

Trial Run: A Mini-Festival at Princeton, Summer 2007

David Gregory



Jill King, Brian Robertson, Rich Williams, Judith Heather, Rika Ruebsaat, Jon Bartlett, Henk Piket, Morgan Bartlett, & John D. Erskine

It was an experiment. Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat had recently retired and moved further inland in British Columbia, from New Westminster to Princeton in the West Okanagan. They had discovered a vibrant community with a rich history and some residents who liked music enough to put on a small community festival in the late summer. The main stage, in the main square, was scheduled to host some local rock bands. Why not have another stage with traditional music as an alternative attraction? Jon and Rika made the suggestion, and it was accepted, provided (of course) that they volunteered to take on the task of organizing the folk music concerts. So in 2007 residents of the town and summer visitors found they had a choice of what to listen to at the local festival. The site of what came to be known as the Museum Stage was the venue for two days of performances by a bunch of musical friends that Jon and Rika had roped in to show Princeton what West Coast traditional do-it-yourself music was all about. Listed alphabetically, the musicians who responded to the call – the real

pioneers of the yet-to-be-born Princeton Traditional Music Festival – were the following:

Eric & Betty Armstrong
Jon Bartlett & Rika Ruebsaat
Morgan Bartlett
Flip Breskin & Zeke Hoskin
Claddach
John D. Erskine
Fraser Union
Don Gilbert
Andy Jacobsen
Jill King
Mike Marker
Fred Muehlchen
Henk Piket
Rattlebone Band
Brian Robertson
Chris Roe
Squeeze (Judith Heather & Rich Williams)
Ellen Van der Hoeven
Lyn Van Lidth de Jeude

This was the lineup for the first day:

Saturday 30 June
Museum Stage

1.00 – 1.30 pm **Jon Bartlett & Rika Ruebsaat**
Songs of BC Miners and Loggers

1.30 – 2.00 pm **Mike Marker**
Songs of Fun and Social Significance

2.00 – 2.30 pm **Ellen Vander Hoeven**
Songs and Ballads

2.30 – 3.00 pm **Don Gilbert**
American Folk Songs

3.00 – 3.30 pm **Rattlebones Band**
Dance Music and Song from Vancouver's Best Ceilidh Band

3.30 – 4.00 pm **Chris Roe**
Sea Songs and More

4.00 – 4.30 pm **Fraser Union**
Songs of Working Lives

4.30 – 4.45 pm **Andy Jacobsen**
Country Songwriter

4.45 - 5.15 pm **Claddach**
Canadian/Celtic Trio



Jon Bartlett & Rika Ruebsaat

Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat, who have already been introduced (see sections 1 & 2 of this issue), opened the proceedings, sometimes singing together, sometimes singly, Jon performing *a cappella* or to Rika's melodeon accompaniment, and Rika usually accompanying herself or them both. This mini-festival did not include workshops but some of the

participants, including Jon and Rika, had decided to build their performances around themes. Jon and Rika's focus on this occasion was on songs, mainly taken from the Phil Thomas collection, reflecting the experiences of miners and loggers in British Columbia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Mike Marker, one of the several American musicians who had heeded the call and travelled up from Washington State especially for this day of traditional music, was second up. Hailing from Bellingham, Mike has been singing and making music for most of his life and has performed at folk clubs and festivals all across North America. He recalls that he once bicycled from the west coast to Toronto with a banjo and was a crew member on the sloop *Clearwater* on the Hudson River in New York, where he used folk-songs for environmental education. His repertoire ranged from old songs about American history to new songs about the environment, First Nations and other topical issues.



Mike Marker

Then came Ellen van der Hoeven, a vocalist from Vancouver, who says she is at ease in many singing

traditions from gospel and blues to hundred-year-old ballads. For many years she has been singing traditional songs on her own and as a member of several groups, including Three Strong Winds. Another project was performing original songs with Karen Kelm as The Neverly Sisters. Ellen also sings with a blues band that plays at dances and bars in the lower mainland. But traditional songs are her first love and they are what she was singing on this and other occasions at Princeton.



