some people are doing this consciously and the others do it accidentally. A "pop" song can actually become part of the folk tradition. A lot of the Beatles songs have become part of at least the current folk repertoire. It doesn't mean they'll last. They *may* last...

FF: Even something like "We Are The World", which tried to be that kind of world-changing song has been disposed of. Six months after it was a big event and a "hit" it just disappeared.

JH: Sure, whereas something like "From A Distance" might last longer- but it might go through the folk process before it's done, where future singers might do the editing that was never done to begin with on a given song.

FF: Nikki Matheson heard your "Drinking Song" somewhere else and thought it was a traditional song.

JH: She heard it up at the Renaissance Festival where they've played it for years as part of the skits that they do. I consider that a greater accolade than having something on the charts or making a lot of money--the fact that a song of mine can exist in a situation where it doesn't rely on my ego or my persona to carry it across.

FF: You went to the Hartford School of Music? Is that right?

JH: Actually I went to the University of Hartford. Hart College of Music is part of that University, and for a year and a half I was a liberal arts student with a major in music at Hart. But then I transferred to the English department.

FF: You said at one time that you took opera-

JH: Right, I studied opera under Elmer Nagi who was this fantastic Hungarian opera director and character extraordinaire--also a great chef, with numerous other attributes-- but a very expressive individual. A lot of what I've learned about being on stage I learned from him.

FF: Was the idea to take it to learn expression, or were you going to study opera--because you don't have the classic opera voice. How did they view you coming into the opera classes, and why did you go there in the first place?

JH: Actually, I have a very good high tenor which I never use because it's not good for getting lyrics across. It's actually detrimental. But I can sing that stuff. The real reason I was in the music school was that it was the only way I could get into college because I had such a mediocre high school record. So I don't consider that a major part of my influence other than the fact that I learned a lot about being on stage from this man.

FF: Did it teach you anything about melody? You talk a lot about writing songs without guitar or other instruments.

JH: Right, I'm a big fan of melody, but I did not learn that from classical music. I learned that from folk music, that a song in its purest form is a gestalt of melody and lyrics.

FF: People talk about Bob Dylan reinventing himself and having his folk persona and his rock and roll personas. You've had the country albums and the folk rock albums, the Irish albums, and the ones now that are more about urban psychology and mystical albums. Did you do that on purpose? Do you think artists make these changes on purpose? What do you think it is that takes an artist from any point into some new direction?

JH: Whatever their current influences are. I've always been very influenced by the people around me. I was one of those kids who jumped on the bandwagon, and if someone came into class with something that got a laugh I'd go around for three weeks saying that phrase, even if I didn't understand the phrase. So, musically, at least at this point, I'm usually hanging out with the younger songwriters--the new songwriters.

FF: I said Bob Dylan because it seemed when he was going through his reinventions that he didn't really care what went on around him. It doesn't seem like you particularly care what the swings of style are in the Village. I'm not trying to compare stylistically what you do with him, just this idea of having your own through line.

JH: Well, I think that by the time you get through with all of this stuff you see what's actually you in it. I consider a lot of what I've written up to this point an experiment--an experiment in the craft of songwriting as opposed to the art of songwriting. And somewhere intertwined with that is the art of songwriting, which cannot be practiced other than subconsciously.

FF: Who are your other influences? For the Irish ones it's Yeats and Mangin...

JH: My influences for the Irish stuff was also going to Ireland, spending a considerable amount of time there, immersing myself in the culture--in its literature, in its people...and just sitting alone in a cottage on the west coast of Ireland for months. That has more to do with it than reading Yeats. That sort of allowed me to understand Yeats, and understand the problems there. And Yeats is not as uniquely Irish as one might understand. Yeats is a key. To begin with, Yeats is Anglo-Irish. He's Protestant. Then you get into the people who influenced Yeats. That's where I got into Mangin. I sort of rediscovered Mangin, who is what the academics call a "minor poet" in their obnoxious way. But Mangin is actually the more significant person in that he is the one that reintroduced a lot of the Gaelic poetry, the Irish Gaelic poetry, to the English language, and that in turn influenced Yeats and a lot of the people who came after him. Then, going back further, and after quite a bit of study of the Irish language, you get into some of the original texts which date back to the Seventh Century.

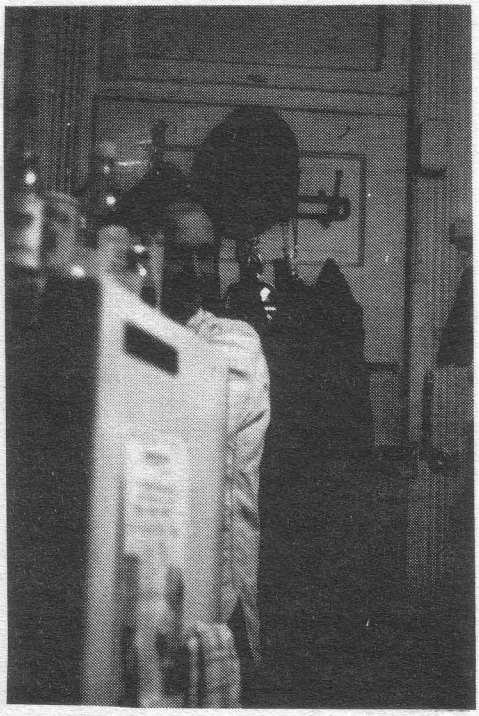
And even these texts are just the traces of an earlier culture. They're just what the monks in the Seventh Century happened to record of pre-Christian culture. So all of this becomes an influence on my work.

FF: When I listen to Irish music on the folk stations around here I don't hear any of that. They talk about the potato famine. Maybe some of the songs talk about leaving Ireland, or how idyllic it was to be there. I don't get a sense of the older history in modern Celtic music.

JH: Well the modern Celtic music is an extension of the Irish-Americans who are often more Irish than the Irish are. The situation in Ireland is an economic nightmare and most of the young people want to leave. They're forced to study Irish in school, so they hate it. Even teachers in Ireland are forced to pass an exam in Irish, so the teachers hate it. You've got a real paradox of culture there. And then there's the Irish-American who thinks, let's go to Ireland on a drinking tour of thirty-six pubs in thirty-six hours, and that's their idea of Ireland.

FF: So, aside from "pop" music and taking these influences into account, where do you think that songwriting crosses into literature? Are there places where they're exclusive-- where you can't take a literary tradition and turn it into this other form that we call the song?

JH: But you see, they both come out of a tradition that predates both of them. I mean, long before anything was written down there were great works of what now would be called literature, but it was part of the oral tradition. Contrary to our popular historical myths, that people of that age were cavemen



clubbing women over the head and dragging them back to their cave, there were very sophisticated cultures. They were aware of writing, and chose not to use writing-- writing was considered a weakness because the memory is one of the greatest tools of writing. The more stuff that can be committed to memory the more you can tap into when you go into your creative trance.

FF: So was the Ogam writing that they had, was that just an indication?

JH: Its pronounced O-ahm, the H aspirates the G. Well, there are lots of different Ogams. They were ciphers that were used to pass messages back and forth. Most of the existant records of it are markings on tombstones - and those are very late.

FF: There are not many people who aspire to literature in songwriting these days. I think there are people who aspire to political ends, and to be poetic. But I don't know that they aspire to be literature.

JH: Well, I don't know that I aspire to be literature. I mean literature has gotten very hung up in the printed word, in the book. I mean the danger with books is that they can be burned. I mean whether by the Nazis or when Caesar burned the library at Alexandria.

FF: My grandfather burned a copy of Lolita.

JH: This is the danger of books, you can imprison the singer but you can never imprison his song.
Whether you look at Neruda or some of the modern political writers who actually live this stuff as opposed to wave rhetorical flags.

FF: Yeah, we're very safe here.

JH: All the people are quite warm.

FF: So, is it an empty gesture for us to write political songs that sound dangerous in a safe society?

JH: Well, the politics have to change, I mean the politics and a political song should be something that's geared to change people, and most of the modern political writing in our society is preaching to the converted. That it's worthless, it's like waving a flag. It's either going to encourage your own troops or get the opposing troops mad, but it doesn't serve any purpose other than that.

FF: The myth of the sixties is that the songs galvanized a generation and..

JH: In a tactical way, like a flag. Some of them were better than that. Some of them actually made people think, and I think actually had role in changing people's thought processes.

FF: Things may have changed in the last few days, but it seem that over the last ten years that there have been some political songwriters- from Sting, to Paul Simon to Eugene Chadbourne to Rod MacDonald. But everybody's been so comfortable. Today the war is three days old. They are even saying "Day Three" on the news like it's a mini series. It will be interesting to see if the romanticism and activimt of the sixties can be drawn back to the hard reality of today.

JH: But a war like this can happen because of this complacency that's existed for the last X number of years. We have been very materialistically warm. Anything that's going to cause that security to be threatened is reason for war. In reality we have sunk in to a great depression in the fields of learning, the arts, and spirituality.

FF: I think our sense of time has gotten shorter and shorter. When I talk to people who are sixteen to twenty-five, a lot of them don't know much of what happened before the early sixties because that culture has been rehashed and thrown up and... mythologized is the wrong word...but glamorized for them. So they don't think about the roots of their own time much less earlier generations. I think that in the nineteen sixties the culture <u>was</u> actually blossoming, and now the things that are used to represent it - pop music, folks songs, TV, fashion trends - all the things that were active elements then have been reduced to commercial things. So the society has become self-referential. The TV shows talk about the pop songs which talk about the clothes which show up on the TV shows. It's become a very closed culture, in spite of the amazing potential access to the rest of the world.

JH: What you're talking about is business--and never underestimate the power of capitalism to make money. I mean they made money off of folk music in the sixties. They made money off of Bob Dylan protesting. They made money as soon as the protesters grew their hair long. They went from the $2 barbershop cut to the $15 hair salon. There's always a way they are going to make money and co-opt what you do.

FF: But now things get co-opted so fast.

JH: They get co-opted very fast, but my attitude about that is render unto Caesar what is Caesar's. All of that is Caesar's and most of pop music--whether it's the fifties, sixties, seventies, thirties, or twenties--it is still business. Forget that. It's irrelevant. In the grand scheme of things it's irrelevant.

"I don't ever tell people what to think. Generally my songs pose questions. They're created to make people think, to make people question what their existence is. "

FF: What is relevant is that when we are trying to appeal to an audience, that the audience is so caught up in the spiral--the new fashion and the new fad--that...

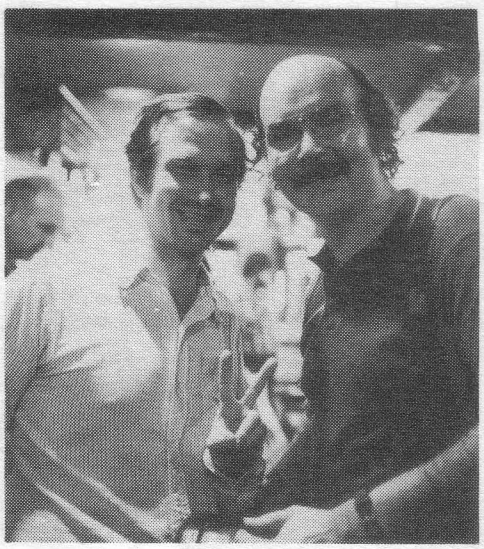
JH: Yeah, if you aspire to appeal to that audience then you're caught up in that. But I don't think the artist should aspire to appeal to any audience.

FF: I'm not sure we necessarily want to appeal to that incredibly huge "pop" audience--I won't even say "pop" audience; that audience for art or whatever. But because the electronic culture is so powerful now, you can get completely lost if you don't participate in it in some way. It might be that the only way your songs will get out are from these tiny little pockets of survivors at a renaissance festival - with one person carrying your song. It may take twenty, fifty or a hundred years to survive.

JH: And if the song is good enough it will survive. If it isn't, it won't.

FF: I actually wonder if that's true. Things get squashed so fast. What scares me is that it may not get out this time, in this century - in this part of this century.

JH: Possibly, but I still think that there is a difference. I give people more credit than that. They may be manipulated by culture and cultural business interests, and they may go to the big rock concert at Madison Square Garden where you yell and drink beer and can't hear the words. Then they go home. They are not going to put that music



with Tom paxton

on. They're going to put on something that's a little quieter and something that's going to mean something to them. And if they have access to it they might even put us on. The problem right now is one of access, but they will put on the stuff that fits the bill--whether its old Cat Stevens stuff (pre-Salmon Rushdie) or Bob Dylan, early stuff or who knows what. They might not admit it, because it might not be cool, but folk music is listened to a lot more than sales figures show.

FF: So what do you think makes a good song? Given the fact that groups like Anthrax and all those heavy-metal bands, and Milli Vanilli (who didn't even sing on their own songs--these are the things that win Grammys) are selling millions of records, what makes a good song?

JH: To me?

FF: Yeah, to you. I know the things that you write now, and I know you've said that you listened to the Everly Brothers a lot. Their stuff is lyrically very direct and very simple, very country/folk-based. Yet, it seems like you're trying to take language and expand it. Is there a common element to those two approaches?

JH: Well I think a song, if it's successful, reaches the audience--even if it's an audience of one--on an emotional level. It's a form of emotional communication. And I'm not saying that the stuff that influenced me thirty years ago would influence me now. If I still like the Everly Brothers it's more out of my own personal nostalgia at this point than thinking that they're any masters of the art.

