

## A NEW NEWFOUNDLAND SONG COLLECTION

Reviewed by T.B. ROGERS

*Come and I Will Sing You: A Newfoundland Song Book*, ed. Genevieve Lehr. Toronto: Univ of Toronto Press (co-published with Breakwater Books, St. John's, in the Atlantic provinces), 1985. 210 pp. \$25.00 (cloth), \$12.50 (paper).

This book contains lyrics and musical transcriptions of 120 songs that Genevieve Lehr and Anita Best collected in various regions of Newfoundland. They provide some background information about the sources of their songs and their historical context, along with several drawings by Elly Cohen and multiple versions for six of the songs. Additional material includes a list of contributors, a glossary of unfamiliar words in the lyrics, a bibliography, an index of first lines, and reference numbers to Mercer's exhaustive *Newfoundland Songs and Ballads in Print 1842-1974*. It is a well-presented collection representing an important addition to the documentation of the rich Newfoundland song traditions.

The documentation of Newfoundland song is somewhat unusual in that all of the classic volumes such as Peacock's *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* and Karpeles' *Folksongs from Newfoundland* were collected and compiled by non-Newfoundlanders (mainlanders). While bringing well-honed scholarly tools to the task, this "collection from outside" runs the risk of missing the meaning attached to the material by the actual singers and audience. Lehr's book is particularly welcome in that it reverses this trend, being entirely executed by Newfoundlanders. When combined with Gerald S. Doyle's important booklets, *Old-Time Songs and Poetry of Newfoundland*, "analyses from within" are now available, and it becomes possible to gain a more balanced understanding of Newfoundland song. Perhaps an example of the native quality in Lehr's collection is the tremendous proportion of locally-composed shipwreck songs compared to the previous books. This reflects a greater valuing of local composition traditions and hence provides a much-needed insider's view of the song traditions.

Given the foregoing, it seems appropriate to see how *Come and I Will Sing You* adds to existing outside collections by virtue of being a native product. Several aspects of the book speak to this. For one, it seems possible, and to my mind desirable, that the collecting being done by Newfoundlanders had an effect on the kinds of material collected. In some contexts and with some types of material, an old-timer may be more likely to share material with an islander than with a mainlander. If singers know the collector shares the same history and social values, they are more likely to reach back for songs that reflect these. This is especially important with singers who are trying to recall material from previous times, which appears to be the case for a goodly proportion of the material in the book. As I look at the selections presented, I get the impression that the collectors have capitalized on this advantage and thereby documented some very interesting variations and previously unpublished songs that are important additions to the extant corpus (e.g. "The McClure," "Maurice Hogan's Song," and "The Leaving of

Merashéen"). The proportion of previously unpublished material is due in part to an editorial decision. Lehr states that she intentionally did not include songs found in the earlier major collections. This, of course, enhances the proportion of previously unpublished materials. Also, some of the material has been created since Mercer's index (e.g. "In Memorium," "Wave Over Wave").

Unfortunately, except for the decision not to reproduce songs from other collections, Lehr did not make clear the rationale used to select from the available material. Therefore invaluable information related to singers' repertoires and the attending data about the traditional singing environment in Newfoundland are not available. It would have been useful to have an explicit statement of the selection criteria used.

Information about the singers who contributed is sparse. There is a list of contributors and scattered material in the short notes following each song. This makes tracking down information about a specific singer (or region) almost impossible. It is indeed unfortunate that the reader is deprived of this important human information, as it would have been one of the major additions accruing from locally-produced investigation. There appears to be a tendency to separate the songs from their living and human context and treat them as "products."

But these reservations aside, the book stands as an important collection of lesser-known Newfoundland songs. Reading it gives a glimpse of the incredibly rich song traditions that are so much a part of the Newfoundland folkways. There is a sense, in this book, of a growing energy and enthusiasm about the old song traditions. To an outsider, the importance of these traditions appeared to be waning in the face of the onslaught of the media and the introduction of mainland musical forms such as country music. *Come and I Will Sing You* is a clear indication that the small and dedicated corpus of revivalists in the province are having a positive effect. From this dedication we now have access to a fine collection of great songs.

*The University of Calgary  
Calgary, Alberta*

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13. Allister MacGillivray is a successful songwriter, and a former guitarist and singer with professional Celtic music groups. He has published three books, *The Cape Breton Fiddler*, *Song For The Mira*, and most recently *The Cape Breton Song Collection*.
14. A series of stage productions produced in Cape Breton with music and script composed and performed by local musicians and artists. These musical revues have been recorded on long-play recordings and produced by the College of Cape Breton Press.
15. *The Cape Breton Song Collection*. Allister MacGillivray, ed. (Sydney, N.S.: Sea Cape Music, 1985) 74.

**Resumé:** *John C. O'Donnell est chef d'orchestre du chœur des mineurs de Cap Breton, "Men of the Deeps." Dans son article, il décrit comment et combien ce chœur a réussi à éveiller l'intérêt de la communauté en ce qui concerne la chanson folklorique, et à en augmenter ses connaissances. Ensuite, il établit le rapport entre certaines des chansons de Cap Breton et leurs antécédents historiques britanniques. Finalement, il démontre comment ces chansons, composées par des chansonniers locaux, ont contribué à l'enrichissement de la culture régionale de Cap Breton.*