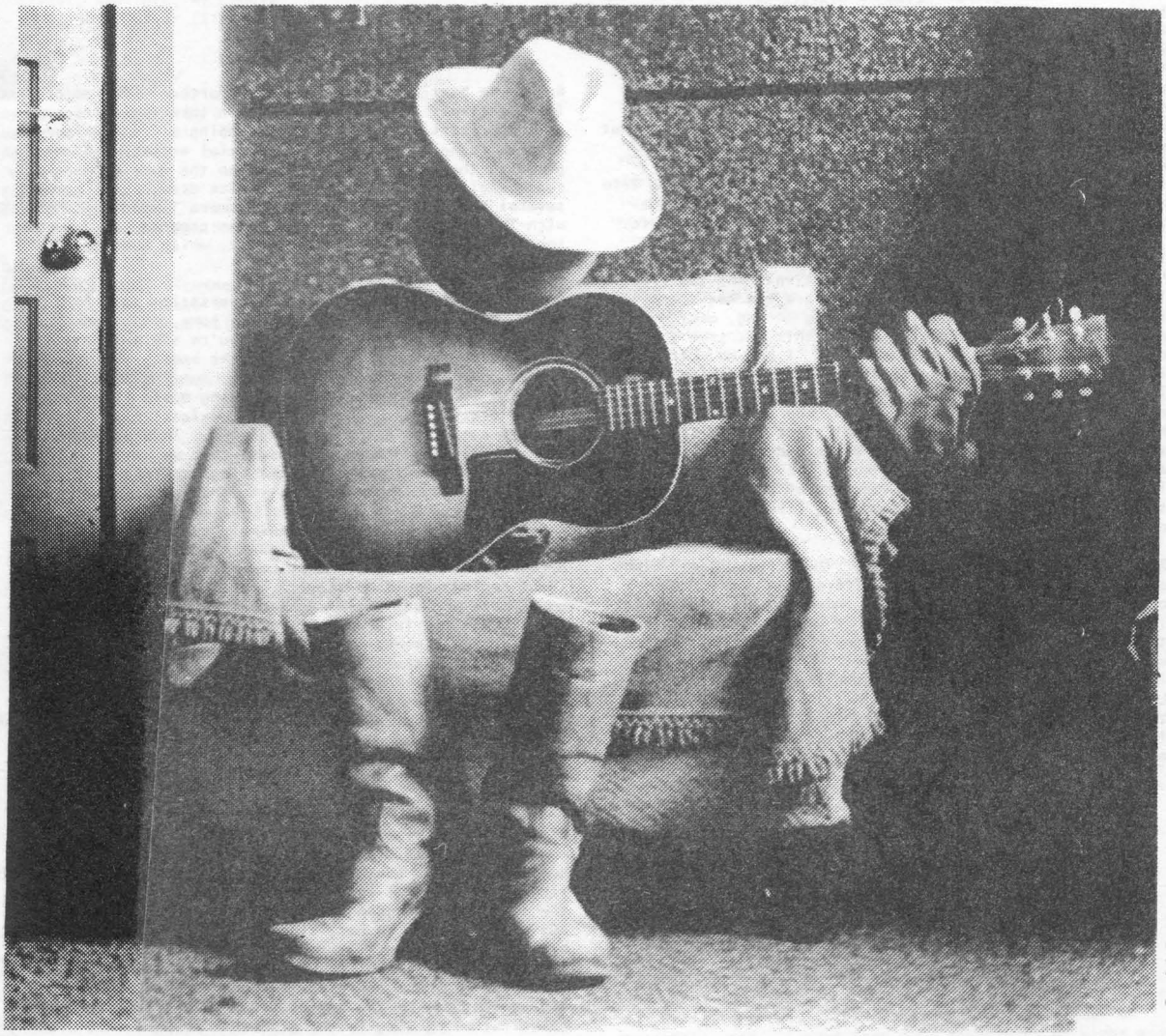
the CooP

The Fast Folk Musical Magazine

June '82

Vol. 1, #5



David Roth

First known photograph of Mr. Trad P.D. Anon, noted author of so many songs. Another coup for "The CooP" by ace staff photographer David Roth.

Traditional Music Revisited

Breaking The Song Barrier

When I was a child, my hobby was coin collecting. One day I committed the major faux-pas of coin collecting: I polished a coin. It certainly looked a lot better to me. When I showed off this newly shined silver dollar to a fellow collector, he explained to me (after the shock wore off) that I had "ruined" the coin by "scraching the surface of authenticity." My first dash of traditional music taught me that traditional music was boring. I say "taught" because at that point, traditional music was tied up with the academic world. Professors would "collect" and "document" "sources" and file them in books. People argued for hours that a folk song wasn't a folk song unless it was a hundred years old, documented by several Harvard professors, and untraceable to any writer, living or dead. And people performed the songs that way. They collected and exhibited songs much the same way that I collected and exhibited coins. About that time, I also remember loving the songs of the Kingston Trio and being shocked to hear other people put them down because they were too "polished." The were not "authentic."

I call them the "folk police;" Stan Rogers calls them the "folk Nazies." They run the folk festivals and the traditional folk clubs of America. They are the keepers of the tradition. The tradition of being boring, overeclectic, and insignificant. But is this the true state of traditional music in this country? I say no. Traditional music has been assimilated, like everything else in this country, into the mainstream. Even established commercial artists like James Taylor and Linda Ronstadt have done recordings of traditional songs. Traditional styles have lasted thousands of years because they work -- a song will survive only if it works. Even when a professor digs up a song it becomes part of the current tradition only if it works (something like the rediscovery of "The Twelve Days of Christmas").

Barriers have been breaking down. The "traditional" clubs are now beginning to book songwriters, and interpreters of current songwriters, at least those who pay hommage in style to the traditional world. It was a battle within the Pinewoods Folk Club, but to their credit, Stan Rogers was finally booked to do a concert. The Sounding Board in Hartford, Connecticut, now books interpreters such as Lui Collins and Robin and Linda Williams. Why? Because they are good. They are entertaining. They are attracting a larger audience for these clubs. And they are making tradition come alive.

But these barriers must break down further. The major folk festivals are still dabbling in tokenism as regards to songwriters. They are still lumping all songwriters into the single category of commercial artist, and compounding the hypocracy by leaning on the more commercially successful songwriters for box office draw. Last summer, several New York based songwriters were lumped together with The Song Project into one token program, at one token festival, for one token check, which subsequently bounced.

A few weeks ago, I overheard a conversation at a folk club. An older singer was offering some constructive criticism to a younger singer: "You're style is too abrasive. Work more to bring out the beauty of the song." The younger singer was arguing back, quoting some statement Bob Dylan had made about "ruining music if you make it too pretty." He went on to say, defensively, that he didn't want to be a commercial singer. This argument seemed very dated to me. It seems that we have finally found a happy medium between the Kingston Trio and Pete Seeger, and between Peter, Paul and Mary and Bob Dylan.

Songwriters are turning increasingly to traditional styles for their inspiration. The list is long of songs already documented in "The CooP" that have traditional overtones (Paul Kaplan, David Massengill, Pete Gardner), as well as performers who add their own mark to a traditional song (Paul Siebel, Erik Frandsen, Peter Tork), and songs set to traditional melodies ("Charlie" Chin, Paul Kaplan, Austin John Marshall). These performers are all in the mainstream of folk music. The traditional song has soared to new heights. Clannad takes the Irish (Gaelic) song into the realm of four-part harmony, jazz overtones, international tours, multi-talented sound men with custom sound boards, and pin-drop concerts. The Roches add an artistic flare to the harmonizing of traditional song, and yet shun the more commercial production.

One day I find myself in the kitchen of a 75 year-old-woman on the west coast of Ireland. She is showing me how to bake soda bread out of coarse wheat-meal. She starts singing. The air I recognize from Clannad. She learned the song from her grandfather. The voice is stark, without affectation. To her, singing is a part of baking bread. In Scotland I hear another woman singing in the kitchen. This time it is "You Fill up my Senses" by John Denver. Mass media has changed everything, but the end product may be the same. I found that song far more beautiful being sung in the kitchen than performed with violins on the radio.

So what does all this mean? It means that the concept of traditional music is changing. The old barriers are breaking down. We are finding a happy medium between rough and polished, between commercial and authentic, and between folk and art.

-- Jack Hardy

the CooP
The Fast Folk Musical Magazine

Published monthly by the musicians' cooperative at Speak Easy, 107 MacDougal Street, New York, NY 10012
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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

Most songs may be "political," but there are political songs and there are political songs. Recently, The CooP spoke highly of songs that have political connotations, but do not directly address current issues. While these metaphorical or historical or indirect songs are sometimes beautiful and moving, I see a real need as well for overtly political songs about contemporary problems. This need for topical songs is plainly dictated by both social and artistic values.

I can illustrate the social aspect from personal experience. I recently performed at a picnic for "homesteaders." These are people who live in buildings in New York City that their landlords abandoned. The City led them to believe that if they would rehabilitate their apartments and live in them, they would become the owners -- "sweat equity." The tenants went to work but as real estate speculation developed in their neighborhood, the City decided instead to sell the buildings to the highest bidders for a tidy sum. The homesteaders were alternately depressed and up-in-arms.

At the picnic, a couple of very fine indirectly political songs were politely received. However, songs about the effects of the budget cuts and about financial speculation in housing were interrupted with shouts of approval and loudly applauded. Afterwards, I spent time talking to dozens of people who told me how important these topical songs were to them -- someone understood, someone cared, someone gave their feelings new life in music.

None of these people appeared to be political activists of any party or organization. This was a motley, cross-cultural gathering of people driven together by public policies that ignored their very existence -- an all too common phenomenon these days. They were not an audience of the docrinaire or committed, but people who needed and wanted clear, honest songs that would speak directly to their concerns.

This experience has been substantially repeated many times. Rarely is it the "fixed agenda" political group that wants to hear a topical songwriter. When such groups want music at functions, they usually look in-house for people who can get the line just right or else reach out for crowd-drawing "big names." The major demand for topical material comes from the general public, typically through a chuch, labor union, interest group (artists, environmentalists, tenants...), etc. The immediate reward for the songwriter is that these audiences are far more plentiful and generally more attentive and responsive than a typical night club audience.

This sounds very nice, you may say, but is this kind of music artistic? No doubt you have heard some absolutely horrendous, hackneyed, atonal, pedantic, unimaginative topical songs. I have. I have also heard more sticky, dim-witted, banal, sexist, moon-june love songs than I could ever remember.

The worth of a work of art depends far more on the inspiration and craft that goes into it than the subject matter of materials used. I have seen good sculptures of kings and bad sculptures of wandering minstrels and vice versa.

Sometimes topical songs will specifically relate to a short-lived issue (eg., a mining strike) although many cover problems that are of long-standing interest (eg., racial discrimination). I believe that a truly artistic representation of an issue or personality in a song will still be appreciated

long after the subject has passed into history. Plenty of songs composed in the heat of a particular struggle, which describe villains and places long forgotten, remain popular and beloved (eg., "Which Side Are You On?"). An artistically created work will inevitably contain elements of universal appeal regardless of its attention to the details of the moment. Often this very specificity is a source of its strength.

I also have difficulty with the proposition that a song is only worthwhile if it endures. To me, a song that says important things and touches people, no matter how briefly, justifies its existence. A song that influences the course of a war does the work of an army. It would be nice, but is unnecessary, that the song be suitable to influence the next war. Songs should be thought of more as spirits or expressions of feelings than as heirlooms or monuments. A special, deeply felt moment of emotion that never returns can sustain someone for a lifetime.

So while I will continue to write indirectly political songs and lots of love songs, for the reasons given, I hope to compose my share of topical songs. If you have convictions on current issues and feel you can express them effectively, I urge you to join me in the effort.

-- Ray Korona

Dear COOP folks,

Thank you for sending the April issue of the Musical Magazine. A useful, appealing, and sensible format. I think it's terrific. Finding Cynthia Gooding on the record was a very special surprise for me. As a young folksinger I aspired to her accomplishment with the songs of other countries and treasured her records. They were in the last batch to go when I had to give up the uncarriables. May she record again soon. She sounds better than ever.

I enjoyed Gary Boehm's article on us Weavers very much. It seemed like the result of a lot of good research, ranging so widely through the past several decades, touching on so many things, politics, popular music, history, as well as telling about the Almanacs, who were certainly our spiritual forebearers.

What a shame that such a good article was marred by that entirely uncalled for and unexplained slam at Holly Near's song "Something About the Women." Gary apparently liked the scene in our film where Holly and I sing her beautiful "Hay Una Mujer Desaparecida" together. He says it reminds him of women united in their concern for each other. But he goes on to say that "Something About the Women" is "jingoistic," in other words chauvinistic and warlike, presumably. This remark shares a place in my opinion with that of a deep thinking "Today Show" stagehand: "I think it's unnatural for a woman to sing about another woman that way." (Quoted by Toshi Seeger)

What is this, you guys? It's OK to cry sad tears about women martyred and lost, but not OK to celebrate the inspiration of women winning their battles, even battles with physical impairment and personal adversity? As I read it, that's what "Something About The Woman" is all about. What are you hearing, and why?

Maybe it's not the song that riles up the men, but my lousy performance of it. One man complained that the complex musical structure of the song is not quite fitting for my voice. Well, I can dig it. Tell you what, the definitive performance of both these wonderful songs is available, Holly's own, on her record IMAGINE MY SURPRISE. Redwood Records, Box 996, Ukiah, California 95482. Listen and learn.

Best wishes for your success,

Ronnie Gilbert

Ronnie Gilbert sings at a rally to save The Lower East Side from real estate speculators and gentrification, May 22.

Brian Rose

Process is Out of Style

Several times in previous issues of The CooP, folk music has been called a process. Peter Spencer, (musician and scholar of folk) says that "the process of collecting and synthesizing is what makes folk music." He and others believe that the young folksinger should study the masters, learn their music inside out, and then begin to form a "single concept" of writing or playing that is original to them.

Back during the hootenany craze of the late '50's, a record featuring such musicians as Lightnin' Hopkins, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee and Rod McKuen (!) included in the liner notes this somewhat different view of the matter:

> You might expect that the unknowns come to learn from the well knowns, but quite usually the well-established folk acts have run out of interesting new songs and ideas for singing them, and so they prey on the fresh and willing "young bloods" for a new supply. This dubious interchange is most usually referred to as "the folk process" by the onlookers and hangers-on.

The problem with a term like "process" is that it does not describe anything peculiar to folk music. There is process art, process painting, dance as process, and some people say that modern art is not a style, but a process. Artists are fond of the word "process" because it substitutes handily for "product" or "object." Likewise, in folk music, it might seem limiting to work within the confines of a style. Process implies progress, even if it involves studying the masters for years and years. Ultimately, "process" fails to differentiate folk music from jazz or rock or classical music. Saying "folk" to modify "process" brings one around to the original question: What is folk? The usual response for those of us who grew up in the '50's and '60's is to duck and cover.

The point here, however, is not to debunk the idea of process in folk music. Most people use the term folk music to describe music that can be distinguished from other kinds by very practical observations. They are talking about a form of music that has a long and rich history -- a form that has assimilated many influences and gradually changed -- but still a form that represents a tradition. This tradition or perennial style can be described both in form and content.

It is music that is homemade, or aspires to a homemade character. It is usually played on acoustic instruments or if not, it corresponds closely to the style of playing done on acoustic instruments. The singing is unadorned and "natural." The lyrics, likewise, are colloquial in style, and if more sophisticated, still strive for a colloquical effect. The song structure tends to be tightly strophic, verse-chorus, verse-chorus. Musical and lyric progression is achieved more through repetition than through far-ranging development. Songs tend to follow traditional concepts: ballads, laments, humor of the folksy wit and wisdom variety, and social comment, usually from a common-sense point of view. Overall, folk music expresses the roots of culture by embracing traditional values and traditional forms.

Clearly, this superficial definition is not totally adequate, and some people may even attack it with strong arguments and protests. Where do you fit rock, jazz, ragtime, gospel, reggae, tin pan alley, punk rock, pop rock, etc? And what about those musicians who seem always to be unclassifiable, who are challenging and stretching the definitions?

