

## Treasures from Our Archives

John Leeder

### *Fifteen Years Ago*

*Bulletin* 25.3 (Fall 1991). Hard times. The CSTM ran short of money, and editor Lynn Whidden rose to the challenge by producing a photocopied issue. Content was substantial, articles “The Musical Saw” and “Learning Through Drum and Dance” appeared, as did reports on the Society’s AGM in Calgary and the Raga-Mala Conference in Winnipeg, and a review of Hugh Verrier’s book *The Songs of Wade Hemsworth*.

### *Ten Years Ago*

*Bulletin* 30.3 (September 1996). This issue included two articles focusing on Latin American music: Murray Luft’s “Latin American Protest Music – What Happened to the ‘New Songs’?”, and “Reflections on the New Song Movement” by Sylvia Hawkins. Several poems from Latin American sources accompanied the articles. Alison Acker’s article on “The Raging Grannies” described that particularly Canadian offshoot of the protest songs movement, and was ac-

companied by some “Granny” songs. Other songs in the issue were Barry Luft’s “See My Gold Again”, Eileen McGann’s “Man’s Job”, and traditional songs “William Brown” and “Peter Crowley”. A sad note was struck by an epitaph for Calgary’s Graham Jones. Numerous reviews of books and recordings completed the issue.

### *Five Years Ago*

*Bulletin* 35.3-4 (Fall-Winter 2001-2002). This was a double issue. I’ll write about it next time.

These issues (and all back issues, either in original form or as photocopies) are available from CSTM Back Issues, 224 20<sup>th</sup> Ave. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2M 1C2. For pricing, see the Mail Order Service catalogue or website ([www.yorku.ca/cstm](http://www.yorku.ca/cstm) and follow the links), or contact [john.leeder@nucleus.com](mailto:john.leeder@nucleus.com). Cumulative Tables of Contents of all issues since 1982 are available on the website as well. [JL]

## The ‘Classic’ Series from Smithsonian Folkways

Lorne Brown

Moe Asch (1905-1986) founded Folkways Records in 1944 in New York City. He sought to record and document the entire world of sound. Working out of a tiny office and studio, he released over 2000 albums before he died! His resolve was never to allow an album to go out of print; even if it sold no copies, it would remain in the catalogue. Upon his death, Washington’s Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage purchased the entire collection, a vast library of traditional, ethnic music, spoken word, documentaries, instructional material, you name it.

Folkways records were never big sellers; most music stores never even carried them. Schools and other educational institutions did,

however, and better record stores such as Toronto’s Sam the Record Man, which I haunted as a youth, always had a selection. Most folk music lovers of my vintage had a respectable collection of Folkways recordings – Pete Seeger, perhaps, Alan Mills, and the Canadian recordings of Helen Creighton and Edith Fowke.

When the Smithsonian took over, it was possible for many years to purchase tapes of all Folkways albums, a process that was costly and took ages, but was rewarding in that these old gems could still be listened to in better sound than they originally had. Which brings us to ...

## Smithsonian Global Sound

Smithsonian Global Sound “delivers the world’s diverse cultural expressions via the Internet in an informative way for a reasonable price.” From [www.smithsonianglobalsound.org](http://www.smithsonianglobalsound.org) you can now download any track from an old Folkways recording for 99 cents (US). And the latest goodie: you can now download entire albums for \$9.99 (US). With a service charge per order of 25 cents and the difference between the Canadian and the American dollar, I find an album costs me approximately \$11-12 Canadian dollars.

Members of the CSTM have long lamented the loss of the two Mercury albums of Canadian folksongs, long out of print. The albums from which these selections were taken – as originally recorded by Sam Gesser in Montreal – are now easily available, either as complete albums or as individual tracks. And oh, yes, you can download the original album notes.

Speaking of Canadian folk material... Smithsonian Folkways (“SFW”) has the whole incredible collection of Canadian material. Field recordings by Helen Creighton and Edith Fowke and Barbara Cass-Beggs, a plethora of Alan Mills recordings, Jean Carignan, Wade Hemsworth’s original album, an intriguing vocal album by collector Ken Peacock, and much, much more. In fact, they’ve just dipped into this priceless wealth of material for their *Classic Canadian Songs* album, which, if you are patient, I will review a little farther down in this article.

Speaking of ‘Classic’ material ...SFW is in the process of releasing a series of ‘classic’ recordings, compilations taken from their extensive library. Currently, this series consists of Classic African-American Ballads, Bluegrass (2 volumes), Blues (2 volumes), Canadian Songs, Folk Music, Labor Songs, Maritime Music, Mountain Songs, Old-Time Music, Railroad Songs, and Southern Gospel. I’m sure there is more to come!

Each of these recordings has updated sound, along with extensive and authoritative liner notes. The wealth of material now made available again attests to Asch’s original vision and to his wisdom in not allowing an album to go out of print. If ever the word ‘classic’ was rightly applied, it certainly is in this series.

And now, finally ...

## Various. *Classic Canadian Songs from Smithsonian Folkways*. SFW CD 40539.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 750 9th Street NW, Suite 4100, Washington, DC 20560-0953, USA; 1-888-FOLKWAYS; [mailorder@si.edu](mailto:mailorder@si.edu); [www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu)

This compilation disc is one of the SFW “Classic” series, and is drawn from the 140 or so Canadian albums originally recorded on Folkways Records. It is a joint project between the University of Alberta and SFW – Moe Asch liked the university and visited it often, since his son Michael was teaching there. Brenda Dalen, of the Faculty of Music in the University of Alberta, an expert in music of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, was responsible for the compilation and the very informative notes accompanying the CD.

