

## JACK WINTER

### PERRY AND OTHER VOICES<sup>1</sup>

«Perry And Other Voices» [Perry et d'autres voix] est le récit très personnel d'un partenariat qui s'est échelonné sur plusieurs décennies entre des gens en théâtre des deux côtés du Rideau de fer.

L'auteur Jack Winter a rencontré le chansonnier Perry Friedman pour la première fois à Toronto lorsqu'il a demandé à Friedman de composer et d'interpréter la musique de *Waiting*, une pièce sur le chômage écrite et mise en scène par Winter, en partenariat avec le ministère de la Main-d'œuvre et de l'Immigration, créée puis interprétée par des victimes représentatives de ce malaise social. Suivant la production de la pièce, Winter et Friedman ont continué de travailler ensemble dans le cadre d'une collaboration qu'ils ont baptisée « Cabaret Canada ». L'initiative a donné lieu à des documentaires radio, des séries télévisées, des spectacles et des tournées... la dernière ayant mené à des projets à Berlin et à Moscou avant l'effondrement du Mur et le démantèlement de l'URSS. Après une période d'une dizaine d'années pendant lesquelles les deux hommes ont quitté leur pays respectif et travaillé chacun de leur côté au Royaume-Uni et en Allemagne, Winter et Friedman ont repris contact et sont restés de très bons amis jusqu'au décès de Friedman en 1993.

La vie professionnelle et personnelle de Friedman au Canada et en Allemagne est documentée et examinée dans "Wenn die Neugier nicht wär": Ein Kanadier in der DDR (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2004). Le présent article, publié pour la première fois en anglais ici, est paru dans une traduction allemande sous le titre *Mein Bruder Perry* [Mon frère Perry].



## INTRODUCTION

BY STEPHEN JOHNSON

It is in the nature of the study of performance history to focus attention on a few events, repeatedly, for all the hoary old reasons: that production was seen by more writers of history, and is therefore important; those actors had prominent careers, and are therefore important; that theatre company is still in existence, and therefore must be important; or, perhaps, there happens to be a

cache of documents available, and therefore.... Histories are written using histories, and canons are created, just as surely in the lives and works of performers and companies as in playwriting.

Jack Winter's own story fulfils all the requirements for canonization, and quite rightly. He wrote with Toronto Workshop Productions on many of their best-remembered creations. His plays are still produced regularly and internationally. His papers rest in the archives at McMaster University (I've used them, and recommend them to you). But in this reminiscence—and elegy—for his friend and colleague Perry Friedman, Jack Winter moves past all that.

What follows reminds us of the complexities of the artistic life in 1970s Toronto: the rich prospects for performance beyond those usual suspects, the “alternatives”; the porous relationship between live performance and the local media, and between theatrical and musical venues; and, perhaps, in particular, the powerful relationship between international, national and local politics. But it also reminds us that all histories, any histories, are first of all personal. Perry Friedman was a working artist whose career flew under the radar of history in this country—well, until now; and yet a study of his life and career is in print. Published in Berlin. In German. What follows is Winter's contribution to that work, published here in English for the first time, submitted from England, where he has lived for many years. SJ



The play was about unemployment. The year was 1972 and there was a lot of unemployment in Canada, enough for the government to try to cover it up. The Department of Manpower and Immigration—workers and foreigners were seen as equivalent social problems—had developed the “Local Initiatives Program,” a system of subsidising short-term employment schemes which temporarily reduced the number of people out of work in the months leading up to a general election—the sort of statistical sleight-of-hand pioneered during the Great Depression and of use in every subsequent decade except those containing a world war when full employment and natural wastage of surplus labour was guaranteed.<sup>2</sup>

I was still young enough to mistake mischief for political action, and to enjoy using government funds to undermine government practice. I'd solicited and received a grant from the Local

Initiatives Program. My brief: to write, direct, and produce a play employing out-of-work people. I'd approached Canada Manpower, the official government job-finding agency. Using their facilities, I'd interviewed and hired four individuals from their register.<sup>3</sup> None had any history of working in the theatre; all had considerable experience of long-term unemployment. Each was willing to make the stuff of his and her own life the subject matter of a play, and to present the joint creation before a live audience. We intended the result to be a new kind of theatrical documentary: a work of the imagination presented by living documents—*Waiting*, a play of unemployment, created and performed by the unemployed.