Ellen van der Hoeven

Don Gilbert, originally from North Carolina but now living in New Westminster, has been playing folk music for over forty years; he performs mostly traditional, old time North American songs. He sings songs from the chain gangs of the American South, from the Civil War, and from the lives of many Americans, past and present. Don particularly likes those histories and stories in song that connect us with people in earlier times who were really not that much different from us; he believes such songs are educational: they can help us learn from our past mistakes.

Don's exploration of the American song tradition was followed by a musical journey across the Atlantic ocean to olde England. Rattlebone Band is part of the Morris dance scene in Vancouver. The band members are also members of the Vancouver Morris Men and they claim to be swifter on their feet than they are with their fingers. Rattlebone plays English jigs, reels and hornpipes and often puts on ceilidh dances. They have become regulars at the Princeton Festival, sometimes expanding their lineup with

guests from Vancouver and elsewhere on the lower mainland.



Rattlebone Band and friends

Chris Roe from Seattle has been singing songs and playing traditional music in the Pacific Northwest for about thirty years. She acknowledges having a love affair with traditional music ever since hearing the Chad Mitchell Trio in 1963. She has been a Morris dancer, a student of early music and a harp player, and she is an active member of the maritime music community in the Puget Sound area. One of her favourite genres is sea songs, which she has sung by herself and in an all-woman shanty band. Her main passion is *a cappella* singing, although she also plays melodeon and guitar.



Chris Roe

Chris Roe's performance was followed by a set from the well-known Vancouver group Fraser Union. Now a trio consisting of Roger Holdstock, Henk Piket and Barry Truter, Fraser Union has been in existence for 25 years. The group has performed hundreds of concerts at labour conferences, folk festivals and benefits. Their repertoire combines blues with Canadian material, their song selection emphasizing social history and ongoing social causes. They tell stories in song of lives past and present from B.C., Canada, and sometimes elsewhere. On this occasion their strong

voices presented a few songs *a cappella* but most accompanied by a variety of instruments, including guitars, mandolins, dobro, and banjo.



Fraser Union

After Andy Jacobsen, about whom we unfortunately have no biographical information, the final group to perform on Saturday was Claddach, a Kelowna-based Canadian/Celtic folk trio comprising Rob Corbett, Lorraine Helgerson, and Ross McRae. Over the past fifteen years they have built up an eclectic repertoire of acoustic music. They sing traditional and contemporary songs that illuminate social and/or political aspects of the human condition. Their material varied from historical B.C. ballads to contemporary topical songs, interspersed with traditional fiddle tunes ranging from Scottish strathspeys to Breton waltzes.



Claddach

It would become a custom at the Princeton festival to have one or more groups of Morris dancers adding colour and the sound of traditional English dance music at intervals throughout the day. Not listed in the program as performing on stage, but to be found nearby dancing in the street at different times on the last day of June were some of the Vancouver Morris Men as well as the (female) Tiddleycove Morris Dancers.



Tiddleycove Morris Dancers

Although limited to one stage, the mini-festival of 2007 was a two-day affair. This was the program for day two:

Sunday 1 July

Museum Stage

1.00 – 1.30 pm **Flip Breskin & Zeke Hoskin**
Songs of Wit and Wisdom

1.30 – 2.00 pm **Fred Muehlchen**
Canadian, American and British Folk Songs

2.00 – 2.30 pm **Jill King**
Sea Songs and More

2.30 – 3.00 pm **Brian Robertson**
Songs of Work and Social History

3.00 – 3.30 pm **Eric & Betty Armstrong**
Country Favourites

3.30 – 4.00 pm **Lyn van Lidth de Jeude**
Ballads and Songs

4.00 – 4.30 pm **Squeeze**
Accordion Tunes and Songs

4.30 – 5.00 pm **Rattlebones Band**
Dance Music and Song from Vancouver's Best Ceilidh Band

Proceedings were begun on Sunday morning by Flip Breskin and Zeke Hoskin from Bellingham, Washington. Zeke is originally from Montreal but has lived in Vancouver for many years. He plays fiddle tunes, Sousa marches, ragtime, and “warped originals” on the mandolin and Celtic harp. He is also a songwriter, seeing the absurd side of life and putting it into witty and humorous songs that have been performed and recorded by groups from Vancouver Island to Newfoundland. He is the composer of “Now It’s Called Princeton”, a four-verse history of Princeton in song [see the *Now It’s Called Princeton* section near the end of this issue]. Flip is a musical mover and shaker from way back, one of the founders of the Puget

Sound Guitar workshop. A finger-style guitarist who plays tuneful instrumentals, her own songs tend to be deep and thoughtful. Not surprisingly, Flip and Zeke's performance together was one of contrasts: off-beat instrumentals interspersed among quite different kinds of songs.