FF: -Except maybe harmony.

Jack visits the grave of Clarence Mangin

JH: Yeah, but that's performance. There's a big difference between performance and the actual song. Let's not get confused there. We sort of digressed into performance earlier, but here we're talking about the song itself, and what makes a good song. But there is something to be said for the simple and direct, and I think that in a lot of ways my writing has become more simple and direct in recent years--at least on the top level, which doesn't mean that there's not a lot more underneath there, but you don't need that to appreciate it on the top level.

FF: Are all your songs about different places--for example, the Colorodo songs, the Indiana songs, or the Irish songs- things that have come out because you've traveled through these places?

JH: Probably. I'd have to think about that for a while. I'm very influenced by my surroundings. The first year I sat at this table on Houston Street I wrote songs like "Houston Street" and "Night on the Town" and lots of songs that reflect the city.

FF: Do you like touring?

JH: I like touring to the extent that I tour, which is not very much. For me it's a rejuvenating process, not to mention the slight ego massage that one gets by being the center of attention. But I think it's hazardous to do that too much. I mean, if you're the center of attention all the time, you start thinking that being the center of attention is your natural state of existence. But as a writer, it shouldn' t

be. But I enjoy the roll, especially when I perform in Europe, of being sort of an ambassador for the alternative America and the alternative musical America. That seems to create some interest in not only fans but the press.

FF: Do they get you confused with the sixties, or do they see a difference between then and now?

JH: They sort of missed the sixties and to some extent are living the sixties vicariously through the new folk artists. But there's also a tradition in Europe of the artistic song that goes back a lot further than "pop" music.

FF: Do the audiences speak English well enough to understand what you're talking about?

JH: Not necessarily. But they study it, and they study the songs in translation. And I think at least in terms of the way I've been writing now-dealing with the sounds of words and the theories that the old bards put forth that the sounds are what convey the emotional message- that these emotional messages can transcend the language barriers.

FF: You've made eight records. How is that idea developed through the eight records? I mean, do you think that the record making process has anything to do with how you've developed as a songwriter? Do you write the songs in isolation or do you think about how they're going to be presented on a reproduceable medium?

JH: I've never written for a record. It's not like I'm under contract with CBS and I have two months to come up with the songs for my next album. I wait until I have enough good songs, and then try to find a way- by hook or by crook- to record an album. I've done several different types of albums. I've done albums that are thematic, both musically and subject-wise, I've done albums that are recent songs. I've done albums that tried to bridge gaps, and may or may not have been successful. Albums, at least on my limited resources, are basically experiments, but I do not put much faith in them because once again, they are as temporary as the books I was talking about in literature. Albums can be burned too. Albums are irrelevant. The danger of them is that people start thinking in terms of definitive ways to do a song, which I think is detrimental to the folk process. People get angry at you when you don't play a song the way you played it on an album.

FF: I think that's the problem that Bob Dylan had. I've gone places and people have known about my songs because somehow my record got there first. So even though they can be burned or forgotten, they're also out there like ambassadors.

JH: Oh yeah, I mean they're definitely useful, but that doesn't mean you should put your faith in them. There's a whole side of creativity that's hindered by the ego. And the more time and energy we waste on the ego the more we hurt our creativity. Albums, for better or for worse, are very tied up in ego. Just the mere thought of issuing a collection of your work--thinking that it's significant enough to do that--

FF:--Especially for us because we have to do it ourselves--

JH: Right, and it's a very egotistical arrogant thing to do, to put out your own work.

Jack confronts the muse at the Bottom Line

FF: Well I know when you do it in a book they say it's a vanity press, and it's a derogatory term-

JH:--And that's what's happened in recording too, where anybody and his sister can now put out their own albums. All it takes is money.

FF: But,the equipment has gotten so good that in some ways it's democratized the process. You , for example, are able to put out eight albums because it's no longer necesssary to own your own press. You need to give some money to the record plant, but it's within our means to do it. Twenty or fourty years ago it was not within most artist's means to do that.

JH: But it's necessary right now because twenty years ago the record companies were still run by musicians and were still interested in the artistic merits of what they recorded...as well as sales figures. But now they're run by accountants and lawyers who are not at all interested in artistic merit.

FF: Well, twenty, twenty-five years ago five-hundred-thousand copies of a record was considered great - fabulous sales. Whereas now they might not call you back.

JH: Right, but also twenty-five years ago if you were not recorded by a record company you could probably surmise from that fact that you aren't any good. Now you can't surmise that fact from not being recorded--which doesn't mean that you're any good, but it just means that you have to make those decisions yourself, which as I said gets very murky with the concept of ego, which at the same time is detrimental to your creative side.

FF: Also, I think, when you see records selling millions of copies, that unless you really have a solid idea of what is good you begin thinking that a million seller must be good because so many people like it. Therefore you try to imitate it. And when you try to imitate something you begin to devalue your own creativity and become artistically bankrupt.

JH: Also, another big difference in the record companies of twenty-five years ago is that the A & R person of that time actually did something. They were artist and repertoire people. They helped go through an artist's repertoire. They were basically an editor. This is a big problem with those of us who put out are own work: we become our own editors, which is not good. We all need editors. That's why I'm very dedicated to our weekly Songwriters Meetings. The process of editing cannot be underplayed in the creative process. In the folk tradition it's future generations that do the editing. They throw out what doesn't make sense, and they rewrite the songs to fit-

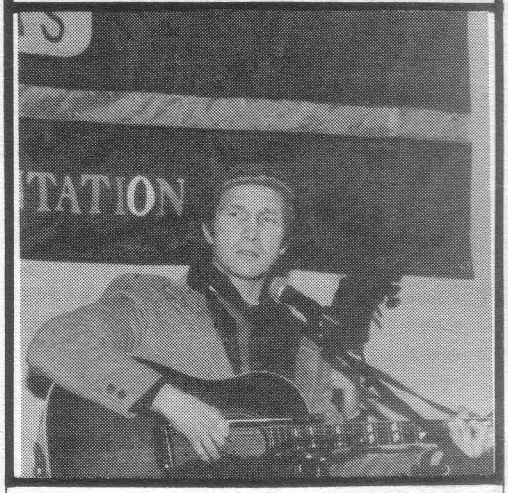
FF: -And then you end up with fifteen versions of Robin Hood...

JH: But they get progressively better. And God knows what they threw out.

FF: Do you think the song is a limited form?

JH: No, It's unlimited, and I think we've barely scratched the surface of its potential. I've been experimenting recently in theater and the use of the folk song in theatrical productions-writing songs that can be sung by more than one character, more than one voice. Very little has been done in songwriting.

"I'm constantly accused of using archaic words...but I think that the writer has got to actively work against this process of limiting language"



FF: You have some songs like "The Orphan From Madrid" or "The Wren" or "The Child" that could be obscure to an average listener--a modern "pop" listener. Do you feel that you have an obligation to an audience to write songs that are more direct or more clear? And how do you feel when the audience doesn't get it?

JH: Well I think those songs--specifically "The Wren" and "The Child"--the audience does get. They may not get it intellectually, but they understand it emotionally... in the proper setting. I sang "The Child" recently at the baptism of a child of a friend of mine and there wasn't a dry eye in the church. Just like I've sung my "Wedding Song" at numerous weddings and there isn't a dry eye there. None of these people understand what the hell is going on in these songs on the basic level, but the images and the

sounds of the words are going to evoke an emotional response, which is valid.

FF: So maybe to force songs to be played in folk clubs and concert halls is really inappropriate.

JH: Precisely.

FF: Not just your songs, but even some generic "pop" songs.

JH: The natural habitat of a folk song is not the stage at Madison Square Garden. The natural habitat is a living room or a campfire...

FF: In some ways businesses have made property of our communal songs, our art, and our theater. It forces us to go to big festivals or huge productions. Then we go home and wonder why our life doesn't feel special. Those rituals--the songs or the plays--used to take place privately, in houses or in small communities. Now there's nothing.

JH: But ironically it makes folk music uniquely perfect for the recorded medium. They don't listen to records in a crowd of fifty thousand out drinking beer. They listen to records in the quiet of their living room sitting next to the fire.

FF: But on some level the business has told us that while records are great, if you really want to get excited you need to come out to Dodger Stadium for a show. And they go to Dodger Stadium, and there's something missing.

JH: Or they tell you that you should be bored sitting next to your fire at home, and that you need to use up your mind's energy with watching four and a half hours of television a day. There's a lot to rebel against there.

FF: Coming back to our current war, do you think "The Orphan From Madrid"--where the song is an allegory as compared with "Ebanezer Creek" where you're telling a narrative--do you think that these kinds of political songs have different values? How does each one have an effect on society?

JH: Both of those songs, which I consider very experimental, would have to be set up by introduction or in the context. It's very hard to understand those songs without the context. Although it's all there if people care to do the homework. If you hand that to a senior in a literature exam in college and say "What is this song about? You have two hours to figure it out." They will figure it out. But most people aren't going to give it that kind of time, so at least in performance you have to explain it. But it doesn't mean that it doesn't reach people, let's say, on a record where it's not explained. "Orphan From Madrid", for example, was never explained on the *Landmark* album. There are no notes on that album. I should have put notes but I did not. I think on repeated listenings it begins to sink it. The images are there, the ideas

Jack leading "The Drinking Song" at Speakeasy

are there--the key words, the sounds of those words. The same goes for "Ebanezer Creek," although "Ebanezer Creek" is a little more direct.

FF: It's more of a narrative. Do you think it's a detriment to the song to have to explain it?

JH: No...not at all. A song exists as a work of art. In the same way that a painting would be framed, an introduction serves as the frame for the song.

FF: Or like a book or a play that's studied? When I talk about a song being literature, what I mean is that it is not as disposable. If it's a three or a seven minute art form you can keep coming back and find more and more in it the more you come back -And maybe with the Everly Brothers you can still like it, but there's only so deep into it that you can go.

JH: Right.

FF: Some songs use the limitations of a human being as a metaphor for morality in the world. "The Children" is a war metaphor; or "The Tailor" is a metaphor for greed and power; "Before You Sing" and "The Hunter" are some.... Do you think the purpose of character in a song is to define how people should be in society?

JH: I don't think that I write that kind of song. I don't ever tell people what to think. Generally my songs pose questions. They're created-at least the ones you just listed-to make people think, to make people question what their existence is.

FF: But "The Tailor" is almost a cautionary tale.

JH: Well "The Tailor" was influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay called "The American Scholar" which is basically a lecture he delivered through which he was warning people to not be absorbed by their role-- to still be a human being. It's the antithesis of "I was only following orders."

FF: When I was in Israel a few years ago I met a guy who got out of being in the Israeli army by legally changed his name to Human Being. Whenever the commander addressed him he had to say Human Being because that was his name, they couldn't change it, so they dismissed him. How much does autobiography play in your songs?

JH: I think it's always in there but it's never pure. It's usually a jump-off place and a lot of my songs, especially characters in songs, are usually composites. A song like "The Children" starts off very autobiographical. It starts off on a playground in Indiana where I outran the local bully and it was my first act of nonviolence. That's probably why I still have my front teeth. And then I take that idea and extend it into the whole antiwar movement in the second verse, and then into a more philosophical stance in the third verse. "Render Caesar his violence as well as his coin."

FF: Do you take the autobiography consciously and change it? In "Dublin Farewell" the whole song is you in Dublin questioning your life and what you should do. Did you intend to take that moment and construct a metaphor out of it?

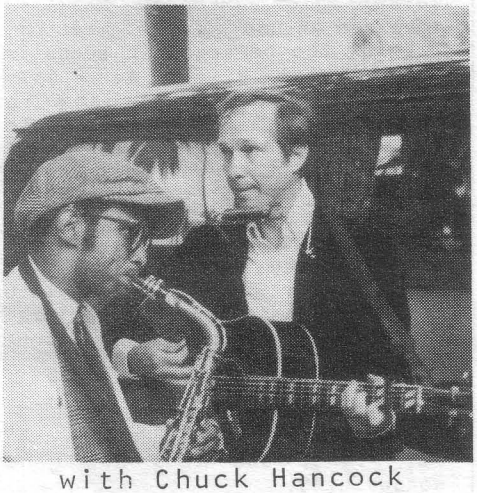
JH: I think that I'm always on guard against the personal. When songs are too personal I consider them not very successful. And I was not even comfortable with "Dublin Farewell" for a long time. I thought it was too personal. So I think the metaphoric angle of that was not very intentional. I didn't record that for ten years. I think it's only later that I realized its metaphoric value--which I don't think I realized at the point of writing. I think the personal in songs is very dangerous. A song only exists in that someone is going to listen to it. There's a whole narcissistic school of songwriting that was perpetrated by..well Dylan was a major offender...but all the early seventies writers: James Taylor, etc. They thought it was everybody's duty to get into their personal lives and personal problems and whatever they wrote became holy--

FF: --The confessional school.

JH: Right, and it's not good songwriting.

FF: A lot of your songs deal with a natural world that in our cities is almost obliterated. We see it once in a while, but don't really pay attention. Why should an audience pay attention to your songs that deal with the natural world if they can't relate it to their daily lives?