This unlikely ensemble had been working together for two months, improvising, analysing, rehearsing, while I prepared a script based on our efforts. As sometimes happens among theatre folk who think they know what they're doing, the group developed a bond of mutual affection and a pattern of accidental good luck. When the demands of our developing play required the presence of an outsider who would represent every bureaucrat and functionary and authoritative buffoon in every system that ever had thwarted anyone, the most imperious out-of-work professional actor in Toronto presented himself... and we opened our collective heart and took him in. When music began to seem a logical extension of our meaning, there was a phone call from a friendly radio producer at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation telling us about an expatriate folk singer who'd "returned," and wondering whether someone could help him find a job.

"Send him along!" we said, and changed my life.

Late one winter night, slumping home from rehearsal, I'd slipped on the ice and now sported an ankle-to-thigh plaster cast which prevented all but the most perfunctory sponge-baths. In comparison to my personal hygiene, soluble problems like national economic recession were a trifle. Perry Friedman was qualified to assist: he had a banjo, two good legs, and was bigger than me. Moreover, this fellow Jew had been born a mere 500 miles away from the town of my birth in central Saskatchewan! Were I to consult the records of the Baron de Hirsch, that nineteenth century middle-European utopian philanthropist who plucked Perry's and my grandparents out of pogroms in Russia and Rumania and deposited them into the unforgiving hinterlands of North and South America, perhaps I'd find we were cousins? By the topographic standards of the vast Canadian prairie at the very least we were neighbours.

I hired him, and daily he carried me to the rehearsal hall and played the banjo and sang. I wrote and directed and, for the first time,

began to heal. After work he and I went to Chinese restaurants and ate competitively and composed songs together, some for our play, several for ourselves. In a decade as a professional playwright I'd never written a song. But one of Perry's talents was to make non-musicians feel comfortable in music—it was, I later discovered, the key to his ability to make his concert audiences join in the singing—and somehow he managed to impart this confidence to me who played no instrument other than the phonograph.

Eventually our theatre piece was completed and ran its short course in and around Toronto, leaving the government un-undermined.<sup>4</sup> I remember the drive back after the final performance to the inmates of a provincial medium security prison. Perry and I perched in the rear of the van which carried the rented stage equipment. I morosely rehearsed the words I planned to use when my colleagues and I inevitably came to say our final goodbyes. Still flushed with performance, Perry chortled, and fingered his banjo. "Now," he said, "you and I can get to work!" It was my first experience of the sheer tenacity of his friendship.

Within weeks we found ourselves on the bleak northern coast of the province of New Brunswick in a one-company company-town, the fragile economy of which was based on a single coal mine, American-owned and employing locals who had been lured from their farms and fishing villages... and systematically fired as coal-seams thinned and U.S.-bound profits declined. Six months earlier indigent citizens had disgraced themselves by storming the local Canada Manpower office to point out to its administrators—and, by the way, to the national press—that, despite government "unemployment benefits," they were starving... and Perry had been hired by the mine workers' trade union to sing to the protesters so as to demonstrate "solidarity." Now he had convinced another friendly radio producer that a progress report was due, and he and I were hired by the C.B.C. to make an hour-long documentary on the subject.<sup>5</sup>

In northern New Brunswick progress was difficult to spot though regress wasn't. Among other things it was now widely suspected that for years (decades?) a spontaneously ignited fire had been burning along the deep underground seams of the local mine. It would only be extinguished when all the coal was gone. Meanwhile it emitted sulphur dioxide gas which filtered through the mine shafts.

On the other hand, oysters in this depressed economy were cheap. One memorable afternoon on the sea-shore Perry and I consumed two bushels of the beauties, and I concluded matters by

running an oyster knife into the palm of my hand where its progress was arrested by hitting bone. As a consequence, by the time of that evening's interview with the local trade union representative—during which he alleged that the unemployment situation was by now so bad that his union had instructed him not to challenge the mining company's policy of continuing to send its few remaining workers underground despite the likelihood of asphyxiation or catastrophic explosion—the microphone I held was covered with blood.

During our gathering of documentary material for the program we were assisted by several locals who were trying to form a political party which would bring their economic deprivation and social exclusion to the attention of the national government. Unwilling to call themselves "French-Canadians," these people saw themselves as the descendants of those rebellious "Acadians" who in the eighteenth century had been expelled from Canada by their British ethnic cleansers, and had ended up in the swamps of Louisiana speaking the melodic patois of the "Cajun"... and gradually forgetting where they'd come from except in their legends like "Evangeline" and their folksongs like "*Un Canadien* [*Un Acadien?*] *errant*."

