

Editorial and Adios

We received only one response to my comment in the last issue about a cartoon in *Folk Dancer* which suggested that participation in folk dance gives one the same international perspective as a (presumably) good newspaper (if that's not an oxymoron in these Black days). However, the matter came back to my mind when I read a piece on Mickey Hart in the current *Dirty Linen* (#86, February-March 2000). Hart, former drummer for the Grateful Dead and a crusader for some musics most people never hear, is quoted, astonishingly, as having said, "You really can't hate somebody when you know their music."

I suppose that a lot may depend on how you define some of those words—"hate," for example, and "know"—but of course you can define any problem into nonexistence if you put a little effort into it. When I read Hart, in addition to my comment on the cartoon, I remembered a now-deceased American politician—a Republican blues guitarist and supporter of Newt Gingrich. Now, I'm sure that he had nothing personal against any African Americans, but, then, I heard that from Texan segregationists during my boyhood there. I also know that Mance Lipscomb, the Chatmon family, and a rather large number of other black musicians relied upon the patronage of their racist neighbors. Peter Guralnick confessed in *Sweet Soul Music* to have been surprised to discover that the great men of soul music (Joe Tex, Otis Redding, Solomon Burke) got at least as much support from fraternities of the south (not exactly hotbeds of love and understanding, if you know anything about southern culture) as they did from the ghettos of Houston, Birmingham, or Atlanta. (Which reminds me—did anyone ever clear up exactly where Eric Clapton stands on Enoch Powell?)

If I'm not mistaken, Jews and Gypsies have had a similar role in eastern Europe: preferred music makers for people who happily butchered them from time to time. I suspect the examples of this could be multiplied beyond our capacity to stomach them. And intolerance is not always strictly a matter of racism, as far as that goes. I remember once noting a model bouzouki hanging from the mirror of a cab I was riding in, somewhere east of Manitoba. When I asked about it, the driver waxed eloquent on the subject of *rebetika* music, and quickly (without prompting) added that the makers of that wonderful music are scum. How many in attendance at the symphony would really want their daughter to marry the second bassoonist?

Unfortunately, it seems quite possible for people to separate the esthetic (hence trivial, for many) joys of music from what

they consider the important business of life. Oh, there are examples of people who've followed music and dance into an interest in the humans who make it. My sense of the character and career of the late rocker Doug Sahm is that he did just this; indeed, I understand that his anthem "Chicano" was received with the respect it deserved among Mexican Americans. But this does not happen automatically. Like certain other sorts of idealisms, to expect music to lead to love too easily may very well set one up for a terrible disenchantment. Such disillusion seems to have happened pretty collectively in the humanities, where the realization that a list of intense music lovers of Europe would include Klaus Barbie and Herr Schickelgruber has led many of my generation to deny that beauty has any ethical or political value whatsoever. (Try to spout something about *Truth and Beauty* in most English grad schools and see where it gets you!)

I've seen a lot of babies go out with the suds in my day. I certainly do not want to be understood to say that music (or any cultural activity) does not have a role either in private or public morality. I tell my students that culture is a tool; hammer and saw won't build a house, but they can be used to help you create shelter. Charles Darwin put it very beautifully, in a biographical note he wrote for his children. He claimed to regret the extent to which his profession had taken his life in his adult years. He'd loved the arts as a young man, but gave them little attention while he was raising his family and changing the world:

...if I had to live my life again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week; for perhaps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.

It seems to me that the arts can help unite the emotions and the intellect. I've always found the wicked also to be stupid (isn't racism a prime example?), and if we are to *do unto others as we'd wish to be done by*, we certainly need to have intellects trained to imagine what others might wish.

This, I'm afraid, takes us a long way from the idea that you can't hate someone if you know their music. I don't even wish it were that simple any more

—GWL



Some years ago, after John and I had become well established as co-editors of the *Bulletin*, I began to save copies of the issues I'd been involved with in a rather large ring binder. That binder is now full, and I do not feel like opening another. I think we've put together a couple of good issues, and we've kept it going for most of the decade, but it's time for someone else to take over. I have several projects that I wish to see through and will continue as co-editor until this year's run is complete.

For what it's worth, I think that the publication probably should be edited in Toronto, which is at least geographically the center of the nation, or even points east of there. Among my disappointments has been the pretty complete absence of Quebec and the Maritimes from the publication. This may or may not be just another example of the regionalism that bedevils Canada, but it should be a problem that could be overcome by something that calls itself a *Canadian Bulletin*. —GWL