Going back to Peter Spencer's contention that folk music is a process: he is right in saying that folk is a synthesis of many different forms. What is also important, however, is the continuity, the traditional form that can be felt and identified as folk. Rock or jazz, for instance, may come out of the people, "the folk," but they have developed their own particular histories and styles. In very practical ways, they sound and feel different. Those people who want to argue around the grey areas in between are missing the point.

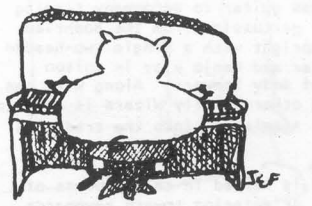
Folk music today, moreover, has become difficult to pinpoint because there is a wide split between those who play and listen to older music and those who are writing and listening to new music. This split has actually widened in recent years, and is similar to the situation in classical music. There may be more classical composers than ever before but the repertoires of most major orchestras concentrate on 18th and 19th century music. The result is relative obscurity for all but a few composers who have turned the key to commercial success by perseverance, luck, or compromise.

Process and continuity break down to a great extent when the past and the present are alienated from each other. The public is polarized between the two, and the young artist often finds the situation confusing and demoralizing. Traditional folk songs (anonymous or time-tested) and contemporary folk songs are rarely presented together, in context. Therefore, again, the process breaks down. Over the years, "trad folkies" have militantly defended so-called traditional music from the corruption of popular culture and the menace of the singer-songwriter. Conversely, many people view traditional folk as irrelevant, un-hip and boring.

This situation is unhealthy in every possible respect. The artistic vitality as well as the commercial viability of the music is depressed by this divisiveness because the "process of collecting and synthesizing" is diminished. The contemporary folk artist is afraid to take up the banner of folk music because of the confusion surrounding the position of the music in the marketplace and in the mind of the public.

For folk music to achieve greater vitality, it must be embraced more resolutely by those who perform it and those who claim to support it. The grand tradition of folk music, a rich and timeless art form, continually transfused by the synthesis of old and new ideas, deserves commitment and definition. Those who seek to blur the meaning and focus of folk music are simply afraid to confront the issues head-on.

- Brian Rose



Hogging the piano

New Traditional Music and the Regional Imperative

by Peter Spencer

During the past few months, New York City has seen performances by several folk music groups in a new and interesting category. Groups and soloists from both sides of the Atlantic are bringing new techniques and instruments into the rich heritage of Anglo/Irish/Gaelic/Scottish traditional music. Recent shows by Clannad, Silly Wizard, DeDannan, The Battlefield Band, John Renbourne, and Alan Stivell have shown this process working in various regional contexts -- from Brittany, England, Ireland, and Scotland.

The process starts with a thorough knowledge of the traditional music and song of a given region, played on the traditional instruments: pipes, whistles, concertina, human voice, Celtic harps, fiddles, and traditional percussion. Then, a fascinating cross-pollenization takes place wherein instruments and ideas from other, totally different traditions are brought to bear on ancient, rooted styles of music. Arrangements are beefed up, textures deepened, harmonies stretched, rhythms developed. Instruments are made to sound like other instruments. Alan Stivell will use bagpipes like a blues harmonica in his arrangements. The Battlefield Band uses synthesizers to play parts originally played on the concertina. The effect can be startling, refreshing, even uplifiting as it points us toward a new world music.

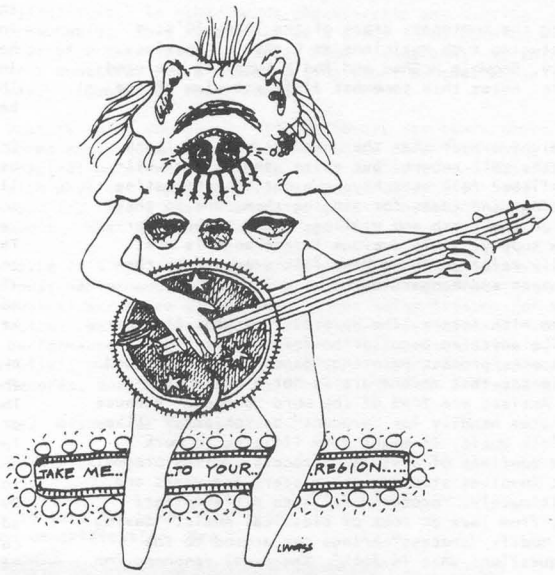
Much of this ferment started with the world-wide popularity of two instruments once viewed as strictly American: the flat topped steel-string guitar and the five-string banjo. During the pop-folk boom of the '50's and '60's, Irish artists like the Clancy Brothers and Scots like Ewan MacColl were playing traditional music on banjos and guitars just like American counterparts such as Rambling Jack Elliot and Pete Seeger. Indeed, MacColl married Peggy Seeger, Pete's sister.

Clannad uses guitars and double-bass to accompany songs and instrumentals usually performed unaccompanied. To the plaintive melodies of Irish/Gaelic song, the guitar brings greater depth and fuller texture. To the skirling music of whistles and flutes, it adds a driving rhythm that can be used in many complex ways to underline the deep feeling in the oldest traditional forms.

John Renbourne's use of guitar is particularly interesting in that he picks rather than strums, playing melodies on the bass strings and countermelodies on the high strings. He combines this with Indian tabla drums for wonderful, constantly moving polyrhythms behind traditional songs and flute music.

Silly Wizard also uses guitar to accompany singing but with traditional percussion from the Bodhrian, a flat drum played upright with a single two-headed stick. Often a guitar and banjo play in unison behind the singing of Andy Stewart. Along with the Battlefield Band and others, Silly Wizard is able to write songs that fit seamlessly into the tradition they are working.

The Battlefield Band is helped in this process of songwriting by their orientation toward keyboards. Their use of piano, organ, and synthesizer broadens



their harmonic range and enables them to change textures from eerie-sounding drones to concertina-like, unisonous lines to the stately fullness of old hymns. Guitar is used for driving rhythm accompaniment to traditional dance pieces played on pipes, fiddle, or tin-whistle; or in combination with keyboards to create an aural wash behind ballads.

Another artist using modern arrangements behind traditional instruments in Alan Stivell. His instrument is the Celtic harp and his tradition is the Gaelic tradition of Brittany. Stivell uses electric guitars and full drum sets behind the delicate sound of the harp and out of this seeming contradiction comes a dynamic, progressive music that recalls English pop-traditional groups of the 1970s like Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span.

Actually, all of these artists seem to share common tenets with the folk-rock pioneers of a decade or so ago, especially the prototype American eclectics, Buffalo Springfield. Their formula was traditional American guitar, often finger-picked, but mostly on electric instruments and combined with a pounding rhythm section deriving mostly from the Memphis/Muscle Shoals style of early '60's rhythm and blues. It's a formula still selling records today, from Fleetwood Mac to the Rolling Stones to Dolly Parton.

Ballads--Storytelling in Song

By Angela Page

A ballad is folksong that tells a story. The singing and writing of the ballad is not a lost art. On the contrary, it is a flourishing medium through which modern singers convey a multitude of dreams, desires, histories and messages.

Stories and songs become ageless, living beyond their creators. Today's stories will be sung in the future just as we sing "Barbara Allan" now, with no idea of authorship.

During the Middle Ages few could read. Minstrels served as the radios and newspapers of their day. They were historians, educators, and entertainers. They carried stories of battle, romance, weddings, magic, mystery, outlaws, and heroes. They were necessary to their culture, free to wander in peace and war. (In 878, it is said, King Alfred entered a heavily-guarded Danish camp posing as a minstrel, and gained information for a successful attack while singing to the opposing king.)

The word ballad comes from "ballare", to dance. What we consider ballads began as three separate arts combined: dancing, poetry, and music. The Oxford English Dictionary gives a definition from 1712 as "narration of a popular story set to music." Today a ballad is a "composition of two or more verses sung to the same melody...with the music strictly subordinate to the air."

Most ballads date back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though manuscripts and tales of Robin Hood have been found from as far back as the thirteenth century.

All nations had their form of minstrels. In France these singers were called "jongleurs." The tales they sang were written by "troubadors" (from the French "trouver," to find meaning). These were usually noblemen, even royalty. In the north of France, tales of Charlemagne's reign over Normandy and Brittany were carried by "trouvers." Storytelling songs were "chanson de toile."

Nobility who sang from the banks of the Rhine in Germany were "Minnesingers," known for their love songs. "Mastersingers" were the common folk from Germany spreading songs.

With no method of recording stories, rhyming aided in remembering. No matter how strong memorization skills were, there were inevitable variations. Storytellers in Ireland (Shenachie), in an effort to maintain consistency in a tale, would gather and recite tales to each other. Together they would vote on the most accurate verson to pass on. Minstrels would carry harps, viols, shawns, to accompany themselves. Popular airs were put to the tales so that they could be sung by everyone and remembered.

In 1000 BC, Britain was inhabited by the Druids. Their minstrels were called bards. There were three classes of bard: First was the priestly bards, who concerned themselves with recording history and religion. The second class were the heraldic bards who spread patriotism, and the thrid were domestic bards that entertained. These singers had to pass exams on their knowledge and abilities.

These bards were given the honor of wearing six different colors. The king wore seven, lords and ladies wore five, governors wore four, officers three, soldiers two, and common people only one. (This began the tradition of the plaid.)

It was common for people to place great honor upon these minstrels. The Count of Thuringia, Landgart, is said to have offered his daughter Elizabeth to the winner of a song contest in 1206. This high degree of respect for the bearer of song has yet to be matched in history.

Ballads such as "Barbara Allan," "Lord Randal," and the "Gypsy Rover" were brought to America with the settlers. Soon America established her own stories and folk heroes. These new tales were often set to common melodies. Our national anthem is set to the tune of an English drinking song. "America" has the same melody as "God Save Great George" ("God Save the Queen") and "Heil Dir im Siegerdranz." There were love songs, cowboy songs, and drinking songs like "Kentucky Moonshine." Robin Hood became Jesse James. America's battles brought us tunes like "Johnny's Gone for a Soldier." (from an Irish air, "Shule Aroon", 1691)

After the Civil War, a new world of song opened up. There was a history to be told. Impressed with the surfacing song of the Negro, whites in blackface began the travelling minstrel shows. The first of these were started by a man named Dan Emmett, who was responsible for popularizing a lot of the tunes we know today, such as "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair," "Old Folks at Home" and "Oh Susanna." The age-old themes of battle, love, heroes and fantasy remained.

The point here is not to trace the beginnings of stories in song, or obtain a specific definition. The point is that narration set to music has always been around, though the status of the singer has diminished.

Frank Ockenfels

"The Drinking Song" by Jack Hardy performed at Speak Easy, left to right, Suzanne Vega, Jeff Hardy, Ruth Ann Brauser, Jack Hardy, Ansel Matthews, Brian Rose, Peter Spencer, John Hodel, Rosemary Kirstein, and Frank Christiar

Today there are writers and singers who make their livelihood spreading songs. They are no longer just one notch below the king in the eyes of society, yet they continue to write and contribute to the ever-present traditions of recording history ("Incident at Ebenezer Creek"), interpreting dreams ("The Water Lily"), recounting battles and relationships, and praising heroes.

Ages before we have evidence of the first ballads, Homer recounted his Iliad and Odyssey while strumming a lute. The Greek epic is still read and reread today.

Odysseus, returning from Troy, was shipwrecked on an island, losing all his men. Calypso found him and cured his wounds with her magic drugs and herbs. She fell in love with him and tried to persuade him to stay with her, promising him eternal youth if he did. Homesick for his family, he refused the offer. Nevertheless, Calypso kept him for seven years until she was ordered by Zeus to let him go.

In Suzanne Vega's version of this ancient story, the music sets a swaying and swelling of the sea as we hear Calypso herself tell of finding and losing the man she loved.

There are many tales concerning prisoners of love. Odysseus was prisoner to Calypso's love. Ballads tell of women remaining true to men who are at sea or fighting, or even known to be dead. In these ballads, it was common for the men to disguise themselves upon their return, to test their sweethearts' fidelity.

In David Massengill's "On the Road to Fairfax County," love betrays life. Prisoners of their love, the two characters are trapped much the same as those in Alfred Noyse's "Highwayman." With timing as tragic as that of "Romeo and Juliet," the sheriff follows and hangs the outlaw. The words and music together create the feeling of an old English ballad, yet the author lives in New York City and is not yet thirty.

Taking the idea of outlaws and romance to America, is the "Ballad of Weaverville, In which the listener hears the tale as if he were riding horseback alongside the storyteller. Many a man, discouraged from finding no gold, turned to gambling and cheating.

In 1849, digging gold was overpublicized and rarely rewarding. Many returned home penniless and shamed. "Wheelbarrow Johnny" by Jack Hardy, is a true story of an American hero, an enterprising individual who left home in search of his fortune. Though his original intention is to pan for gold, he finally makes his fortune by falling back on his family's trade of building wheelbarrows. This blacksmith becomes famous. His business developing to eventually include wagons, automobiles, and trains, and he becomes an important citizen contributing to the growth of America.

Another way to gain heroic recognition was through battle. Not all accounts were favorable toward battle or individuals as in "Captain Carr." "The Band Played Waltzing Matilda," by Eric Bogle, concerns lads heading into battle, cheered on by flag-waving crowds. As the story continues, our view of glory lessens. By the final verse, the wounded return to a much-changed crowd. The refrain of "waltzing matilda" is carried throughout the song until we learn that the singer has lost his legs while fighting and will not be able to

walk, let alone dance. The melody slides into Australia's popular tune, carrying strong overtones of patriotism.

"The Queen and the Soldier" takes battle into a fairy-tale setting. Suzanne Vega tells of a soldier who confronts the queen for whom he has been fighting. Realizing the true values of life, he puts his own on the line in refusing to go to battle. Confronted with the truth of what she is doing, and feeling the rising of her own feelings, she orders that he be killed. Everything is safely back in order. The battle continues.

Taking battle directly from history, Jack Hardy tells of an "Incident at Ebeenezer Creeck." After the Civil War, songs of freed slaves and battle march tunes were numerous. "Marching through Georgia," written in 1865, says, "...how the darkies shouted when they heard the joyful sound... while we were marching through Georgia..." Hardy's story is a sharp contrast. General Jefferson Davis considered the black refugees seeking freedom in the North to be a detriment to his army. Under the pretense of there being heavy fighting ahead, the blacks were made to stay at the rear of the army. Soldiers were ordered to take up the

pontoon bridges (portable crossings) before the blacks could cross Ebenezer Creek. They were abandoned to the mercy of the Rebel soldiers. Many women jumped into the water, trying to reach the opposite side. Many drowned, many were shot, and the rest were sent back to slavery. The song sets a rhythmn of a marching army.

In traditional tales, it is common for animals to aid or warn man. In Archie Fischer's, "Witch of the Westmorland," ravens tell a wounded knight how he can be healed. He must seek the witch of the Westmorland, half mare, half woman. The animals play an important part in the story. Phrases such as "kissed him once and twice and three times round again" are typical ballad phrases. The choice of pronunciation and words again suggest an old English ballad, yet the song was written by a Canadian songwriter in 1974.

The image of the lake is used again in "The Water Lily." In Indian legend there is little distinction between this world and the next. This story is more of a revelation. The lulling melody takes listeners into a dream. A lonely wife dreams of her dead baby.

The dead often return to pay back debts, or sometimes as mothers to suckle their young. Another common theme is the returning of someone to guard their land.

In Robin Williams' "Kansas Legend" Bill Hornstein becomes a well-respected, hard-working dirt farmer, keeping a promise to his pa take care of the land. In a battle for money, Bill kills the sheriff and is soon dead himself. His ghost, of course, can still be seen keeping watch over that land.

Last is the fable, a story with a moral. Taken from a tale told in Devizes, England, the author, Jack Hardy, has created a true drinking song (see discography). Space is actually provided in each verse for the partaking of drink by the listeners and performers.

When hanging was popular in England, there was a pub owner who offered last pints of ale. This story involves a lad who refuses this drink and brings on his death all the sooner. Just as the lad dies, a pardon arrives from the king. We are left to believe that if he had only taken the time to have the drink, he would be alive.

Mankind has written and rewritten these stories throughout history. Storytelling in song is a living tradition. It is not a museum piece or relic of middle-age culture. It is a reality of life. This tradition of storytelling is consistent and unaffected by fads. All the previously mentioned songs are currently in circulation and are being submitted to constant oral transmission. Storytelling is alive and well and living in the folksong.

