

RECORDING REVIEWS

It's Time for Another One: Folk Songs from the South Coast of Newfoundland. 2005. Compact Disc. Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media, and Place (MMap), Memorial University of Newfoundland. Liner Notes by Beverley Diamond, photographs, song texts and musical transcriptions, 39pp.

Folklore of Newfoundland and Labrador: A Sampler of Songs, Narrations and Tunes. 2006. Compact Disc. Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media, and Place (MMap), Memorial University of Newfoundland. Liner Notes by Peter Narváez, photographs, song texts and musical transcriptions, 44pp.

Saturday Nite Jamboree. 2007. Compact Disc. Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media and Place (MMap), Memorial University of Newfoundland. Liner Notes by Neil Rosenberg and Ted Rowe, photographs, song texts, 20pp.

BY RICHARD MACKINNON

This is a remarkable collection of CDs that represents years of research on and about Newfoundland and Labrador folklore and vernacular music. The Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archives (MUNFLA), established in 1968 by the Department of Folklore and Dr. Herbert Halpert, houses valuable oral, aural and music collections from the distant and recent past. Traditionally the archive's role has been

to preserve, catalogue and make available these resources. But archives often do not make their materials widely accessible; visitors need to spend time in archives to discover what is there and to access important but sometimes difficult-to-find materials. The Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media, and Place (MMap) at MUN, established by Dr. Beverley Diamond in 2003, allows for digitization, editing and mastering of audio recordings. A collaborative partnership between the MUNFLA archives and MMap has resulted in these three CDs that provide wide access to songs, stories and radio broadcasts that otherwise would be inaccessible. Each CD has extensive liner notes complete with historical context, biographies of singers and story tellers, song texts and tunes, and references written by Memorial University of Newfoundland scholars of vernacular music: Dr. Beverley Diamond, Dr. Peter Narváez and Dr. Neil Rosenberg.

The first CD, *It's Time for Another One: Folksongs from the South Coast of Newfoundland-Ramea and Grole*, is a collection of field recordings done by Jessie Fudge in 1968 when he was a Memorial University of Newfoundland student. Historical context about the South Coast of Newfoundland in the 1960s is followed by a discussion of the collection, biographies of singers and a commentary on the distinctive repertoire found amongst these singers. An annotation and discussion of each track follows.

The use of the recording studio to remix three of the songs in this collection is innovative. As Dr. Diamond says:

“Three well-known Newfoundland producers, each of them committed to encourage respect for traditional music, were commissioned to choose a song and make it new in one way or another. They were given complete freedom to perform or produce it anew, using the archival recording or not. They could use processes of mixing or arranging as they saw fit. There were no rules. Both the producer and the sound engineers subsequently discussed their concepts and sonic decisions” (12-13). Each producer came up with something a little different. With his guitar for accompaniment, Jim Payne chose to sing the song, “The First of October,” a humorous song about smuggling on the south coast. Jim’s explanation of why he chose this song and his aesthetics of performance are included along with a commentary from the sound engineer, Spencer Crewe: “Jim’s approach allowed for more freedom in the mix and ‘freedom’ in this case is translated as a ‘more contemporary technique: big sound, full warm, crisp notes, and punchy’. He explains that ‘he shined up and warmed the vocals by adding a bit of air and boosting mid range frequencies’” (14).

Pam Morgan, on the other hand, chose to create a new arrangement of “Sal Stopped Up to Iron Some Clothes” by “incorporating the original performance by Robert Childs, but performing a second voice and adding three accordion lines (played by Graham Wells) and the bodhran. As with Payne, she provides a discussion of the reasons why she was drawn to this song and her aesthetics of performance. The Sound Engineer, Spencer Crewe, also discusses the particular studio techniques he employs to modify the sound of the instruments to

be more evocative (14-15).

The third producer, Glen Collins, collaborated with journalist Monique Tobin and disk jockey Mark Power to recreate the tragic ballad, “Cold December Day.” Their aim was to focus on the theme of loss: “To convey the cultural loss to an even younger generation who may or may not be interested...the kitchen party does not exist for them the same way it did for the singers on the tape but their world is nonetheless a fragmented mix of all that has gone before and is part of the present” (15). What they come up with includes the original recorded tragic ballad performed by Gordon Kendall, mixed with voices recorded by Monique Tobin discussing the demise of the Grand Bank fishery on the Burin Peninsula and a DJ spinning a hip hop beat behind it.