Flip Breskin & Zeke Hoskin

Fred Muelchen was next up. He started singing at the Vancouver Folk Song Society in the early sixties. After working 30 years in Germany, he returned with his wife Linda to Summerland to retire and to carry on where he left off 30 years ago—singing Canadian, American and British folk songs. Then came Jill King, a transplanted Kiwi from New Zealand, an enthusiastic singer of sea songs, who has been involved in singing and organizing nautical songfests for many years. She always likes to get the audience participating, singing along on the choruses of her shanties.



Jill King & John D. Erskine

The next artist, Brian Robertson, now resides in Vancouver but comes originally from Powell River, living there (he says) when more people had boats than cars. He has traveled many countries but has always felt B.C. is his home. His work life has been var-

ied—as commercial fisherman, cabbie, engineer, economist and historian—and from that springs the variety and depth of his songs. He writes and sings on a wide range of themes, from work and local history to love and the environment, plus blues and a little satire, mostly drawn from personal experiences. He is best known for his finely crafted songs about the west coast, including the widely-loved “When the Tide Goes Out (The Table Is Set)”. As a singer, he also enjoys belting out shanties, of which he has a considerable repertoire. When he's not making solo appearances, Celtic music is another passion, in which he appears as a guitarist and vocalist for Irish Cream and the Irish Wakers, and as a frequent guest of the Jocelyn Band.



Brian Robertson

Brian was followed by Eric and Betty Armstrong, a duo who originally hailed from the northeast of England. Over thirty years ago they met in a folk club there and have been singing together ever since. A vital part of the British folk club scene before they came to Canada, they continued to organize folk music and Morris dance activities after they immigrated. Founders of the North Shore Folk Club, they were also active in the Vancouver Morris Men dance team and the band Jiggery Pokery. In addition to music from English tradition they perform American songs sung in an old-time family style. Rika Ruebsaat joined them for part of their performance.



Rika Ruebsaat with Betty and Eric Armstrong

Next came Lyn Van Lidth de Jeude from Bowen Island. Lyn sings music that was shared in families of the southern Appalachian Mountains during the early 1900s, the best kind of family entertainment in that era. The songs were a poignant illustration of the daily life of the mountain folk and they speak to us today as strongly as they did when they were collected almost 100 years ago.



Lyn Van Lidth de Jeude

Squeeze—Judith Heather and Rich Williams from Gabriola Island—perform a mixture of traditional and contemporary songs from England, France and North America. They enjoy harmony singing and have recently branched out into storytelling. Their special love is dance tunes from France, played on accordions and melodeons. They have a long history

in Morris dance as well as a fascination with traditional French music and Parisian musette.



Squeeze

Another set by the Rattlebone Band was followed by a finale of shanty singing in which Jon and Rika were joined by other shanty specialists including Jill King, Brian Robertson, Henk Piket (of Fraser Union), Judith Heather, Rich Williams and John D. Erskine. John Erskine from Victoria is fascinated with traditionally rigged ships and the songs that come from the age of sail. He has worked on the *Lady Washington* (WA State's Tall Ship ambassador), the *Hawaiian Chieftain*, the *R. Tucker Thompson* (a Kiwi schooner on passage from Hawaii to Victoria), and spent four seasons as first mate on the B.C. schooner *Maple Leaf*. A mainstay of the Victoria Folk Music Society, John founded the Victoria Nautical Song Circle and has hosted community radio folk music shows.



Shanty singing with Brian Robertson, Rich Williams, Judith Heather, Jill King, Jon Bartlett, Henk Piket, & John D. Erskine.