Discography

1. "Calypso" by Suzanne Vega
   from March issue of "The CooP", sung by Lucy Kaplanski
2. "On the Road to Fairfax County" by David Massengill
   February issue of "The CooP"
3. "Ballad of Weaverville" by Mary McCaslin & Jim Ringer
   from Prairie in the Sky, Philo PH 1024,
4. "Wheelbarrow Johnny" by Jack Hardy
   Landmark, Great Divide Records, GDSR 1762
5. "The Band Played Waltzing Mathilda" by Eric Bogle
   Sung by Tommy Makem on Tommy Makem & Liam Clancy,
   Blackbird Records, EPC 82081
6. "Queen and the Soldier" by Suzanne Vega, unrecorded
7. "Ebenezer Creek" by Jack Hardy
   Landmark, Great Divide Records, GDSR 1763
   Also the May issue of "The CooP"
8. "Witch of the Westmorland" by Archie Fisher
   Sung by Stan Roger, Between the Breaks,
   Fogarty Cove Music, FCM 002
9. "Water Lily", words by Henry Lawson, music by Priscilla Herdman, Waterlily, Philo PH 1014
10. "Kansas Legend" by Robin Williams,
    Robin & Linda Williams, Flashlight FLT 3003
11. "The Drinking Song" by Jack Hardy
    Landmark, Great Divide Records GDSR 1762

Musical Architecture: The Roches

by Rod MacDonald

The Roches' Town Hall recital at Christmas of 1980 was for a long time my favorite concert: great music, rapt audience, even the good tidings of the season pitched in to make it a special event. A few months later came "Nurds," an album that moved distinctly away from the airier musings that had, to me, always been inherent in Maggie Roche's songs; this time the emphasis was more on upbeat, satirical observations, nosing around the laundromat and high school corridors where everyone is a jerk at least once in awhile.

Reading into the change, which, like the way one reads into anything, is subject to being completely off base, it seemed as if the Roches were trying to resolve a conflict songwriters usually have between deeply felt, personal attitude types of songs, and tunes that speak for a lot of people. Suzzy and Terre, mining the paranoias and ironies of commonplace situations -- working in a restaurant, getting dressed to go out at night, for example -- started compiling their own material, poking fun at the routines of life, and especially at themselves. "Jill Of All Trades," where "All of you will buy a ticket just to see my face again," gave way to "Once you get on you might never get off the commuter train." It seemed the two attitudes were like magnetic poles, one involving the listener in the singer's personal life and thinking, the other in an almost burlesque depiction of the social comedy.

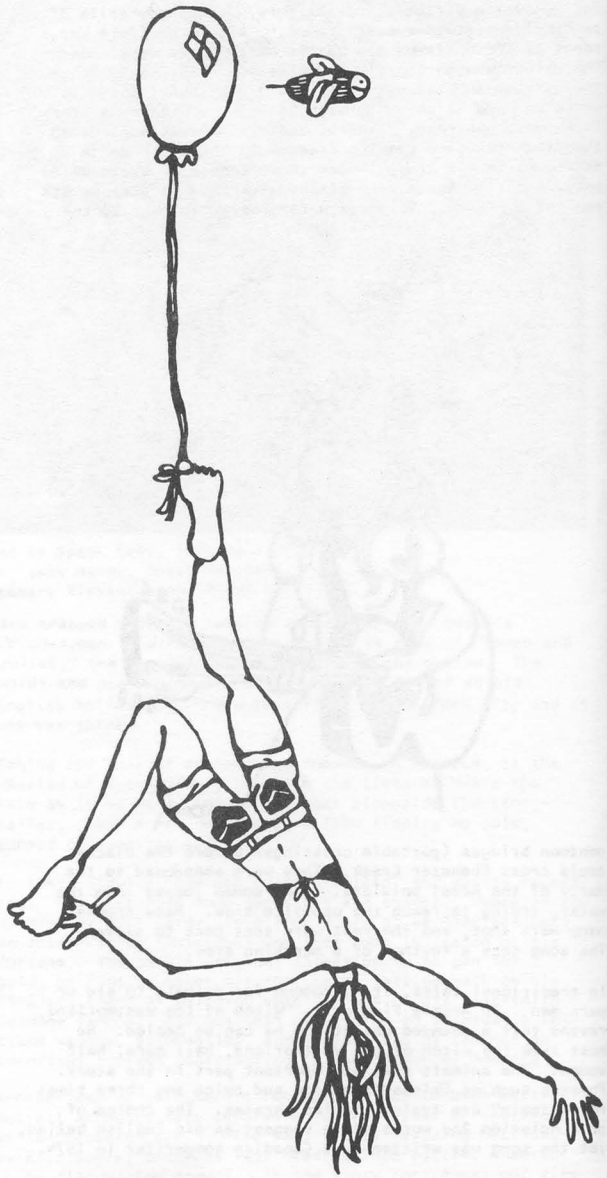
Then the group took a few months off while Suzzy had a baby girl. They resumed performing this spring, turning up at Buffalo's Tralfamadore Cafe a few days before their Bottom Line gig in mid-May. Great, I thought; a road show, in front of an audience that may not know their personal stories or even have heard much of their music before.

The Tralfamadore Cafe looks like a local franchise of the Bottom Line: new, shiny, painted wood sides, spacious and flattened out. No old cathedral ceilings, no walls of photos and posters of everyone who ever played the place. I began noticing details. The crowd, all advance-ticket sales (about a hundred people who didn't buy in advance wait outside for standing room) looks pretty well scrubbed yet downbeat, women in spring dresses and sneakers, men in sport jackets and T-shirts. Do the Roches appeal to feminists, I wonder? (Later in the show they sing "We're leaving behind our boyfriends soon" and the four women at the next table applaud like Republicans at a rally to support the death penalty). There are lots of couples, and many of them clap at the opening lines. Well all right.

First detail: electric pickups on the acoustic guitars. All three singers lean right into the mikes, abandoning their old style of mixing themselves two feet away from the microphones. At first Terre's guitar has the loud, vroom sound acoustic pickups put out, and practically drowns out the words to "Elizabeth," a song new to me. "Turn down the monitors," says Terre after the tune, and during the concert she and Suzzy say it again several times. Nonetheless, the words clear up for "One Season," one of my favorites:

One season I was born
Fell down like an acorn
I am the only tree
And everybody leaves

I've got to get away from you



The audience laughs at the tag line, and through this ballad, harmonies soaring to some amazing high notes, I'm on the edge of my seat. Each verse is sculpted with a different vocal arrangement, turning a simple verse-hook poem into a symphony built on the tension between two lovers:

Prize fighter with bruised pride
A fuse blew when you tried
To fix the worn out wires
And set the house on fire

I've got to get away from you
If only for a day or two

Then the human comedy begins: "Commuter Train," "Nurds," "My Sick Mind." The singer stands in front of the mirror getting dressed, changes, changes again. ("Now I feel I've put on airs.") "The Death of Suzzy Roche" ("Some people really have a lot of nerve"), a far-fetched account of being murdered by a laundry attendant in retribution for her (imagined?) arrogance, follows.

Then two new songs, "Want Not Want Not Want Not":

You can have my guitar, I don't care
You can have my boyfriend, I don't care
You can have my attitude, I don't care

Want Not Want Not Want Not
(uh uh uh)

The most aggressive tempo of the night, with both Maggie and Terre strumming spare, fat chords in union; and "The Second Family," in which a soon-to-be-mother has a time talking to her lover about his first wife and kids. It's a tough, sometimes biting song, and I wonder if the layoff from touring hasn't put an edge on the more sardonic side of their material. Sure enough, during the later "Halleluyah Chorus" ("the surprise of the evening," writes Buffalo's newspaper music critic the next day) Terre and Suzzy start camping up the lines "And He shall reign omnipotent" and people start laughing at the mention of "He" in several lordly guises, then the crowd jumps to its feet for the first of several standing ovations.

In the middle of the show they shift gears and slide into a very funny reading of Loudon Wainwright III's "Golfing Blues," and "On the Road to Fairfax County," by David Massengill. Terre hits a switch for the latter and turns her guitar sound into a synthesizer that has it popping the individual lead notes like a steel drum in Central Park. It makes me realize again how they can do the unexpected, using electronics on a very traditional-sounding tune, or trading off vocals so the most intense lines often get sung by someone other than the writer of the song. One minute the writer is singing her own lines, the next the poem is being interpreted by another sister, until together they create a vocal structure that rises up and fills the air like a well-made skyscraper.

Maggie leads the trio through "The Married Men," then begins the strum to "Hammond Song," where the singers hear all the dire predictions -- "You'll never come back, (you're) throwing yourself away" -- from family and friends and lovers "if you go down to Hammond." The last line rings out:

If you go down to Hammond
You'll never come back

as the crowd erupts into long, sustained applause. After the show I ask Maggie about this (one), something like, you know, I always felt part of what makes "Hammond Song" so powerful is that you did it, you turned your back on all those statements that you wrote into that song, then here you are, throwing the words right back at them: "You'll never come back," but you did, and here you are, standing there proud and singing that line. "You know, she answers, I never thought of it that way, but now that you mention it, it is an interesting idea."

Maggie heads for the piano, and Terre sings a beautiful solo rendition of "West Virginia," from their first album when they were still a duo. And thogh I've heard it several times before, it suddenly occurs to me that this is one sister talking to another of her first sexual experience:

Nineteen
Charleston
He said he was a genius
B plus average

The boys keep score
On the back of the bathroom door
I don't think he'd ever
Been there before

Am I imagining things? Or just slow to catch on? Beats me, I forgot to ask that one.

The set moves on with "Ireland Song," the last lines moving in a round that winds beautifully down to a close. Suzzy sings Terre's "Oh Mr. Sellack, can I have my job back," a tune that effectively bridges the gap between the real world details and the emotional space the Roches move toward:

Waitin' tables ain't that bad
Since I saw you last
I've waited for some things
That you would not believe
To come true

and for encores come "Pretty and High and Dry," a scarily-on-the-edge version in which Terre steps out front with a real sarcasm in her voice; then "Runs in the Family," and a ditty their father taught them in which all the Egyptian pyramid builders turn out to be Irish. The crowd stands up for the encores each time, and the room is electric with energy, for it's been a great show again.

It seems to me that what makes the Roches special is the tension between incongruous elements woven into their music. Three sisters, each a distinctly talented person, take a unified stance; sharing their emotional highs and lows as if they were one person, they transform them into a beautiful musical poetry (then, for counterpoint, chanting an answer back at the lead singer, as when "I'll do the creams" leads to "she'll do the creams"). It's like musical architecture: the blocks of imagery and emotion keep piling up, always constructed a bit differently, a bit more imaginatively, than one expects, until each piece stands on its own, vibrant and ready to assume its place in the skyline. And then, once or twice, the whole thing turns into an illusion, an artifice that the singer rips away with one telling image: "We're going away to Ireland soon" becomes "I dreamed I saw my guitar bouncing down the runway," and from that point on the threat is always in the air, that the beautiful skyscraper may be gone in the next line.

These are very well-written and thoughtful songs, I'm thinking, and if the new ones in concert are typical of the next batch, there will be more humor, broad and barbed, armed with a driving beat that will stand out as a new development. And maybe they'll keep on turning events into dreamscapes and popping them with pinpoint lyrics, only to reveal the moon behind, skimming along through the clouds.

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Folklore

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT ANYWAY?

by Bill Ponsot

FOLKLORE will be an ongoing, open-ended discussion on the origins, historical facts, figures and folks behind that which we call folk music. Each column will focus on a point of interest, guided in part by what I have in mind and also by questions from readers. Your questions are encouraged, and I will endeavor to incorporate answers to them into my monthly columns.

When I first offered this topic for an article, it was suggested that it be a series. Realizing that it is, in fact, an endless subject, I took one step further and proposed this column. It will not necessarily follow any given chronological order, but each topic will be explored as thoroughly as possible in the space allowd.

To begin with, I want to set the stage with a working definition of folk music so that there is a clear understanding of what we are discussing. In recent years, the venerable Oxford English Dictionary has included definitions for types of music which have attained separate categorization in the past century and have become commonplace terms in our language. The blues, jazz and folk music are the most notable of the OED's entries. The definition offered for folk music is extremely simple: "a music of popular origin," It's so simple, in fact, that it led me to look more closely at the two words "folk music." Folk are a people, nation, race, or tribe; and music is the art of the muse, applied generally to the artistic culture of poetry, etc. The folk song (again, simple) is a song originating from the people.

So what we have here is open to a pretty broad interpretation, and American folk music is almost every music there is, except classical and jazz, since we are a country of other countries, a nation peopled by every tribe from all over the world. This wide influence over the centuries has given us a rich backbone in folk music. However, what has become known as folk music is only the tip of the iceberg. It has diverged into many categories with special titles: the blues, bluegrass, country and western, which all have their roots in folk music. One major difference between them is instrumentation.

Your basic folksinger today accompanies himself on acoustic guitar with an occasional harmonica; when you emphasize the harp or slow the song down, it denotes the blues; electrify it for rock and roll; and throw in banjos and fiddles for country and bluegrass. All of these are now considered American music forms, but all are derivitives of traditional music from immigrant cultures. If this seems an oversimplification, without just treatment to a given style of music, take my word for it that it is, and that all I'm doing is clearing the deck.

Having done that, I think, we'll move on. A very significant part of what folk music is lies in the oral tradition. For many centuries, the folk song was not recorded for posterity in any way except for an elder minstrel teaching his art to a young successor whose responsibility then was to remember it for the next generation. Though still important today, the oral tradition has become less significant through the advent of the record and an effort to publish these songs in written form.

The interest in transcribing the oral tradition onto paper and then record is a relatively recent occurence in the world's history. One of the earliest examples of an effort to do so was that of the Grimm Brothers, who travelled among the Germanic tribes gathering golk tales. Their collection was published in 1828. A much less considerable effort in recording the oral tradition, but still significant, can be found in Jeremiah Ingalls' "The Christian Harmony" (New Hampshire 1805). This pamphlet was primarily a hymnal for religious services in the New England area, but the songs themselves were traced to older English and Scottish ballads; making it the first such compilation in this country.

The first major collection of folk songs to be published was Frances Child's "English and Scottish Poplular Ballads." This incredible undertaking was published between 1882 - 1898 in ten parts, ultimately forming five large volumes. Child chose 305 distinct ballads and researched all the variants, including adaptations in other languages, a history of each, a biography, bibliographies; in short, the most exhaustive research ever compiled on any form of folk music 'til that time. Although part of Child's research did concer itself with tunes, there is, overall, very little preserved intact from other sources. Many classical composers (particularly German composers of the 19th century) used folk tunes in their writing; and, as mentioned, religious music is in part derived from traditional folk tunes.

Folklorist John Lomax contributed a wealth of information, which he spent much of his life collecting. His first publication in 1910 titled "Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads" contained, among others, the first published version of "Home On The Range." But the work he has done with and without his son Alan will be more fully discussed in a later column, as we look more closely at who has researched folk music and lore.

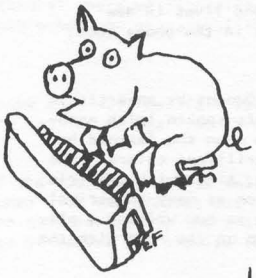
The folk music of today is unquestionably a synthesis of those musical idioms which preceded it; and the folksinger is more commonplace than ever before. The self-taught guitarist has become so visible that one need not go far to find one. Whether this is an outgrowth of the "make a record, get rich quick" ideology born of the sixties, or simply the availability of more money to more people with access to a wider range of inexpensive guitars, is worth asking. Probably a combination of both with emphasis on the latter, is close. Also, recordings of both historic and current folk musicians are readily available these days.

This is important because it is a carry-over of the oral tradition, modernized. Any number of novice musicians go beyond listening to the radio (a prime influence thirty years ago), to borrowing and buying records and tapes from which to learn so-called standards and new material, which in turn influences their own songwriting if they get that far. Despite vinyl shortages, the annual production of new recordings still exceeds 7,000 albums. Of that, less than 3,000 are classical music, the balance being all other styles. What the percentage of folk albums is in that balance would only be a guess since there are no available figures that break down the recording industry's output in that way. It is, however, easy to say that after the folk revival of the late fifties and early sixties gave way to rock and roll, the effort to record every "folkie" who walked through the door diminished a great deal. Equally easy to say, though, is that such recording has never come to a halt and seems to be on the rise again. There are more "indies" (independent labels) than ever before, with a large percentage of them concentrating on folk music and, based in rural areas of the country, working to capture their region's creative output.

