

Review Essay:

Par un dimanche au soir: Léah Maddix, Chanteuse et conteuse acadienne (Arsenault) and
A Family Heritage: The Story and Songs of LaRena Clark (Fowke and Rahn)

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Georges Arsenault. *Par un dimanche au soir: Léah Maddix, chanteuse et conteuse acadienne*. Moncton: Éditions d'Acadie. 1993. 188 pp. ISBN 2-7600-0232-2.

Edith Fowke with Jay Rahn. *A Family Heritage: The Story and Songs of LaRena Clark*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press. 1994. 308 pp. \$27.95 softcover. ISBN 1-895176-36-0.

In recent decades the study of individual musical experience has become an acknowledged process for enquiry in folklore and ethnomusicology. Earlier, and usually within the framework of humanistically rooted historical musicology, the achievements of individual musicians had been celebrated in biographical works whose authors commemorated the life and works of a particular individual (usually white European and/or European-trained males), situating the person's contribution within a particular historical and stylistic "context." By contrast, the interdisciplinarity of folklore and ethnomusicology, coupled with their fundamental technique of working directly with human subjects (i.e., fieldwork) have contributed to an increasing awareness of music as socially based, and individual -- and shared -- lived and living experience. This awareness has been connected also to postmodern ideas of reflexivity, and alternative modes of representation.

In Canadian traditional music studies, Georges Arsenault's collection of songs and stories from Léah Maddix, and Edith Fowke's and Jay Rahn's collection of songs from LaRena Clark are two recent cases in point. These books share a number of common elements: both present life story accounts of the respective individual in narratives combining quotations from the subject and commentary by the authors; both present detailed musical and textual transcriptions with explanatory notes; and perhaps most noteworthy in comparative terms, is that the focus of both books is a remarkable woman singer and composer.¹ Together these books demonstrate the

value of studying individual musical experience. Within a historical context, they also demonstrate the pervasive preservationist ideology which has characterized both English- and French-language traditional music collecting in the 20th century. And yet, as much as these books are similar, there are also interesting points of difference to which I refer in the following discussion.

Acadian folklorist Georges Arsenault explains that he first heard of Léah Maddix when he was a first-year student at the Université de Moncton in 1971. Inspired by the work of Frère Anselme Chiasson (in the Cape Breton francophone community of Chéticamp), Arsenault set out to discover whether there was a similarly rich folklore tradition in his native Notre-Dame-du-Mont-Carmel parish on the Northumberland strait of Prince Edward Island. As with other Canadian collectors, Arsenault's route led him to a rich and varied tradition, in this case a francophone one within the very region in which he had grown up.

After studies at Moncton, Arsenault completed an M.A. in folklore (Arts et traditions populaires) at Laval University, and has subsequently published several collections of Acadian songs and stories from Prince Edward Island (1980, 1982, 1983a, 1983b).

Par un dimanche au soir has four chapters, plus introduction, conclusion, glossary of Acadian words, and bibliography listing archival sound recordings as well as references to relevant literature. The book's first chapter, "Une femme amoureuse de la vie" is a substantial life story (44 of the book's 188 pages) of Léah Maddix (1899-1986), in both the

¹ Comparably important is Angéline Paradis-Fraser as studied in Deschênes (1982).

author's and the subject's words. Also 16 family photographs are gathered in the middle of the chapter. The place as well as Léah's genealogical roots are described with affection and thoroughness.

For example, Arsenault explains how Léah's father, Aimé Aucoin, was the fourth generation of the Aucoin lineage on Prince Edward Island, with roots in the deportation of Acadians in the mid-18th century. Oral tradition and the 1798 census help trace Aimé's great grandfather's stay in Philadelphia and arrival in PEI through the names "Jean Aucoin" and "John Wedge," for as Arsenault points out, the latter is an English translation of the French "coin" (p. 16).

Based in such historical contexts, the combination of French and English names is still found throughout the Acadian community. Indeed, regarding Léah's own name, Arsenault writes:

À l'instar de plusieurs autres "Léa", elle a éventuellement ajouté un "h" à son nom pour l'écrire à la mode anglaise, car les anglophones confondaient souvent Léa avec Léo (p. 44).

