

## Letters to the Editors

Just a note to CSTM/SCTM readers about my recent participation in the Alan Lomax Tribute held in New York, April 9, 11-12. You can read more details about it in the Alan Lomax website, but for me it was particularly moving to be part of the Song Swap, and to be there for the concert with the extraordinary line-up of Odetta, Pete Seeger, Arlo Guthrie, Jean Ritchie. The event was held parallel to and in cooperation with the Peoples Poetry Gathering, which itself was an extraordinary event, including, for example, a collective responsorial reading of Edgar Allan Poe held in a Greenwich Village graveyard at midnight....

The Lomax event was organized by various people and organizations: mostly the Alan Lomax Archives/ Association for Cultural Equity (ACE), directed by Anna Chairetakis Lomax; City Lore, directed by Steve Zeitlin; and Ray Allen from Brooklyn College. There were papers, some academic issues (this important part of Lomax's work was not the main focus of the event), reminiscences, songs, stories, ideas, arguments - but the most amazing element was the confluence of people. The main concert roster was: Odetta, Pete Seeger, Arlo Guthrie, Honey Boy Edwards, Jean Ritchie, Spencer Moore, and the New Lost City Ramblers.

Two of the many splendid sessions were one called "I was recorded by Alan Lomax", in which Matt Barton, the Director of Sound Archives at ACE (and indispensable Main-Everything-Person), interviewed Jean Ritchie, Spencer Moore, the Solomon Carey family, and Honey Boy Edwards about their experiences being recorded by Alan Lomax decades ago. Then I was privileged to be part of the extraordinary "Song Swap" session. I found myself on stage, in a semi-circle, sitting next to - Pete Seeger on my left and Barbara Dane on my right; Guy Carawan next to Barbara, Bess Lomax Hawes (Alan's sister and a highly respected folklorist) next to Pete, Jean Ritchie and Oscar Brand next to Bess, and on Guy's side, the New Lost City Ramblers, with Mike Seeger acting as main MC. It was like being in a dream - I grew up listening to all these people and modelling my own approach to audience participation in concerts on what I learned from watching Pete Seeger - and never thought I'd find myself on stage as part of a song swap dedicated

to Alan Lomax, whose work I'd also known and admired long before becoming involved with the Spanish recordings. And it was one of the songs Alan Lomax recorded in a Castilian village which I sang: I'd learned it first from his old Columbia LP in the late 70s; then two years ago I re-recorded it from the same woman who sang it for him, 49 years later; she herself died this past January, and so I sang it as a tribute to both of them, and to Anna, Lomax's daughter, who grew up hearing it and then singing it to her own husband and son.

One of the most moving songs of the swap was Pete Seeger and Bess Lomax Hawes doing "Bye Bye My Rosy Anna", Bess singing, leaning on her cane, and Pete on banjo. The evening concert is almost impossible to describe - just having all these people together on one stage was an experience, as was having supper all together in the Green Room beforehand. Tamar (my daughter) asked Pete about the "Frog Song" and he ended up talking to her for almost half an hour about how his father (the eminent musicologist Charles Seeger) used to sing it to him every night when he was small; Pete then segued into a detailed description of certain types of fishing boats and nets and frogs tangled in them... In the concert, Arlo Guthrie did an unforgettable rendition of "Blowing in the Wind". The old "Last Night I had the Strangest Dream", sung by this gathering, and at this time in world events, took on a special meaning. And Pete, in his 80s as tall and straight and blue-jeaned as ever, threw back his head and led the audience in a closing song, dedicated to Alan: "He's a good old hobo, but he's dead and gone."

*Judith Cohen, Toronto*

There's a grammatical error at the end of the third paragraph of my letter in the Spring 2003 (37.1) issue. The final sentence should read "The issue is that Gregory's claim that Cameron's comments are `belligerent & abrasive' is not supported." The subject of the relative clause is "claim," not "comments." The bad news is that when I consulted my draft, the blunder is my own; my students would have a heyday with this one.