Such a trend has a tremendous influence on aspiring folk-singers. For one thing, it gives obscure rural musicians an opportunity to record their material, much in the same way The CooP does, in the heart of New York City, for urbanites. It also furthers the preservation of the oral tradition, since the vast majority of artists on the "indies" would never be allowed to record for a major label.

Folk music is a continuum. To explore its background is to explore the history of man. Pete Seeger says that, "Tradition is still not fully explored and topical songs are a bottomless well. As long as life moves, music moves; as long as kids are crying, there will be lullabies written and sung." (The Face of Folk Music - Citadel, 1968) Whether we grasp the full scope of this project in FOLKLORE remains to be seen, but we'll keep it interesting.

A reminder: questions about folk music are invited and encouraged. Please address them to Bill Ponsot, FOLKLORE, The CooP c/o Speak Easy, 107 MacDougal Street, Greenwich Village, NYC, NY 10014.



Pigging at the piano

A Few Thoughts on Cambridge

By Jack Haray

Friday -- Cambridge is not at all like New York. I am playing at Passim, a commercially run establishment that does not serve booze. The show starts on time. We are no there. Traffic. Tom Ghent fills in for us. He is on stage when we walk in. Van Ronk is late too. We almost fill in for him. New York puts its best foot forward. The crowd this night (second show) is receptive (they listen) and passive (they applaud). It is all new to them. They are used to being fed what they know. I am the "opening act." Not expected to be very good. A few people have heard of me through another singer who sang one of my songs. Musicians do not get in for free. They do not come. In between sets I walk over to the Idler. Friendly enough club with a beautiful outside room in which to eat, drink and talk without disturbing the show. The show is two New York based musicians. The New York CooP records are on display at the entrance. There are musicians here. They are even listening to the show. A good sign. What musicians I meet are self-conscious. The term "local musician" is everywhere. Provincial attitude. "Imported" is better. Haven't they read Emerson's essay on The American Scholar? I though he lived around here.

Saturday -- Cambridge is beautiful in the lilac scented sun (corny line but it is one of those corny beautiful days). I take an MTA train to Boston Common. My host for the weekend is Stephen Baird, a noted street singer, who forced the legalization of the craft in Boston. I watch him work the crowd. Kids are a specialty. He gets them playing Kazoos and whistles. The adults are also entertained. Everything has a double meaning. A wood puppet named Ronald Reagan. I walk around for the afternoon watching other street performers. Here they are all good. Not like New York where one has to pass by twenty out-of-tune Bob Dylan clones before one hears something decent. This phenomena of street music goes on into the night. It must cut into the club audience, but it supports a lot of musicians. Saturday evening between shows I walk over to the "Nameless Coffee House." Beautiful oak paneled room that seats about 150. Church but not church run. Been going fifteen years. Everything free. Six acts booked each Friday and Saturday. None paid. No admission. Free food. Pass the hat for expenses. More people than at the other clubs. The quality of music is good and so is the audience. This is their last evening until the fall. School year? The volunteer staff is burnt out. Why don't the musicians help more?

Sunday afternoon -- We play a matinee at Passim that is broadcast live over radio station WERS. WERS programs five hours of folk music a day. Hooray! Best audience of the weekend. What an asset radio is. Between the matinee and the evening show, I am invited to a meeting of the newly formed "Folk Arts Collective." Slow yankee sensibility. I have to force patience upon myself. Impressive lineup: 43 people -- musicians, club owners, promoters of concerts, program directors from radio stations, other folk artist. Folk resource booklet proposed, communal concert hall proposed, communal sound system proposed. Idea of records discussed. Committees. Long term projects. There is something to be said for the anarchy of New York and the action of New York. I say it. Everyone is impressed with what we've done. More committees. Next meeting in four weeks. Sigh! After our evening show we get paid. Our check has been docked a small amount for our tardiness. Less of less is still less. We pack-up. Four of us and a bass fiddle in a car with 108,000 miles on it. Isn't folk music fun. "I'm going back to New York City, I do believe I've had enough."

On the Record

GERRY DEVINE is 25 years old and hails from Delaware, where he sang and played in numerous rock bands. He was an original member of the Song Project. Currently, he is writing and performing songs, most notably with the Floor Models.

ERIK FRANKSEN plays the guitar and lives in New York City. He needs work. He's in the phone book.

"JAMBOREE":

KATHY DEVINE, 23, was raised in Queens by an artistic mother of Mexican heritage, a soft-spoken Irish nanny, and a variety of relatives, from whom she learned her love of music, literature, and brilliant colors. She teaches third grade and swimming, sings with the trio, Jamboree, and performs or works on as many theatrical productions as time allows. She is now writing a play for children, and is hoping to go on the road with the trio (and her cat!).

NINA MARIE is an actress/singer presently devoting her creative energies towards Jamboree's success. After extensive travel and study abroad several years ago, Nina returned to her native N.Y. performing as a solo artist at such clubs as The Comic Strip, Proof of the Pudding, and Something Different, as well as working in Children's Theatre and Off-Off Broadway companies. Her goals are to sing, act and never waitress again.

DEBORAH WEITZMAN is a singer/songwriter/actress/drummer. Having spent over five years studying and performing music and acting in Europe and New York, she is very excited about working with the trio, Jamboree - steadily. When not performing or rehearsing, she can be found dancing at Ballroom and Folk Dance sessions throughout the city.

HUGH O'DOHERTY, 31, grew up in Darby, Pennsylvania, attended St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia and moved to New York in 1974. Hugh performs his own songs plus the songs of Jack Hardy, Tom Intondi, Rod MacDonald and Hugh Prestwood. Hugh presently lives on Prince Edward Island in Canada's Maritime Provences with Eileen, his wife, and Andrew, their son.

THE NEW ENGLAND EXPRESS is ROB AND JOHN STRACHAN. They are originally from a small country town in Northern Connecticut but now live in Greenwich Village. They find themselves adjusting very well to city life and are well on their way to becoming utterly depraved.

CHRISTINE LAVIN gave up the lucrative dual career of airline stewardess/brain surgeon to pursue music and Jewish men. She has recorded one album, "Christine Lavin Absolutely Live" (Lifesong Records LS 8134 -- now a collector's item) and was famous for three and a half minutes when she appeared on NBC's "Today Show" last year. She is currently working on a musical revue entitled "Jewish girl trapped in a Shiksa body."

AUSTIN JOHN MARSHALL: As "John the Angel Fish," John Marshall has been reading poetry at the Folk Co-op since February of this year. Before that in the U.K. he had been a writer and producer of albums, notably for his first wife, Shirley Collins, and Steve Ashley. In addition, he has produced films of both Jimi Hendrix and The Incredible String Band.

Since coming to the States in early '81, he has mounted a radio production of his ballad-play "The Great Smudge: A Romance for Street-Organ" for WBAI, and started a religious satire series "Heaven's Kitchen."

This is his debut as a singer, and whilst he has no immediate plans to further a career in this field, remains open to offers.

DAVID MASSENGILL is know primarily for his songs accompanied by dulcimer, although he has recently taken up guitar. He has toured the country twice with Dave Van Ronk and his songs are performed by such artists as the Roches and Rosalie Sorrels. David is from Bristol, Tennessee.

CAROLYN McCOMBS: Born in New York City in April, 1952, Carolyn began singing professionally in 1971 in an Off-Broadway rock-musical. In the next years, she performed in New York's cafes and clubs, as well as a six month national tour with a production of the rock-musical, "Jesus Christ Superstar."

From 1976 through the beginning of this year, Carolyn has traveled and toured extensively in Europe. She has also appeared many times on radio and television throughout Germany.

Carolyn has done extensive studio work as part of a "studio-choir," as well as under her own name. She has recorded an LP on Philips (Phonogram) Records as part of the group "Witchcraft," and currently has a solo single on the Hansa Label.

I met Paul Joses while I was living in West Berlin. He and another Irishman were playing the same club circuit as I - they billed themselves as "Gusty" and for the most part played loud, beer-drinking pub songs. But I came to know a mellower side of Paul when he asked if I'd be interested in hearing and maybe performing some of his own compositions. He played me a few and I fell in love with all of them. . . especially "Wasted Love." As Paul never considered his own voice suitable for the song, when the time came to record a demo of it, he called upon me. Paul Joses is still living and working in West Berlin - and hopefully still writing more of his beautiful music.

DAVID MICHAEL ROTH is a singer/songwriter from Chicago who lived in Alaska and overseas for four years before coming to New York in 1980. He is currently working as a workshop coordinator for Hospital Audiences, Inc.

THE SONG PROJECT has five members: Tom Intondi, Martha P. Hogan, Lucy Kaplanski, Bill Bachmann, and Mark Dann. The idea of the group is to perform the best songs written by songwriter-artists associated with the Greenwich Village music scene. The group's repertoire is now stronger than ever, containing over forty songs by some of the best writers in town. Stephen Holden, of the New York Times, has written: "If anyone needs proof that folk music is alive, it is only necessary to look at The Song Project... radiant musical intelligence...seldom has the expression 'fresh blood' been more vividly personified."

PETER TORK took his first piano lesson at age six and has been taking lessons on or playing piano, guitar, banjo, french horn, bass, and harmonica virtually continuously ever since. He was playing music in the basket-passing houses in the early '60s. A trip west to seek his fame and fortune was successful. As some people know, Peter became a member of "that rock concoction" (The New Yorker), The Monkees, honored for its comedic virtues by the musicians and its musical virtues by the comedians. Since then, Peter has played in various musical situations including rock and acoustic settings, and taught high school in California. More recently, Peter has been plying his wares on the East Coast. "Make me an offer," he says cheerfully.

ERIK FRANDSEN lives in New York City and plays the guitar, although several of his friends are actors. He needs work. He's in the phone book.

SUZANNE VEGA is from New York City. She is a Barnard College graduate and is 22 years old. She has been active in dance and theater, and recently wrote and performed in a musical theater production based on the life of Carson McCullers.

June's Song Lyrics

side one

WASTED LOVE

Well you've finally reached a conclusion
Through some lines you've heard in a song
You've been saying what's causing confusion
I can see that you're getting it wrong
Your lovers, they always forget you
When the day takes the night from the sky
There's always another beginning
And maybe a better surprise

Refrain:

Wasted love was making you lonely
Wasted love was making you small
When it gets down to counting the heartbeats
No love gets wasted at all

(Repeat)

You've got your guns at the ready
Don't go shooting me down
Your hands are shaking, not steady
Are you slowly coming around?
Don't jump into the fire
You'll only get stung by the flames
Now give up that silly old crying
You'll only lose at at these games

Refrain

MONTCHANIN

We can ride on a hurricane,
sail on sunlit water,
Take the road of the renegade,
or stay inside the border
And with a little time
We can hook up to something so fine
There's gold in the mountains and stars in our eyes

Chorus:

Oh Montchanin where the tall grass bends
Rockin' in the motion of that gypsy wind
Lights on the water and the latch on the door
Sayin' "What'd you ever leave here for?"

Flowers dryin' out in the sun,
an outpost left unguarded
A thousand things I haven't done,
and time that I got started
I should have already gone
This life I'm leading isn't my own
I'll cry for the love of the ones left behind

Chorus

Oh, runaway angel
Standing in that dusty ring of light
Did you ever hear anything so clear
As the song that's pounding in our ears tonight

Chorus

"What'd you ever leave here for?"
"What'd you ever leave here for?"

GYPSY

you come from far away with pictures in your eyes
of coffee shops and morning streets in the blue and silent sunrise
but night is the cathedral where we recognized the sign
we strangers know each other now as part of the whole design

Chorus:

oh, hold me like a baby that will not fall asleep
curl me up inside you and let me hear you through the heat
oh ...

you're the jester of the courtyard with a smile like a girl's
distracted by the women with the dimples and the curls
by the pretty and the mischievous, by the timid and the blessed
by the blowing skirts of ladies who promise to gather you to their breast

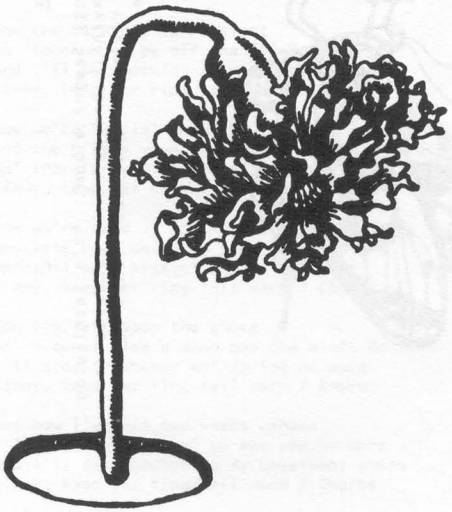
Chorus

you have hands of raining water, and that earring in your ear
the wisdom on your face denies the number of your years
with the fingers of the potter, and the laughing tale of the fool
the arranger of disorder, with your strange and simple rules
yes, now I've met another spinner of strange and gauzy threads
with a long and slender body, and a bump upon the head

Chorus

with a long and slender body, and the sweetest softest hands
and we'll blow away forever soon, and go on to different lands
and please do not ever look for me, but with me you will stay
and you will hear yourself in song blowing by one day

but, now hold me like a baby ...



side one

I TRULY UNDERSTAND

Remember what you said, my dear
When we stood side by side
You swore you'd love no one but me
And be no other man's bride, my dear
And be no other man's bride

CHORUS:

And I truly understand
That you love another man
And your heart shall no longer be mine

I wish to the Lord I'd never been born
Or died when I was young
Than seen them two brown eyes of yours
Or heard that flattering tongue, my dear
Or heard that flattering tongue

Chorus

Now who's gonna shoe your pretty little foot
Who's gonna glove your hand
Now who's gonna kiss your ruby red lips
When I'm in the foreign land, my dear
When I'm in the foreign land

Chorus

Traditional
Arrangement by Peter Tork

I Truly Understand: Notes

I found the song on a Peggy Seeger album. It's intriguing because of its unusual rhythmic and harmonic cadences and melodic line. There's a mixing of two traditional styles that makes it sound fresh.

THE WHITSUN DANCE (DANCING AT WHITSUN)

Lyric by Austin John Marshall
Melody: The False Bride (Trad.) / Staines Morris (Trad.)

It's fifty-one springtimes since she was a bride
And still you may see her at each Whitsuntide
In a dress of white linen and ribbons of green
As green as her memories of loving

The feet that were nimble tread carefully now
As gentle a measure as age do allow
Through groves of white blossom, by fields of young corn
Where once she was pledged to her true love

The fields they stand empty, the hedges grow free
No young men to tend them, nor pastures to see
They have gone where the forests of oaktrees before
Had gone to be wasted in battle

Down from their green farmlands and from their loved ones
Marched husbands and brothers and fathers and sons
There's a fine roll of honour where the Maypole once was
And the ladies go dancing at Whitsun

There's a row of straight houses in these latter days
Are covering the Downs where the sheep used to graze
There's a field of red poppies and a wreath from the Queen
But the ladies remember at Whitsun
And the ladies go dancing at Whitsun

(Come you young men come along
With your music, dance and song
Bring your lasses in your hand
For 'tis that which love commands
Then to the Maypole haste away
For 'tis now a holiday)

The Whitsun Dance: Notes

Whitsun: A traditional British spring holiday, on or near Pentacost, but deriving its name from the white outfits of Morris Dancers, for this was the official start of the Morris Dancing season - usually about the third week in May.

The First World War had a devastating effect on the village tradition of Morris Dancing, and what had once been an extremely vigorous, bucolic and rich part of country life became widely regarded as a quaint and rather ludicrous relic. The Maypole, centre of village springtime celebrations, was replaced by a war memorial, containing in many cases the names of most of the young men of the village.

The English Folk Dance and Song Society is an institution in London alternately loved and derided. I often used to wonder why there always seemed to be so many middle-aged and elderly ladies there, joining in the country dancing. I was told that there was an unofficial "club" of First World War widows, who danced in memory of their lost loves, Morris Dancers. The song was written in early '67. The date of composition takes "fify-one springtimes" (not fifty "long") back to 1916.