In recompense for their guidance Perry and I invested the remainder of our travel expenses on a social gathering in our hotel room. It was our last evening on this assignment. Perry ate and drank and sang and kept the others singing. I ate and drank and listened to the poets and the academics who mostly made-up the leadership of the community... and kept my tape recorder running... and collected enough additional material to justify a second hour-long documentary. We called that one "An Acadian Party."<sup>6</sup> As Perry and I had felt at the time, it was angry, drunken, and a little sad.

When we got back to Toronto, we composed and recorded some songs based on our impressions—the best was called "Fire in the Mine"— and we edited and produced both programs ourselves, a first-time experience for each of us. Then, like football managers after a costly victory, we sat back and discussed where the team was heading. Ours was, Perry maintained, more than a collaboration. It was a partnership. As such it had to have a name. He suggested "Friedman and Winter," but somehow that sounded like a firm of divorce lawyers. I thought "Winter and Friedman" was better, but Perry said it reminded him of a life-long personalized weather report. We settled on "Cabaret Canada," a kind of European/North American contradiction in terms. There were no cabarets in

Canada. No Canadian worked in political cabaret. The name implied two people huddling together in a cold country they couldn't wait to get out of. Our next project confirmed our direction.



**Jack Winter and Perry Friedman (1989).**

Photo by Brigitte Friedman.

In fact our next project was called “Cabaret Canada.” It consisted of three short programs per week for a local television channel servicing the area of metropolitan Toronto.<sup>7</sup> The content was a good soup of songs, monologues, and vignettes. I sang as little as possible and Perry wrote only what he could spell. One item we managed to include in nearly every show was called “Nice News” and was introduced by a jolly signature tune which ended with the proud slogan: “Nice News! Only The News That’s Nice!” The camera cut away to a shot of Perry and me seated behind an absurdly immense news-reader’s desk. We greeted one another as though we hadn’t met in years: “Hello, Perry!” (musical bridge), “Hello, Jack!” (musical crescendo). Then with imbecilic cheerfulness we read out that day’s series of bulletins. “Nice News Local Weather Forecast: no snow in the subway!” “Nice News Vietnam War Report: President Nixon announces that U.S. bombing of Cambodia will be abandoned the moment he orders it to stop!” “Nice News Cultural News: Andy Warhol says... anything!” And so on.

We were having fun. Because our audience was at the other end of a TV signal and our crew never raised their eyes from their knobs, it was difficult to judge whether anyone else was. Our program director, who I hope remains nameless, preferred filming

handsome stationary objects like beer cans and news-readers. Me she tolerated. "Writers," she shrugged, "aren't supposed to be visual." Perry, however, she loathed. Due to bounce and glare his banjo was anti-photogenic. "Do you have to," she asked him after yet another failed close-up, "use all your fingers?"

Stubbornly continuing to include every note in a song and unreasonably refusing to paint his instrument matt black, Perry amiably ignored her... until the Vietnam show. It remains the only time I saw him lose his temper at work.

Mei Lei, a small village located somewhere beyond the director's control booth, was back in the news. Perry and I suggested to the channel's executive committee that we be permitted to depart from our usual format in order to produce and to host a two-hour long "war special" featuring those prominent Canadian entertainers whose enthusiasm to address the topic would enable us to persuade them to work for expenses. We too would waive our fee, which offer alone shocked the chief executive into agreement.<sup>8</sup>

In order to increase the sense of passionate immediacy, the program was video-taped before a live audience. The highlight unquestionably was a famous Québécois chanteuse. To appear on the show she had cut short a lucrative engagement in Montreal and had refused travel expenses. She had prepared a version of her song specifically for the occasion and had rehearsed it until she could present in to her own impeccable standard. She sang a beautiful lament which spoke of an inimitable French-Canadian sense of loss and, by implication, gave voice to those far-off victims whose homeland was in the process of being destroyed.

And it was she upon whom our director concentrated her most insulting skills, repeatedly interrupting in mid-song to suggest that the singer might like to make use of the wardrobe department's storage facility to find a dress which was "less Montreal," to recommend that facial expressions needn't be "so regional," to advise that "real Canadian vocalists" never gestured if they had neglected to shave their armpits. Of course the director never left the sanctity of the control booth, and confided her helpful comments to the public address system to be shared only by the ears of the audience. When an entire rendition of the song finally was achieved, the director cut short the applause to inquire whether the singer really hadn't brought along an English version which could be substituted. "In case our famous visitor hasn't noticed," she added, "this is Ontario."

