Traditional Music across Canada from to Sea to Sea

From Ontario:

Folk Music in the Sudbury Region

Dianne Cameron

In addition to the Northern Lights Festival (coming up July 6-8), Festival Boreal also runs some folk events throughout the year which range in flavour from traditional to contemporary to... More or less a sampling of what one might see at the festival any year. These may take the form of house concerts, folk club events, or special mini-festivals, such as the Spring Meltdown in March featuring a wide variety of artists performing at several venues around town (including our own favourite, Duncan Cameron). There are also a few local restaurants, bars, coffee houses and other venues which feature folk musicians from time to time. The Elm Tree is a fairly recent new venue which features a folk music concert series.

There are several very active traditional folk associations in the area, including a Ceilidh branch which sponsors a spring Celtic Fair, Irish Gaelic lessons, dance, whistle and their groups and other activities. A Scottish country dance group gets together weekly throughout the fall and winter. The local Cope Breton Club has been holding a spring Cape Breton Easter festival every June for many years. This year it was held June 16, and featured an array of traditional Gaelic and English singers, musicians and dancers in continuous performances from 1 to 9 p.m. Many of these performers were local, and the talent was outstanding. It was one of the best traditional music events that we have ever seen in Sudbury, and the number of exceptional young fiddlers playing was wonderful to see.

Networking... Networking... Networking!

How could a song circle go wrong, with singers and musicians like Charlotte Bernstein singing a Yiddish version of that lovely line from Psalm 118, 'I will lift my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help', that she learned from a rabbi, then following this with a funny parody on 'This Land is Your Land', about how Israel is surrounded by Arab lands... Louise Carroll, with her young自我 sitting on her lap, leading us in that beautiful old Pentecostal gospel song, 'Partther Along'... Wayne Chester, fine songwriter and guitarist... and what would a song circle be without cheerful Debbie Smith picking out great songs from Rise Up Singing, Sing Out's great songbook of lyrics, both traditional and contemporary folk, a book that every singer should have.

And Jeila Mills, great dulcimer player, the female member of Jack's 'GreenWood' trio, organizer of the Dulcimer Club in Guelph, whom, although she was not feeling well, brushed herself out from Queen's to the Circle, because she didn't want to miss any of what turned out to be a magical evening (That's dedication, eh)... Jackie Ridley, her strong lovely voice and fine guitar picking always a welcome addition to any song circle, and passing it along to daughter Ariel... Monique Hobbs... what a lovely voice and selection of songs... and our resident A-1 five-string banjo player, Margaret Jackson, who I doubt has ever missed a Song Circle.

And the Song Circle would be complete without Mr. Old Chestnuts Song Circle himself, Jack Cole, singing the two songs that everybody asks for, 'The Canadian Tire Song', and, as a fitting end to the evening, 'The Fiddler's Song', to rousing cheers and claps, whistles, yips and hurrahs and other enthusiastic noises, along with full-throated choruses.

Now, here I must admit that I am somewhat biased on how the evening went, because my wife, Mary, and I were fortunate enough to have our daughter Kate Jarrett, her husband, John Hart, and their three children, Terry, Martha and Rachel, come from Peterborough our son, Stephen, from London; our oldest granddaughter, Lindsay, a budding penny whistle player and possible fiddler, this summer working as an interpreter at Doon Pioneer Village (she has gone real "folkloric" and has done some excellent essay work on Canadian traditional folk music for her course work at Queen's in Kingston); our oldest daughter, Linda, would been with us as well, but she had to be in Ottawa.

Many years ago, before they all got busy with careers, raising families, etc., we used to do concerts as "The Jarrett Family". Kate, John and I also formed the children's trio, "Young at Heart".
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There are also several local traditional music bands, including the Friends of Erin and Paddy's Patriots who do mostly Irish music, but I'm not up to date on all of those, having been away for the last five plus years. This year it was held June 16, and featured an array of traditional Gaelic and traditional Korean folk songs! Dianne Cameron lives (again) in Sudbury, ON, where she taught and played her various instruments, hosts ceilidhs and house concerts, and from which she roams to perform at various festivals.

The Ultimate Song Circle
Merrick Jarrett

It is 7 a.m. Sunday morning, April 27th. I am driving along looking for a place where I can buy milk at this hour, when we have visitors with children at the breakfast table, and we have run out of milk. It being so quiet at this hour as I drove along, I started thinking about the evening before, when, and not for the first time, I reflect on the Old Chestnuts Song Circle in Kitchener, Ontario, and what it has meant to so many of us, what an inspiration it has been over the past years; how much fun and joy we have had, and the friendships we have made.