JH: Because it's still very much a part of their subconscious. What we consider civilization, which is a mere three thousand years old, is a drop in the bucket compared to how long human beings have been on this earth--five million, ten million years, whatever the latest figure is. The collective subconscious was created over that period of



with Chuck Hancock

billions of years and it's not going to be changed by a mere three thousand year digression into this barbaric civilization of ours. The subconscious is still in tune with many things that we're not aware of. All you have to do to realize that is go up to the insane asylum on a full moon.

FF: You were talking about influences. How much of your work is preceeded by intellectual exercises or research. In "Works and Days" there's Emerson's essay, Hesiod's poem...how many things do you put in these songs, and is that on purpose? Is it a natural synthesis or are you trying to pull different kinds of literature in a song to expand the form.

JH: "Works and Days" was titled that because the theme of the song is the same theme as Emerson's essay, which alluded to Hesiod's poem, but the song itself is not at all belabored in allusions to literature or footnotes and I don't think it needs any explanation per se. The song is all images of a young person dreaming at an ocean coastline and is a metaphor for his awakening.

FF: In songs like "Mayday" from verse to verse there are different references from Shakespeare and--

JH: "Mayday" is a much different type of song. "Mayday" is much more conscious in its allusions and its..."Mayday" is a work in irony offsetting all these different images that go by very quickly with the whole dance metaphor of the song.

FF: In "Porto Limon" you're taking Walt Whitman with the "Oh Captain, my Captain."

JH: Right, but that's a song that's part of the little bit of poetic common lore that our common culture has. Every schoolkid has to study that poem, so it's one of the few allusions you can make that is almost done tongue in cheek. It automatically says we're talking about the ship of state and says this is a political treatise.

FF: In a lot of your songs, you're trying to draw people in and tell them that there are things beyond the song that you want them to think about.

JH: Yeah, and sometimes that works against me. It intimidates them from just relating to it on the main level.

FF: Why should we care about the moon as much as you do? You use the image all the time--the three sisters, the phases, the light of the moon. If we're interested in the heavens and their effect on us, why not all the planets, why not astrology, why are you obsessed with the moon? People have asked me to ask you this question. Why the moon?

JH: The moon is--

FF: --The moon to the exclusion to everything else.

JH: The moon is quite a symbol. I'm not sure I can answer this question in twenty-five words or less, but...The moon is symbolic of not only the muse of the writer, but the feminine concept of the deity as it is incarnate in that muse, the feminine side of ourselves that we have played down in our male-dominant chauvinistic culture. It is symbolic of the old sharing, life-creating cultures, the partnership societies that predated the domination societies. People are always saying, well if you're not for this patriarchal stuff then you must be for the matriarchal society, or is that what you're trying to push. But it's not a question of patriarchal versus matriarchal. It's not that you want women in charge instead of men, it's that you want no one in charge. It's a concept of more life-giving and life-nurturing and partnership in society, which I think the creative force is part and parcel of that. The moon is a convenient symbol of that, because as I was alluding to a minute ago with the loony bin on a full moon, the moon still has an effect on us and most people are aware of it, even consciously as well as subconsciously. --Which doesn't mean that the other planets and natural cycles don't have an effect on us, but here's one that might be the key to get them to be aware that these things have an effect on them.

FF: Do you think you wear out it's effectiveness by using it so much? When you have political songs you don't pull in Mars as the war god--

JH: --Oh I <u>do</u>. "Orphan From Madrid" is all from the point of view of Aries or Mars, the god of war. It's definately in there, but even that is part of a later myth. Mars did not start out being a war planet. War is only about seven thousand years old. For the mast vajority of time mankind has been on this planet they have not warred. Warfare is not the natural state of human beings.

FF: Do you believe that?

JH: Yes.

FF: I don't.

JH: Well, that's your prerogative, but everything that I've been studying and reading,

and my own instincts tell me that that's not the case.

FF: But do you think you wear the symbol out as a poet and for your audience by usuing it so much?

JH: Possibly, but I still maintain that everything I've written up to this point is merely experimental, and not meant to be thrown together in the collected works of Jack Hardy. If you threw it all together, yeah, it probably is very worn out. But it doesn't mean that I'm not getting better as a writer. --And if anything out of my repertoire gets thrown into the collected repertoire of future generations, at best it will be one or two songs.

FF: So they won't know.

JH: Right. They don't know how many things I throw away.

FF: Let's talk about the neighborhood a little bit-- the Greenwich Village neighborhood. You came here in what year? '76?

"I function well in chaos"

JH: I first came here when I made a little foraging expedition in '73, in '74. I moved into the "Houston Street Hilton" here in 1975. So that's when I actually--I'd been here a year before, camping.

FF: Were you playing then?

JH: A lot on the streets, and guest sets, hootnannys, open mikes, living rooms.

FF: When did the Songwriters Exchange start? I got here in '82 and it had been going on for a few years in the Cornelia Street Cafe then.

JH: It's hard to say where the Songwriters Exchange really started. In my head it started with Maggie Roche and myself, who at one point dedicated ourselves to writing a song a week and comparing notes and editing each other's work, and talking about what was influencing us, and that was probably '74.

FF: When did it get institutionalized?

JH: It first got institutionalized at the English Pub, which later became a Blimpie base, then turned into something else, but it was a pub where the West 4th Street station lets out on 3rd Street at 6th Avenue. We took a night there, I can't remember whether it was Monday or Thursday, but a bunch of us just played there and we got into bringing in our latest work and working it into our performance. At that point Massengill was already here, Andy Brechman was here, I think Brian was there...It's hard to remember.

FF: So that was '78?

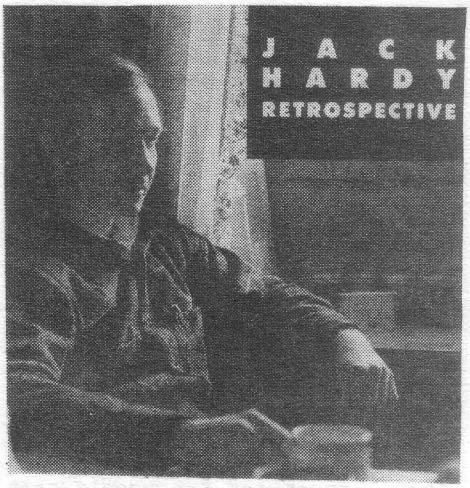
JH: That was '77. And then when it closed Carolyn Mas had been working as a waitress at the Cornelia Street Cafe, which just had opened up, and she talked to the management there, and came and talked to us and said "How would you like to move what you were doing over here?" So we sort of moved it over there, and it slowly evolved over there. The cafe management was always confused as to what it was. They were always looking for somethinbg that was a performance, something that would generate business.

FF: It was something I had been looking for--for ten or fifteen years. I'd go out trying to find a group of songwriters that wasn't obsessed with the "pop" thing, and it was refreshing to find one.

JH: Yeah, it's been a battle all along. Actually I prefer the structure that it has here, although it's somewhat limited by being in a private residence in that it's hard to get new people there and people perceive it as a closed clique-ish concept, which it was never meant to be, and isn't at this point. Anyone and everyone is welcome, but it's hard to convey that to people. It was easier at a cafe--

FF: --When you could look through the glass from the street--

JH: Right, and it's easier for someone to anonymously check it out in a cafe, but then in the cafe it was always subject to the battle of economics--and that's



why we got kicked out of the cafe. It was getting in the way of business.

FF: And there was a little performance aspect to it--

JH: --and the performance aspect, and those people who wanted to structure it. The creative process cannot be structured. We can't say, OK, let's criticize this song...everytime they try to institutionalize the criticism of a song it's such banal crap. What are you going to say after someone finishes writing a song? "Oh, I liked that." or "Gee, that was great."

FF: I usually don't have anything to say until a week or two later, and then I wish I could hear the song again and talk about it.

JH: --Or those writers, those of us who are dedicated to this process--over a period of months or years you get to know what the person's trying to do and you can spend the time with them. You know that the piece is a step in a new direction. When Massengill came in recently with his Christmas song, which I think is one of the best things he's written in many years--and I might add that It's the first one of his songs in many years that he's actually subjucted to that process, and it went through many drafts and got better each time--it got better, and he got criticism from people who are very intimately familiar with his work. Familiar with his pluses and his minuses--

FF: --that he can trust enough to come to.

JH: Right. And trust enough that he can take the criticism--and he didn't take it all, I mean, he's never taken all of it...

FF: Which I think is a strength--

JH: Right.

FF: --it's not ignored because he's arrogant, As an artist you make choices on your own.

JH: But I still get my best criticism from this group--not publicly after I play the song, but privately from the few people that I trust and the people that work with me on my work. It's an integral part of my work to have that.

FF: What did you think of the Cornelia Street songwriters record? Did that accurately reflect the Songwriters Exchange at that time?

JH: No.

FF: Have you heard the newest C.D. reissue of it?

JH: The album itself was always a product of the cafe itself, which never understood the process of what was going on there and they looked at it as a performance concept. In that way it's an interesting document of some of the people at that point. But it was never what it should have been or could have been at that point. -And a lot of what it should and could have been went into the eventual *Fast Folk* albums.

FF: -of being more of a snapshot--

JH: --More of a snapshot and more all encompassing.

FF: Capturing the ongoing community of it?

JH: Right.

FF: And the ongoing development of artists, and the experimental quality of artists...

FF: Around that same time you worked at Folk City. What was Folk CIty like before it became a comedy and new wave club, before it closed?

JH: Folk City, when I first arrived in the city was sort of at a low point. It was really on the skids. None of the folk singers were playing there. I think earlier than that Allen and Stanley had booked it for a while before they started The Bottom Line, which is about the time that they started The Bottom Line. When I came to town nobody was booking it. Mostly what was playing there was a lot of second rate bands, a lot of the bands that ended up moving over to CBGB's and starting the new wave business that was playing at Folk City then...and the punks...But most of the folk singers-what was left of them- Frandsen, Paul Siebel, were hanging out at the Kettle of Fish, which was sort of the folkie center at that point.

FF: Now The Kettle of Fish, which used to be across from where the SpeakEasy is now (which used to be the Fat Black Pussycat), is in the building where Folk City was before it closed, which wasn't the original legendary Folk City, which used to be Gerde's.

JH: --But it was the Folk City when I came. The original one was on 4th Street. But the one that I'm talking about was on 3rd Street.

FF: Right...where The Kettle is now.

JH: Right. They still had an open-mike there, which was really the only folk music that went on there, and was mostly the ghost of Bob Dylan. And it was sort of an endpoint on numerous folksingers pilgrimmages to the city--anyone who read the Scaduto biography of Bob Dylan had to go to Folk City and meet Mike Porco. In fact the first time I was in there was when I met Maggie and Terre Roche--we were booked together at Carnegie Mellon University in their coffeehouse for a weekend, and they sort of talked me into coming back to New York. While I was visiting them they did a guest set there, or something, and that's the first time I was in there. But there was very little folk music going on there. We slowly rebuilt the club.

FF: Did you run it for a while? You didn't book it--

JH: No, I never booked it, contrary to most of the people who held grudges against me because they didn't get booked there, nobody could really tell Mike Porco what to do. I liked Mike a lot and I considered him a very good friend. He's one of the best human beings I've known, but you couldn't influence him.

FF: How aware was he of the whole myth of Folk City-- the whole sixties myth. Because he was in the middle of it, did he

The Song of the Assassin on stage in 1989

try to perpetuate it, or did he care, did he discuss it at all?

JH: He would discuss it in somewhat of a nostalgic way. I don't think he was ever really aware of what was going on, why it was going on, and to what extent he played a part in it, which he did. All I can do is project the way he was in 1974 and 5 to the way he must have been in the sixties, and he probably wasn't much different. He was a very hard-working individual who had a different set of priorities than fame and fortune.

FF: He had nothing to do with the big anniversary concert when it closed-- the twenty-fifth anniversary, because he had sold the club by then.

JH: Right, as a matter of fact he called me up and asked if I wanted to go with him to it. He said he had an extra ticket--I can't remember whether he said he had to actually buy the tickets, but he had an extra one and wanted to know if I wanted to go.
FF: -Because you didn't play at the concert.

JH: Right, I wasn't asked to play and I was creatively edited out of the book about Folk City...which is a different discussion than I want to have now. But I might add that for seven years we held court there and worked on rebuilding the folk scene here.

FF: -Which was the precurser to the SpeakEasy. So why did you leave Folk City to start the SpeakEasy? When I say you I mean you and--

JH: Right, the collective you and the collective we started SpeakEasy to pick up the slack when Folk City exchanged hands. -And what they excluded there was the up and coming people, and the idea of developing new artists-- which was uniquely what Folk City had always done.

FF: It seems like the *Coop* , the *Fast Folk* projects, starting the musicians cooperative, and now the way the Songwriters Exchange is a pasta dinner where we get together, that community is a big part of how you function, or what you gravitate to. -What you try to create when you want to start something. Why is that? A lot of folksingers seem to be these isolated individuals.

JH: I do not think that an artist can create in a vacuum. For every great artist there was a school of art. Visual artists, musical...very few artists have ever created in a complete vacuum.

FF: There used to be a tradition of apprenticeship and there isn't anymore.

JH: Well to a certain degree that's what we have in our Songwriters Exchange even now-a system of apprenticeship where the Songwriters Exchange has all different levels and ages of songwriters.