Perry sat through the entire shameful episode without a quiver. He did, however, become rather pale. I thought it was

nerves—we were scheduled next to deliver an especially bizarre episode of “Nice News.” It was never delivered. At our cue Perry stood, strode across to the live camera and, mere inches from the lens, delivered a cold hard version of “Speak White!” a violently anti-imperialist song likening French-Canadians to black Americans and Anglo-Canadians to—well, throughout his performance Perry kept his eyes firmly focused upon the control booth. Then he packed up his banjo and walked out... on camera! I, of course, followed though it was several days before I could close my open mouth. “Cabaret Canada” had come to an end before the Vietnam War.



**Winter and Friedman in recording studio (1973). *Cabaret Canada* at work.** Photograph by Dan Murray.

That last paragraph describes what should have happened but, of course, didn't. Perry and I would no sooner have insulted an audience by walking out on it than the chanteuse with greater justification would have. As it was, all of us completed our work, then walked out—she, back to Montreal and New York and Paris where she continued to serve the cause of nationalism with the power of her art—Perry and I, to the next gig after the last... which turned out to be almost as far from martyrs and racists as Mei Lei from Toronto.

And “Speak White!” did become a permanent part of our concert repertoire. We used it at our next venue: East Berlin, the capital of the German Democratic Republic.





Perry's long history in the G.D.R., predating our acquaintance, is described elsewhere by others qualified to do it.<sup>9</sup> He had told me only a few of the details, not out of an innate modesty but because he was pretty sure that at a distance I couldn't understand the character and the dimensions of his career there. Now in the Spring of 1973 he persuaded a producer of the adventurous C.B.C. series *Between Ourselves* to inform my ignorance by commissioning a radio documentary on "artistic conditions behind the Iron Curtain." The result was three months of voluntary interviews and reciprocal concerts conducted in and around East Berlin.

Naturally, as a Canadian, I searched with diligence for the western personification of the eastern artist—suppressed, repressed, embittered, out of touch, covetous—but had little luck locating a live archetype. Instead I perplexingly encountered cultural giants whose names had formed a part of my university education and therefore were assumed to be dead, and singers and actors and poets and novelists and dramatists and graphic artists from several generations who didn't seem to know they weren't supposed to be sophisticated or cosmopolitan or (gasp!) contemporary, all of whom were un-envious of Perry's travels and happy to see him again!<sup>10</sup>

To add to my confusion, none of the writers we interviewed seemed either propagandistic or proselytising... and not one of them asked for the name of my literary agent. In fact, many of the female writers were so emancipated they no longer made the emancipation of women their principal theme, and we decided to follow that theme beyond the verge of artistic enterprise into the factories and the offices of what had been, but a few decades earlier, super-chauvinist Prussia.

Most of the East German artists were aware of the invisibility of their work abroad, but were distracted from despair by the deadlines of their publishers and the schedules of their entrepreneurs and the appetite of their public on this side of the Wall. Any exasperation was directed at their own bureaucrats and was assuaged by a kind of barbed playfulness while waiting for those tedious people to do the necessary work that would enable them to do their own. Perry's favourite illustration was Hans Eisler's famous query to yet another committee which was meeting to keep East German music pure: "Be so kind as to tell me, comrades, what is a socialist chord?"

No one was particularly exercised on the topic of state censorship. Most considered it a sort of reasonable tax paid on generous state subsidy. The son of one of Brecht's principal theatre colleagues, himself an eminent international stage director,<sup>11</sup> patiently explained to me: "Of course in the West you're free to say whatever you want to say because no matter what you say it won't make a difference. Here all of us are the government, so like a government we have to watch our mouths." Then he added, "Even great patrons of the arts like the C.B.C. and Coca Cola must expect the occasional product placement?"

Well, Perry and I watched *their* mouths... and two hour-long programs emerged.<sup>12</sup> When one of our C.B.C producers eventually heard the tapes, he said: "I expected a trip to the zoo. You've given me a subversive soirée." I think he meant it as a compliment.