And last night's session in particular, which I have called "The Ultimate Song Circle", for reasons that follow. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to sit in Jack Cole's "Circle" that he started some six years ago, know that Jack runs a tight ship. He doesn't let singers or musicians break off into little groups to do their own thing, as I have seen in other song circles, resulting in what sometimes approaches chaos; he likes to have us supply lyrics if possible, so we can sing along with the singers and enjoy the choruses, and generally feel a part of the songs, resulting in an evening of great participation and enjoyment by all.

And as he goes around the circle, everybody involved not only to have a song, or 'passes' to the next singer. We all know that when thirty-odd people are involved, it is not likely that any of us will get to sing more than a couple of songs before the break, but nobody is disappointed, or gets their notes out of joint.

And no Song Circle would be complete without Mr. Old Chestnuts Song Circle himself, Jack Cole, singing the two songs that everybody asks for, "The Canadian Tire Song", and, as a fitting end to the evening, "The Potter's Song", to rousing cheers and claps, whistles, yips and hurrahs and other enthusiastic noises, along with full-throated choruses.

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and Stephen was a member of the trio, "Lord God and the Beachwarriors," doing wonderful parodies poking fun at the legal profession (since all three of them are lawyers!).

We thought the Song Circle was a good place to have a musical family reunion. On Friday evening, Mary's 89-year-old sister, who had written her first essay at age 89, was talking about how to use song as a tool for community building and social change, and how music can be a way to connect with people from different backgrounds.

Another event that turned the evening into a magical one for me was to see six children of varying ages all singing in their own "song circle" on the floor, but still being a part of the larger group, since Jack made sure that the children all had input as they went around the circle. Jackie's daughter, Ariel, Louise's daughter, Sofie, and Dave's daughter, Amanda, and her brother, James, for whom I promised a Zulu war chant and here a Bulgarian Rom friend I met when he was playing accordion in the main square of Varna, which has been known as the hometown of many famous musicians.

I am sure I echo the feelings of everybody who took part last night, and who have been part of previous Song Circles, who love you, respect you, and stand in awe of how, in your professional life, you manage to put it all together; and at the same time, organize house concerts, write songs, publish books, even more material at "The Woods" and Celtic programs, and become an increasingly proficient instrumentalist. Take a bow.

Merrill Jaretz is a masterful singer who lives in Waterlo, ON. He may squirm in embarrassment, but the term folk legend might rightly apply here.

News from Judith Cohen:

It's everywhere! These few lines are in response to hear new editor's call for any news, any announcement (always time-limited)! This is an event a year old Martha, who had worked out some lovely harmonies, also with Kate; and Lindsay was "Northwest Passage", since one of her essays was on the history of the Northwest Passage, and at the same time, organize house concerts, write songs, publish books, even more material at "The Woods" and Celtic programs, and become an increasingly proficient instrumentalist. Take a bow.

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I, have (again) for Spain; my daughter and I are doing several concerts, including one for a conference in a medieval town in Aragon where not long ago a collection of medieval Hebrew manuscripts were found being used as bindings for Cathedral liturgical manuscripts, probably since the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1569. With co-operation from all concerned, the manuscripts are being restored, and this is the second conference which has grown out of the discovery. In fact, the Cathedral itself is on the list of sponsors! As a Sudanese Muslim friend of ours is joining us for the conference on oral and other instruments, the event recalls the coexistence of the three cultures of medieval Iberia before the expulsion. And the co-operation is encouraging, to say the least.

We'll also be playing in Palma de Mallorca, and have a Bulgarian Rom friend, who was playing accordion in the main square of Madrid a year ago this week will join us for a couple of songs; he and his wife, who is a Bulgarian Rom friend, and I was able to introduce them to some musician friends there, and to also a Gypsy musician friend in Extremadura, a province of Spain in Portugal, none of my Gypsy friends and acquaintances choose to use the term "Bosnian"; they stay with "Croatia" (Croatia) and "Cigano" (Gypsy)."

Now that my beloved three-year SSHRC grant report is due, I am an aficionado of Spanish traditional music and other traditions. (Thanks SSHRC) and before that, thanks, York University Office of Research Administration, and thanks, Canada Council, the greatest help in immeasurable). I've promised Lorne that I'll write about this in more detail in a future issue: it's the Alan Lomax recordings project.