The song first appeared on an album called "Autumns in Eden" by Shirley A. Dolly Collins, issued in '69. The track was axed by the U.S. publishers, arbitrarily removing the climax of a suite of traditional songs intending to tell the story of the broken tradition of England. Tim Harb of Steeleye Span made a version of the song on "Summer Solstice." Priscilla Herdman, Jean Redpatu and Gordon Bok have all recorded the song over here in the U.S., but all learned from the Harb version. I am grateful to the Folk Co-op for letting me have the chance to put on record the complete version, with the hopeful segue into the "Staines Morris" ending, pointing to the resurrection of that lost spirit of England.

THE EUNUCH'S LAMENT

I am a eunuch brave and true
I am a eunuch through and through
With a hey ninny ninny
High nanny nanny
Hey ninny high nanny poo

O in this life I've had no fun
I've had no gun to bang the bun
With a hey tooter shooter
High dangler banger
Hey tooter high banger boo

I have no ding to dong the queen
I have no use for the latrine
With a hey zipper dipper
High zapper dapper
Hey zipper high dapper doo

O as a lover I am a flop
I've never heard a cherry pop
With a hey piggy squealer
High fanny squasher
Hey piggy high squasheroo

The queen is hot but I am not
For long ago my wad was shot
With a hey blipper nipper
High blapper whapper
Hey blipper high whapper woo

The clocks go tick the bells go bong
I'd give my arm for an eight-inch wong
With a hey wonger bonger
High wanger banger
Hey wonger high bangeroo

I am a sexless shepherd bred
I'll never prod where others tread
With a hey gooser moocher
High gander masher
Hey gooser high masher coo

O all the plums of Italy
Will never peel their bush for me
With a hey beaver basher
High pubic poacher
Hey beaver high poacher chew

My feet are flat and not only that
I've got no balls to beat the bat
With a hey weener peeler
High tater nailer
Hey weener high nailer blue

The dames go chit the dames go chat
I cannot wipe their welcome mats
With a hey weezer squeezer
High asser splasher
Hey weezer high splasher poo

John Dillinger had a twelve inch prick
It's fellers like him who make me sick
With a hey super drooper
High party pooper
Hey super high pooperoo

The time has come to bid good riddance
Til the eunuch makes his next appearance
With a hey fuck you
High fuck you
--And I mean that with all my heart...on--
Fuck you and your big whazzoo

David Massengill

side two

ALOT LIKE ME (HAVE I GOT A GUY FOR YOU)

I can see in your eyes, that you've had too much of this
phoney singles life-style
You hope that this time you'll meet someone who won't turn
out to be a reptile
To save you from catastrophe, I'd like to offer a nominee
He's sharp as a blade, and he'll come to your aid, and he'd
remind you alot of me.

Chorus:

Have I got a guy for you, you've come here just in time
He's charming and suave, and he's quite a heart throb,
And his clothes look alot like mine.

He sings, plays guitar, and writes his own songs
but the words sometimes get lost
That don't bother him because he knows
he'll make them rhyme at any cost
But he can really make a melody,
and he excells at delivery
He's cool, and he's tops, he's with the Boston Pops,
and he sounds alot like me.

Chorus

He often counsels the heads of state
he's got an I.Q. of 180.
Depenable as a wind up clock,
he's a guru to Dale Carnegie
He's a model of decency, and relative humility
he's honest and kind and he's very refined
And he acts alot like me.

Chorus

He's handsome and free, got a college degree
He's all you will need for eternity
He's got blue dungarees and clean B.V.D.s
Run out front and you'll see, his name's on the marquee
And he spells it alot like mine.

Hugh O'Doherty

JAMBOREE

Now m'lads be of good cheer
For the Irish coast will soon draw near
In a few more days we'll sight Cape Clear
Jinny, keep yer ring tail warm

Chorus:

Jamboree, Oh Jamboree
Ai j'ring-tailed blackman sheet it home behind
Jamboree, Oh Jamboree
Jinny keep yer ring tail warm

Now my boys we're off Holy Head
And there's no more casts of the Dipsy Lead
'N' soon we'll be in a feathered bed
Jinny, keep yer ring tail warm / Chorus

Now the barnship is in sight
An' soon we'll be off the Ol' Rock Height
And I'll be knockin' at yer door tonight
Jinny, keep yer ring rail warm / Chorus

Now we're haulin' thru the lock
And the pretty young gals on the peir do flock
An' there's my Jinny in a new pink frock
Jinny, keep yer ring tail warm / Chorus

Now we're tied up to the pier
And it's down below to pack yer gear
An' I'll be a kissin' oh you my dear
Jinny, keep yer ring tail warm / Chorus

Now I'm safe upon the shore
An' I don't give a damn how the winds do roar
I'll drop my anchor an' to sea no more
Jinny, keep yer ring tail warm / Chorus

But now I've had two weeks ashore
I'll pack my bags an' to see you no more
And I'll say goodbye to my Loverpool whore
Jinny, keep yer ring tail warm / Chorus

Traditional

side two

OUT OVER THE LINE

I've been making my way through this hurricane
upon a restless sea
I've long been away from the sight of land
but I guess that had to be
I've given it up for something else
I just can't lie to me

CHORUS:

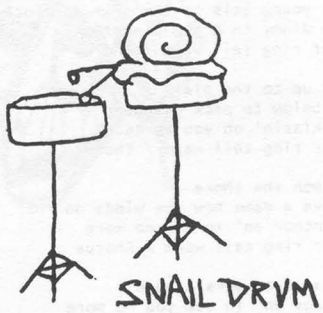
Oh, Mama
I really did it this time
Oh, Mama
I'm out over the line

You know I've been on this trip a long, long time
but I guess I'll get there yet
You said I could take your well worn path
but it seemed too safe a bet
You laugh and you dance to beat the band
so does a marionette

Chorus

No, I never could see why you'd run so hard
in a race that can't be won
You know I came of age the day I saw
your lives had not begun
I've been slipping away toward a rendevous
with the land of the midnight sun

Chorus



NORMAN'S WAY

I read that Norman Rockwell died, I didn't even know him,
But I remember visitin' Stockbridge, where all his work was showin'
I remember how the people glowed just because they had a chance to share
An old story or two about a man who painted America there...
And he made people happy by what he did, so can you,
Make people happy by what you do...

Lincoln was our president before the fighting started,
Fought the Civil War in order that his people not be parted,
He was helpful to his people be they black or be they white,
And he cried to see 'em fighting, but he wanted what was right,
He made people happy by what he did, so can you,
Make people happy by what you do...

Now I won't be no president, and I can't be king,
But I'll always try to make you smile, to me that's everything,
And I'm surely not an artist with a canvas or a brush,
But I paint my songs with colors that remind me of your touch...

Robin Hood, he was a thief, and Shakespeare was a bard,
Plato a philospher, D'Artagnan was a guard,
But the thing they had in common was what man had been conceived in,
The idea that you should always strive to do what you believe in...
And they made people happy by what they did, so can you,
Make people happy by what you do...

Now I ain't no philospher, and I've never been a thief,
But I'd steal your heart tomorrow if your lovin' I could keep
And I'm surely not a swordsman or a marksman with a pen
But I draw these songs with images of seein' you again...

I read that Norman Rockwell died, I never even knew him,
But his paintings showed the people that he loved what he was doin',
So you don't have to be a genius, virtuoso or a king,
But you gotta start right from your heart, you know that's everything,
And you'll make people happy if you do...
Make people happy by what you do...

Norman's Way: Notes

This song goes back some three years, to a time when I was pondering an age-old issue: looking for joy in our daily chores. Reading one morning in the Anchorage Daily News that Rockwell passed away reminded me that, although many art critics panned his work, he had an uplifting and enlightening effect on millions of folks -- no small achievement in this crazy world.

Regretting What I Said When You Called Me 11:00 on a Friday Morning to Tell Me that at 1:00 Friday Afternoon You were Going to Leave Your Office, Go Downstairs, Hail a Cab, Go Out to the Airport to Catch a Plane to Go Skiing in the Alps for Two Weeks, Not that I wanted to Go with You, I wasn't Able to Leave Town, and I Couldn't Really Expect You to Pay My Way (and I'm not such a hot skier), But After Going Out with You for Three Years I Don't Like Surprises (subtitled A Musical Apology)

I didn't mean it when I said I hope the cable
in the elevator snaps when you step on board
and I was joking when I said I hope you crack your head
and get mangled by the downstairs revolving doors
and I was kidding when I said I hope the #103 bus
hits and makes a pancake out of you
I'm sorry I'm sorry
but isn't it amazing what a woman in love will do

And I really don't want to see your taxi on the 59th Street Bridge
flip over and crash through the rail
and I'd feel bad if at the airport you were mistaken
for a local sex offender
arrested, beaten up and thrown in jail
and I really don't want to see you getting radiation poisoning
from the metal detector
that all passengers on foreign and domestic flights
must walk through
I'm sorry
forgive me
for all the mean things I said to you

You thought I didn't have a temper
ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha surprise
but I really don't want to see you
dismembered by the marijuana sniffing dogs
when a simple little nipping would suffice

And I'm sorry that I said I hope
the plane explodes in mid-air
as it carries you away from me
and I'm sorry that I said
I hope you break both legs
on the mountain while you ski
and I'm sorry for all the nasty things
I said about your mother
even though we both know they're true
I'm sorry
I'm sorry
I'm swallowing my pride
I'd feel so guilty if you died
Oh I'm sorry
but I'm still mad at you

BABY GRAND

MacPherson's Farewell

Farewell ye dungeons dark and strong
Farewell, Farewell to thee--
MacPherson's song will not be long
Upon the gallows tree

Untie these bands from off my hands
And give to me my bow
I've got to leave my brave Scotland
But a tune before I go--

Chorus:

Say rantingly and wantonly
And dauntingly played he
He played a tune and he danced around
Below the gallows tree

There's some come here for to see me hang
And some to steal my fiddle
But before that I do part with her
I'll break her through the middle

Well he's taken his fiddle into both of his hands
And he's broke it o'er his knee
Saying when I'm gone no other man
Will ever play on thee

Chorus

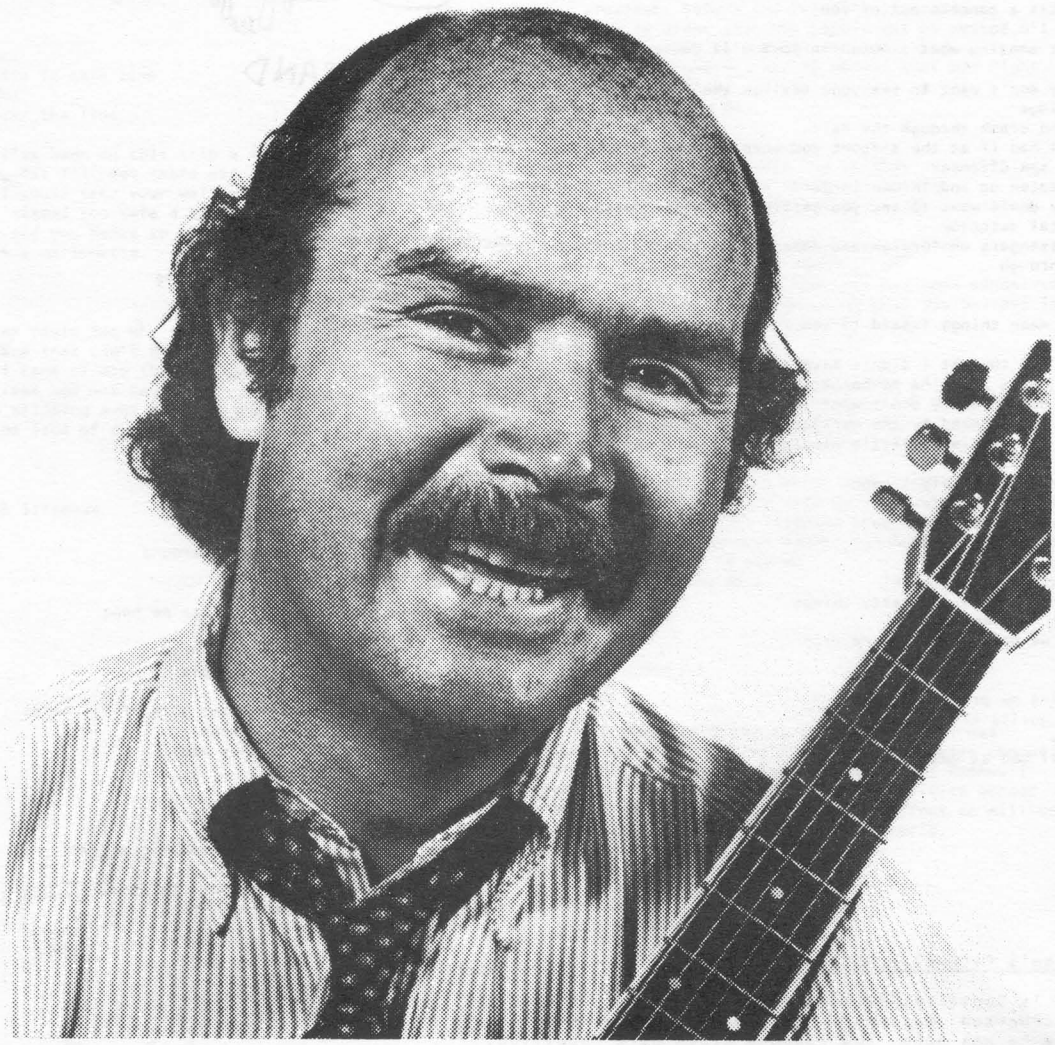
The reprieve was comin' o'er the brig of Banf
For to set MacPherson free
But they put the clock a quarter before
And then hanged him from the tree

Traditional

MacPherson's Farewell: Notes

The song is Scottish, dating from the reign of James I. Jamie MacPherson was real. I've heard several stories as to why he was hung; the reasons given were rebellion, horsetheft, and playing music (sometimes a political crime). The broken fiddle is on display at the ancestral MacPherson clan hideout near Glasgow.

The song is also known as MacPherson's Lament or MacPherson's Rant, usually because it's sung by a drunken Scot, a cappella and at the top of his lungs.



Still a "Rambling Boy"

by Sherwood Ross

Tom Paxton has been playing his guitar for more than 25 years now, growing steadily in stature as a performing artist and composer. Not everybody recalls that the 45-year-old folkie raised in Bristow, Oklahoma, just a jackrabbit's jump north of Woody Guthrie's birthplace, materialized on the Greenwich Village coffeehouse scene about the same time as Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs, and that he has provided inspiration for many veteran performers from Joan Baez to John Denver. Most of those who made their folk careers ripping at social injustice and the Vietnam War are gone now, or have so changed their music so that no hint of the original remains in their electronic reincarnation. But the Chicago-born Paxton remains true to his no-frills, solo acoustic calling. "I'm still just a dedicated folkie," he told me over dinner one night in O'Henry's Restaurant before playing a benefit for Ed McCurdy. If his style and voice have improved over the years, he is still packing in audiences nine times a month pretty much as he has always done, with his troubador's mixed bag of originals ranging from love songs to political cartoons and from attacks on nuclear power to hymns extolling family life. Paxton has the capacity to stand alone on stage, armed with nothing more than his baritone voice, a guitar, and his own compositions and move audiences to laughter and tears for two hours a night without ever once repeating himself. Like the electric chair he satirizes, a Paxton song can take deadly aim on an institution or an individual, but the accompanying musical jolts are deftly contrived to bring audiences to life.