Perry's actual position in the artistic community of the G.D.R. was best understood by other members of it. As a visitor I could not have been aware of its cultural ramification, its social nuance, its professional ebb and flow. What I did observe was that the musical entertainment industry of that small country was full of busy people doing popular business—criss-crossing the land on extended tours, coming together in amazingly well-attended themed concerts and massive international festivals, then resuming their normal course along the byroads, passing one another with a wave and rarely colliding. What I also noticed was that there were a few others like Perry working the circuit—an American rebel rock-star, a Dutch shtetel songstress, a West German cabaret satirist, etc.—foreigner-born entertainers who thrived in the G.D.R. partly through their natural ability, partly through the lack of competition. Like a discriminating shopper in the global supermarket, the East wanted the best of whatever the West had to offer, but didn't see the need for more than one of each.



At this point I'd known Perry less than two years. Almost every aspect of our working partnership had involved travel, some of it of very long distance, a factor only partly attributable to our Semitic inheritance of nomad genes. Unknown to us, however, that phase of our association already was over. The next began, appropriately enough, with travel. Once again, the destination was behind the Iron Curtain—this time further behind—all the way to the opaque window.

Chile had happened and Allende was dead—so too was the

international reputation of the government of Canada which had protected its Chilean mining interests by abetting Pinochet's fascists and impeding his resisters.<sup>13</sup> Perry and I concluded that Toronto required another Cabaret Canada concert, this time without the intervention of videotape and video-tapers. For the event we borrowed the theatre of Toronto Workshop Productions where I had worked with George Luscombe as his playwright and dramaturge on and off since 1962.<sup>14</sup>

The evening was attended by the pinko provocateurs and fellow travellers who had flocked to the theatre's last Bolshevik extravaganza: *Mr. Pickwick*, my knockabout dramatisation of Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*.<sup>15</sup> The following dawn (which was red) the phone rang. The caller had been at the concert. "You did your best in bourgeois circumstances," she said. Then she inquired whether my "comrade" and I would like to attend next week's United Nations sponsored "world peace congress"<sup>16</sup> in Moscow as honorary members of the Canadian "cadre"? I replied that as a comrade I would have to consult my comrade. After an imaginary phone call to Perry, who doubtless was still asleep, I phoned back and coolly shouted: "Yes, please!"

I returned to my mattress unaware that two important things had just been arranged: Cabaret Canada had given its last concert, and my bachelor days were over.

Moscow's Hotel Rossia is, in fact, four hotels standing shoulder to shoulder in a square. Each is immense; together they are positively Stalinesque. One of our fellow delegates, the mayor of a moderate-size town in British Columbia, reckoned that "for real power" he'd prefer to be mayor of Hotel Rossia.

Including Perry's and mine, the average age of the Canadian peace delegate was biblical. For many this excursion was a reward for decades of service to unpopular causes and a re-avowal of dedication, a trip to Mecca. For some it was the equivalent of slightly premature interment in the Kremlin wall. For the rest of us the introductory plenary session in the Congress Hall of the Kremlin would prove it to be a late excrescence of the Cold War—a juvenile propaganda exercise which, in its aggressive moralising, was rather American in tone. "Who," said Perry, "needs to be sold disarmament like detergent?" For him and me and one other I hadn't yet met, that first session would be the last we attended.

During the flight to Moscow our "chairperson"—it was she who had phoned—briefed Perry and me. Our "peace credentials" were "suspect," being based upon "one agitational concert and no surveillance." We would have to "prove your loyalty and earn your keep." This

was her polite way of inviting us to entertain during evening meals.

For all our delegates the most important room in the Hotel Rossia was the dining hall, a mass feeding chamber evidently designed by an architect of Soviet aeroplane hangars. Three meals a day including vodka at breakfast were prepared with the efficiency of the Red Army and served with the taciturnity of the Russian peasantry, neither of whom had access to our Tsarist bill of fare. On the first evening Perry was instructed to forego one serving of red caviar—he commissioned me to reserve his quota of black—so as to provide our delegation with a recital. This he did, until his excellent rendition of the trade union anthem “Joe Hill” was interrupted by a drunken bellow. “Enough of these dirges!” slobbered the 150 kilogram boss of a prominent Canadian trade union. Earlier the same gentleman had boasted of his intention to spend entire days in the dining hall where, by a careful stockpiling of courses, he would contrive to make one meal merge with the next. Six months later he absconded with union funds to live out his retirement in the West Indies.