FF: In my work as a set designer I I meet people who have all the tools and the skills for work, but they don't know how to use them. They know how to paint or draw but they don't have the mind or the heart to apply it, and there are few ways to learn without a master. Is that what you think the community generates?

JH: Yes. And the community generates the processes that I was talking about earlier- the editing processes, even the sense of support that it becomes a support group for what we do. Because what we do is a very radical, lonely existence, and completely against the way our culture is moving, both economically and creatively.

"All the people are quite warm, except the few who gather fuel"

FF: You mean for an individual to create.

JH: Right. For an individual to create and especially for an individual to create what we're attempting to create.

FF: I think that the society has isolated people so it can sell them an idea of a connection. So, I think that we are the antithesis of that. When we're working alone and or trying to build something we're fighting the overlord who tells us what separates us. I think that's why so many people feel isolated, disenchanted with their lives.

JH: That's the ultimate capitalist goal: to have everyone isolated and ordering their merchandise--

FF: By catalogue?

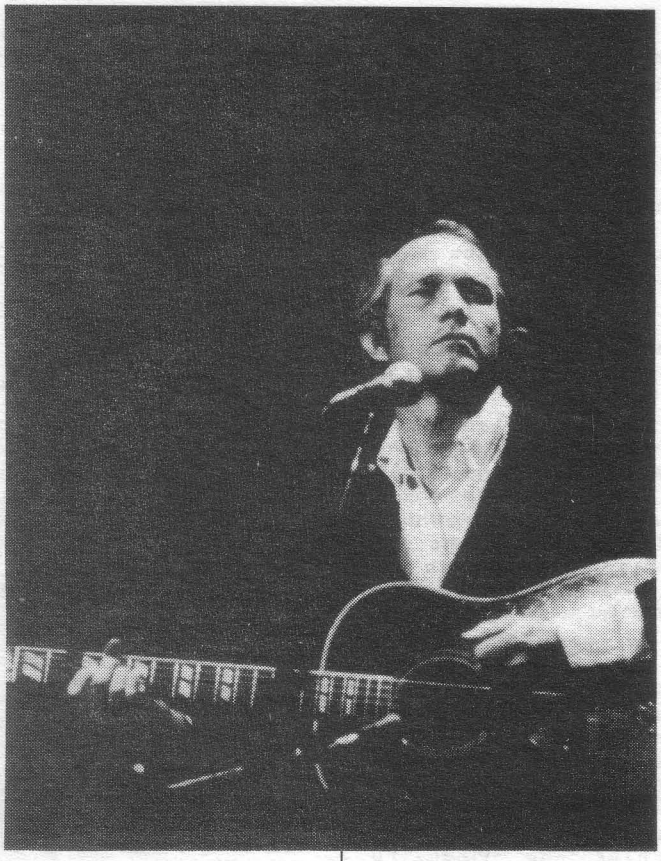
JH: No, by computer hook-up.

FF: But the SpeakEasy was chaotic. The first thing you ever said to me was in the middle of this horribly chaotic meeting about whether or not we should have a sandwich board out on the street was "Isn't communism wonderful." Do you think that chaos actually breeds anything positive?

JH: Yes, I function well in chaos. Our Thursday night meetings are very chaotic. I mean, there's no order to it. We cook dinner, we drink wine, we eventually get around to singing our songs, criticize them when we get around to it or earlier, or ignore them...it's chaos. Creativity comes out of chaos. Chaos is a function of creativity.

FF: But the chaos of the institution doesn't matter. It's the people that come together and what they create that matters. I think the tragedy of the myth of Folk City, or any famous place, is that people come to think that the building and the posters on the wall are what's important, but it's not. It's the people who came through there. That's also why audiences latch onto stars. They think that it can give them something that they don't have themselves. Each of us goes through our own steps. Let's say there's twenty-five of us here on a Thursday night working on our songs-- that's a moment for us. For somebody else it's going to be a myth or a legend, but they weren't there and they're never going to be able to experience it except as this vicarious thing. Imitation is a sincere form of flattery but vicarious creativity is empty.

JH: But it's nothing that they couldn't do for themselves somewhere else.



FF: No.

JH: It's just unique here in that New York is somewhat of a mecca for that type of thing.

FF: What I'm getting at is that when people mythologize a moment like Bob Dylan onstage with an electric guitar in 1965--that's a moment of his expression. All that other people can do is watch that moment. They can never experience it as he did as a natural step, unless they've built a community of their own...

JH: Right, that's where a sense of community is important to reestablish the internal work of an individual. A sense of community becomes an alternative religious experience in that part of the male-dominant myth that was superimposed on this society, which externalizes religion. --And the worshipping of external images and an external concept of the deity who's going to give you the commandments and tell you what to do and solve all your problems instead of looking inward and having the faith in yourself to solve these problems or find enlightenment. To me that's where a sense of community serves that purpose uniquely for creativity.

FF: But in our particular community when people have gone off and become famous at different levels in different ways there isn't much payback. Either they don't talk about having come from here or they don't discuss or acknowledge publicly what they went through to become who they are now.

JH: Well that's part of the problems of fame and fortune, and as I said earlier when you asked me about touring , it's one of the dangers of being the center of attention for too long. You start thinking that you're the center of attention and start believing what they write about you and start believing you are supernatural and you are the deity.

FF: And when you say things like that people here say, "Oh, well Jack Hardy is difficult to get along with. He's just so opinionated ." And then people start to view you as this hard-to-get-along-with guy, which I'm sure you know. How does that affect how you function in the communites? You keep trying to build these communities and I've seen them backfire on you, but you keep doing it.

JH: Mmm...well I think most of the people who think I'm hard to get along with are people who don't know me very well. I mean, the people who deal with me constantly I don't think have that impression. I'm definitely opinionated. I definitely speak my mind, and I basically don't waste time or energy on frivolities.

FF: So how much do you think that this community had to do with building the careers of those who have gone on?

JH: I personally think that it had a lot...but once they become a part of the business world they're out of it and they generally don't have the time for it. I think they suffer as artists. I have no idea if they suffer as individuals. A few of them sneak back in here whenever they have a chance, but they don't have much chance. You'd have to ask them what they think about it or why they don't mention it. All I can speak for is myself and I know that the sense of community is very important to me and to my creative work.

FF: Was the purpose of starting *The Coop* and *Fast Folk* to create another community, or just to catch the writers on record, or to make our own community records--vanity records.

JH: The documentation of the scene I always looked at as a byproduct of what we did. The main function of *Fast Folk* I think from the beginning was to get these artists to take seriously what it was they did as an art form. I looked at is as an extension of the Songwriters Exchange, as an ongoing...in a way a journal of our development as songwriters, and what we found interesting of New York and people that passed through. --Even if we send a little field trip to forage in Toronto to see what's interesting there, or Los

Angeles or Boston. But I looked at it as a function of what was going on here. It's always subject to people saying "Oh, it's that New York clique and they think they're so great." Well, sure, we do think we're great, or we wouldn't do what we do. The fact that we can get together and do this and put out these records I think is an extension of the fact that-

FF: -that we do it.

JH: That we do it. We're not doing anything that anyone else couldn't do. But it doesn't mean that it's easy to do-- it's very difficult to do, as Steve Key found out when he tried to do it out in San Francisco. They put out two issues or something and it disintegrated. You constantly have to fight the preconceived myths of this being part of the fame and fortune routine, and the ego-gratification routine, the stepping-stone routine. And right now the very attributes that *Fast Folk* feels it needs to promote are somewhat counter-productive. Constantly reciting the litany of names of people who have come out of *Fast Folk* is actually detrimental to the idea of *Fast Folk,* because then it's perceived as a stepping-stone, as if we're trying to discover new superstars. That was never the intention.
It's not so much that they were "discovered," but that a high percentage of those now "famous" people came through this particular place in time. In some ways that's unfortunate in that we did a lot of the work that A & R departments in record companies should have been doing all along, and we did it for free. And we didn't even have a limousine and an expense account.

F F : Yeah. It is counter-productive to have to list those names all the time. I think that there's another twenty-five names that with the same commercial push would have had similar or greater success.

JH: But that's not our worry.

FF: But that's all after the fact. Because when you were recording the first twenty-five records or so, and the ones that I've done, I don't think we thought about it. It's only now, looking back after sixty-four records, that you can say, "Oh, look at that, look who's famous now and look who's famous now." But that's hindsight. When I talk to the press I need to educate them about hindsight. They don't know. You say "Suzanne Vega" to them and they say "Oh, Grammy nominee, three albums. Where did she come from?" So using her name or somebody else's is a point of reference, and then if you can get them interested enough in her early work, then you can try to get them interested in your work, or Rod MacDonald's work.

JH: But I don't think that necessarily works. Because they're interested in her because of her fame at this point, and not for the same reasons we were interested in her back then. It doesn't necessarily get them interested in anybody else other than...they'll ask you, "Well, who do you think is going to be the next one to come out of this?"

FF: I say, "I don't know." Or care.

JH: But that's all they're interested in, because that's what sells newspapers. You can look at the pre as a necessary functional or tactical-

FF:-It's a tool.

JH: -tool to get more people aware of *Fast Folk* , but it's not going to help us do what we should be doing.

FF: Do you feel pressured by time in your life, or by the time it takes to write? In the commercial world there's eleven months between records. That probably has no bearing on you, but do you feel pressure in your life to accomplish a certain thing?

JH: In the same way that I look at my songs as experiments, I don't really at this point know what it is that I want to do. It's not like I have an agenda and am feeling pressured by time. I'm on a day to day level I'm always pressured by time...three kids and the appropriate baggage that--there's never enough time to write. But that is secondary.

FF: But what I'm asking is do you feel that songs get away? That if you don't have enough time to write that you lose what you might have done yesterday.

JH: No, I don't feel that way. I thnk that the only ones that get away are the ones that are very topical. If you don't write your Saudi Arabian song right now it's not going to be relevent, and I don't write that type of song to begin with. I think that we're only here for a small amout of time, and we can best use that time to create. That process of creation is not understood by people. That's where I say our sense of community, even our pasta dinners, or the occasional drinking of too much wine or the occasional lengthy abstinence of the same is all part and parcel of the creative process. The closeting of yourself to try to finish something...it's all part of it. The same as listening to what other people are doing, or being aware, or helping other people do what they're doing and helping them criticize their work and getting them to criticize your work is part of that process.

"And only one thing troubles my heart; a wound that will not succumb to art"

FF: Do you think that the term "folk music" has been damaged by all the commercialism?

JH: Probably. All our language is damaged by commercialism. Look at the great words you can no longer use.

FF: I heard somebody asking on the radio this morning--they were talking about the term "collateral damage."

JH: Collateral damage is the civilians they kill. The military is great at this bastardization of language. They interviewed some pilot. "Oh, I was out there, I delivered my package, and I was back." -I delivered my package.

FF: Shell shock is not shell shock anymore. It's post-traumatic stress syndrom when the cause is still shell shock. It's less descriptive than it used to be. I think that in these songs

we're trying to use language to get back to a real meaning and that in the rest of the world it seems that language is getting away from our real experiences.

JH: Yeah, even fifty years ago the number of words in print, the number of words in common usage, was about three times what it is now. What would get edited out of a newspaper article now as being too obscure is far less than what they would have-

FF: Because language is a physical expression of what we feel. Words develop out of our bodies. We ex- press ourselves.

JH: I'm constantly accused of using archaic words in my writing, but I think that the writer has got to actively work against this process of limiting language. I don't care if occasionally people have go to look at a dictionary and look up a word they heard in one of my songs.

FF: Otherwise you're not able to say anything new because you're using a smaller and smaller pool of ideas and words, and people can only refer to smaller and smaller thoughts. I think we have to refer to bigger thoughts.

JH: This is where your question about the "folk" label comes in. Labels themselves are a part of that process. People want to label things so they don't have to think about them. The news media now want everything categorized and labeled. "Oh, we know what a folk singer is. Oh, we know everything about them." They have a specific limited image. I want to break those limits. I want to break that idea, expand that idea, not limit it. I don't want to limit myself. It's not that I'm afraid of that term the way a lot of my economic brethren are afraid of it because it might be a dirty word in the music business. I'm not afraid of it for those reasons. I'm afraid of any label that is limiting.

FF: But I think that's because the economic brethren are trying to break it in a different way. You're trying to break it from the bottom through language and through the form of the song.

JH: -to expand it.

FF: Yeah, expand it. Not to damn synthesizers, but the economic brethren are trying to break it by synthesizing the very base of it.

JH: But all of that is performance, which has nothing to do with the song. I still look at the naked song as being the essence of what we're talking about, because that is what will survive.

FF: But the label "folk music" as it's used today-

JH: -is a performance concept.

FF: -is a commercial distinction.

JH: Right.

FF: Even more than performance.

JH: Right, but when I talk about folk I'm talking about the folk tradition or the oral tradition where songs get passed down, a process which got completely bastardized and almost destroyed in the late fifties and early sixties when it got taken over by the academics. They started treating the folk song as an archeological-

FF:-dig?