I have to say right out that this is an album anyone with the slightest interest in Canadian traditional music should have. The treasure trove that is Folkways has been combed over, and the results are on this disc: performers such as Jean Carignan, Wade Hemsworth, Alan Mills, Stanley Triggs, Tom Kines and Karen James are featured, along with field recordings including O.J. Abbott.

The only thing anyone can quibble with is, of course, the selection. Everyone listening to this CD will no doubt say, “How come such-and-such wasn’t included?” No doubt Brenda Dalen and her committee asked the same thing. But there is a good representation of the various areas of Canada, no mean thing to accomplish given the preponderance of recorded material from the Maritimes. English and French (and Gaelic, African, Jewish, etc.) traditions are well balanced, and there are traditional songs and composed songs as well, also representative songs from our First Nations people. The CD ends with Sandy Stoddard performing some bear and moose calls for Helen Creighton.

To please everyone, this would have had to be a multi-CD album, although even then there would still be some plaintive voice asking, “Why no --- (fill in the blank)?” I personally think there is a good cross-section of Canadian folk music represented, with a nice balance between studio recordings and field recordings. But if I may add my plaintive voice, I would ask why Hélène Baillargeon was not on this album. And I wish Ken Peacock had been included, as well as a recording of Phil Thomas that I know is in the SFW archives. But that’s mere quibbling, and the more I

think about it, the more I think that the discussions from everyone listening to this CD will be part of its value.

I'm very grateful to Moses Asch and Sam Gesser for recording this material in the first place, and for Asch's vision to keep all his records in print. And of course I'm grateful to the people at Smithsonian Folkways for co-producing this album. But I can't help thinking about the fact that it is Americans who did so

much to preserve our recorded Canadian folk music, and it is Americans who are reissuing it now. (See Ed McCurdy's new/old album, reviewed in the previous issue.) What's wrong with Canada? Can't we do that, too? Why isn't someone re-releasing all those early Canadian folk music records on various other labels? Why has the RCA 9-disc Centennial collection of folk songs been left to languish out-of-print, for example? Only in Canada, you say?

## More Reviews

### Book

**Beverlie Robertson (with notes by Edith Fowke).** *With Knowing Eyes: Canadian Women in Song*. Brandy Creek Music and Publications, 2468 Falkenburg Road, RR #1, Port Carling, Ontario, POB 1J; [oldblues@golden.net](mailto:oldblues@golden.net)

This is an important book, and a long-awaited one. People who enjoy Canadian traditional music finally have a new songbook for their shelves.

The book has been long-awaited by Robertson herself – 30 years, in fact. As she observes, 30 years gives one a wry perspective on the nature of progress. Whether the progress she refers to is of the project or of the status of women is a moot point. It was the International Women's Year (1975) when the project started; Edith Fowke came on board at Wade Hemsworth's book launch at Trinity College, and contributed many songs that had hitherto been unpublished.

Between the covers lie eighty Canadian songs about women, mostly traditional. The songs are divided into ten categories: "Women in Love", "Women Left Behind", "Ladies' Choice", "Taking Care", "Careless Love", "Devastation", "Married Life", "Brains over Brawn", "Adventuring", and "The Struggle". Songwriters represented include Shirley Eikhart, Marie-Lynn Hammond, Wade Hemsworth, Vera Johnson, Anne Lederman, Gordon Lightfoot, Rita MacNeil, Sylvia Tyson, and Nancy White.

As is expected, the majority of the songs are in English. There is a good sampling of songs in French, alas with no English translations, as well as a Yiddish song (translated by Judith Cohen) and a Ukrainian song, "I Must Have Been Blind When I Married Him", translated by Robert Klymasz. Cynthia Kerr's "Give Us Back the

Night" has been translated by Chantal Chamberland into French. In her preface Robertson gives a clear and rational explanation why there is no music from Canada's Native women in the book. The music has all been transcribed by Beverlie Robertson herself. Chords have been added, and I am pleased that they have been deliberately omitted for some songs that sound best *a cappella*.

The selection of songs is fascinating. The beautiful "If I Were a Blackbird" is represented by a rare Ontario version with different words and melody from the familiar. An Ontario "broken token" ballad is included, along with "The Star of Belle Island". This is such a beautiful song; more Canadians should be aware of it. "Taking Care", the fourth section, reflects the role of women in the creation and nurturing of humankind. Interestingly enough, all the songs in this section are recently composed, leaving this reviewer to wonder if traditional music never reflected this aspect of women. Drawing on my ever-fading memory, I could not readily recall such a traditional song. Interesting.

The well-loved "She's Like the Swallow" comes with three verses not normally sung, which give added poignancy to the song. "The Bad Girl's Lament" is here, one of the large family of songs that are identified by the earliest example, "The Unfortunate Rake", of which the familiar "Cowboy's Lament", aka "Streets of Laredo", is the best known. Perhaps from being immersed in this book of women's songs I found myself wondering why the male "rake" is merely "unfortunate", the cowboy is merely a cowboy, but when the protagonist is a woman, she becomes the "bad girl".

"Brains Over Brawn" is one of my favourite sections. Child ballad 4, "Lady Isobel and the Elf