From the Editor

Remembrance Day services are echoing in my ears. September 11 is gnawing at my heart, and Canadian armed forces personnel are sailing to active combat in the Gulf. (Admittedly, being in the centre of the U.S. fleet is probably the safest place on earth.) And bombs are falling on Afghanistan.

Your ink-stained editor has long since given up hope of ever making sense of this world of ours, but he can still dream. I find myself singing old friend Ed McCurdy's song a lot, lately. You might want to join in ...

"Last night I had the strangest dream, I never dreamed before. I dreamed the world had all agreed to put an end to war."

By Judith Cohen

Following Alan Lomax's Footsteps in Spain

Have you heard about some English professor from the BBC who's issuing a CD with music from our town? Back in 1998, a friend asked me this, sitting at an outdoor cafe in a small town, or large village (about 2500 people) in southern Galicia where I was doing fieldwork. Several questions later, the "English" professor turned out to be not English, but the American Alan Lomax who indeed spent seven months recording traditional music in Spain in 1952, and produced several programmes of his recordings for the BBC, as well as LP's on Westminster and on Columbia Records.

At my friends' request, I followed up the Galicia recordings in a sort of vague way over the next while, until a couple of years later, with a few days to spare in New York, I spent a day in the Alan Lomax Archives. And another year after that, in the fall of 2001, here I am, general editor of the Spain Series of Rounder Records' spectacular project, issuing 100 CDs from the Alan Lomax Collection.

When I first looked at Lomax's Spain recordings log, it was with an instant flash of recognition — the Spain he spent seven months travelling through in 1952 was "my" Spain — not the Spain of beaches and bull-fights, but the Spain of unrelenting sun or rain-darkened villages with no heating, of villagers who will drop everything to sing for you — or not sing for you at all; the Spain of endless contradictions... I had even done fieldwork in some of the same villages and in a couple of cases, recognized names of people who had sung for him nearly half a century earlier. A couple of months later, when anthropologist Anna Chairetakis Lomax, Lomax's daughter and director of the collection, invited me to be the editor of the Spain Series it was the beginning of an exciting, absorbing adventure. Besides the recordings, ACE, the Association for Cultural Equity (the name reflects Lomax's long held philosophy) houses the Lomax Archive, with his sensitive field notes, photographs, detailed records of payments scrupulously made to people he recorded, and copies of scores of letters he somehow found time to write thanking people for their help. And besides the actual Spain material, and the excitement of working with my colleagues in Spain to document it and re-issue it in the best possible way, it is a pleasure and privilege to...
For a month or so I wandered erratically, sun struck by the grave beauty of the land, fight and sigh at each of these noble people, ground down by poverty and a possible fatal wound. I saw that in Spain, folklore was not mere fantasy and entertainment. Each Spanish village was a self-contained cultural system, penetrating every aspect of life; and it was this system of tradition, often pagan, mazes, that had been the spiritual armor of the Spanish people against the many forms of tyranny imposed upon them through the centuries. It was in their inherited folklore that the people, the fishermen, the muleteers and the shepherds I met found their models for that noble behavior and that sense of the beautiful which made them such satisfactory friends. (pp. 43, 45).

In Spain that Alan Lomax began to take the direct correlations between folklore style and culture (Sampier p.29) which eventually led to his Cantastor's identity. Today, the music scene in Spain celebrates diversity: world music festivals, concerts and recordings abound, and musicians from Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East are collaborating with Spanish musicians, creating new forms and new contexts for regional traditions. Ethnomusicology is gaining acceptance at more universities, and a new generation of ethnomusicologists is active in research, publication and innovative approaches. Regional revival groups, local festivals, and documentation centres are all growing. But in 1952, this was far from the case. As well, economic hardships, poor roads, areas separated by mountain ranges, and ancient agricultural methods made for a difficult life, but, along with firmly entrenched life and calendar cycle events, also maintained musical traditions which might otherwise have disappeared. At the same time, however, an officially promoted nationalism was establishing folklorized versions of traditions, often by the Sección Femenina of the Falange. Founded in 1937 by the sister of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the Falange's founder, and dissolved in 1977, the Sección Femenina saw music as a crucial means of achieving national unity within a specifically Catholic context, and through education. It sent out mobile units of women educators, whose mission included Spain's dictatorship, Galician, Catalanian and Basque and their variants were severely repressed, while local traditions were standardized and their editing approved. (pp. 8, 45).

Contacts and information, references:
work with Anna Chairetakis, Matt Barton and everyone associated with ACE.