JH: Dig. -And collected different versions of songs, and this is the best specimen of a song. They use the same archeological terminology and just about ruined it, never realizing that folk was meant to be a living, breathing, continuing process, not something that stopped to be categorized. The danger was when it started getting written down because then it was something they could collect. --Just in that records now become something that people collect. I don't have to explain that to you, Richard, who used to be a record collector. But I get really angry when I hear that people collect my records. One of my "Mirror of My Madness" albums (that first came out in a white jacket) recently sold at a record sale in Milan, Italy for three hundred thousand lira, which is roughly three hundred dollars. And this is a record that I originally sold for four dollars. I guarantee that whoever bought that wasn't interested in what was on the record. It's just like you're trading a coin. I find that very offensive. I find that abhorrant. In the same way I find it offensive that a Van Gogh painting sells for six million dollars when he died poverty-stricken. That has to do with business. They'll find a way to make money. It amazes me that someone can make money off of me when I 've never made money.

FF: Because it's all after the fact. Even if you're not mythologized in a big commercial way, it's the same. In some little pocket they've mythologized this idea of Jack Hardy, and so somebody wants a piece of it, and if there's an empty place in their life they're going to try to fill it with something. And for that person it was that record.

JH: But it's very ironic when I've dedicated my life to breaking that, and worked actively against it, and have never been a part of it, to have it end up that way.

FF: So how would you feel, if you've been so careful writing the songs, about them becoming part of the folk tradition and changed, simplified, or sanitized?

"Render Caesar his violence, as well as his coin"

JH: Fine. That's not up to me. If people want to do that, then fine. That's the editing process that we should have done here. And I do it to a great extent at this point.

FF: Do you go back and rewrite songs years later? Let' s say there's a song that you thought was the quintessence of what you tried to do as you wrote it. If you woke up a hundred and fifty years later and the song was twisted around somehow wouldn't that be contrary to what you tried to do?

JH: Not necessarily. I mean, I do rewrite older songs. I rewrite them in performance. I

drop out verses, I leave off changed lines, they undergo a constant honing process. If I sing "Houston Street" now it's a much better song than it was when I wrote it. And I don't consider it a very good song. But it serves a purpose in performance.

FF: So what do you want to do next? You're writing plays now.

JH: Well, I'm experimenting with the song in the theatrical setting where the scripts themselves become elaborate introductions to the songs. And the songs have, especially in the concept of mythology, a visual footnote for the songs that would have been obscure. My current play is on an anti-war theme and is set in the time of King Arthur, who is the epitome of the mythological knight in shining armor. I'm trying to use that myth, and debunk that myth, and turn
it around and show how the feminine society and the feminine attributes to society were systematically bludgeoned into submission. I have numerous songs that I have just written for this play, as well as songs that I've had in my repertoire for many years. They all fit in there, and they fit together because of this script.

FF: You are going to perform tonight. You have a sound-check in a few minutes. You've talked about the songs, but when you go to perform them tonight, what do you take on stage to try to communicate these songs? I know that you use the sound of the language when you write. How does that carry over into performance?

JH: I think my performance has gotten much better in recent years and my delivery of songs and the way I experiment with singing them. I realize the way I use language when I hear my children pick it up from me--where moon is a four syllable word. Moo-ah-nnn-ah. They pick up things that I might not notice. Most of what I perform are my more recent compositions, which I'm experimenting with, seeing their potential in delivery, their potential in performance, and see what comes across. I spend a lot of time with my audience before during and after a performance, and actively pursue what gets across.

FF: Do you think playing for foreign language audiences helps you get across to the English-speaking audiences?

JH: Often. The foreign audiences are much more analytical, much more curious about this. I've had conversations with people in Germany and Italy about my songs that I've never had here. They pay attention. I enjoy interacting with my audience, and that's something I think is sacrificed when you become famous. Then, you create these walls between you and your audience. You almost have to in order to play that type of myth.

FF: A lot of the songs seem serious at first glance. Do you worry that presenting that heavy a package of material to an audience is going to be to difficult for them?

JH: Well, that's where the skills of performance come in, and I rely on my between-song explanations and introductions to be entertaining so I don't have to make the songs entertaining. But there are ways to look at this in a sort of tongue-in-cheek and self-deprecating and ironic way that allow the audience to know that it's not quite as serious as it might come off. And this is what you lose on a record. I've had people come out of my performances thinking that I'm thoroughly entertaining, when if you look at the songs I've just performed you'd think they'd want to go and slit their wrists.

FF: But even on some of those songs you might want to slit your wrists over, they're very sensuous, juicy sorts of songs. There always seems to be light at the end of them. Even something like "All For the Love of Michael" . I think this is a dark song, but at the end of it I still feel like this woman's going to survive somehow. You don't say that, but that's what I get out of it. For me, that's the reason a lot of your songs succeed, where other songs about social despair don't succeed, because there's no redemption, no way out.

JH: But you see, the danger of what we do, being swallowed up by the commercial world, is that we're lumped in with the "glee men" of the world, and some people perceive what we do as entertainment. I've never perceived what I do as entertainment. I don't set out to entertain an audience. I'm not a diversion to take them away from their troubles. I'm there to make them confront their own inner feelings and their own life goals, their own raison d'etre. There are enough glee men out there who are going to make them laugh, who are going to make them forget about reality for a while. All you have to do is turn on the television. But there's enough of that - I don't have to do that.

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LYRICS

Selling Out

I got a '68 Ford pick-up that just needs a transmission
I got Kerosene heater and a Sears window fan
Got a thirteen inch TV
It don't work but boy its cheap
You just better call today
'Cause its gonna go fast

I'm sellin' out
I'm sellin' out
Everythings in good condition
Its just not good to me now
I'm movin' out
I'm cleanin' house
Don't you call me up tomorrow
'Cause today I'm selling out

Howdy, Howdy Mr. Swap Line
This Grady down in Graysville
I got twenty sacks of cotton seed laid up in the barn
I got an old John Deere tractor
With a brand new carborator
I got backhoe and a grader lay to wastin' in the yard

Chorus

I got a Maytag washer like new top loader
Got an Evenrude motor you could fix it real cheap
I got a 36 Buick never took it on the highway
You better call me up by Friday
It'll all be gone next week

Chorus

I got some wagon wheel bunk beds
With matresses and ladders
Got a bike with training wheels
That'd be a steal at twice the price
I got an Daisy BB rifle and a Browning 30-30
And my oldest daughter's wedding dress
She only used it twice

Chorus

Rough Edges

Night fell like a stone
Into the well of a country Hollow
The last goose call faded away
I was desparate to follow
Any the wind blew
anywhere but here
Thought I had nothing to lose
And I was way beyond fear
I was only thirteen and my world was on fire
I ran, I ran
I ran to the water

I was walkin' the rough edges down
Down
I was walkin' the rough edges down
Restless dreams kept me on my feet
No safe place to come down

Day rose like a hope
Over the grey of a city morning
One mad move and I had two empty hands
Restlessness came without warning
Any way the road turned
Any where but here
I'd already lost what I lost
I figured I could handle the fear
I wa only eighteen and my world was burning

I ran, I ran
I ran without turning

I was walkin the rough edges down
Down
I was walkin the rough edges down

Right down to a smooth foundation
I feel
I feel the walls crashing down

I'm counting my footsteps by the river
I'm thinkin' about tomarrow
Big white cranes wheel in the sky
They're takin' away my sorrow
'Cause everyday the road turns
Everyday I'm here
I still got nothing to lose
But this Phantom of fear
'Cause I got a strong heart and I know the lay of the land
I know what to do
When things get out of hand

I'm walking the rough edges down
down
I go walkin the rough edges down
rough edges down

Three Monkeys

Its so hot here the wind forgets to blow
Shimmering heat waves move in the streets below
In the haze of noon
The wind gets lost at sea
Where it blows is a mystery

Yeah man, it dangerous and hot in this country
Strangers listening on the phone
We're in jam
This thing could blow up in our faces
I f they chase us on the lamm

Down in the land of sugarcane
Waiting on a sign of rain
Mission confidential
See no - hear no - speak no -you know
Silence in the art of keeping three monkeys in your heart

Its so hot here
The black sand smokes like coal
Sun barbeques your body
Fries your soul
Rain drops sizzle and pop in the dust of the road
Mesages in secret code
Yeah man, there beaucoup kinds of heat in this country
and there are soldiers in the street and urgent telegrams
And people fall in love a lot
Because its dangerous and hot
on the lamm

chorus

Yeah man, its strictly need to know
Its coded 'midnight tango'
Yeah, because it dangerous and hot

repreat first verse

chorus

A Burning Leaf

The father's black shirt was open
At the throat
He spit over the rail
Of an iron bridge
And searched his pockets
For something worth giving up

Before the setting sun
Before his hopes collapsed
And heaven ran him ragged
for what he could call his own

His vow of chastity
His vow of honesty
His vow of poverty
Of love to call his own

Haloed light behind her shoulders
Caught him hard
And cut him down
He loved her through that white November
Now their child's voice calls to him
His chain of faith cut at her neck
She remains
But the chain is gone
To the ice cold river bottom
Where the burning leaves he tosses
Fall

His vow of chastity
His vow of honesty
His vow of poverty
Of love to call his own

The basement room was jamed with old chairs
Nowhere to sit
No one to avoid
Two small windows let the south wind blow
In all directions
It brought no choice
The ceiling rained down paint chips
when anyone walked above
They dog him harder than his own steps
Like an ancient rain of stones

His vow of chastity
His vow of honesty
His vow of poverty
Of love to call his own

No one calls for his confession
Did someone lock the door?
When he looks in the glass in the clerestory
He knows what good his collar is for

Into the river dropped a burning leaf
Followed by the match that did it in
A cigarette butt and his white collar
His child complained about the wind
Its better than the ice cold bottom
Of the river out of reach
He lit a match
And another
Burning leaf
Fell
From the river bridge

His vow of chastity
His vow of honesty
His vow of poverty
Of love to call his own

His vow of chastity
His vow of honesty
His vow of poverty
Of love to call his own

Prisoners of their hair

What do Crystal Gayle, Dorothy Hammil
Donald King and Gloria Steinhem
Have in common?
They are prisoners of their hairdos
Prisoners of their hair
If they changed the way they comb their hair
They'd never be recognized anywhere

Prisoners

What do Stevie Nicks, Leon Redbone,
Pee wee Herman, Tom Wolfe
And Pope John Paul have in common?
They are prisoners of their wardrobe
Prisoners of their clothes
If the changed the outfits that they wear
Nobody would stop and stare

Prisoners

Its a little crazy
Its a little weird
ZZ Top are prisoners of their beards
Imagine them in weightless in outerspace
Beards and hair flying all over the place
(Don't worry that could never happen
--- except maybe in a music video)

Its a very fine line between a groove and a rut
A fine line between excentrics
And people who are nuts
But why do I concern myself with such superficial fare
'Cause I'm a prisoner of stupid thoughts
Which is worse than being a prisoner of your hair

---Wait theres more!!

I wonder if Crystal Gayle has nightmares about hanging out with Reverend Al Sharpton and Mary Travers being chased by a wild pack of scizzors toward a swimming pool filled with Nair
Oh, my god Crystal - wake, wake up!--- wake up!!!!

Row

Row, row, The wind is gonna blow
We might get caught in the gale
Row, row, the motor won't go
We aren't rigged up with a sail
Five miles or more
'till we get to the shore
Row, row

I don't know how I got out here
I don't remember a thing
It doesn't seem like a place I would go
I never travel these waters
When the waves are this high
But it's too late to worry , I know

Do you need to get off of this island?
Then come on into the boat and stay low

Chorus

I didn't bring a thing with me
Except these two pairs of oars
Where they came from, well I couldn't say

They're not all that we need now
But if we're pulling together
We'll maybe get there before it is day

And I promise I'll try to stay with you
'Though the boat may perhaps, get away

Chorus

Now is the Dream

My candle burns low
Its light only passes
A shadow of me onto you
I move not a step
The floor underneath me
Would cry and would moan
And would stir you
Empty your mind
Picture the water
Float in the sight and the sound
The beating of night
The beam of the moon on the wall
Your world turns around

Chorus:
Now is the dream
Melting the song
Now is the dream
Spinning the night
Now is the dream
That brings you tomorrow
That shows your desire in the light
In the light

The walls of this room
Are watching you weep
Longing for faraway places
Where will the sadness
Have gone in the morning
Without ever leaving its traces
The next time you see
You'll remember how easily
Night washes clean
all the streets in this town
The heavy and dark
The dust and the thickness of day
Your world turns around

Chorus

Away

Piece of stone
Piece of loam
Piece of foam
From waves -Oh
Living living
Live and quick
To the nick the prince of knaves -Oh
The blue green eggs lay in the nest
A nest of wattles made -Oh
Two lay still
Two hached at will
And one had flown away -Oh

Fly away
Where is a way?
Way beyond the dreams today
Never wish - for what you wish
You just might wish away - Oh

Riddle me this
Riddle me that
A needle in the hay -Oh
The girl I love in the window above
Will you come out to play -Oh
But while she watched another hatched
She began to cry -Oh
I've big strong wings
I've learned to sing
But I have not learned to fly -Oh

Chorus

Jack be nimble
Jack be quick
Does anybody care -Oh
Jack be slow and everyone knows
Why Johnny's too long at the fair -Oh
There's none who'll die for a woman twice
And once is no proof of love -Oh
The blue green eyes lay in disguise
And life is long enough -Oh