Paxton says he regards himself primarily as a singer and a writer, not a guitarist. This clear-eyed assessment is easily reinforced by the rhapsodizing of literally hundreds of artists who have performed Paxton originals and the relentless expansion of the Paxton discography. Indeed, there are now 20 albums bearing his stamp, beginning in 1962 with "I'm The Man Who Built The Bridges" (Gaslight Records) and culminating with "The Paxton Report". Turned out with the synchronized beat of a metronome, his albums include songs that have stood the test of time, including "Rambling Boy," "The Last Thing On My Mind," "Bottle of Wine," "Talking Viet Nam Pot Luck Blues," "Whose Garden Is This," "Jimmy Newman," "Can't Help But Wonder Where I'm Bound," "Lyndon Johnson Told The Nation," and "Marvelous Toy." Over the years, Paxton's influence has rippled out from folk through popular music literature and may be heard at times in the outpourings of Steve Goodman, Kris Kristofferson, and John Denver, his most famous protege. When asked by Playboy to describe those musicians who influenced him, Denver named only Paxton, asserting, "In my opinion, he's the greatest songwriter in the world and someday I hope to do an album of Tom Paxton songs." When told by NBC's "Tonight Show" that he couldn't perform Paxton's "Forest Lawn," a satirical ditty that does in the Los Angeles mausoleum, Denver waited until he was a guest host on the program and just played it anyway. NBC survived. In one album, "Live at Town Hall," Judy Collins played no fewer than three Paxton songs and got a hit single out of "The Last Thing On My Mind." This composition, by the way, has now been recorded by more than 200 different artists around the world. Recently, "Marvelous Toy," written through the eyes of a child who is given a present from his father (Paxton's father died when he was nine), topped all the charts in France and was a hit here for the Chad Mitchell Trio. In Canada, The Rovers scored a recent platinum hit with their rendition of Wasn't That A Party." Playing Paxton originals has helped spell sucess for many better-known-performers, including Neil Diamond, Charlie Pride, Jose Feliciano, and Glen Campbell. Not surprisingly, Harry Chapin has praised Paxton as "one of the five greatest songwriters of the last 20 years" and many rising writers and performers claim him as a "mentor."

Since the blue-eyed, 185 pound six-foot singer runs six miles each morning (he has shed 43 pounds by this regimen), never touches a drop of hard stuff or soft snuff, and has given up cigarettes ("it improved my voice the very next day!" he told us), it might appear that Paxton could jog on forever. (The fact that he's written a song satirizing this sport doesn't deter him from running and he is a familiar sight in Chicago and other cities jogging from his hotel room to the local museums and back). But the first thing on Paxton's mind increasingly is writing and he is contemplating cutting back his concert schedule in order to do more of it.

The chief criticisms of Paxton as a performing artist have cropped up in the columns of those reviewers who regard his stagecraft as "too slick." This back-handed compliment only reinforces the fact that Paxton can mesmerize a live audience. "I enjoy connections," he has been quoted as saying. "I've just come to feel, correctly or not, that mine is not basically a music act. It's a recitation. It's Tom's turn." During the famed Isle of Wight concert in 1969, when Dylan unveiled his electric rock band, Paxton warmed up the crowd beforehand solo on a bare stage before 200,000 cheering fans, some of whom apparently thought after the third Paxton encore, that Dylan was just a magnificent anti-climax. The contrast between Dylan and Paxton is even more remarkable if one examines their messages. Writing in the Village Voice several years ago, Jack Newfield remarked, "Before there was glitter, and punk, and coke, there was Tom Paxton. . . Bob Dylan wrote a song memorializing Steve Biko, who died in a jail cell in South Africa. Dylan, a genius, sings without feeling or conviction before 18,000 people at the (Madison Square) Garden. Paxton sings, with wit and credibility, before 300 people at the Other End."

If Dylan's alleged lack of feeling is debatable, Newfield is on the mark concerning the emotional wallop Paxton can pack into lyrics. Henry Kissinger once remarked that granting an interview to Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci was the stupidest mistake he had ever made. But Kissinger comes off even worse at Paxton's fingertips: "The white bones of Allende (overthrown President of Chile), they're your Peace Prize, Dr. K."

Since Paxton's career centers primarily around what he has to say as much as how he says it, a glance at his philosophy is in order. "A laugh can make a bloody serious point," he told one writer. "I've always voted straight Democratic," he told another. And "I'm nothing if not predictable," he told us. So it is that after rising early in his East Hampton, Long Island, home and getting his youngest daughter off to school, Paxton settles down amid the welter of newspapers and magazines that provide grist for his new satires. By Noon, on a clear day, he's got a song in his bag. Like a political cartoonist (if he sketched,

he'd probably be more like Oliphant -- the cartoonist with the wisecracking bird on the sidelines -- than Herblock) much of Paxton's material is drawn from the headlines. In introducing him on NBC-TV's "Tomorrow Show," Tom Snyder referred to Paxton foremost as a political commentator. Last year, Paxton wrote 100 songs, more than enough for "The Paxton Report" (Mountain Railroad) album of political and social satires. Given his predictability and political bent, it is not surprising that Paxton comes down in favor of solar power, abolition of the death penalty, justice for South Africa's repressed blacks, and a fair deal for returning Vietnam veterans. What is unpredictable is the way Paxton makes his points. "Bring Back The Chair" is a tongue-in-cheek work purportedly favoring capital punishment. Coming complete with sing-along chorus, he hails electrocution for its entertainment value, to wit: "Slap a little make-up to 'em/As the juices sizzle through 'em/Howard Cosell could interview 'em." In other Paxton works, like "Steven Biko," verses come over in deadly earnest, building up from rifle shot to cannon intensity. Listeners are taken patiently over the details of Biko's murder at the hands of government goons much as the Apostles unfolded the story of the Stations of the Cross. The work, which can build to a shattering climax with the refrain, "Ah, ah, Africa!" is so intense that some audiences utterly unfamiliar with Biko's murder are left choking back tears. Another Paxton original, about crippled Vietnam Marine vet Ron Kovic, based on Kovic's book, "Born On The Fourth Of July," is a devastating attack on the short deck Congress has dealt returned vets.

Paxton's former manager, Douglas Yeager, claims that Paxton has never thought of himself as a protest singer. If so, perhaps not thinking about it consciously is the way to make a career out of it. If "You Can Eat Dog Food" is not a protest song about the poor whose plight makes dog food a staple, there never was one. Paxton is at his best, however, with his not-so-gentle satires. The gay community is still laughing over his song about a lady named Anita. The chorus goes: "You squeeze mine, Anita/I'll squeeze yours, Anita/You've been chosen, Anita/Yours are frozen, Anita/Terrible costs, Anita/Covered in frost, Anita/Smile and pray, Anita/You'll feel gay." Another recent Paxton song, decrying nuclear dangers, warns that Harrisburg, PA, residents, might "glow in the dark/Grow feathers just like a lark/Stand in the fountain/And light up the park."

Yet another Paxton ditty lampoons former President Carter by commemorating the ex-nuclear sub skipper's celebrated naval engagement when his rowboat was attacked by a swimming rabbit. Sing-along audiences invariably are convulsed by the refrain, "I don't want a bunny wunny in my wittle rowboat/In my wittle rowboat in the pond/For the bunny might go cwazy and bite me in the thwoat/in my wittle rowboat in the pond." If this song suggests Paxton is not quite the doctrinaire Democrat he claims to be, there are other signs of disenchantment as well. While jogging along one day he got the rhythm for "We All Sound The Same," a poem that roasts all politicians. His song on the Abscam scandal, "I Thought You Were An A-rab," also reflects public disillusionment with crooked congressmen: "I thought you were an Arab/A desert caliph or a sheik/I thought I'd be your friend in Congress/You'd be grateful/What a terrible mistake!"

Scandals come and go, and most Paxton protest songs have faded into history. But his personal songs, particularly the love lyrics, display elasticity and may prove to be his most enduring contribution. A family man who now has enough songs to pack an album devoted to his wife, Midge, Paxton's lyrics extole fidelity, and fatherhood. "My Lady's a Wild-Flying Dove" was written as an engagement present for his wife. "Leaving London," "One Time and One Time Only," and "Outward Bound," are also love lyrics seemingly destined to endure. Paxton has also penned a number of children's songs, including "Jennifer's Rabbit," dedicated to his daugher, and "Goin' To The Zoo," recounting one of his favorite family-man pasttimes.

Join The CooP

If you have an idea for an article pertaining to folk music, write it, and then submit it to The CooP.

If you know a song that is particularly hot, beautiful, haunting, poetic or otherwise calling out to be recorded, contact The CooP.

If you are an artist with sketches or doodles, bring them out of hiding and submit them to The CooP.

Donate your talents.

For articles or songs contact Jack Hardy or Brian Rose.
989-7088 260-5029
For drawings, cartoons and graphics, contact Steve Brant.

Today Tom Paxton is at the peak of his career. The folkie who attacked the poverty that forces some elderly to subsist on dog food has collected royalties for the Ken-L Ration TV ad, "My Dog Is Bigger Than Your Dog," a converted Paxton kiddie song. And the man who no longer touches a drop of malt is the voice (but not the writer) behind the popular Miller beer commercial, a TV ad that sold a potful of suds for the brewers. BBC-TV turned over an hour to Paxton a couple of years back for a special one-hour, "The Paxton Report," and Australian TV did a one-hour "Four Corners" special entitled, "Tom Paxton, the Voice of America." Last year, "Sound Stage" recorded a TV special featuring Paxton, Josh White, Jr., Odetta, and Paxton colleague Bob Gibson, for release in conjunction with a national tour by the quartet under the title "Folk Music, U.S.A." Although Paxton's albums haven't sold as well recently as they did during the Vietnam War, he is happy with the switch from the Vanguard label to Mountain Railroad (3602 Atwood, Madison, WI 53714). Paxton believes that it is the strength of the left wing in the U.S. that supports folk music, but album sales might possibly be declining because of the shrinking numbers of young people in the folk music age spectrum. The singer-composer is at the peak of his popularity and demand for appearances has never been greater for him in Australia, Singapore, Canada, Western Europe, and even in the Communicst bloc countries -- despite his musical attack on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The question is: "What next?" Nobody expects Paxton to sit back with his collection of greco-Roman volumes and classical records, secure with his niche in folk music history. He will always make time for family, Broadway musicals, Lincoln Center operas, and benefit concerts. But he has more stamina than a teenager and an itch to do more writing. His self-directed putdown about being "nothing if not predictable" contains the seeds of recognition that change is the law of life. Paxton fans may wonder if he will retrace his previous steps or break new ground. Ed McCurdy, a long-time Paxton-watcher, feels that Paxton has never quite reached the potential his gifts might provide. Other friends feel that Paxton in recent years has not produced songs to equal his early works. (Questions: how many great songs, great paintings, or great novels is a creative individual supposed to turn out?) Paxton's songs, meanwhile, remain unpredictable and his new direction, which seems sure to come, could further enrich the folk music scene. At 45, going on 18, Tom Paxton is still "A Ramblin' Boy."

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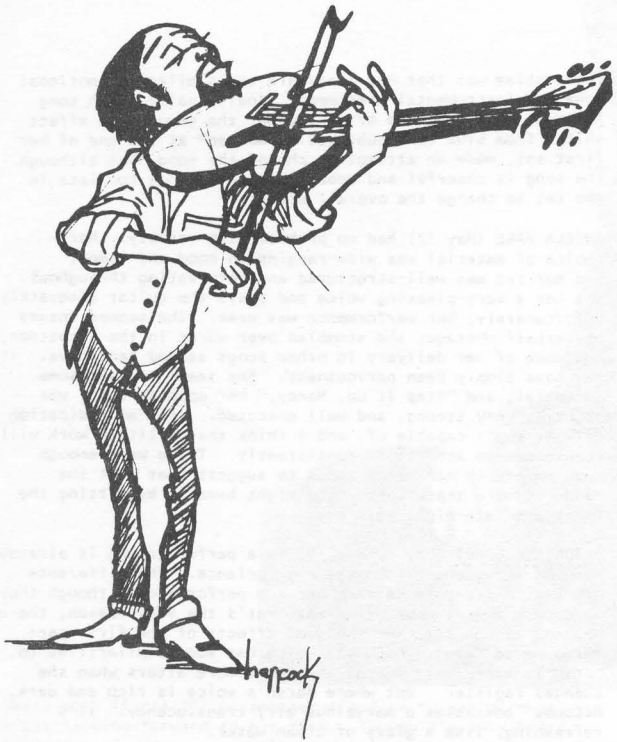
The Bluegrass Capitol

By Randy B. Hecht



It's not easy being a reporter. Go to Bleecker Street to interview the newest folkie whiz kids on the block and ask them, "What is a folk song?" They'll sneer at you in disgust and the interview will be dead in the water, even if you don't realize it. But bluegrass whiz kids in Washington, D.C. are different. They don't sneer in disgust when asked why the nation's capitol is also its bluegrass Mecca.

They roll their eyes and groan.

So much for regional differences. Folk and bluegrass are, at the very least, distant cousins, and Washington is our bluegrass capitol. The only trouble with learning why is that bluegrass musicians and fans are having too much fun playing and listening to bother with silly questions.

Silly or not, there are a few answers available; they range from the sociological to the geographical to the just plain obvious. The CooP got a few answers this month from John Duffey, a member of The Seldom Scene.

One factor of the music's success here, of course, is the size of the city. Washington is the largest city in bluegrass country and, as Duffey said, "You've got to have a population to draw on." There's not a musical genre in existence that could make it big in Winston-Salem. But Washington has another advantage over the other, smaller cities that might vie for the title of bluegrass capitol: the members of The Seldom Scene call it home.

After considerable hemming and hawing about not wanting to sound "like a coneited sonofabitch," John Duffey concedes that his band may be more than slightly responsible for the D.C. bluegrass phenomenon. "We do very well here," he said, and once he warmed up to the topic, he sounded like the proverbial proud papa whose band is clearly a favorite child: "Cashbox Magazine said and The New York Times said that this is the best band in the business." Who is Duffey to argue?

Duffey, the band's mandolin player, also shares lead guitar responsibilities with Ben Eldridge who, in turn, doubles on banjo. The other members of The Seldom Scene are John Starling, guitarist, bass player Tom Gray, and Mike Auldridge, whose expertise with the dobro has made him a popular solo act, as well. The five play each week at The Birchmere, a club located in the Washington suburb of Alexandria.

According to Duffey, the audience comes to listen to music. There is no talking, no socializing of any kind; the experience is, he says, unique in his performing experience. Duffey is also quick to defend the image of bluegrass fans, who he sees as highly intelligent and not at all in line with anyone's stereotype of a beer-bellied redneck. In fact, as far as sociological explanations go, it's possible that most Washington bluegrass fans are, by day, three-piece-suited "movers and shakers" in some of the most stressful, high-pressure jobs in town. Spending an evening listening to bluegrass music is cheaper -- though, it seems, just as effective -- as spending a week out in the country.

Don't make the mistake of throwing bluegrass and"country" music into the same keg, though. John Duffey clearly believes that one of the best things about bluegrass is that it has escaped the commercial contamination to which "country" has succumbed. "The worst radio station you can ever hear," he says, "is country programming that goes by nothing but the Billboard charts."

For those reckless enough to pose a variation on an old standby, Duffey does have a few very broad guidelines for what a bluegrass song is. "It's basically acoustic music. I don't think there's any particular type of song ...instrumentally (bluegrass and jazz) almost go side by side," he said, although vocally, bluegrass is "like nothing else." The Seldom Scene has turned every form of music, including rock and roll, into bluegrass; their philosophy is that the style classifies the music. "It's something people either like or can't stand," Duffey said, "I call it white soul music."

The Seldom Scene has released nine albums in the past ten years, and Mike Auldridge has released an additional five dobro instrumentals. The latest band and dobro recordings are respectively, After Midnight and Eight String Swing. Although the band has no immediate plans to appear in New York City, they will play this summer at a festival in Cooperstown and at the Cultural Center in Saratoga Springs.

Meanwhile, they'll continue to wow a packed house each week at The Birchmere, which Duffey credits with a lot of responsibility for making bluegrass so popular in Washington. "If every city in the country had a Birchmere," he said, bluegrass "would be on the charts." Especially if all those clubs could book The Seldom Scene on a weekly basis.

New Faces/Up and Coming

by Rosemary Kirstein

When I volunteered to do reviews of NF/U&C, I have to admit I didn't know what to expect; it simply seemed like an interesting thing to do. I had no idea it would turn out to be this interesting and enjoyable. I was handed some nice surprises.

The main surprise was the sheer volume of real talent that was presented. Most of the acts I saw I have seen previously in the Hoots at Speak Easy and Folk City, but Hoots are a poor basis on which to judge. Many people are capable of doing two songs decently, but falter after that. But most of the people I saw this month were able to sustain a whole set; some were really outstanding, and some caused me to change a previously held opinion.

NICK VENTRY (April 28) was one of these. I am used to thinking of Ventry as a specialist in clever songs with ragtime-style fingerpicking accompaniment, but this time he showed a much darker, moodier side. He did none of his humorous standards, but kept to more serious songs, like "The Short Swords of Herod" and Prine's "Sam Stone." It expanded my idea of Ventry's approach to his art, and the audience seemed to agree with me.