The extensive liner notes also include photographs of Ramea and Grole and of some of the singers, a hand-drawn map of Grole originally done by Fudge in 1970, a note on the arrangers and studio producers, two musical transcriptions, and the lyrics for all songs. This is a great resource for scholars, teachers and students who want to understand the singing and music traditions of the south coast of Newfoundland.

The second CD in the set, *Newfoundland and Labrador Folklore: A Sampler of Songs Narrations and Tunes*, follows a similar pattern to the first CD. An introduction written by Dr. Peter Narvaez sets the context. He says: “In total, these tracks illustrate a wide variety of musical and storytelling traditions”(2). Indeed there are Child ballads several hundred years old – (“The Girl from the West Country,” “Willie O Winsbury,” (Child 100) – broadsides such as the Gay Span-

ish Maid, tragedy and disaster ballads, a supernatural ballad, an alphabet song, an erotic song, occupational songs, labour facilitation worksongs and dance tunes. There is one Scottish Gaelic song from the Codroy Valley and one French Newfoundland piece although English songs predominate. In addition to the songs there are two spoken-sung performances – *cante fable* – “Little Dickie Melbourne” and “St. John’s Girl.” There are also two fixed-phrase recitations, “Romeo and Juliet and Job’s Cove Rock,” and one free-phrased narration, a humorous exaggeration from Labrador, “Dogsled Tall Tale.”

As with the first CD, the liner notes for each performance are extensive, providing a description of the performance, the name of the performer if known, the collector, the date and location of the recording, and the MUNFLA (archival) number. A lengthy reference list is also provided. Photographs and biographies of each singer are included along with transcriptions of songs, narrations and tunes. As Dr. Narváez says: “In that they have also conveyed a sense of place, the music and narratives of this anthology may also be considered forms of the region’s vernacular culture... To a certain extent, therefore, these materials have contributed toward regional identity. Paradoxically, however, the vernacular songs of this sampler challenge the Newfoundland and Labrador “folksong canon,” for example, the repertoire of vernacular songs most identified with the province nationally and internationally through popular media and recurrent usage (e.g., “It’s the B’y,” “Squid Jiggin’ Ground,” “Star of Logy Bay,” “The Ryan’s and the Pittmans”)(1). I like that the anthology has songs as well as nar-

rative, providing a sense of the materials in MUNFLA. One of my favorite cuts is “MacDonald’s Reel” played on the accordion by Minnie White of the Codroy Valley and collected by Margaret Bennett in Tompkins in 1973. Minnie was a master accordion player who played Sunday afternoon shows at the Starlight Motel when I was conducting fieldwork there in the 1980s. As the liner notes say: “While many women singers can be found within the world of traditional Newfoundland music, not many became instrumentalists. But Minnie bucked tradition and became one of Newfoundland’s great masters of the ever-popular accordion, going on to release many recordings. Minnie composed tunes, hired her own band, and played both accordion and mandolin. She recorded four albums and received many awards including the Order of Canada (1993) and an East Coast Music award (1995)” (20-21). Minnie also plays the mandolin and has a second cut on the CD, a mandolin version of Saint Anne’s Reel. One of the strengths of the anthology is that it includes both internationally, regionally and locally known performers. For example, Emile Benoit, an internationally known fiddler, storyteller, composer and singer is included along with Rufus Guinchard, an icon of Newfoundland fiddling. Minnie White is more known throughout Newfoundland and Atlantic Canada. Likewise Allan MacArthur is renowned in the Gaelic world as a storyteller, singer and bagpiper. William “Billy” White is known as a singer of work songs in the logging camps of Newfoundland and Stanley Trim is recognized locally in Labrador as a “superb singer” (20).

The most recent of the three CDs,

Saturday Nite Jamboree (2007) presents two radio programs produced at CBN in St. John's and broadcast on CBC in 1963. As Dr. Neil Rosenberg, the producer says: "Saturday Nite Jamboree' came at the end of an era where live entertainment shows had a regular spot in radio programming. It was the last series of its kind, a Newfoundland kitchen party on the air, and the fans soaked it up" (1). As with the other CDs in this series, the liner notes are detailed, clear and well written with material on the history of broadcasting in Newfoundland, the program itself, photographs, biographies of performers and a reference list. It was serendipitous that these recordings survived because the standard at the time was to re-use the tapes for new shows after they were broadcast. As the Introduction explains, Dinah Hilton Fitchett, a nursing student from England, went to the CBC studio with her friend to watch the show being recorded. She enjoyed the performance and asked if she could get a copy of the broadcast. Instead of making a copy, Harry Brown gave her the original recordings, two seven-inch open reel tapes, after the show was broadcast. Dinah kept these tapes in England for forty years and brought them back to Newfoundland a few years ago. When searching for a way to get copies made she was directed to Dr. Neil Rosenberg of the Folklore Department at Memorial University of Newfoundland (1).