Chorus

Chorus

Words and music © 1990 by Jack Hardy

Gravedigger

isolation
take it like a hard drug
mixed with the whiskey
smooth as a silk dress

void of elation
just take a look at my mug
who'd wanna kiss me
when i'm lookin' like this mess?

long for an open field
to sit on a tree trunk
just look at the roots
wooden spider in the ground

lookin' for a new deal
to pull me out of my luck
maybe a pair of new boots
can walk me out of town

i --------- am a gravedigger
i ---------work with dirt and bones
i ---------am a grave digger
i ---------am diggin' one of my own

friends try to tell me
everybody's gotta problem
i must say that soothes me
for about a second and a half

does there gotta be a hell-freeze
to stop my sobbin'
or maybe a cool breeze
down there just to make me laugh

i am a big square
squeezed in a small circle
corners gettin' rounded
four little half moons

i needed my edges there
now my face is gettin' purple
my veins have pounded
to the surface of my skin, dude

chorus

i had some chances
what did i do with them?
i had some chances
what did i do with them?
i took a shovel
i dug a big hole
i measured it six feet
i shoveled them under

i'm in a bad mood
who's gonna get it?
lookin' for a scapegoat
who's willing to take a chance

where is this cool dude
who's willing to let it
roll off his shoulder
like a pebble in an avalanche

Words and Music © 1988 richard julian

Mangled Savannah Waltz

There's a drunkard with wings on his shoulders
There's a submarine made out of heather
A woman and man waltzing under the ocean
And five thousand cobras in sleeveless green sweaters

Here's a house with no walls and no rooftops
Just an open door waiting for me
And the invisible robot who sits on my shoulder
Son, I paint what I see

Cause i've starved for art so long
that I had to eat the bowl of plastic fruit
And my lady whose face was a portrait to die for
Dipped out with a cubist in a checkerboard suit

Three days without sleep and I see barking rhinos
A few grams of blow and the bannisters belch
Close my eyes to a squint and the newspaper boy
Is a hell-breathing dragon I'm sworn to destroy
Now a mangled savanah is manna to me
Son, I paint what I see

Dear lord please bring me rolling fields of wheat
and cherubic children at play
Cause it's been such a strain since my eyes went insane
and the world began to sway

Now I've run out of renaissance roses
The last supper's not my cup of tea
So my means of depiction are strictly non fictional
Son, I paint what I see

There's a drunkard with wings on his shoulders

Words and Music © 1989 Jim Allen

Fun to Be Perfect

Where's you get those cheek bones honey?
How'd you grow that hair?
People who don't even know you
Stop and stare
God must have had a good day
When he painted on your face
Setting you as the example
For the human race

It must be fun to be perfect
Fun to be perfect
Fun to be perfect

Where'd you get those eyebrows honey
You don't have to pluck
Was it in your gene pool of just luck
You probably stare into your mirror just imagining
The potential attributes of your future offspring

Chorus

I believe that living would be easy
If only I could be perfect too
I'd sail right through my life so free and breezy
Reacting like perfect people do
Thank you my darling...

Where's you get that body baby
Always tan and tight
You don' t even exercise
let alone eat right
Down here on the planet Earth I'm working up a sweat
I don't know but something tells me
I'm not there yet

Chorus

Words and Music © 1989 Julie Gold

Marian Rosen & I

Today Marian Rosen and I will do nothing
from sunup till sundown
Except ride the silver tension wire above the bridge
above Brooklyn town
In our white petticoats we are two white clouds
ballerinas in the air
And the crowd below coagulates and shouts your crazy
but we don't care...
we don't listen to them.... ahem...

My the world looks so small from way up here
you can hold it in your hands
and move the boats around the rocks and clean up that tragedy
there! -made by man...
with all the obstacles removed look! Marian! We are standing on our own!
Just like the Lady of the Harbor with her torch song held up high she's
Made of stone...
(she hears everything we say - yes, she does)

But

What about the people
And the sirens down below
They are talking about us
Like we are criminals you know
They are laughing at us

shouting at us
silly stupid girls you have no
Business holding traffic, yeah...
Holding up the world
Someone says that you will fall
Someone says that I will fall
Hey Marian, they think we're gonna fall

Oh what about that man all dressed in red
He's telling someone that he knows me very well
He never knew me
Four years we spent together far apart inside one bed
That's what he said
Just listen to him talk
He never knew me...
He says:
Why don't you settle down?
Why don't you settle down?
settle down?
settle
(no thank you) down.....

Did you ever get the feeling
This is not gonna last too long
(I got that feeling)
Sooner or later we'll get hungry
And you'll look down...
When we go down there Marian
You can hold my hand
And the things we cannot change right now
We'll settle later
On dry land
When the answers come ashore...
(They always do...like a big white bird that don't say shit...
She don't say shit because she knows and those that don't know
--they talk all the time)

Today Marian Rosen and I will do nothing
From sunup till sundown
And ride the silver tension wire above the bridge
Above Manhattan town
And you down in the crowd
Waving your flag all dressed in blue
Well you just keep on waving
Cause sooner or later we'll fall for you
But we won't be swayed...(hey hey)
doo doo doo doo doo doo
doo doo doo doo doo doo dummmmmmmm.....

Sunlight On The Window

I got this hole in my head
Some nights you can see clear through to China
My whole life seems to add up to this look upon my face
It tends to leave me somewhat lacking in the social graces
Sometimes I wish I was honest
Sometimes I wish I was on a train just rolling away
Sometimes the sunlight on the window
The sunlight on the window
The sunlight on the window
Thats all I got to say

Theres a ruckus out on the street corner
The argument gets ended with a butcher knife
He took off running down 10th
Never to be seen again in this life - no
She dropped the blade
She picked up the baby
She shouted something of a warning to the future
She said "I don't need this shit anymore"
She went inside and slammed the door
The sunlight on the window crashed down to the floor

Saturday night at the movies
Sunday afternoon looking out the window
Oh, but we didn't make this one up no, no
God got to dreaming and we all appeared
Just another little drama that caught fire in his beard

Baby, we are bound by the winter sunlight
To that shivering old bum
By the wind that scatters leaves and grace
And all of the things we leave undone
Random acts of love in the darkness
The lightning that rises from the heat
And burns right through to your most secret places
Like promises that cut too deep
But it seems the sunlight on the window in the morning
Is all we get to keep

Now I got this hole in my head
If you look close some nights you just might see the star brain sky
And christmas eve
And the canticle clock of my memory
And all the things I almost believe
Believe what you can
It don't matter whats true
But that ain' t up to me and you to say
What I need for you to know the most
I could never explain
Its like this
The sunlight on the window
The sunlight on the window
Thats all I got to say

Don Quixote's Lullaby

When I went off to change the world
I thought that this old world would come around
But now I see that all my hopes and dreams
To topple down regimes
Were like a king without a crown
But someday
And not so far away
The headlines all will say
We turned the world upside down

Who will carry on
Who will sing the freedom song
When I lay down
Who will raise the freedom crown

When I went off to change the world
I never thought the world would dare change me
For I was young and thought I'd never die
Or need an alibi
I flew high just as I pleased
Black and white
We'd stay up half the night
To argue wrong from right
And I hold dear the memory

Who will carry on
Who will sing the freedom song
Who will carry on
When I'm dead, when I'm gone

Oh, I went off to change the world
When I got back the world was just the same
Sad to say but oh the saddest part
The unbreakable heart
We could not start to save our lives
Grasping straws
Defending a lost cause
Til every martyr falls
It was the night of the long knives

Who will carry on
Who will sing the freedom song
From Kent State to Tianmen Square
They kill the students anywhere
Every nation, every state
Freedom means to agitate

I went to join the revolution
But I couldn't find a parking place

When I went off to change the world

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RECORD REVIEWS

GREG BROWN
DOWN IN THERE
(Red House Records)

by Jim Allen

There isn't really any ground-breaking going on here in Greg Brown's seventh recording for Red House. Brown generally mines a familiar country-folk lode, and the themes of working-class people alternately buckling and blossoming in their journeys through life have been heard several times before from other sources, but that just ain't the point.

It's the life that Brown brings to these songs that makes this a worthwile offering. If this were one of those old-fashioned black vinyl things with a hole in the middle, I would return most often to the second side, because that's where the real gems are. "Poor Black Slider" is a powerful story of a man losing his family and probably his soul on account of his inability to control his dark side "I'm a poor backslider in the pit of sin/I try to crawl back out/I slip back in". Eventually he looks heavenward for salvation, "The preacher told me Jesus laid down his life for my sin. Well I'd lay mine down too if I could do it like him."

The standout cut here is "Fooled Me Once", an extended ballad whose spare production underlines the emotional tension of its story about a woman who graduates from the school of hard knocks. This song also features an undeniably beautiful yet very simple melodic structure.

"Band of Gold" and "All Day Rain" (a duet with Shawn Colvin) are unpretentious and striking thumbnail sketches of domestic bliss. Throughout the course of this ten-song collection Brown receives sympathetic, understated support from his band which includes Bo Ramsey on guitar and Angus Foster on bass.

DAVE VAN RONK
HUMMIN' TO MYSELF
(Gazell Productions)

by Jim Allen

No one needs to be told that Van Ronk has been a folk legend for the better part of thirty years. What might come as a surprise, though, is his way with standards such as "Making Whoopie" or "Wrap Your Troubles In Dreams". This is the area of American folk music he tackles on this collection. The Vocal pyrotechnics of his live shows are absent here, but restraint serves these songs well.

Van Ronk's finest moment is his ominous interpretation of the Gershwin brothers' "It Ain't Necessarily So". Erik Frandsen's "The Fresno Shuffle" and Miles and Bishop's "Jack You're Dead" are Jump tunes on which the fur begins to fly. To these ears, Christine Lavin's quirky soprano-on "Two Sleepy People" and "I Can't Give You Anything but Love" - seems out of place beside Van Ronk's gruff baritone. Nevertheless, there's plenty of solid vocalizing on this record.

(Gazell Productions, PO Box 527, Mansfield Center, CT 06250)

Peter Rowan:
DUST BOWL CHILDREN

by Keith Kelly

With this release, Peter Rowan single-handedly revives the concept album. Dust Bowl Children is an album as beautifully simple as its subject matter. Using just his powerful voice, guitar, and passion, Rowan offers a series of perspectives on the devastated lot of the suffering farmers, planters, and all those who depend upon the earth to make a living.

Much of Dust Bowl Children's songs seem to concentrate on the modern-day farmer's situation, which has received much attention in the last few years. Yet Rowan isn't just jumping on the haywagon. Rather, he seems to be taking advantage of this current attention in order to advance beliefs he and his subjects have always held. The writing is influenced by traditional Native Amerian lifestyle. The front-cover photograph shows a 1905 Hopi Indian corn harvest, and the album contains a brief Hopi prophecy: "All I have is my planting stick and my corn. If you are willing to live as I do you may live here with me."

One might expect that one person with one guitar singing twelve songs on roughly the same subject could grow tedious and predictable. On the contrary, the sheer intensity of Rowan's profound feelings for his chosen area propel the songs, and compel the listener to pay attention. He achieves musical

variety by pitching the songs in different keys, by playing in different tempos, alternating between fingerpicking and flatpicking, and by adding careful touches of slide guitar, harmonica, and those trademark yodels.

The twelve songs, all written by Rowan with occasional collaborators, range from driving fingerpicked workouts to lilting waltzes. The lyrics examine past, present, and future fates of dust-bowl men, women, children, drifters, rainmakers, and others. The opening title track rails against the industrial destruction of the land and the livelihoods it once provided.

"Before the Streets Were Paved," attempts to put this devolution in perspective by means of a grandson asking his grandfather about life in the old days:

Before time was only money
and machines made man a slave
Was the world all milk and honey
before the streets were paved.

The album's longest track, "Barefoot Country Road," details the reminiscences of an idyllic childhood in Tennessee, when the harmony between land and people was still safe and undisturbed. But when the adult returns to the same spot, he finds only waste and indifference.

Look here, I just found a rusty old horse shoe
If it could talk I know
that it would tell a tale or two
The old ways, they die hard to make way for something new.

The irony of finding a good-luck symbol among the weeds is not lost, while the song's eerie slide guitar evokes the wind whistling down the now-abandoned road.

"Seeds My Daddy Sowed" is the album's shortest, simplest track, yet it is also the one that sticks in the listener's mind the longest. The lyrics perhaps describe a ride through town, while the child-narrator points out the important sights:

This is the bank where the money goes
To pay back the man that my daddy owes
Who sold us the field that blossomed
into crops
That grew from the seeds that my daddy sowed.

A later verse offers a more mature observation:

The man who owns the bank
Is the man who owns the field
Is the man who owns the seeds that my daddy sowed.

The "uh-huh" at the end of each verse reinforces the grim acceptance of this vicious circle.

The remaining songs are filled with the same passion and commitment. The driving, dancing rhythms of "Rainmaker" help tell the story of an Indian medicine man who, to his own surprise, can actually make it rain (sometimes). "Forest for the Trees" which begins by decrying the short-sightedness of past and present generations, concludes on a more hopeful note:

I took my young son up on a clear-cut mountain
I fell down on my knees
I prayed that he will someday see
The forest for the trees.

