

Singing in Athabasca

A great deal of traditional singing took place at Hallowe'en during the CSTM conference in Athabasca. Friday evening saw a Singers' Circle at the Riverhouse Restaurant, at which CSTM regulars from all over the country were joined by local musicians. There were many songs and many singers, and a good time was had by all. It would be invidious to single out just one or two of the anglophone performers. For posterity, however, I will record that Sandria Bouliane, Rika Ruebsaat and James Prescott all sang in our other official language, which added variety to the proceedings.

The academic papers during the day on Saturday were interspersed with two workshops. Panellists in the first one on "Women in Traditional Ballads" were Moira Cameron, Rosaleen Gregory, Rika Ruebsaat, and Paddy Tutty.



All four women were in good voice, with Moira contributing "Maid on the Shore", "Love Henry" and "Oh, No Sir!", Rosaleen "The Daemon Lover", "Lass of Loch Royan", and "I Will Put My Ship in Order", Paddy "Fair Annie", "Rosie Anderson", and "The Crafty Maid's Policy", and Rika "Le long de la mer", "Clayton Boone" and another version of "The Daemon Lover". The late arrival of lunch meant that there was time for contributions from three other singers: Robert Rodriguez with "The Knight and the Shepherd's Daughter", Jon Bartlett

with "Bonny Farday", and Mike Ballantyne: "Our Good Ship Lies in Harbour".



The afternoon workshop on Western Canadian Song provided an opportunity for four singers from Alberta and British Columbia to sing and talk about traditional songs from their own regions. Jon Bartlett began the proceedings with "The Bold North-West Man" and also contributed "Know Ye the Land" and "Are You from Bevan?". Despite protesting that his repertoire of appropriate material was slim, Mike Ballantyne offered "Canning Salmon", "Where the Cohoe Flash Silver" and "The Grand Hotel". Phil Thomas, who of course had a huge repertoire to draw upon, chose "Haywire", "Bowser's Seventy-Twa" and "The North-West Logger". John Leeder, the sole representative from Alberta, chimed in with "Jerry Potts", "Where the Ghost River Flows", and "The Jam on Jerry's Rocks (Young Munroe)". By no means the least enjoyable part of the workshop were the comments on the songs offered by the

participants; as Jon remarked at the close, they were leaving behind a scattering of footnotes to be brushed from the floor before the next session.



The Saturday evening concert at the Nancy Appleby Theatre consisted of two parts. The first half featured quite a variety of CSTM stalwarts, and it was a treat to hear them performing together. MC John Leeder started things off with “Painting Over the NAR”, and then introduced Mike Ballantyne who sang “Jack the Sailor” and “The Carrion Crow”. President Norman Stanfield took out his pennywhistle and played a medley of “Ten Penny Bit” and five other Rapper jigs, with “Valse Clog” as an encore. Rosaleen Gregory sang “Queen Eleanor’s Confession” and “Lowlands Away”, while James Prescott also chose a traditional ballad, “Sir Patrick Spens”, followed by a francophone item, “Les Prisons de Nantes”. Next came Murray Shoolbraid, who contributed two night-visiting songs, one in French and one in English, and then it was time for another instrumental break. Northumbrian piper Derek Lofthouse played a

medley of “Brafferton Village” and two double hornpipes, and subsequently asked John Leeder to accompany him on another medley that included “Winshields Hornpipe” and “Salmon Tails Up the Water”. Next up was Robert Rodriguez with “The Farmer’s Curst Wife” and the song that drew the most applause, Bill Gallaher’s “The Last Battle” about the second Riel Rebellion. Rika Ruebsaat and Jon Bartlett contributed “The Greenhorn Song” and “The Green Cove” respectively, and John Leeder closed out the first half of the concert with “The Hudson Bay Line”.

The second half of the concert was the Paddy & Moira show. They kicked off with a joint performance of “The Wild Hog”, and then traded ballads, Moira singing “Jock o’ Hazeldean” and “Down By the Willow Garden (Rose Connolly)” and Paddy “Annachie Gordon” and “Kemp Owen”. A duo version of “The Bonny Bonny Banks of Airdrie-O” was followed by two songs from the Canadian northwest, “Lament of a Miner’s Wife” and “Ruby’s Song”, both sung by Moira. Paddy’s beautiful “Bonny Portmore” (about the cutting down of an Irish woodland) led to a tongue-twisting, tragi-comic lament for a dead cow, performed with aplomb by Moira. Then came two impressive renditions of lengthy traditional ballads, Paddy’s version of “The Famous Flower of Serving Men” and Moira’s account of “Tamlyn”, before the evening concluded with a duo rendition of “The Homeless Wassail”. The night was late but we were happy that this had been an occasion when these fine ballad singers had felt comfortable with performing some of the longest and most magnificent items in their repertoires.



Photographs of Rosaleen Gregory, Robert Rodriguez, Norman Stanfield, and Paddy Tutty & Moira Cameron courtesy of Gerry T. Bulmer.