Quickly, because I really do have very little time, many of you know that Rounder Records is issuing a huge series - at least a hundred CDs from the Alan Lomax Collection. Many have already been released, each with a generous bonus full of song transcriptions (words only), full translations where required; background commentary and so on. The director of the Alan Lomax Archives and of the project is Anna Chaires Lomax, Alan Lomax's daughter - a knowledgeable, helpful, generous person it is a delight to work with. My role here is General Editor of the Spanish Series, which will come to over 15 CDs from various regions of Spain. Once I'm in Spain anyway, researching and coercing, I'll continue to do what I started in April during a different trip: return to villages Lomax recorded in, and at times even interview some of those who sang for him almost fifty years ago. It's a very exciting project, and Lomax's own field notes are an inspiring combination of detailed observation and a truly caring attitude toward other people - as well as some delightfully barbed comments about those at certain levels of politics at the time - 1962.

But, as promised, more on that later.

Dr. Judith Cohen is that rare combination of scholar and performer, an ethnomusicologist who has been collecting material in Spain and Portugal for several years.

From Alberta:

Congratulations to the Bulletin's music editor Maureen Chafe on the birth April 23 of her third daughter, Rachel. Maureen is now on leave from Mount Royal College.

From Newfoundland:

Bridge Noonan

The Folklore Department at Memorial is set to publish Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland (Gibbs Broom Greenleaf and Grace Yarrow Mansfield). The book has some news editorial content, but even for the most part is just exactly as originally published. It will contain blurbs from some SJFAC members and friends. The cover is being designed by Helen Houston, who works in Linda Rustin's office at MUN.

The Folklore Department is also publishing a book of selected essays by Dr. Herbert Halpert, who is largely credited with helping establish the Folklore Department.

Dr. Halpert died on December 29th, 2000. He began teaching folklore courses in MUN's English Department in 1962. After the Folklore Department was established, he taught there until the late 1970s. He continued at the university as professor emeritus and guest lecturer, and continued writing until 1992.

This notice was extracted from The Broadside, the newsletter of the St. John's Folk Art Council.

From Prince Edward Island:

News from Georges Arsenault

Ottawa - Georges Arsenault, PEI's first folklorist, has just completed the field recordings made in the 1970s with traditional storytellers. It is part of a collection which was launched by the Centre d'études acadiaises of Universite de Moncton. The folklorist there, Ronald Labelle, whom you might know, is in charge of the collection and is much interested in folk tales. He wants to work on an exhibit on folk tales with Moncton's Music Museum.

Georges Arsenault is a folklorist living in Prince Edward Island. He has recently published a book of folk tales and songs in French called Contes et chansons de l'Ile-du-Prince-Edward.

The end of July featured, once again, the "Larry Gorman Folk Festival". Larry Gorman, born in 1866, was one of PEI's most famous (if infamous) songwriters. Some of his songs are still sung today. A highlight of the event is the Gorman Best Tour, led by the imitable Larry Gorman historian, folklorist and musician, and which features stories and songs of the lumbering, fishing and farming traditions of West Prince, along with hunch in a lighthouse!

Sandy Ives, from Maine, who earned a PEI Music Heritage Foundation Award of Honour, is taking part in the festival. He's the author of "Larry Gorman, the Man Who Made the Songs". Participants also include a great mix of new and established Island musicians, including Louis Galante. "The Bulletin" applauds the concept of this festival, honouring one of Canada's traditional storytellers in a way that encourages the tradition to continue."
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have a Bulgarian Rom friend here, who was playing accordion in the main square of Madrid a year ago. This year we join forces with a couple of songs; he and his wife have a daughter called Nelya, for whom we have played. We have been together for months, and I am pleased to introduce them to some musicians there and, also to a Gypsy musician who made

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- 1952.

Now that my beloved three-year SSHRC

research grant is just about over, my trips in

Spain are taking on another aspect, besides the

ongoing work with Sephardic and Crypto-Jewish

("Marrano") traditions and also regional village

traditions. (Thanks SSHRC and before that,

thanks, York University Office of Research

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From the Northwest Territories

Mauro Cameron: A Fiddle Singer who lives in Yellowknife, NT, and performs with Ceildh Friends. With several CDs to her credit, she will be giving a workshop this summer at the Storytellers of Canada/Gescren du Canada conference in Iqaluit, Nunavut.

From Saskatchewan

Paddy Turtle

I find it heartening that there will be a lot of traditional music from many parts of the world, as well as a number of songwriters who are heavily influenced in their folk traditions in Saskatchewan this summer.