Simplicity is the secret of the powerful impact of all aspects of Dust Bowl Children from the song lyrics and arrangements to the album-design--white with a few simple words printed on what looks like an old-fashioned manual typewriter. Many of the songs sound as though they were recorded live in the studio; perhaps all of them were. One small photograph of Rowan appears in one corner; the Hopi pictures and quotation are given more prominence. The sound is crisp and clean, capturing every catch in Rowan's expressive singing voice.

Overall, Peter Rowan's Dust Bowl Children is a masterful, powerful, passionate album, with timeless appeal. One can only hope that Rowan's clear message--save the land, save its people--will be heard by enough people to make a difference.

Sugar Hill 3781, 1990

BLAKE BABIES - SUNBURN
(Mammoth Records)

by Jim Allen

Yeah! As Lord Buckley would say, lend a lobe, cause this is way cool stuff. The Blake Babies are an avant-pop trio who are two albums into a career of turning electric-guitar based pop songs inside out and back again, making sparks fly in the process. John Strohm's guitar sounds like a murdered owl ascending to heaven, and his composition, "Girl In a Box" gets my vote for one of the best songs of the year. See if it ain't so.

(Mammoth Mail Order, Carr Mill 2nd Floor, Carrboro NC 27510)

Tony Bird... Sorry Africa

(ROUNDER/PHILO CD PH-1135)

By Richard Shindell

From the post-colonial heart and soul of Tony Bird comes a fine new record on Rounder/Philo Records. Sorry Africa, mixing African and American folk influences, paints a portrait, or a mural, of life in Bird's native Malawi - the struggles of its people, the natural beauty of the Rift Valley, and one artist's relationship to them. The first track on the record, "The Rift Valley", is full of references to mangos, coconuts, baboons, monkeys, and bliss all around. One gets the impression that if Henri Rousseau had been a songwriter rather than a painter in the naive genre, he would have sounded like this. Yet, Bird's ebullient and unabashed celebration of his native land takes on a more self-conscious (and race conscious) tone when he gets to the chorus:

> and the people in the valley
> they have a paradise
> and sometimes when they're feeling happy
>
> they'll smile and say to you:
> "White man, why're you so quiet?
> Did you forget? We are in paradise."

It is this same self-consciousness which provokes a certain amount of disagreement over the relative merits of the title track, "Sorry Africa", a straightforward and heartfelt apology. The basic idea is summed up in the chorus:

> But I'm sorry Africa
> I'm sorry for my people
> I'm sorry what we did to you.

Elsewhere, Bird admits, "Of course, my song cannot undo". True enough.

There are two views (gleaned from a random and informal sample). First, there are those who would say that this song represents a new milestone in the age-old project of liberal guilt seeking solace and forgiveness. This is, say these same critics, too little too late, an impotent and meaningless gesture at best.

On the other hand, there are those - myself included - who would rather cut the guy some slack. The rationale goes like this: the spectacle of a lot of equally liberal and equally white folks standing around complaining about whether or not an apology is, say, too effusive, too fashionable, too politically correct, misplaced, or even counter-productive strikes me as ridiculous. When making an apology - and an apology is all this song attempts to be - it is usually the receiving party that decides whether or not an apology is appropriate.

In less capable hands, the task of apologizing to the entire continent of Africa for centuries of injustice might easily come across as presumptuous, self-serving, and a bit to fashionable. Oh no, one can hear them say, not another Mandela song! Yet Tony Bird was writing songs like this long, long before it became fashionable. And, at least as far as this reviewer is concerned, he does it very, very well.

"Wings Like Vivian's", a hymn to a woman approaching mythic status, owes much to Dylan's "She Belongs to Me". Whether or not it owes too much each listener will have to decide for herself - in fear and trembling.

'Mango Time,' another innocent romp, is superbly performed and great to dance to. Again, Bird's post-colonial sensibilities are evident. He ends the song with a spoken epilogue: "In Africa, mango time is more important than tea time." One thinks of T.S. Eliot wondering if he dares to eat a peach.

Although Bird seems to take pride in both the anglo and the african aspects of his heritage, there is throughout this record a yearning for a more idyllic (i.e., perhaps less anglicized) past. Here one is closer to the land; mangos are eaten with abandon; and the all-too durable vestiges of colonialism are disarmed by the healing and redeeming powers still present in the cultures that colonialism has exploited.

"WHERE THE FAST LANE ENDS" FRED KOLLER -

(Alcazar)

by Craig Harris

Nashville-based Fred Koller has written songs with such top-rated songwriters as John Hiatt, John Prine and John Gorka. On his won, Koller uses his husky, Tom Waits-like, vocals to make each tune a personal statement. Accompanying himself on acoustic guitar and joined by a virtual who's who of contemporary country music, including Hiatt, Vassar Clements, Lacy J. Dalton, David Mallet and Ashley Cleveland, Koller serves up a seamless blend of folk and country music. Much of the album reflects on the hardships of being on the road and years for a slower, more-family-oriented, life. Koller sings of needing to spend more time with "long lost friends" during the title track and envisions being "Just an average Ameican husband and wife" during "Patio Lights". The high points of the album, however, are the duets that Koller sings with Nanci Griffith of the Griffith-popularized tunes, "Lone Star State of Mind" and "Going Gone".

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THIS RECORDING WAS DRAWN FROM TWO CONCERTS HELD AT THE BOTTOM LINE IN NEW YORK 2/24/90

Special guests were Michael Smith and Townes Van Zandt

THE ENTIRE SHOW RAN AS FOLLOWS:

P R O G R A M

Hosts

Christine Lavin & Steve Stapenhorst

The Band

Mark Dann/*Guitar* Lisa Gutkin/*Violin* Jeff Hardy/*Bass*
Margo Hennebach/*Keyboards* Howie Wyeth/*Drums*

"SELLIN' OUT"..... *By Eddy Lawrence*
"HERE COMES THE WATER"..... *By Chuck Pyle*
"ROUGH EDGES"..... *By Rachel Polisher*
"HIGH HEELS"..... *By Christine Lavin*
"A WAY"..... *By Jack Hardy*
"MARYANN ROSEN & I"..... *By Lillie Palmer*
"GRAVEDIGGER"..... *By Richard Julian*
"COME UN SOGNO"..... *By Pucci/Biagi*
"THE KID"..... *By Buddy Mondlock*
"A BURNING LEAF"..... *By Richard Meyer*
"THE MAGIC KINGDOM"..... *By Brian Rose*

I N T E R M I S S I O N

"CASCADE"..... *By Josh Joffen*
"NOW IS THE DREAM"..... *By Wendy Beckerman*
"BLUE WING"..... *By Tom Russell*
"SUNLIGHT ON THE WINDOW"..... *By Frank Tedesso*
"FUN TO BE PERFECT"..... *By Julie Gold*
"DON QUIXOTE'S LULLABYE"..... *By David Massengill*
"VORFRUHLING"..... *By Wolf Diermann*
"P..... O. T.... H....."..... *By Christine Lavin*
"MANGLED SAVANNAH WALTZ"..... *By Jim Allen*
"BROKEN PLACES"..... *By Margaret A. Roche*
"ROW"..... *By Lori Mcloud*

STAGE MANAGERS

Kate Heald & Ann Webster

FAST FOLK
MUSICAL MAGAZINE

ON THE RECORD

David Massengill
David is a native of Bristol, Tennessee, where he once chased a bobcat and vice-versa. He made his debut at Folk City in Greenwich Village, accompanying himself on dulcimer. Dave Van Ronk taught him guitar and took him on two national tours. Van Ronk notes that Massengill's songwriting bears "the signature of a master." Though Woody Guthrie is his greatest influence, his songs are compared with Dylan's, Paul Simon's, and even the B-52s'. He has opened the Newport Folk Festival and closed the 25th anniversary concert for Folk City, which aired on PBS and BBC T.V. He has also performed at Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center. His songs have been recorded by the Roches and Joan Baez, and his own recording of "My Name Joe" appears on the New Windham Hill collection *Legacy*. He was nominated Best Folk Act of 1987, '88, and '89 by the New York Music Awards and was a Kerrville 1989 New Folk winner. He is currently working with Suzanne Vega's producer, Steve Addabbo, on his debut album.


David Massengill

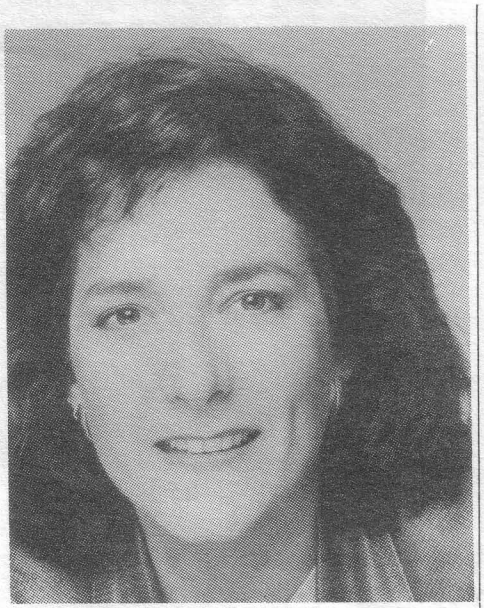

Eddie Lawrence

Eddie Lawrence is an Alabama born and bred songwriter/musician who has lived in New York City since 1982. His musical background suns the gamut from studying classical violin as a child to playing guitar in country and bluegrass bands around the southeast to being a member of the critically acclaimed Lower East Side roots rock and roll band L.E.S.R. His solo albums, *WALKER COUNTY, UP THE ROAD, AND WHISKERS AND SCALES AND OTHER TALL TALES* have been released on his own label, Snowplow Records. The album recieved significant airplay on college and public radio stations around the U.S. and gathered rave reviews from American, Canadian and European critics.

Lillie Palmer/ (PB-Palmer & Bragg)
Lillie lives and writes songs in the East Village. She has attended Goddard College, Vermont, the Trinity Rep Conservatory of Rhode Island, and Fordham University. Lillie contributed a cut to the recent Windham Hill *Legacy* album. *East Coast Rocker* writes. 'Palmer reminds one of a young Joni Mitchell- the epitome of the down to earth folksinger.' She is currently recording with her band.

Julie Gold is from Philadelphia and has been living in NY for the last ten years. She is best known as the composer of "From a Distance", which has been recorded by over fifteen artists worldwide and nominated (as of this writing) for three Grammys. She performs up and down the East coast and was a memeber of the 1990 FAST FOLK REVUE.

Rachel Polisher was a professional cook of thirteen years, and an urban nomad. She moved to New York one year ago from Colorado. She writes poetry and fiction, and designs graphics. Rachel was a New-Folk performer at the 1988 Kerrville Folk Festival in Texas, performs from time to time at in, NY as well as other clubs across the country. She was a member of the 1990 Fast Folk Revue at the Bottom Line.



Julie Gold

Wendy Beckerman

Rachel Polisher

Wendy Beckerman has been on the New York Scene for about two years. She has toured Italy and plays up and down the East coast. Originally from New Jersey Wendy recently escaped with honors from Brandies University.

Christine Lavin

Christine has released five albums on Rounder Records, the most recent one being *Attainable Love.* She toured Australia where the highlight was appearing on the Australian Today Show singing the "Air Conditioner Song"
with the "Willard Scott" of that country in front of the weather map. Christine is well-known to club and festival audiences across the country for her charming and witty songs and style. Christine has been one great ambasador for the New York scene and folk music generally.

Christine Lavin

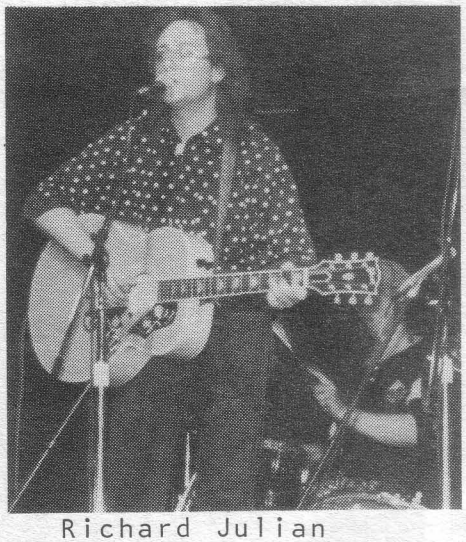
Frank Tedesso

Frank Tedesso

Frank is from Chicago and now he lives in New York.

Richard Julian is an up and coming songwriter/performer on the New York scene. Richard moved here from Las Vegas in 1986 after spending a year taking requests and playing the cheesiest chords he knew in the land of slot machines and neon cactus trees. In the last year he has performed at the Newport Folk Festival, the Fast Folk Revue at the Bottom Line in New York City, and the Bluebird Cafe.