One song of his bothered me, however. It deals with the subject of a small town's reaction to an interracial couple, and most of the song is excellent. It uses deceptively plain language and tells its story in an understated straightforward fashion that is much more moving in this context than any "high art" poetry could be. It was wonderful. It broke my heart.

But it contained this line: "I say 'fuck off' to all you whose brains are so thin/ you can't concieve I'd love a woman who's wrapped in black skin." Obviously, Ventry's intention in saying "fuck off" is to use the phrase's shock effect to communicate how angry he is, but that's not the effect he gets. When the line comes up, the audience tends to snicker ("Did you hear what he said?). The subject matter is far too important, and the rest of the song is far too fine to be reduced to a snicker. As a matter of fact, the reason I never noticed before what a good song this is, is that I had tended to dismiss it after that line. I thought it was just Ventry being amusing. It's not. But that snicker makes the audience do the ideas an injustice.

Ventry shared the bill that night with BARBARA MARSH. Ms. Marsh's performance also caused me to alter my opinion. For some reason, I never used to care much for her voice, but now I can't even imagine why I ever felt that way. She has a fine voice, a strong, rich contralto, evocative as a cello, capable of fascinating changes of texture. Her guitar work is also quite good, enough above the average female guitarist to rate comment (that average, by the way, seems to be climbing all the time; stand back, gentlemen). Her opening song, "Snowfall" grabbed my attention, and she managed to maintain it through "Empty Promises" and "Again." However, by the time "Blue for Blue" came along, I felt my interest flagging.

The problem was that her songs are too similar in emotional tone and instrumental treatment. Individually, each song is good, but taken one after another the cumulative effect shifts from blue to lugubrious. "Nathan" at the end of her first set, made an attempt to change the mood, but although the song is cheerful and upbeat, it came along too late in the set to change the overall effect.

ANGELA PAGE (May 12) had no problem with variety. Her choice of material was wide-ranging in mood and tempo, and her set was well-structured and interesting throughout. She has a very pleasing voice and plays the guitar adequately. Unfortunately, her performance was weak. She seemed unsure of herself onstage; she stumbled over words in the "Scotsman," and much of her delivery in other songs seemed tentative. It may have simply been nervousness. She seems to have some potential, and "Step It Up, Nancy," her opening song, was actually very strong, and well executed. It's an indication of what she's capable of, and I think that a little work will enable her to achieve it consistently. There were enough good points in her other songs to suggest that what she needs is more stage-work. She might benefit by hitting the Hoots and late-night walk-ons.

CAROLYN McCOMBS (May 12 and 18) is a performer who is already showing improvement from stage experience. The difference was even noticeable between her two performances, though they were only a week apart (perhaps that's the very reason; there was not enough time for the good effects of the first performance to fade). McComb's voice has some similarities to Marsh's, especially in the way the timbre alters when she changes register. But where Marsh's voice is rich and dark, McCombs' possesses a marvelous airy translucency. It's refreshing, like a glass of clean water.

She seems quite capable on the guitar, as well, but I had a little difficulty discerning this. Her sound was a bit mushy, with a lot of string rattles. I don't think it was her playing that caused this, it seemed to be the instrument itself, or perhaps the strings.

One thing I did notice was a sense of distance from the audience. On the first evening I could hardly blame her for this because the audience was noisy past the point of outright rudeness. (I went around doing my "Hey, some of us are trying to listen" routine, but it didn't seem to help.) On the second night the audience was more attentive, and McCombs' distance was somewhat diminished, but still there. It wasn't until the song "Crazy," when the problem completely disappeared that I saw what caused it. In "Crazy," she gives herself completely to the song, placing her self into it. In other songs, though she may execute them perfectly, there is less of this personal involvement. An example is her version of Mitchell's "A Case of You," where she breaks up the line "on the back of a cartoon. . . (pause, long breath). . . coaster. . ." In that song, she treated the words as mere vehicles for the notes, and lost the sense of meaning, but again, this was less in evidence on her second night. It might be a function of nervousness, which will cure itself with time. I'd like to see a lot more of Carolyn McCombs.

Photo of Carolyn McCombs
by Tanja Schonberg

DAVID ROTH (April 28) is another I'd like to see more of. I was looking forward to his show. Though I'd only heard a handful of songs previously, and only one at a time, each of them had impressed me. Hearing him do a whole set confirmed my opinion. Roth is a very polished performer, very musch at ease onstage. His songs are consistently good. His lyrics move along easily, his subject matter is varied and interesting, his voice is one of the best I've ever heard, and his instrumental approach is exellent. He's the only person who's written a song about Harry Chapin's fatal accident ("One of My Own"), which I can not only stand, but actually like.

My favorite song of his is "Know Your Love," possibly the most cheerful song I've ever heard. In it, Roth recounts his entire life, from beginning to the present. In theory, this should be dull, but Roth approaches it with joy and touches of humor. All his music has a strong positive undercurrent, even the sadder songs and the serious ones. It is light-heartedness, but not in the usual negative sense of the term, implying a certain amount of simplemindedness. A truly joyful sense of life is a difficult thing to achieve these days. It takes intelligence, perceptiveness, and most of all, courage. David Roth has all of that, and in his music he gives it back to us, who so desperately need it.

In speaking of DAVE BOLGER (May 5 and 12), I have to invoke my caveat: I've never cared much for country and western, and having never cared much for it, I've never listened much to it, so I don't have much background on which to base my judgement. In general, Bolger has a good voice, and is a decent songwriter. I enjoyed his "throwaway blues," "Deep and Abiding Love." I'm unsure of his instrumental ability. On "The Separation" he faltered, but on "Waiting for a Train," he suddenly threw in some very nice work. I wondered why he didn't do more on that level. I'd be interested to hear a real C & W fan's opinion of him.

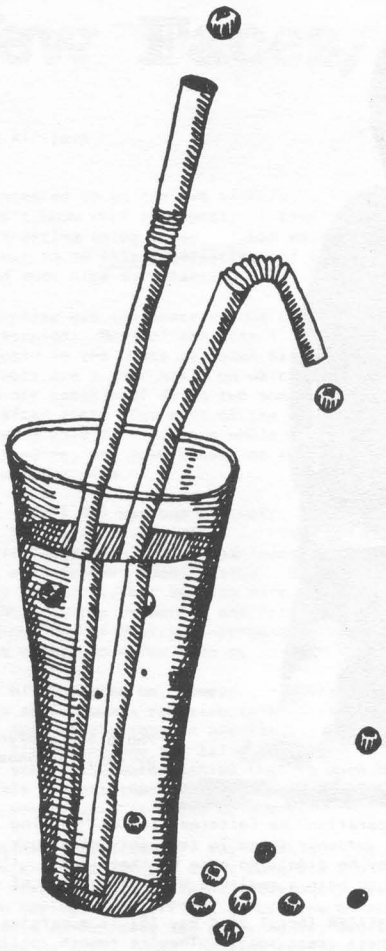
Now, MARK BERGER (April 28 & May 28) is a perplexity. He's got these great songs. They're smooth, polished, upbeat and catchy. The lyrics are good, the subjects are interesting. He leans a bit too far toward soft-rock for my taste, but that's just taste. Objectively, it's good, strong music. But his delivery. . .

At some point in his life, someone must have told Berger that he should sing "with feeling." He puts a lot of feeling into his songs. And that's just the problem -- he puts it there. He grafts emotion on top of the song.

A song, any song, already has emotion, emotion inherent in the nature of the work itself. Berger doesn't look in the song for the emotion that's there, focus on it, experience it himself, and then try to communicate it to you. What he does instead is paint a sensitive, pained expression on his face and sing with gusto, with energy, with verve, "with feeling." The overall effect is one of phoniness. And it's such a damn shame, because these are good songs. But I couldn't enjoy them.

(Time out for opposing viewpoints, i.e., the rest of the audience. They were hooting and hollering. They ate it up. No comment.)

There was one moment in his set on the 18th that I was able completely to enjoy, however. It was when he called



Loren Moss

up the New England Express (Rob and John Strachan) to back him up on his song "The Last One." Berger's delivery seemed to tone down, and the expansion of the vocal aspects directed attention away from his subsistence-level guitar work. Suddenly, his writing seemed to have the setting it deserved. It was a nice change. Perhaps what Berger needs is a group full-time, to show his songs to their best advantage.

THE NEW ENGLAND EXPRESS also did better with Berger than they did alone. Normally, I'm a sucker for good, tight harmonies, but their's seemed not so much tight as locked up. The harmonies are also too much the same from song to song. They could stand to cut loose a bit, and the way they sounded with Berger suggests that they might benefit from a third voice. And like Ms. Marsh, their songs were too similar in emotional tone and tempo.

I must give them a lot of credit, though, for their song "Our Only Home." In it they attempted more complicated guitar passages than in the other songs. Although they faltered badly, the attempt was so interesting that I was impressed. Also, at the end they went into an extended vocal section which again suffered from rough execution, but showed some interesting ideas. This is a song to keep your ears open for. When they get it polished, it might be very fine indeed.

Last month's NEW FACES also included three faces completely new to me. In brief:

JOHN GREEN (May 18) is a smooth performer, with good vocal and guitar ability. His songs were interesting and complex, although the serious ones seemed a bit muddy. He was able to pick up on audience reaction and alter his set accordingly, which is a good skill to have. Some of his humorous songs seemed overdelivered, but the audience was with him all the way.

SUSAN PIPER (April 28) has a strong pop influence, and her songs suffer from pop music's flaw of making deep emotions seem bland. One exception was "Miracle Worker," dedicated to Paul Simon, which had a nice soaring spirit behind it. "Round Before" was a lot of fun, but she really shouldn't keep telling us how young she was when she became a professional musician. It has no bearing on anything. Who cares? That was then. This is now.

JOHN DYER (April 28) was both a pleasant surprise and a disappointment. In his first set he won me over with his excellent guitar work, his fine voice and his clever interpretations. "The Butcher and the Taylor's Wife" was especially interesting, with its unusual interplay between voice and guitar bass strings. Dyer played difficult passages with perfect ease, and also seemed quite at home onstage.

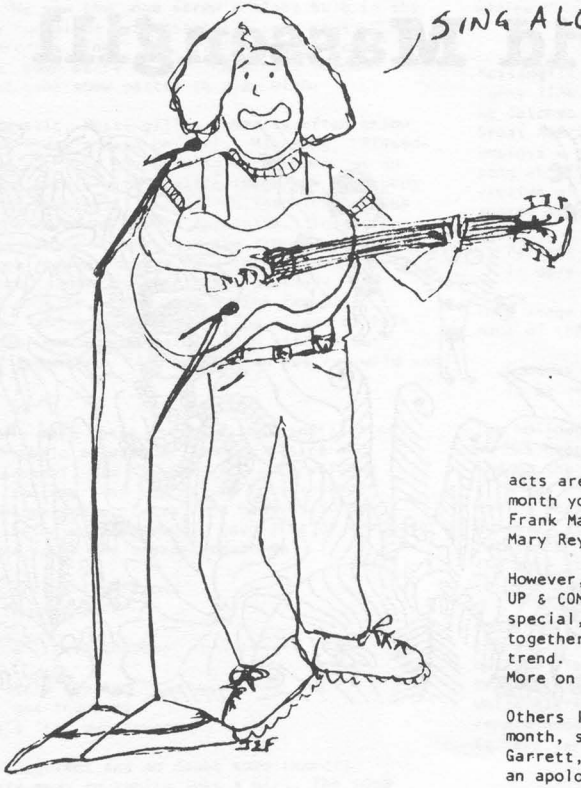
His second set didn't live up to the first. He seemed to have lost heart, perhaps due to the dwindled audience. His performance was sloppy. After that wonderful first set, I felt cheated.

The May 2nd edition of UP & COMING featured ILENE WEISS, ANSEL MATTHEWS, PETE GARDNER and SKIP BARTHOLD. Ms. Weiss gave her usual relaxed, fine performance (though I could stand a little less rambling between songs -- but I consider this very minor). Ansel Matthews is another musician whose performances have become consistently good (you've ssen them both before, lots of times). One interesting addition to his act is Pete Gardner on lead guitar. The first time I heard this combination, it was fairly shaky, but this time they showed much improvement. Gardner is a good addition.

Pete Gardner's solo set was also very interesting. Gardner's artistic development has been very rapid in the last few months. It's a little like watching a bamboo shoot; the growth is actually visible as it occurs.

His only problem seems to be nervousness. That night he was shaky. He stumbled in "Michael in the Garden," and "Man on the Sidewalk" was so rushed he had trouble getting the words out. "Willing," however, was very smooth. Gardner has some nice flatpicking in his songs, and I think his voice is one of the better male voices around. Keep your eyes on him.

But the biggest surprise for me this month was Skip Barthold. I had only heard Barthold in the past at the Cornelia Street Cafe Songwriters' Exchange, so I had never heard more than one song at a time, and always a brand-new, barely polished song. His music seemed highly abstract, and I had doubts that such a rarified approach would go over for an entire set. I didn't think I'd be able to simply relax and enjoy his music.



I was right on one point: I didn't relax. Barthold's music demands that the listener's mind remain active at all times, and that's what is most enjoyable about it. His songs are complex, both in the lyrical approach and in the structure of the music. It is a focused complexity that never descends into muddiness, as can too often result from such ambitious attempts.

Barthold's guitar work is very clean and crisp; he executes his instrumental complexities with utter precision. His lyrics are also precise; the images are hard and sharp, like diamonds. He communicates ideas and emotions with a glittering clarity.

I especially enjoyed "In the Heat of an Attraction" which uses a nice mix of visual imagery, concepts and sensations. And the idea of treating the Muses as local girls in "When the Girls Come Home" was a lot of fun, although, yes, it did need the explanatory introduction.

Why have I never heard a show by this man before? When and where is he playing again? Someone, tell me.

There were two other evenings of UP & COMING in the month of May, but I'm going to include them in next month's article. The main reason for this is time. (Exchange overheard at Speak Easy: Brian Rose: Say, Rosemary, how's that article coming? -- Me: Fine. By the way, when's the dealine? -- Brian: Monday. -- Me: Monday!! -- Brian: Well, actually, last Monday. . .) I don't want to just rush something off the top of my head, because these particular acts are ones I especially want to linger over. So next month you can expect to hear (at length) about Thom Morlan, Frank Mazzetti, Marilyn J, Eric Wood, Doug Waterman and Mary Reynolds (especially Mary Reynolds).

However, I want to make a quick reference to the May 23rd UP & COMING: a lot of effort was spent to make the evening special, a real event. The acts worked up some songs together, and even included a lyric sheet. This is a good trend. I'd like to see more of that level of involvement. More on this next month.

Others I skipped this month I know will be performing next month, such as Susan Brewster, Bob McGrath and Maggie Garrett, so I'll include them then. And as a final note, an apology to Nancy Heller and Alph Edwards; the only show you had was on May 5th, when I was performing myself. I was too nervous about my own set to give you the attention you deserved. I hope I have another opportunity to hear you.

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Editor:

When I read my letter printed in the last issue of the Coop, I realized I'd made a slight error that entirely changed the meaning of one of the sentences. The sentence was the one where I point out that "people guide their actions by ideas; either their own or the ideas of others, absorbed by upbringing or societal influences." It should have read: "...people guide their actions by ideas; either the ideas of others, absorbed by upbringing or societal influences, or their own."

As you can see, the difference is major. It's important to realize that people are capable of self-determination, that they can consciously choose their philosophy.

Rosemary Kirstein

Beating Around the Bush with David Massengill

By Gary Boehm

Exuse me sir...I am a writer
Though the critics are jealous of my genius
They say I'm writing with my penis

If Massengill does indeed write with his penis then he must be a voracious and ferocious lover. His pen is sharp, honed with humor, cutting easily and quickly to the bone. Massengill is bawdy and irreverent, he's subtly ironic and he's acerbic; the man is wildly funny and quietly cute.

Some of Massengill's most serious musings are expressed humorously. How does he tell us that Russians take things much too seriously? With a riddle. In Massengill's "Theory of De-evolution," he writes:

What's wrong with the Russians?
Have you read their novels
They all die in brothels

Then later in the song he plays off the old traveling salesman joke:

Do you get my gist all you communists
Can you take a joke
Did you hear the one, the traveling salesman
And the Bolshevik's daughter
Bolshevik you've got a lovely daughter

By making a joke he takes a little of the sting out of the accusations, but no one, nothing, is safe from the lash of his pen.