One reading of Léah's life story is as a metaphor for rural Acadian life: schooling interrupted by a bout with tuberculosis, stints working in the nearby town of Summerside, and then in Massachusetts as a housekeeper and nurse's assistant, a broken first marriage back in PEI, and then a long and happy one with Alyre Maddix (three children) with whom she worked on a small farm to earn a living, running a home for orphaned children, work as a midwife in the local community, and later years in a Summerside retirement home. Notwithstanding the hardships in this story, the salient part of the metaphor is the lifelong happiness and contentment Léah experienced in her family and community. As Arsenault emphasizes throughout the book, this theme is illustrated in her love of singing and storytelling.

The book's second chapter, "C'était par une belle journée," contains 16 songs Léah composed over 65 years. Arsenault provides commentary on the songs and delineates two periods of production:

Les chansons produites pendant les années 1940 sont avant tout comiques, traitant de la vie et d'événements qui se sont produits à Saint-Gilbert.... La seconde période [1973-1984] a produit principalement des chansons sérieuses (p. 47).

Arsenault places particular emphasis on this part of Léah's repertory, commenting that because of his interest in folklore, he was especially interested in "*les chansons de composition locale*." He explains further that because of the lack of an established "*tradition littéraire*" in the Acadian region, such songs are much more than the mirror of an individual's life experience -- they are a valuable reflection of the lived experience of the community (p. 47).

Chapter 3, "Chantons tour à tour," is a sampling of 14 songs Arsenault collected from Léah, with commentary by the author. Observing that Léah's repertoire is "*très varié*" (children's songs, love songs, songs about marriage, and local events, even some songs in English--not included here), Arsenault says he selected this group of songs because they are "representative" and complete. In his introduction to this group of songs, he underlines the interconnections of oral tradition and age in the Acadian song tradition, writing:

Voici d'abord les premiers airs qu'elle a probablement entendus dans les bras de sa mère (p. 107).

Mme Florine Desprès, formerly of the Music department, Université de Moncton, did the book's musical transcriptions, with revisions by Charlotte Cormier and Donald Deschênes. Pitches, including chromatic inflections, are carefully notated, as is tempo -- each has a metronome indication -- and text placement. Where appropriate, the air ("*timbre*") on which the song is based is provided.

A drawback of the book is that there is almost no information about the transcriptions or music, despite the variety of musical forms, scale types, and styles (lyrical, dance-like, etc.) in the collection. One of the few comments pertaining to the music, "*Toutes ces mélodies [i.e., by Léah in chapter 2] sont construites sur des gammes majeures*" (p. 103), is not exactly correct. Admittedly, most of these melodies are "major," but at least two ("Francis Arsenault," one of Léah's two "*complaintes*," and the book's title song, "Par un dimanche au soir"), contain interesting modal inflections (as do a number of the songs in the following chapter). Indeed, questions of age, origin, identity, which guided much of this research, could well be elaborated through musical analysis.

Striking in this book is the intimacy between the subject and the researcher. Arsenault's close connec-

tion to his Acadian roots, and his fieldwork and friendship with Léah Maddix and her family for more than 20 years, are revealed throughout the volume, which reads in places like extracts from fieldnotes. Arsenault's hopes, expectations, and preferences--he tells us he started out looking for folk tales, (*les contes*) rather than songs--as well as his optimism in finding the quantity of both songs and stories he did, are woven engagingly throughout the narrative, in and around the songs and stories. Arsenault's sense of sharing with Léah, her family, and the community, is a motif throughout *Par un dimanche au soir*, and is every bit as important as the book's documentation and affirmation of Acadian traditions. This reflexivity of Arsenault's work is one of its decided strengths.

Published in 1994, Edith Fowke and Jay Rahn's *A Family Heritage: The Story and Songs of LaRena Clark* was the last of the many well-known song collections by eminent folklorist, Edith Fowke (1913-96). LaRena Clark (1904-91) was Fowke's most prolific and revered informant. In the book's introduction, Fowke explains that she met LaRena in 1961 in Richmond, near Ottawa; she describes LaRena as "the most unusual singer I discovered when I was looking for folk songs in Ontario during the 1950s and 1960s" (p. 3).

They established a correspondence, and Fowke eventually compiled a list of more than 500 songs in LaRena's repertoire, which Fowke describes as "amazing" in its variety: "folk songs" as well as "popular songs of the nineteenth or early twentieth century". Also highlighted is the importance of oral tradition: "I can think of no other singer who knew so many songs learned entirely from her own family, and none who has so many rare and unique ones" (pp. 3-4). Fowke explains that she and Rahn narrowed down the selection of songs for the book to those that were "unique or rare, were particularly complete or well worded, or showed interesting textual or musical variations" (p. 4).