Richard Meyer and Mark Dann



Richard Julian

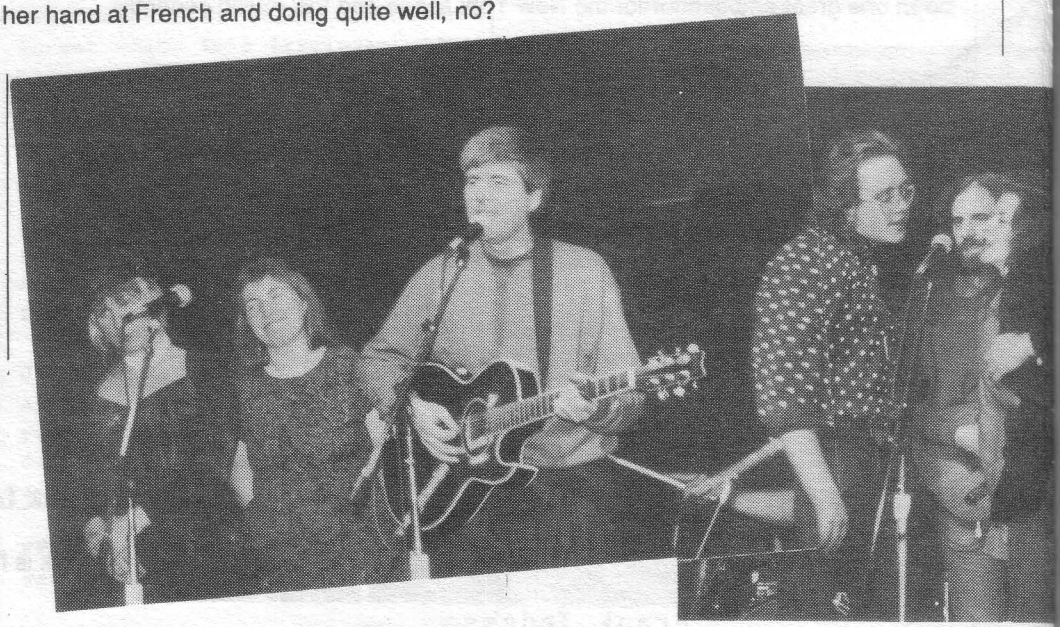
Richard Meyer

Richard booked the SpeakEasy in 1984-85 and co-produced *Live From the SpeakEasy* broadcasts for a year on WBAI. *Sing Out!* published his song "The January Cold." He has released one album; *Laughing/Scared* and is working on a second to be called *The Good Life!* He contributes music to many stage productions and fills out his triple-life as a set and light designer. He designed scenery and lights for over 70 productions since 1982 including *Old Business* at the NY Shakespeare Festival, *Friends* at the Manhattan Punchline and The LA premiere of *Hurlyburly* with Sean Penn/directed by David Rabe, and *All My Sons* in Madras, India and *Self Defense* in LA. Richard is Technical Director for the Mabou Mine's Obie award-winning production of *Through the Leaves* in New York, Montreal and Jerusalem. He has been editor of *Fast Folk* since 1986. [For booking call: (914) 885-3268].

Lisa Gutkin

Lisa can be heard frequently in and around New York City playing with country, bluegrass and Irish bands as well as doing quite a bit of session work. She performs regularly with the Rentones, Deborah Snow, the Jumbo String Band, Il Giulare di Piazza, and has toured with *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*. She is now trying her hand at French and doing quite well, no?

Lisa Gutkin



Brian Rose and the Magic Kingdom Ensemble

Michael Smith
Michael has two albums produced by Anne Hills on Flying Fish Records, *Michael Smith* (1987) and *Love Stories* (1988). His songs have been recorded by many artists, including Steve Goodman, Tom Rush, Anne Hills, Claudia Schmidt, Jimmy Buffett and Josh White, Jr. He has appeared on nationally syndicated radio shows such as NPR's "Good Evening" and "The Studs Terkel Show." Michael composed the music for and appears in *The Grapes of Wrath* with the internationally famous Steppenwolf company. *Chicago* magazine called him "one of the best songwriters in the English language." For booking information contact: Rich Dieter, Dieter Associates, Five Allen Avenue, Fair Haven, Vermont 05743 or call (802) 265-8671.

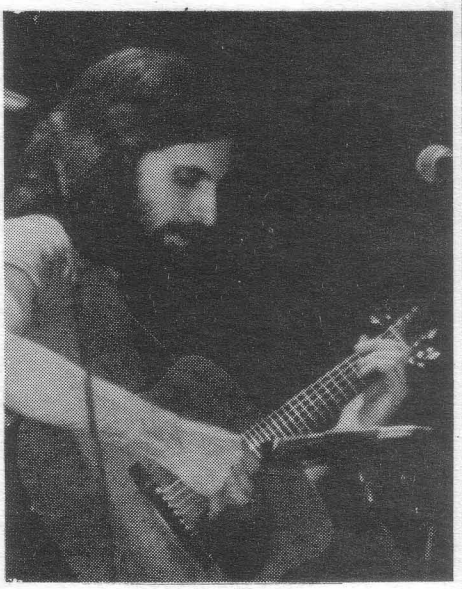
Brian Rose is from Virginia and moved to New York in the late 70's. He recorded first on the Cornelia Street: The Songwriter's Exchange' and appeared also on the first CooP album. Brian has recorded regularly for Fast Folk and his songs 'Old Factory Town' and 'Open All Night' have been featured in the FAST FOLK MUSICAL MAGAZINE REVUE. Brian is a professional photogapher specializing in architecture. He has exhibited in Europe and was represented by a one man show of images of the Iron Curtain at the International Center of Photography.

Jim Allen was born in New York City between Sgt. Pepper and Magical Mystery Tour. He learned about rock 'n' roll from his mother and he learned about songwriting from Frank Tedesso. He is still a thorn in the side of both. He's never read Rimbaud in the original French.

Jack Hardy
Jack has been a central figure in Greenwich Village since arriving in 1978. He is one of the founders of The CooP (now the *Fast Folk Musical Magazine*), the SpeakEasy Musician's Cooperative and the Songwriter's Exchange. Jack has released eight albums on various labels in the U.S. and Europe, the most recent one being *Through*. Jack tours regularly in the U.S. and Europe. He has been called the "leader of the contemporary folk scene" by the New York Times. (For booking: Great Divide Records, 178 West Houston Street, #9, New York, New York 10014).

Jeff Hardy
Jeff is a stand-up bass player in addition to being a professional chef. He has served as bassist for all of the *Fast Folk* shows and has managed to keep his sense of humor.

Mark Dann
Brooklyn-born, Mark has engineered more than 35 issues of *Fast Folk*. In his spare time, he builds, repairs and plays basses and guitars. He has played guitar Bass and Drums for countless performers here and in Europe. Mark toured with Dion and the Belmonts at 19. Although he has never had a beer he is fully computerized.



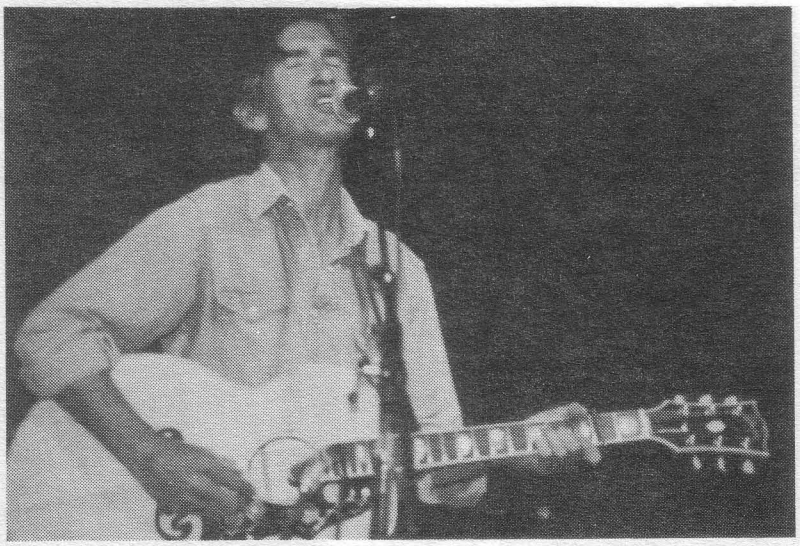
Mark Dann

LORIE McCLOUD: "I was born and raised in Northern Illinois in a family where the only instrument played was the piano. My first exposure to acoustic music came with the TV programs "Folk Fest" and "Hootenanny" in about l962, and at that same time, Peter, Paul and Mary had a hit with "Don't Think Twice" on the radio. I used to go to bed and hide the transistor radio under my pillow, listening until I heard that song before I went to sleep. All through school I played for company dinners, benefits, school talent shows, mall openings, coffeehouses, etc. I consider myself a performer first, and a songwriter second. I have a whole repertoire of songs that come from obscure albums not too likely to be requests at a club. When I moved to Corpus Christi in 1982 , I stumbled onto the Lis'nin' Post, a little acoustic club where people were requested to refrain from smoking and talking or else go outside. I majored in communications in college, not so much to be on the air as to find out how music programmers in radio choose what to play. I'm ambitious to make good strong albums, play on concert stages in Europe, the U.K., and Australia and to promote musicians of worth who are not currently being heard in the States.

Margo Hennebach
(Piano & Keyboards) Classically trained, Margo has performed folk and original music for nearly 15 years in the US, England, and Holland. She has recorded and performed with Paul Winter and Pete Seeger in addition to New York based folk artists such as Rod MacDonald and the band Idle Rumors. She is also a practicing music therapist.

Howie Wyeth
Drummer Howie Wyeth has recorded with (among others) Robert Gordon, Don McLean, Roger McGuinn, Link Wray, and is an alumnus of Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Revue. What most people don't know is that Howie is an exceptional piano player, specializing in the music of Thomas "Fats" Waller, James P. Johnson, and Willy "The Lion" Smith.

Bill Kollar, along with his wife, **Janice**, owns and operates London By Night Productions in Woodbridge New Jersey. He recorded last years double LP, *LIVE FROM THE BOTTOM LINE, AN EVENING IN GREEWICH VILLAGE* and FF302/February l986, as well as *I KNOW* by John Gorka, and albums by Dennis Dougherty, Christine Lavin and Jack Hardy's record *THE HUNTER.*



Townes Van Zandt

THE BAND
MARK DANN/ ELECTRIC AND ACOUSTIC GUITAR
JEFF HARDY/ STAND UP BASS
LISA GUTKIN/ VIOLIN
MARGO HENNEBACH/ KEYBOARDS
HOWIE WYETH/ DRUMS

STAGE MANAGERS FOR FAST FOLK/ KATHERINE HEALD & ANN WEBSTER

STAGE MANAGER FOR THE BOTTOM LINE/ NEIL LIFTON

DIGITALLY RECORDED FOR FAST FOLK BY:
DAVID VAN DER HAGEN/ PRODIGAL SOUND

DIGITAL TRANSFER AND ALBUM ASSEMBLY BY BILL KOLLAR:
LONDON BY NIGHT STUDIO, WOODBRIDGE, NEW JERSEY

MASTERED BY JOE BRESCIO: THE MASTER CUTTING ROOM

SPECIAL THANKS TO ALAN PEPPER AND STANLEY SNODOWSKY
AT THE BOTTOM LINE FOR THEIR CONTINUING SUPPORT OF FAST FOLK AND THE NEW YORK SONGWRITER'S SCENE

FAST FOLK IS FUNDED IN PART WITH PUBLIC FUNDS FROM THE NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS AND ADDITIONALLY BY SUBSCRIPTIONS AND INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

FAST FOLK
MUSICAL MAGAZINE

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(EDDIE LAWRENCE)
EDDIE LAWRENCE/ GUITAR AND VOCAL
JOSH JOFFEN/ VOCAL
RICHARD JULIAN/ VOCAL
THE BAND

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ROUGH EDGES
(RACHEL POLISHER)
RACHEL POLISHER/ GUITAR AND VOCAL
DIANNE CHODKOWSKI/VOCAL
THE BAND

-3-
THREE MONKEYS
(MICHAEL SMITH)
MICHAEL SMITH/ GUITAR AND VOCAL

-4-
PRISONERS OF THEIR HAIRDOS
(CHRISTINE LAVIN)
CHRISTINE LAVIN/ GUITAR AND VOCAL

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A BURNING LEAF
(RICHARD MEYER)
RICHARD MEYER/ GUITAR AND VOCAL
LISA GUTKIN/ VIOLIN AND VOCAL
JOSH JOFFEN/ VOCAL
THE BAND

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JACK HARDY/ GUITAR AND VOCAL
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(JIM ALLEN)
RICHARD JULIAN/ GUITAR AND VOCAL
THE BAND

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THE MAGIC KINGDOM
(with apoligies to Mr. Hensch,
Senior vice president of
Disney corporation)
(BRIAN ROSE)
BRIAN ROSE/ GUITAR AND VOCAL
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RICHARD MEYER, WENDY BECKERMAN, LISA GUTKIN,
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RICHARD JULIAN/ GUITAR AND VOCAL
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AND MARGO HENNEBACK/ VOCALS
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FRANK TEDESSO/ GUITAR AND VOCAL
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MARGO HENNEBACH/ VOCAL
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LILLIE PALMER/ ELECTRIC GUITAR AND VOCAL
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ROW
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DIANE CHODKOWSKI, MICHAEL SMITH,
WENDY BECKERMAN, GERMANA PUCCI,
JULIE GOLD, FRANK TEDESSO,
EDDIE LAWRENCE, BRIAN ROSE,
DAVID MASSENGILL,
TOWNES VAN ZANT/ VOCALS

THE BAND
MARK DANN/ELECTRIC & ACOUSTIC GUITAR
JEFF HARDY/STAND UP BASS
LISA GUTKIN/VIOLIN
MARGO HENNEBACH/KEYBOARDS
HOWIE WYETH/DRUMS