Never once for stereotypes, Alan Lomax wrote: "The spades are held in both music and fine
people was not the hotblooded Gypsy south with its
work with Anna Chairetakis, Matt Barton and
the highlands of Northern Castile, and the green
not actually intended to spend time in Spain:
Nazi, who had taken over the Berlin folk song
Institute for Higher Studies [CSICJ in Madrid ... he
chief.. . in charge of folk music research at the
suggested that I leave Spain.
let me know that he personally would see to it that
experience with a Nazi, and, as I looked across the
of
Lomax's profound appreciation for the people he
problem. This classically difficult fieldwork and
out of tape was an almost insurmountable
met, did not imply a pristine, mythically
"In
the summer of
the Civil,
ethnomusicologists is active in research,
areas separated by mountain ranges, and
difficult for me to film.
In Canada, folklorist offering to
in a month I expected 2 or 3 songs; Alan Lomax
record songs and other oral traditions, though
mostly from elderly people. As an
-ethnomusicologist, I could not refrain from making judgments about "old and new", and
not to lament the disappearance of traditions but rather to passionately examine metamorphoses and
hybrids. For several years, I went along with
and of hearing the old people's stories about the
passing of their traditions, I no longer can. Yes,
there are exciting new traditions developing, and I
enjoy and celebrate many of them. But that
does not change the fact that many aspects of
traditional musical life ARE disappearing, or
already have gone forever. Remember that Alan Lomax called a "system of cultural super-
highways" (46). In 1996 an elderly fiddle and drum
player in a small Salmansana village told me he
worried constantly about who would take his place
playing for weddings and ritual events when he
died. Young people who learn in the provincial
collector, he said, just don't play the same way:
they all live in cities and want to be
performers. And few people sing the old ballads
and wedding songs. One old village woman told me
that on cold winter nights, she lay bundled up in
bed, singing all the oldest ballads to
herself, one after another, till she finally fell
asleep to her own lonely voice in the darkness.
With these recordings, Alan Lomax has given
many lonely voices in the dark a different life
assisting is generating a whole new world which softens the
harsh lights of our new millenium.
Judith R Cohen, Toronto, 2001

Contacts and information, references:

http://www.rounder.com/rounder/ artists/lomax_alan /
tapes/ http://www.lomax-ace.com
1996: Michael Parrish, "Alan Lomax,
Documenting Folk Music of the World", Sing Out!
46:2:20-5
1960: Alan Lomax, "Saga of a Folk-Song
Hunter", Hi-Fi Stereo Review
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Spain: Galicia, fall 2001
Spain: Aragon/Valencia, fall 2001
Spain: Extremadura: spring 2002

Some books by Alan Lomax:
1946. Folk Songs: USA (with John A. Lomax), New York, Duell, Sloan and Pierce, re-editado: Best Loved American Folk Songs, Grosset and Dunlap 1950
1960. The Folk Songs of North America, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday
1967. Hard-Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People (con Woody Guthrie and Peter Seeger), New York, Oak Publications
1993. The Land Where the Blues Began, New York, Pantheon

MacPherson’s Farewell

Ballad of the Month

MacPherson’s Farewell

Fiddle tunes and tragically fatal endings have seemingly been linked from the time of the consolidation of the modern form of the instrument in the early 17th century. At the same time that a mature Antonio Stradivarius was fashioning his most famous instruments in Cremona, the earliest and most famous condemned fiddler legend came into being with the Scots highwayman James MacPherson. The tune which bears the outlaw’s name has frequently been printed in collections of Scottish fiddle music, after its first appearance in the Sinkler Manuscript in 1710 under the title “McFarsance’s Testament,” and has the distinction of being the earliest known fiddle tune in strathspey rhythm. There is no proof that MacPherson, a historical figure, composed the melody usually known as “MacPherson’s Rant,” but it has been popularly attributed to him for centuries.

What led him to his unfortunate demise? MacPherson was born in Banffshire about 1675, the son of a beautiful gypsy woman and a Highland laird, MacPherson of Invershire, in Inverness-shire. He was raised by his father, who unfortunately died young, after which MacPherson went to live with his mother (whose good looks he had apparently inherited, though perhaps he acquired his immense physical presence and strength from his father). As he grew to adulthood he developed a fondness for the wild life and became the leader of a “lawless gypsy roving band,” establishing a reputation as a freebooter who operated in the Scottish counties of Aberdeen, Banff and Moray. Highwaymen and freebooters were certainly not rare in 17th century Scotland, especially in the Highlands, and once he was captured and executed it is likely he would have been quickly forgotten, but MacPherson insured his lasting fame with a grand gesture on the scaffold at Market Cross in Banff on the cold November morning of his execution.

Although several stories of his end differ in details, the main threads relate that MacPherson stepped onto the platform with his fiddle in his hand, took up his bow and proceeded to play his last communication to the world, his rant (sometimes it is said he played three tunes: “MacPherson’s Rant,” “MacPherson’s Pibroch” and “MacPherson’s Farewell”) at the conclusion of which he offered his violin “to anyone in the crowd who would think well of him.” However, either no

Did You Know?
The Canadian Folk Music Bulletin exchanges copies with other publications, such as:

This Month at the Rogue .................... Vancouver BC
Sing Out! ........................................ Bethelhem PA
Dance and Music Camps 2001 .................. Haydenville MA
Country dance & Song Society .................. Newsomboro KY
The Living Tradition .......................... Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, Scotland
Bulletin de Liaison de la FAFAS ............... Paris codez 13
Three Quarter Times ......................... Vancouver Folk Song Society
Canadian Musician CM ............................. St. Catharines ON
Fiddler Magazine .............................. North Sydney NS
and others

All of these eventually end up in the CFMB’s archives, lovingly watched over by Bill Secjeant in Saskatoon.

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