

In the Mail

Dear Editors,

I was saddened to hear in *Canadian Folk Music* 38.1 of the passing of Marie Hare. Even though the summer of 1977, when she came as a staff member to Pinewoods Camp for folk music week, is now over a quarter of a century ago, I can still recall her daily sessions out on the camp-house porch overlooking Long Pond as she mesmerized those of us who came to hear her sing her wonderful songs from her native New Brunswick, whether it was a comic courting song such as “Billy Grimes the Drover”, the classic woods narrative “Jam on Jerry’s Rock”, or perhaps her most spellbinding vocal narrative, “The Lover’s Conversation”, which could take up to twenty minutes to sing. This in turn reminded me of her very early album for Folk Legacy Records, No.9 in their catalogue. Now, anyone who knows Folk Legacy remembers that with each recording would come a most invaluable booklet giving all the lyrics as well as biographical information on the performer in question. Well, the booklet on Marie’s recording was more in the nature of a mini-tome, almost a doctoral dissertation in size and scope. In a recent conversation I had with Caroline Paton, Caroline mentioned that thanks to modern technology this classic album has been re-mastered and re-issued as a CD, under the same number as the original recording. Thanks to the Patons and Folk Legacy for keeping Marie’s music and memory alive with this recent offering.

When I heard of Ric Fielding’s passing it was like a bit of goodness and wonder had been snuffed out of the world. Lorne Brown’s interview with Ric should be placed in a frame and labelled *For the Ages*. Fielding was one of that rare breed of performer for whom a T-shirt should be created saying “I’ve gone a hell of a lot further for a hell of a lot less”. I can still remember quite vividly a Sunday in June many years ago at the now long defunct Oasis Coffee House, in those days run and operated by Kathy and Arny Naiman, when Ric Fielding was the afternoon’s main act. It mattered little whether he sang a traditional ballad such as “The Death of Robin Hood”, a Bob Coltman rewrite of a Child ballad such as “Patrick Spenser”, or a down home bluesy number such as “Salty Dog”; it was like listening to musical poetry in action. Whether it was a Child ballad, an oldtimey or bluegrass piece, a Beatles’ song or an early nineteenth century piece in praise of immigration to Canada, Fielding was in every sense of the term a bard and minstrel extraordinary and a singer of memorable tales. And although Ric had a deep and abiding love for the traditional ballad, he

was not above gleefully tampering with the same, as evidenced by a song such as “Off to School No More”, which can be found on his third and last recording, *Acoustic Workshop*. Ric Fielding only made three recordings before his tragic passing, but they were on two of the most respected and high-quality labels devoted to excellent folk recordings to be found in all of North America, Folk Legacy Records out of Sharon, Connecticut, and Borealis Music out of Toronto. Sandy Paton’s entrance into Fielding’s life and musical career, a pivotal event if ever there was one, perhaps demonstrates that Folk Legacy’s co-founder recognized in Ric one of those rare performers who can get inside a song and make it his own. Ric, the world will miss you, but the good folk up yonder have much to look forward to musically in the aeons to come.

Robert Rodriquez, New York City

Dear Editors,

Here is my membership... but that is not why I am writing. Rather, it is to express my delight at the Special Issue on *Songs of Canada*. Unlike many of your readers, I’m not a musicologist or even a musician. Rather, in 1980, while in Quebec, I was asked by a Péquist sympathizer why, unlike them, we *maudit anglais* didn’t have any old folk songs. I was tongue-tied. All I could remember was “Farewell to Nova Scotia” and “Donkey Riding” (from a public school song book from the fifties), and I couldn’t sing more than a line or two of either. I could, at the time, sing several old French Canadian songs.

When I got back to Ontario I looked for books and records and found a rich but neglected tradition. Meanwhile “folkies” and folk festivals celebrate the traditions of American blues, American bluegrass, and the odd bit of world music and music of the British Isles. And of course, lumped in with the world music is music from Quebec. Of old English Canadian folk songs there is neither awareness nor interest. And whenever I suggested to folk festival people that folkies might be interested in music of their own country, they looked at me blankly. Absolutely no comprehension.

So it was a delight to me to discover the Canadian Folk Music Society in the eighties. There were others who not only were aware of Canadian folk music, but who cared. So I have stuck with the organization for close to twenty years. And issues like the one commemorating Edith Fowke, and this one with all those old songs, make it worthwhile.

Peter Loney, Edmonton, Alberta