Massengill is often irreverent. In "Down Derry Down" he asks, "Are you bored with the Lord?" With a twist of the screw, he turns the light-bulb joke around and says in "Sightseer" that "He saw the pope screw a light bulb in the woods." Hell's a fun place for Massengill. He says, "Come on down, the brimstones fine," and, "It's finger lickin' good when you go down derry down." Here he's found advertisements and game-show patter to play with.

While sometimes caustic, Massengill's humor is often below the belt (by which I don't mean unfair). His song, "Pissed-Off Eunuch" stands out like the Washington Monument as an example of his love affair with phallic imagery. This song bares the fruits of Massengill's research into the various appellations for the male and female apparatus. Inventive David gives us the bowser wowser, and the trouser trout, the flapper whapper, beaver basher, and the welcome mat, dings, dongs, wongs, plums, bushes, pubic poachers, and super drooper. A dick is seldom just a dick for Dave, it's a plow, a pen, and a sooth**sayer**. The effect of this profusion of euphemisms is not just prudish titters but raucous, surprised laughter. His imagination has run wild and it all rhymes.

Not content to only make jokes and puns, Massengill also utilizes the more subtle aspects of humor: satire and irony are in his arsenal. In "Sightseer," a very funny song, he lampoons the American tourist in Foster Grants, Hawaiian shirt and seersucker pants. He manages to be satirical without being contemptuous. Each line of the song is funny, even more so in the unexpected rhyme:

> Been to London Bridge in Arizona
> Ate a Big Mac in Barcelona

Perhaps he sneaks a little contempt in here:

> He's seen the world revolve
> But he doesn't get involved
> For sightseein's its own reward

The caricature is perfect and no doubt some members of the audience are made to squirm just a bit. The song is made even funnier because, as each verse draws to a close, Massengill rattles off the list of ludicrous sights with increasing speed.

Massengill is a master at dreaming up unexpected couplings. One wonder whether the strange turns in the story lines of some of his songs aren't detours to accomodate a rhyme he's thought up. In "Hatfield's Revenge" (or "The Corncob Of My Discontent") Hatfield kills McCoy:

> And when he got wormy
> I learned taxidermy
> And stuffed him with pages from a Sears catalogue

In "Contrary Mary" he's got a man playing bassoon so that he can say, "With his last breath he muttered bazoom." In "Hungry Man," Massengill simply makes up a word when he needs a rhyme. The hungry fellow was given some chicken feet by a rich man:

> Well I put them in some gravy to make chicken-foot stew
> But to my stomach it was a crockle-doodle-do

One man's poison...

All of this playfulness with words is enhanced by Massengill's performance. Some jokes are aided by his Tennessee accent, a slightly lascivious Southern drawl. In "Sightseer" he sings:

> I'll never forget the Paris sew-ers
> Where I lost a pair of binoculew-ers

Other witticisms are abetted by his timing. In "The X-rated Gossip of History," Massengill has a horse being lowered onto Catherine the Great's bed while "She was giving...(pause)... advice."

Massengill knows how to play the serious line off of the funny line. By juxtaposing the ridiculous with the sublime, he catches the listener between a sob and a smile. "The Great American Dream" is an example of a solemn song which employs a grim humor in its most tragic instances. It is a song about the false promise of "America," told by the victims of that dream. One victim, the "writer," who was quoted at the beginning of this article, says:

> Perhaps you've read my work in True Confessions
> It pays the rent and fuels my obsessions

This image of the "writer" perverted is followed by a statement of the "writer's" dream:

> Someday I'll write the Great American Novel
> To be required reading in the Ivy League

The hollowness of the "writer's" dream is magnified because he has been driven to write pulp and smut. We may be laughing at the beginning of the verse, but by the end we've been silenced. The listener is disarmed and made vulnerable, having been drawn out with humor. Massengill moves in quickly, zinging the listener with the statement of the "writer's" dream. Though the dream seems cynical, it is all the more disturbing because we suspect that he once believed in "the dream."

Massengill is a serious songwriter. While his humor helps to make his work entertaining, it is never safe; anger and outrage lie just beneath the surface of many of his lines. Never strident, he rips apart things sacred to many people. While his images and perspectives are often bizarre, they remain under control. His humor, besides being funny, is very serious stuff.

"Contrary Mary" and "Massengill's Theory of De-evolution" are avaible on Cornelia Street: The Songwriters' Exchange, Stash Records, Inc., ST103
"The Great American Dream" is in the May issue of The CooP.
"On The Road To Fairfax County" is in the February issue.
"The Pissed Off Eunuch" is in the June issue.

The CooP regrets an error in the publishing information on Woody Guthrie's song "This Land Is Your Land" in the May issue. It should have read:

This Land Is Your Land
Words and Music by Woody Guthrie
TRO- c 1956, 1958, 1970 Ludlow Music, Inc., New York -BMI

Return of a Classic: Hootenanny Hoot

by Dave Van Ronk

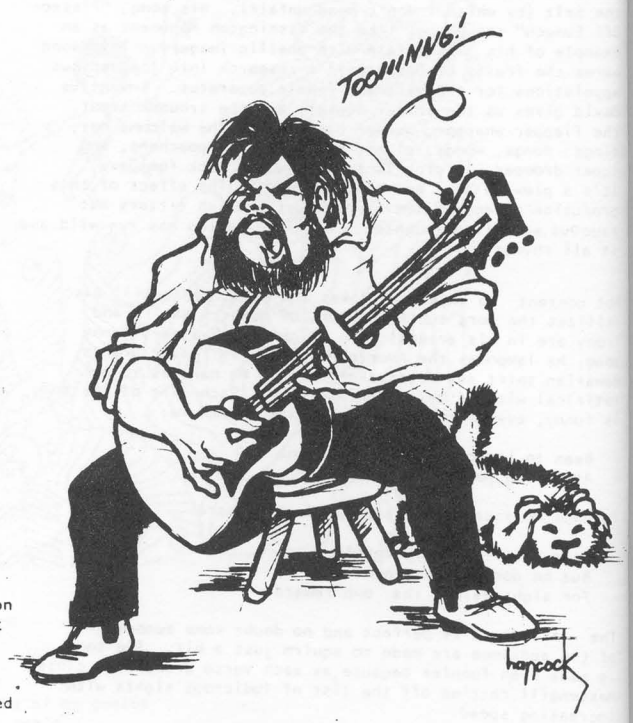
In 1964, when this movie was first released, as a reviewer for Cavalier Magazine (I think it was Cavalier), I panned it savagely. Wrong. Eighteen years later, I'm here, hat in hand, to do what I can to rehabilitate the reputation of what is certainly a film classic.

"Hootenanny Hoot" follows the line of the traditional Hollywood 'teen music exploitation flick: media exec stuck out in the boonies (stranded between planes, flat tire, whatever), hears the "kids" play strange new music. (The "kids" are generally in their thirties and the "strange new music" is, as a rule, five years out of date.) "Say," he says, after twenty three seconds of skeptical resistance "These kids have really got something here. I think I'll make them all stars." And he does. Also, everybody falls in love.

When these things make money, generally it's on the drive-in circuit, this one bombed at Alcatraz. So, what's to rehabilitate? The thing that makes this film stand apart is, of course, the music (not to mention the choreography, which I will). Swing has been parodied repeatedly in this genre. Rock and Roll, ditto. The results have been generally hilarious, but hardly unique. This time, for once and only, it's folk music's turn.

From the very beginning we know this is no ordinary musical gobbler. As the opening credits roll, Sheb Wooley ("Purple People Eater" was still in his future) sings the title song, with it's mesmerizing chorus, "Hootenanny, Hootenanny, Hoot, Hoot." The tone has been effectively set. Most of the action takes place on a college campus somewhere in Missouri - great doings, a hootenanny is coming to town. The extras are in a state of high excitement. "What's this?" Our pipe-puffing, square, New York T.V. producer asks. "Get with it, Dad" or something to that effect, and the poor fellow is almost bowled over and trampled to death by penny loafers.

The plot proceeds according to plan, and the music - ah the music! With such immortals as the Brothers Four, George Hamilton IV, Johnny Cash - Johnny Cash? Yes, and he damn near wrecks an otherwise perfect movie by turning in an excellent version of "Frankie and Johnnie." But no matter, the redoubtable, aforementioned, Sheb Wooley is on hand, as are the unforgettable Joe and Eddie, to save the day for what outraged purists (myself included) used to call "fake music."



Really, I don't know what got into me back then. I thought I had a sense of humor. How could I resist the delights of "Foolish Questions" performed on a trampolene?

Which brings me to the dancing. Imagine "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" performed by a troupe of spastics, weaving in and out of flannel-suited, crew cut, trios, quartets, duos, and what have you, and you still don't have the half of it. You simply have to see it for yourself.

The Musician's Co-op, who screened this wonder at Speak Easy on May 18th, should be commended for their vision. Moreover, they should be petitioned to do it again, thus helping to restore to us an important part of our musical heritage, and placing the current folk music revival in perspective. This film deserves a five cranberry rating. Selah.

June Folk Listings

Below is a partial listing of the current folk scene throughout the metropolitan area. This month we have received the schedules from three clubs: Folk City, Beat 'N' Path (Hoboken, NJ), and The Back Fence. Auditions for the Back Fence may be made by appointment with Ernie or Rocky. (Call 475-9221) They are held Tuesday - Thursday from 7:30 - 8:30 and there is no cover. Auditions at Folk City are by drawing on Monday nights at 7:00. Admission here, is also free.

If you would like your gig or your club's schedule listed in future publications, please contact Jay Moore at Speak Easy, 107 MacDougal Street (598-9670).

June 1 BOB HORAN - Back Fence

June 2 FRANKLIN MICARE - Back Fence
EVEN MONEY - Back Fence

June 3 FRESH AIR TRIO - Back Fence
JAMES TREGAS - Back Fence
DOUG WATERMAN & MARY REYNOLDS - Beat 'N' Path

June 4 JOHN RENBOURNE & JOHN FAHEY - Folk City
GENT & WEISS / EVEN MONEY - Back Fence

June 5 ROD MacDONALD - Folk City
FRESH AIR TRIO / TRAINDRIVER - Back Fence

June 6 EVEN MONEY / BRAD DONOVAN - Back Fence

June 7 BOB HORAN / LYNN HANEY - Back Fence

June 8 BOB HORAN - Back Fence

June 9 FRANKLIN MICARE / EVEN MONEY - Back Fence

June 10 FRESH AIR TRIO / JAMES TREGAS - Back Fence
DOUG WATERMAN & MARY REYNOLDS - Beat 'N' Path

June 11 EVEN MONEY / SPEEDO - Back Fence
JOHN HERALD BAND - Folk City

June 12 SPEEDO / TRAINDRIVER - Back Fence
BERMUDA TRIANGLE - Folk City

June 13 EVEN MONEY / BRAD DONOVAN - Back Fence

June 14 BOB HORAN - Back Fence

June 15 BOB HORAN / TOM RUSSELL - Back Fence

June 16 FRANKLIN MICARE / EVEN MONEY - Back Fence
PAPA JOHN KOLSTOD - Folk City

June 17 FRESH AIR TRIO / JAMES TREGAS - Back Fence
MANDRAGORA - Folk City
DOUG WATERMAN & MARY REYNOLDS - Beat 'N' Path

June 18 EVEN MONEY / GENT & WEISS - Back Fence
CELTIC THUNDER - Folk City

June 19 FRESH AIR TRIO / SPEEDO / TRAINDRIVER - Back Fence

June 20 EVEN MONEY / SHERI BECKER - Back Fence

June 21 BOB HORAN / LYNN HANEY - Back Fence

June 22 BOB HORAN / TOM RUSSELL - Back Fence

June 23 FRANKLIN MICARE / EVEN MONEY - Back Fence

June 24 FRESH AIR TRIO / JAMES TREGAS - Back Fence
MARTY CUTLER & CHARGED PARTICLES - Folk City
DOUG WATERMAN & MARY REYNOLDS - Beat 'N' Path

June 25 CHRIS SMITHER & CATFISH HODGE - Folk City
EVEN MONEY / GENT & WEISS - Back Fence

June 26 FRESH AIR TRIO / SPEEDO / TRAINDRIVER - Back Fence
RYO KAWASAKI & THE GOLDEN DRAGON - Folk City

June 27 EVEN MONEY / BRAD DONOVAN - Back Fence
COUNTRY JOE MacDONALD - Folk City

June 28 BOB HORAN - Back Fence

June 29 BOB HORAN - Back Fence

June 30 FRANKLIN MICARE / EVEN MONEY - Back Fence
HELEN HOOKE - Folk City

***And don't forget to check the SPEAK EASY schedule on the back page!!

Gary Boehm

SPEAKEASY 107 Macdougal NYC 598-9670

JUNE '82

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
All Shows 9pm until ? Unless Otherwise Noted	MONDAY DOLLAR NITES with FRANK CHRISTIAN 10 PM MOVIES at 8 - $1	1 OPEN MIKE with JOHN HODEL sign-up 7:15	2 POETRY WITH SHELDON BIBER 7-9 pm • NEW FACES WITH PETE GARDNER 9 pm-?	3 THE BALKANIZERS 8pm $3	4 FRANK CHRISTIAN Skip Barthold $4	5
6 Joey & Judy George O'Brien RUTH ANN BRAUSER JOSH JOFFEN BOB McGRATH	7 "DON'T KNOCK the TWIST" with Chubby Checker	8	9	10 PAUL KAPLAN (traditional music and...) $1	11 JACK HARDY The Belles of Hoboken Frank Mazzetti $4	12
13 Pete Gardner MAGGIE GARRETT ANSEL MATTHEWS ERIC WOOD $1	14 SELECTED SHORTS CAB CALLOWAY BOSWELL STRS MILLS BROS.	15	16	17 Rev. F.D. Kirkpatrick .... DAVE LIPPMAN 8PM $3	18 DAVID MASSENGILL LUNATUNE $4	19
20 DAVE BOLGER MARILYN J. Thom Morlan ANGELA PAGE	21 "THE GIRL CAN'T HELP IT" JAYNE MANSFIELD LITTLE RICHARD FATS DOMINO	22	23	24 $1 NIGHT with PAUL KAPLAN	25 TONY BIRD Mary Reynolds AND Doug Waterman $4	26
27 THE Hollywood Dick Doll Revue Susan Brewster Ari Eisinger	28 "DON'T KNOCK the ROCK" BILL HALEY & THE COMETS	29	30	Childrens' Concert with Ilene Weiss every Saturday $1 1pm		

Credits

side one

1. Wasted Love (Paul Joses)
   Carolyne McCombs/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass & 2nd Guitar

2. Montchanin (Gerry Devine)
   The Song Project
   Tom Intondi/Vocal & Guitar
   Lucy Kaplanski/Vocal
   Martha P. Hogan/Vocal
   Bill Bachman/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass & Guitar

3. Gypsy (Suzanne Vega)
   Suzanne Vega/Vocal & Guitar
   John Caulfield/Fiddle
   Mark Dann/Pedal Bass

4. I Truly Understand (Traditional)
   Peter Tork/Vocal & Banjo

5. The Whitsun Dance (Austin John Marshall)
   Austin John Marshall/Vocal
   John Caulfield/Fiddle
   Mark Dann/Bass

6. The Eunuch's Lament (David Massengill)
   David Massengill/Vocal & Dulcimer
   Jack Hardy/Guitar
   Jeff Hardy/Bass
   Peter Tork/Banjo

side two

1. A Lot Like Me (Have I got a Guy for You)
   (Hugh O'Doherty)
   Hugh O'Doherty/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass & 2nd Guitar

2. Jamboree (Traditional)
   Jamboree:
   Kathy Devine/Vocal & Guitar
   Nina Marie/Vocal & Tambourine
   Deborah Weitzman/Vocal & Dumbek

3. Out Over the Line (Rob Strachan)
   The New England Express
   Rob Strachan/Vocal & Guitar
   John Strachan/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass

4. Norman's Way (David Roth)
   David Roth/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass & 2nd Guitar

5. Regretting What I Said... (Christine Lavin)
   Christine Lavin/Vocals & Guitar

6. MacPherson's Farewell (Traditional)
   Erik Frandsen/Vocal & Guitar