*George Lyon, Calgary*

Thanks for printing my song "Painting Over the N.A.R." last issue. Just to set the record straight, the song was first printed in the *Rocky Mountain Recorder* (a magazine published at one time by the Rocky Mountain Folk Club), vol. 6, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1982). The accompanying text was taken from that source, and the drawings were added by then editor Tim Rogers -- I'm not sure where he found them. My drawing skills are definitely not up to producing something so competent!

*John Leeder, Calgary*

Thank you for sending us the Fall issue of *Canadian Folk Music* containing the review of our Grant Lamb CD [36.3, p. 40]... We enjoy Canadian style fiddling ourselves and play a lot of tunes we learned from Canadian fiddlers. There used to be a lot of fiddle contests and jam sessions in B.C., but these have mostly disappeared as the fiddlers have disappeared. We really have seen the end of an era, and the last of the great dance fiddlers from the period when what we now call "old-time dance" was the popular dance idiom of the community.

Here is some additional information... Grant himself played real good tenor banjo. We sat around a few Canadian Legion halls with Grant playing banjo and Vivian [Williams] playing the fiddle. He also played great backup piano and this can be heard on Vivian's *Fiddler* recording. Doing a two-step to 6/8 time used to be fairly common. A lot of fiddlers we knew back in the '60s and '70s played clogs as reels, but when asked about the difference between a clog and other tune forms would play a clog as a clog. As the reviewer pointed out, Grant really was a reflection of his times. Great review!

Grant was a major influence on our own playing. We learned a lot of tunes from him, but more than that, learned what dance playing was all about. He came to visit us fairly often, usually in the winter. We wouldn't know he was coming until we heard the knock at the door. We'd ask how long he was going to stay. The answer always was "no plans, no plans". Sometimes it would be a week or so, sometimes a month or more. One time he had a heart attack in Seattle and was with us for well over a month. The doctor prohibited him from raising his arms up far enough to play the fiddle, so he gave Vivian a real workout playing the piano while she fiddled.

One time he showed up with his camper and his 78-rpm record collection, which he gave to us. It has been a great source of good Canadian fiddling for us. We have a lot of informal recordings of Grant with a lot more tunes than on the CD and wonder if there is any archive that would be interested in them.

*Phil Williams, Voyager Recordings, Seattle, Washington*

## Treasures from Our Archives

*Ten Years Ago*

**Bulletin** 27.2 (June 1993). As this issue was a Festival Directory issue (it came out once a year, back then), we left the "newsletter" style (which economics had begun to dictate) for a booklet format with a cover, much as the magazine appears today. In addition to the Directory, the issue contained Allan Thrasher's article "The Society's Name and its Membership", which explained reasons for the change away from "Canadian Folk Music Society" which had recently taken place, as well as "Learning About Folk" by Vic Bell, who was then artistic director of the Calgary festival. Musical items for this issue were Norm Walker's song "The Prairie Pagans" and George Lyon's tune "Mr. & Mrs. Jamieson" (accompanied by a memoir about the couple for whom it was written). Reviews of recordings *On Wings of Song* (a compilation of Yiddish songs), Brendan Nolan's *Across the Great Divide* and storyteller Mary Eileen McClear's *O Canada* were included.

*Five Years Ago*

**Bulletin** 32.2 (June 1998). George Lyon interviewed Phil Thomas for this issue; Phil contributed a couple of songs from his collection ("Are You From Bevan?" and "Hard Rock Miner") and a short piece about his wife Hilda ("Hilda Herself"). Also appearing was Ada-Marie Atkins Nechka's account of the University of Calgary's celebration of the work of the late Edith Fowke. A number of reviews of books and recordings, plus the Festival Directory, showed up as well.

These issues (and all back issues, either in original form or as photocopies) are available from CSTM Back Issues, 224 20th Ave. NW, Calgary, Alta. T2M 1C2. See the Mail Order Service catalogue or the website ([www.yorku.ca/cstm](http://www.yorku.ca/cstm)) and follow the links) for pricing. [JL]