

# From the New President

*Rika Ruebsaat, CSTM President*

Last November I was elected president of the CSTM and one of the things I promised to do upon getting elected was to keep in regular touch with the membership. One means of doing so will be a regular column in *Canadian Folk Music*, of which this is the first.

I'd like to begin by telling you a bit about myself. I think this is important because it will contextualize my leadership. I was born in Germany in 1948 and immigrated to Canada in 1952. I grew up in BC in a family which sang together, mostly German folk songs, and then later, songs of the North American folk revival. In the early 1960s our family became involved in the Vancouver Folk Song Society (VFSS) and sang at their regular Folk Song Circles. As a teenager I learned to play guitar and began singing on my own, both at the Circle and at coffeehouses around Vancouver. In the mid-1970s I decided to focus on Canadian songs, which had been sorely lacking in my repertoire. Through my ongoing involvement with the VFSS, I met Jon Bartlett and the two of us sang and toured together, produced folk music magazines and radio shows and worked organizationally in the VFSS. In 1981 we stopped singing full time and became classroom teachers, a job which I still hold. Over the years we have continued singing, researching, presenting and writing in the area of traditional song. My involvement in the CSTM began in the late 1970s when I was elected to the Board. My commitment to Canadian traditional music continues unabated and I see the CSTM as a vital vehicle for its preservation and dissemination.

For me, making music is about sharing and 'conversation', both in words and in music. We share the language of music and can 'speak' to one another in that language. We can also have conversations about the music which bring us closer to mutual understanding and make the music more meaningful. In this issue of *Canadian Folk Music* Jon Bartlett gives a 'blow-by-blow' account of the 2005 CSTM Conference/AGM. As co-organizer of the weekend I'd like to indulge in a very subjective reflection on the event.

The parts of this year's Conference/ AGM that worked best for me were those in which these conversations took place. The impromptu singing at the Friday evening reception and at the party on Saturday evening were a joy to be part of. People

unbuttoned themselves and shared their music in an egalitarian and inclusive manner. It was a real 'high'. The Saturday sessions that included time for conversation were, for me, the most satisfying. The discussions during and at the end of the "Teaching Folk Songs in Canada" session allowed us to hear from a wide variety of perspectives, which I found very enriching. My main frustration with most conferences is the shortage of time for these conversations. We are always under such tight timelines that we rarely have time to absorb what one speaker has said before we're on to the next.

In a similar vein I found Sunday's AGM highly frustrating. We get together but once a year to share our common interests and we spend it looking at our watches and squirming in our seats trying to get through the immediate business. We never have time to discuss what it is that actually unites us or in what directions we'd like to go. The most satisfying conferences I have attended were those where time for conversation, both verbal and musical, were built in. This was possible because the conferences spanned several days or a week, at the end of which the participants had evolved into a community of interest. If the CSTM is to go from strength to strength we need time to converse meaningfully. If we don't do so, what are we but just a loose conglomeration of individuals working in isolation who get together once a year to 'strut their stuff'?

I welcome your comments.

## In the Mail

I am finally responding to your letter of many months ago to pass along my appreciation of your kind review of the Prairie Higgler's CD *From Door to Door* and the issue of *Canadian Folk Music* (vol. 38.4). Your review was well received by the Higgler's and we basked in the limelight for the moment at least.

You might be pleased to know that since Bill Sarjeant's passing the group has carried on with all the energy and enthusiasm that Bill put into the group while he was with us. We have redefined ourselves, but it remains a happy group enjoying its music.

*Joseph T. Mink, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*