The liner notes include a "Background" section that provides a concise, detailed history of broadcasting in Newfoundland. The author discusses the development of broadcasting in Newfoundland from the two major broadcasters in the 1930s, VOGY and

VONF to VOCN, VONF and VOWN and the joining of these latter two stations to CBC under the call letters CBN and CBY in 1949. Further, the author discusses the various precursors to the *Saturday Nite Jamboree* such as the "Irene B. Mellon" in 1934, "Uncle Tim's Barn Dance" in the 1940s, renamed "The Barn Dance" in 1945, "Ralph and Don" in the late 1940s that became "Ralph, Don and Bob" in 1948, "The Brockways" in 1943, "Woodland Echoes" in the 1940s, "CBC Dancing Party" in 1949, "Saturday Barn Dance" in 1953, "The Happy Valley Boy's" in 1951 and "The Great Eastern Oil Bargain Hour" 1951-1952, to name only some of the shows. For many of these programs, there are no recordings available and the authors rely on newspaper accounts to provide details of the shows and the performers.¹

There is also a clear discussion of the emergence of recordings of popular music by local Newfoundland artists beginning in the 1950s. As they say: "The first locally recorded albums did not begin to appear until 1955. A dozen or more came out over the next five years" (5). These include recordings by people such Omar Blondhal, Wilf Doyle, the Shamrocks that included fiddlers Don Randell and Ted Blanchard accompanied by Eric Dicks on piano, John White, and Brian Johnston and the Dipsydoodlers. As the notes indicate: "In 1963, at the time of the Saturday Nite Jamboree programs presented here, all of the current recording artists in Newfoundland, with the exception of Omar Blondahl, were regulars on the show. Or to put it another way, all of the featured acts apart from the Bluegrass Mountaineers were established recording artists. In this, the show

was unique and had a built-in recipe for success” (6). Each broadcast begins with “a tune heard widely in blackface minstrelsy and early country music—testimony to the links between those forms of entertainment...” (13). Then bluegrass and early country music is performed, indicating the widespread popularity of this form of music in Newfoundland at this period. Following the country performances, local and Irish songs and tunes of Wilf Doyle and John White are included. The last sections of each show “mixes the Irish, local and country material in different ways, presaging the mixtures that would soon appear in popular Newfoundland acts of the late 1960s and beyond” (15).

This three-part set is a necessary addition to the collection of any scholar of vernacular or popular music in Canada as it makes available previously difficult to access materials and provides some new versions of older recordings. It will also be of interest to the general public who wants to understand the complexity and history of Newfoundland vernacular music. One hopes that the series will continue and that we will see more audio CDs representing other aspects of the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador. Perhaps the series will also expand to include other archival materials such as early television shows, films, video, or slide shows on DVD that represent the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador.



NOTE

1. In Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, where I am located, there were

similar radio and early television shows of local music that we know little about. The first reference to a radio show of Cape Breton music was a 1921 broadcast of dance hall music from the Rex Hall, Glace Bay by Harry Holden. In the 1930s, a weekly program that was nationally aired on the CBC was “Cotter’s Saturday Night,” produced by CJCB. Other shows included “Celtic Ceilidh” and “Highland Lassie,” featuring Winston Scottie Fitzgerald, in the 1940s, and “Cape Breton Barn Dance” in the 1950s. Local television shows such as “Melody Lodge” and “Oland’s Saturday Night” aired Cape Breton music in the 1950s and 1960s. The kind of research that informs *Saturday Nite Jamboree* needs to be done for Cape Breton Island and Nova Scotia.

Welta’q - “It Sounds Good”: Historic Recordings of the Mi’kmaq. 2008. Compact Disc. Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media, and Place (MMAp), Memorial University of Newfoundland. Liner Notes by Janice Esther Tulk, photographs, song texts and musical transcriptions, 60pp.

BY CHRISTOPHER SCALES

Welta’q is the fourth and latest CD to be released by the Research Centre for the Study of Music, Media, and Place (MMAp), an organization established in 2003 under the direction of Beverley Diamond, Canadian Research Chair in Ethnomusicology and affiliated with the School of Music and the Folklore Department at Memorial University. Ac-