Eva Windster: A traditional singer, dancer, and musical entertainer with banjo in tow.

Celso Machado (BC): Brazilian guitarist, percussionist and multi-instrumentalist who will be featured in the Aboriginal Circle of Intimate Workshops.

Wendy Lengen: A mix of reels, hornpipes and jigs, with a special emphasis on the traditional music of northern Saskatchewan.

Scott Keesee: A talented multi-instrumentalist who will be playing the fiddle, mandolin, guitar and dobro.

From other parts of Canada:

Natcho Fontaine: A top-notch guitar player who will be performing with Ceildh Friends. He was born in Cuba but moved to Saskatchewan in the 1980s.

Keith Seccul and his band of Wild Indians (US): A Native American band who bring the heartland of Canada to life in their energetic live shows.


* The Lightening Fiddles: They are a five-piece Celtic group from Saskatchewan featuring Skye Lennox on fiddle, Margaret Leighton on bodhran and accordion, Ryan Siegel on accordion, Patrick Leighton on flute, matalohi and bodhran.

* Michael Hughes with guitar, bouzouki and vocals. The Lightening Fiddles also deliver a turbo-charged mix of infectious reels, jigs and songs while staying true to the spirit of the Celtic Tradition.

* Donnie Logan (SK) Children's storyteller and musical entertainer.

* Oye Rumberito from their Morumba Cubana recording. These guys were nominated for a Juno for their Cuban music from their Morumba Cubana recording. They are known for their high-energy performances.

* Natcho Fontaine is one of the top-notch guitar players who will be performing with Ceildh Friends.

* Paddy Turtle is a talented multi-instrumentalist who will be performing with Ceildh Friends.

* Gabrielle Scott: A traditional singer from the Northwest Territories who will be performing with Ceildh Friends.

* The Canadian Folk Music Bulletin de musique folklorique canadienne

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From the Northwest Territories

Moira Cameron

Summer in Canada's Northwest Territories is magically a season of festive events and celebrations. However, in very few of these northern festivals can there be found a truly entertaining portion of the Great Northern celebration of our region's famous carvers, the north. Some, like the Inuvik festival, become a celebration to be found in each community across the territory as simply a music festival. Big name Celtic bands and rappers as well as a number of indies deliver a turbocharged mix of infectious reels, jigs and songs while staying true to the spirit of the Celtic festival. Ripping up their heels with the band will be the Bantry Lassies featuring the fine fiddling of Irish dancers Laura Johnston and Ashley Scoone. Regina Folk Festival Coming to Victoria Park on August 17, 18 & 19 Performers (in alphabetical order)
- The REAL ONES (BC via Norway) Celtic folk band with four members who have 40 years of combined musical journeys and who have recorded eleven albums between them. Their rich harmonies and instrumental skills provide a framework for their real life images and themes portrayed in their lyrics. "We set about to create an honest sound, traditional in its structures, yet unique in rhythm and feel." Not a Love Song (eclectic folk, blues, traditional, roots) from Crooked Creek fame on Friday evening at this Year's Festival!
- Njacko's music will heat up even the chilliest New Year's Eve. Njacko lives in Saskatoon, SK. He has recorded many CDs on the edge of the Prince Albert National Park, Saskatchewan, two hours north of Saskatoon on Hwy 77 towards the Noel Hill Irish Concertina School in Newberg, Oregon. Poet, writer, composer, performer and 'listen to the masters and learn to play the music!'
- I, myself, am off to my favourite traditional music heavens: Fiddle Tunes workshop at Port Townsend, Washington, and, later this summer, to the Noel Hill Irish Concertina School in Newberg, Oregon. These are both intensive environments for learning their traditions and "unplugging" their roots. "These unfettered solo performances are the best way to experience music - to listen to the masters and learn to play the music!"
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From British Columbia:

Ballad report for May, 2001

Jon Bartlett

O n  most recent Ballad Night featured Malcolm Page, who led us as promised through the history of the "broadside" ballad. He has very kindly prepared the notes below:

Malcolm Page said that his starting point for his thinking was noticing the number of words which preceded 'ballad' in commentaries. These words include: folk, traditional, minstrel, stall, street, broadside, booth, literary and modern. He had focussed especially on the broadside ballad, usually one ballad text on one big sheet of paper, printed, illustrated and the name of the scribe. Broadsides flourished from the early 1500s to the late 1800s, so overlapped considerably with the heyday of the Child ballad. They existed in many thousands: the biggest collection is of 17,500, and Pepys collected 1,671, and many must be lost. Broadsides were sung by a balladsinger in many thousands: the biggest collection is of penny: the performer was also the advertisement. A Winter's Tale. In newspapers, in the late 19th century. 17,500, and Pepys collected 1,671, and many must be lost. Broadsides were sung by a balladsinger at fairs and markets, with the text sold for a penny: the performer was also the advertisement. Shakespeare portrays a wandering ballad singer in A Winter's Tale. Broadsides faded away with near-universal literacy, and mass circulation newspapers, in the late 19th century.

