

## SONGS OF THE TRAVELLING FOLK

EDITH FOWKE

MacColl, Ewan, and Peggy Seeger. *Travellers' Songs from England and Scotland*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977, and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977. 387 pp.

This recent book by two leading figures in the British folksong revival is the first extensive collection of songs from British travellers. In their introduction the authors say: "It may be argued that we are guilty of exaggeration when we suggest that the travelling people have become the real custodians of English and Scottish traditional song," but few familiar with recent collecting in Britain are likely to argue. Others like Hamish Henderson and Mike Yates have also found the travelling folk a major source of songs.

To avoid getting bogged down in arguments about definitions of "gypsy" the editors interpret "travellers" broadly to encompass gypsies, tinkers, Romani—the many inter-related groups who live on the road or whose ancestors lived on the road. Their collection presents 158 songs from seven Anglo-Romani speaking travellers and eleven Scots travellers between 1960 and 1975. They give notes about the life-styles of the two groups, some experiences in tracking down singers, and brief biographical notes on the eighteen singers, with lists of the songs from each. A check indicates that 99 of the 158 songs came from three: John Macdonald (21), Caroline Hughes (46), and Nelson Ridley (32).

In an extensive music note the authors point out some of the characteristics of the gypsy songs. Many of these they share with other traditional singers, but as a group they seem more inclined to avoid strict rhyme, to preserve many songs in very short or fragmented forms, to turn words into gibberish, and to run together lines or stanzas from different songs. As a result, the collection is more interesting as a reflection of what happens to songs in oral tradition within this particular group than as texts and tunes for singing.

The songs are grouped under the headings: Child Ballads, Additional Traditional Ballads, Faithful Lovers, Casual Encounters, Hesitant Lovers, Unfaithful Lovers, Family Opposition to Lovers, Soldier and Sailors, Crime and Criminals, Rural Life, Humorous and Miscellaneous, and Travelling Life. The last section is the only one peculiar to the travellers. The others for the most part present versions of fairly widespread British songs, many of which are known in Canada. Indeed, it is interesting to note that quite a few of the travellers' songs are more familiar in Canada than in the United States. For example, North American versions of the following travellers' songs seem to be known only in Canada: "The Banks of Sweet Primroses," "The Rainbow," "Jamie Foyers," "The False-Hearted Lover," "The Bonny Bunch of Roses," "Camden Town," and "Erin Go Bragh." The following are much more common in Canada than in the United States: "Lang A-Growing," "MacDonald's Return to Glencoe," "The Maid of the Sweet Brown Knowe," "The Bonny Irish Boy," "The Fatal Snowstorm," "The Green Bushes," "Sheep-Crook and Black Dog," and "Erin's Lovely Home."

The editors give brief introductory notes and extensive bibliographical references for each song. Indeed, their bibliography, running to a dozen pages, is one of the most extensive I have seen in a song collection. I was therefore

surprised to find that several significant Canadian books were omitted: Arthur Huff Fauset, *Folklore of Nova Scotia*; Louise Manny and James Reginald Wilson, *Songs of Miramichi*, and Edward D. Ives, *Twenty-one Folksongs from Prince Edward Island*. However, to balance these omissions, I should add that it contains a number of British listings unknown to me.

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### Le Catalogue de la chanson folklorique française (continué)

collecteur qui recueille une chanson comme

Nous sommes partis aux vignes et nous n'en trouvons point

Je monte dans un arbre et pour y voir plus loin

J'ai-t-aperçu un moine et là-bas dans un coin

Il confessait les filles et le verre à la main<sup>7</sup> (etc.)

n'a aucun moyen, si ce n'est peut-être la formule de la laisse, de savoir que c'est là une version des *Femmes des maris aux vignes*. Pour cela, il aurait fallu que chaque titre soit suivi d'une version à titre d'exemple, illustrant concrètement la relation titre/texte. Pour pallier à cette lacune, il faudra songer à publier dans l'avenir une série de recueils anthologiques où les chansons seront présentées en concordance avec les titres et les cotes du *Catalogue*. C'est à cette condition seulement qu'il deviendra un outil de consultation à large diffusion et qu'il rendra les plus grands services aux chercheurs comme aux profanes.

CELAT,

Université Laval

Québec, Québec

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## A REFERENCE LIST ON CANADIAN FOLK MUSIC

This is a revised and updated version of the reference list that appeared in the first issue of the *Canadian Folk Music Journal* in 1973. It is selective rather than complete: it includes most books of traditional songs and most records by traditional singers, along with some representative articles on various aspects of Canadian folk music and some folk-song records by non-traditional singers.

The published material has been divided into language groupings, with a general section for works that include songs in two or more languages. Asterisks indicate items that include more extensive bibliographies.

The list of compositions based on Canadian folk music is necessarily limited but it includes both published and unpublished works. (Publishers are indicated in short form in brackets.) Most of this material and information on Canadian composers and their music are available at the libraries of the Canadian Music Centre de musique canadienne: No. 3 — 2007 W. 4th Ave., Vancouver V6J 1N3; 1259 rue Berri, bureau 300, Montréal H2L 4C7, and at 1263 Bay Street, Toronto M5R 2C1.