The volume is in 4 sections: introduction, biography, the anthology of 93 songs (divided into 14 groups and by far the largest part of the book), a discussion of "LaRena's Place in Musical Tradition," and, finally, detailed listings of references to individual songs, recordings, publications, as well as song indices.

Fowke begins the introduction by emphasizing the importance of women as folksingers through history,² and continues by observing the importance of mothers as purveyors of songs to both daughters and sons. Not to discount male family members as informants, Fowke distinguishes genres along gender lines:

... LaRena learned most of her love songs from her mother and grandmother, and all the bawdy and comic songs from her father and grandfather. Similarly, the men rather than the women sang the songs about fighting and murders (p. 2).

Fowke emphasizes this idea in other commentaries of the collection (cf. pp. 137, 266).

In "LaRena's Story" (Chapter 2), we are told of LaRena's mixed ancestry: "English, Irish, Scotch, French, Pennsylvania Dutch, and native Indian (also, her mother was Catholic and her father was Protestant)." This aspect of LaRena's background was an important factor for the variety of her repertoire.

LaRena grew up in southern Ontario, first in Pefferlaw, then in and around Orillia and Beaverton. Married three times (her first husband died young and the second marriage ended in divorce), her third marriage was to Gordon Clark (1947). Gordon worked first in the armed forces and later in business; consequently, LaRena and Gordon lived in several places (Chatham, New Brunswick, Oakville, Ontario, Winnipig, Edmonton, and Ottawa) before retiring in Hawkestone on Lake Simcoe, i.e., in the area LaRena had grown up.

Gordon and LaRena were both keen on "finding out as much as they could about their country" (p. 9), and worked together on a number of interesting projects. One of these was a series of records of LaRena's songs (no longer available) published on their own "Clark" label and financed by an anonymous sponsor. Fowke also outlines LaRena's career as singer, which included performances in the 1960s at Mariposa, the Madoc Folk Festival, the Philadelphia Folk Festival, and others.

Critical here is that throughout her career as folksong collector, Fowke attached much importance to the idea of performance (live or recorded) of folksongs as a vital means of dissemination and

² One cannot help but think also of the importance of women as folksong collectors and scholars.

education. In LaRena, she found an ideal informant: one who knew hundreds of songs and was an effective performer.³

The importance of performance is evident in Jay Rahn's musical transcriptions, which are printed in an eminently readable, large-scale, songbook format, with guitar chord indications "to facilitate performance by contemporary 'revival' singers" (p. 262).⁴

The 14 sections into which the songs are divided open with nine "Classic" or Child ballads (in the anthology tradition of placing this "venerable" category first), followed by, among others, songs on different aspects of love, bawdy ballads, comic songs, Irish, English, American, Canadian songs, as well as Scottish items connected with Robert Burns, and finally, five of LaRena's own compositions. Each song is provided with a brief commentary in which salient characteristics and general comments on textual variants are given. In addition, a useful aspect of this book is the list of "Sources and References" at the end of the collection, which contains detailed textual and musical concordances, as well as recording references for each of the ninety three works.

Rahn's initial discussion of the repertory's musical features, "General Aspects of LaRena's Singing" (pp. 4-5) and later, more detailed treatment, "LaRena's Place in Musical Tradition" (pp. 259-264), are informative and thorough. In the latter section, he considers such topics as "Musical Forms," "Phrasing and Metre," "Syncopation," "Tempo," "Scales and Modes," "Harmonic Implications," "Range," and "Singing Style."⁵

Rahn's transcriptions and musical analysis provide an interesting contrast with the contributions of Fowke's earlier musical collaborators, notably those of Richard Johnston and Norman Cazden. For example, Rahn distances his approach from the latter's work:

I have not tried to pin down what Norman Cazden called 'tune relatives,' that is,

similar melodies that have been used with other texts (see his musical introduction to Edith Fowke's *Lumbering Songs from the Northern Woods*). Instead, I have tried to show how LaRena's tunes fit the traditions of individual songs regarded as text-tune units (p. 5).

Rahn's contribution, based on his broad theoretical and historical knowledge of traditional song, as well as his sincere respect for Edith Fowke's work, is a fine enhancement to the book, and one has the sense that this was truly a collaborative project between folklorist and ethnomusicologist.