Broadside ballads are of two main types: human romantic tales, such as 'Robin Hood' which would usually be categorized as folk songs and news, either National Enquirer type scenes and fantasies, or actual news (Roy Palmer's book, The Ballad in History, reprints many of this kind, on the Spanish Armada, the Great Fire of London, and so on). Broadsides are most often viewed as inferior to Child ballads. Child himself describing them as "undoubtedly deplorable and worthless." Gordon in The Ballad of Tradition admires them for what they reveal of ordinary people, everyday life, and the trade and interests. John Holloway, however, finds in them "vivid tabulae, drama, quick psychological insight, fast, hand-drawn, openmouthed to life, crooked house." Alex Beld in The Ballad sees broadsides as urban, not rural, topical, not timeless, and the work of hacks for money.

Jon Bartlett sang "The Bold Northwestman" by G Malcolm Laws.

Grateful thanks to Jon Bartlett for sharing some of his research.

The Canadian Folk Music BULLETIN de musique folklorique canadienne

No, it's as easy as 3.1415926535897932384626433832795...
From British Columbia: Ballad report for May, 2001

Jon Bartlett

Our most recent Ballad Night featured Malcolm Page, who led us as promised through the history of the "broadside" ballad. He has very kindly prepared the notes below:

Malcolm Page said that his starting point for his thinking was noticing the number of words which preceded 'ballad' in commentaries. These words include: folk, traditional, minstrel, stall, street, broadside, bothy, literary and modern.

He had focussed especially on the broadside ballad, usually one text ballad on one big sheet of paper, with a woodcut illustration and the name of the author or printer. Broadsides flourished from the early 1500s to the late 1800s, so overlapped considerably with the heyday of the Child ballad. They existed in many thousands; the biggest collection is of near-universal literacy, and mass circulation. A Winter's Tale.

The Ballad in the 1500s to the late 1800s, so overlapped considerably with the heyday of the Child ballad. They existed in many thousands; the biggest collection is of seven thousand.

Broadside ballads are obviously based to some extent on traditional ballads. The Ballad in History, reprints many of this kind, on the Spanish Armada, the Great Fire of London, and so on.

Broadside ballads are most often viewed as inferior to Child ballads. Child himself described them as 'unspeakably despicable and worthless.' Gordon Gilchrist in The Ballad of Tradition admires them

We must have a look at the substance of their formative years playing common ground of natives and non-natives alike - of these communities, the Powwow trail, and the First Nations reserves (which could be a surprise to some, but clearly documented in many sources).

The Donohue choir will certainly get our attention, and perhaps other provincial communities, the Powwow trail, and the First Nations reserves (which could be a surprise to some, but clearly documented in many sources).

Thanks, Malcolm! The evening was a real winner, and there was much discussion. Our next meeting is the last of this season; we'll be starting again in September. The next meeting will count, so please almost immediately in singing and writing - 'tis a shock about 6 pm followed by as many ballads as we can cram in on top of a full stomach. That will be the last time to feel free to bring interested friends, as always.

The presentation of speech and game at the Scottish Day of Culture here in the last month went well, we thought pretty well. It might be something we do a lot more of, particularly since our attention (Rika's attention, that is) was directed to the questions of what was so good about Aberdeen for ballads? We might well tap into some local knowledge here.

Jon Bartlett is a ballad singer and enthusiast who lives in Vancouver, BC, and is a former editor of The Canadian Folk Music Bulletin. It is a coincidence that editors like ballads?

Norman Stanfield teaches in the School of Music (music.ubc.ca) in the University of British Columbia.

I hope all our readers find this column as interesting as I do, and sincere thanks to the contributors. You will note, though, that several provinces are missing. My hope is that this column will continue to interest people about traditional music from every region of Canada. If you would like to contribute, send your material to me. If you know someone who was a contributor, contact them, and also send their names to me.

This column depends on your input!

Thanks again, Lorne Brown Editor

Is it difficult to learn to play the banjo?

No, it's as easy as 3.1415926535897932384626433832795...