Both books discussed in this essay are accessible reading, and should be of interest to anyone who wishes to learn about Canada's rich heritage of traditional music. In fact, these books complement each other in a number of engaging ways, notably in their modes of presentation, and in their portrayal of local, regional, and individual experience. With their focuses on music as socially rooted, lived experience, these volumes are welcome, innovative additions to the literature on French- and English-language traditional music.

At the end of the LaRena Clark book, Edith Fowke writes:

We believe that this study provides new folksong and folk-music materials for comparative scholars, for ethnomusicologists, for singers, and for those interested in Canadian culture (p. 266).

This statement can be read also as an apt description of the motivation and prolific productivity of the remarkable career of one of Canada's most distinguished folk music collectors.

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³ Here we can compare LaRena's quite public career with the folklore of Léah Maddix, which was intimately and exclusively linked to her family and community.

⁴ Rahn (1986-87) discusses adding chord symbols to traditionally unaccompanied melodies etc.

⁵ Rahn (1989-90) provides an even more detailed treatment of these topics.

Deschênes, Donald. (1982). *C'était la plus jolie des filles: Répertoire des chansons d'Angéline Paradis-Fraser*. Montréal: Éditions Quinze.

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Reviews

Carmelle Bégin, with the assistance of Constance Nebel. *Opus: The Making of Musical Instruments in Canada*. Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992. 148 pp. \$29.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-660-14006-3

Although the art of instrument making in Canada developed slowly over a century, it has experienced a revival in the last two decades. Carmelle Bégin, curator of the Ethnomusicology Programme at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, has chosen instruments which reflect this upsurge of interest, and presents the artists who created them.

Bégin's book features over 100 musical instruments made in Canada by some sixty artisans: traditional, folk, and symphonic, including reproductions of early European instruments. It is the first work of such scope on Canadian instrument making.

In her descriptions of the instruments, Bégin highlights features of their history, decoration, and social significance. Each description is complemented by a short biography of the instrument maker. The instruments are presented in four sections: the making of instruments, historical overview, aesthetics, and symbolism.

In "Making Musical Instruments," Bégin considers medieval, renaissance, and baroque instruments, substitute materials, and the jazz ensemble. This section includes reproductions of such early instruments as Dominik Zuchowicz's *pardessus de viole* in the manner of Nicolas Bertrand (d. 1725). Anecdotes about the artisans add much to the book's

appeal: for example, Linda Manser's penchant for creative inlays, as illustrated by her steel-string guitar with motifs representing eight animal species that are endangered or already extinct in Canada.

The section on "History" traces the development of the guitar, the string quartet, the marimba, and the flute. Included are citations of recently developed instrument designs, e.g., the Butterfly flute headjoint created by Jack Goosman.

The "Aesthetics" section deals with the lute and the trio sonata. A colour photograph of the soundboard on a 17th-century Flemish-style harpsichord by Yves Beaupré shows the beautiful artwork of Danièle Forget, with a foliage motif, tulips, a parakeet, a dragonfly and bees -- all characteristic of Flemish ornamentation.

The section on "Symbolism" discusses materials and sounds as well as symbolic instruments, including folk instruments of North American origin and instruments originating outside North America.

Canada's mosaic nature is revealed in the heritage of such artisans as Constantin Tingas, whose Greek parents took him back to their homeland for much of his childhood. In his Toronto workshop, Tingas builds violins, violas, 'cellos and guitars, alongside such traditional Greek instruments as the *bouzouki*, the *baglama*, the *tzouras* and the *laouto*.

The numerous photographs (both colour and black-and-white) result in a charming, small "coffee-table" book that doubles as an academic resource for those who wish to learn about the current state of instrument making in Canada. Bégin includes photographs of the artisans at work along with their creations.

Especially useful is each caption's acknowledgment of the historical instrument's original creator as well as the maker of the instrument illustrated, where the artisan resides, the year of construction, the materials used, the dimensions and the Canadian Museum of Civilization catalogue number. Two indices help one look up instrument makers and instruments. But for researchers, an initial division into instrument-families would have been preferable and would still have allowed for Bégin's four sections.

A useful research tool is tucked away at the back of the book after the general bibliography. Kevin James has compiled a selected bibliography of newspaper and periodical articles written between