In the interest of geriatric digestion neither Perry nor I was asked to perform again, though we were invited to attend all functions in the crowded conference itinerary. Everybody agreed that the most exciting event was going to be a welcoming address by a moribund Leonid Brezhnev, which gave us some idea of the vitality of the less exciting events. Regretfully we skipped that session too, having a pressing engagement to discuss nothing in particular with anyone at all.

The next evening Perry discovered me in the remotest corner of the dining hall at a discreet table for two seated across from a fresh-faced young woman with green eyes. Glancing around at the blue-haired delegates wolfing scarlet borscht and white blinis, he diplomatically blurted: “Where did you find her?” My companion introduced herself as a member of the British delegation, and invited Perry to pull up a chair. To his everlasting credit he declined. I think he thought it was a “conference romance.” I think she and I did too. And so it was. And so, thirty years later, it continues to be.

My future wife and I had met that morning on the bus transporting delegates across Red Square to the Congress Hall. I’d lurched into the empty seat beside her, interrupting her reading of that day’s survey of the previous day’s events. My opening line was: “Is that a copy of Brezhnev’s speech?” which she remembers as uniquely flirtatious. I maintain that I was afraid of being quizzed on the return flight by our vigilant chairperson. On the other hand, there had been plenty of empty seats on the bus.

Jackie and I saw little of Perry during the rest of the conference. He did not seem to be in the audience at the Bolshoi Ballet or the Russian Circus or the Obratzov Puppet Theatre, nor among the viewers at the Tretchikov Art Gallery or the Kremlin Museum, nor within the queues at the Gumm Department Store or the tomb of Lenin, nor amid the passers-by along the sentimental, slush-covered thoroughfares or the adorable, sleet-filled industrial canals or the beatific traffic jams of romantic, late-October downtown Moscow... though I'm not certain either of us would have noticed had he appeared. Of course he might have broken his resolution and been attending scheduled events in the Congress Hall, but we did not bother to look there.

All in all Perry bore my rapture pretty well. Twice on the return flight I caught him glancing in my direction and snorting. By the time we were making our final approach to Toronto International Airport, he had begun to speak to me again, albeit expletively.

Within a month I was back on salary at Toronto Workshop Productions, working on a series of plays<sup>17</sup> which would fully occupy the next few years. Within two months my green-eyed person had given up her salary, her flat, her family, and her homeland, and had come to share my mattress forever.

Somehow Perry's and my friendship survived these professional imperatives and domestic alterations, though in retrospect it's clear that's what it was becoming: a friendship rather than a partnership. Of course there were still the occasional jobs of work together—some university concerts, a couple of phonograph records, an outdoor rally in support of strikers against (ah, the ingratitude!) the C.B.C.<sup>18</sup>—but more and more we met for the pleasure of meeting, and we ate Chinese food, and we toyed with projects we would never undertake but enjoyed conjecturing. Perry's most imaginative was, through a combination of illustrated doggerel verse and voice-recording on plasticised paper, a lively line of singing Christmas cards... an unusual enterprise for a pair of Jewish atheists.

The truth was, though we enjoyed consuming the products of capitalism, neither of us had a talent for accumulating its currency—a sin which in normal times, unimpeded by practical inconveniences like divorce, we were inclined to confess a virtue. These were not normal times.

My first marriage had dissolved some years before; Perry's was in the process of deteriorating. Though we didn't discuss it when we were together—indeed, he avoided the topic and, whenever

possible, the house which it darkened—it hung over him like a cloud. He continued his independent freelance work with his usual employers: the trade unions and the C.B.C. His appetite for Chinese food remained intact. We'd meet and eat and talk about our several projects. We continued to share a commensurate enthusiasm for them, but there was a difference. I was employed in a theatre collective, surrounded—sometimes suffocatingly—by colleagues; in my home two people were giving their lives to one another, each confident a bargain had been struck. Except for fleeting contact with producers and technicians, Perry worked alone; when he went home, his isolation increased. This most compatible of colleagues, this most gregarious of men, was lonely.

One morning I received a phone call from the office manager of Toronto Workshop Productions. Perry had dropped off a package addressed to me “for indefinite storage.” When I opened it, I found his share of the mint copies of our Cabaret Canada phonograph records alongside the miniature gong we struck to signal the beginning of each new item of “Nice News.”

Perry and his family were gone. I was not to see him again for ten years.



In 1985 in Montreal my mother's telephone rang. “You probably won't remember—” began the person on the other end.

“Ah!” said my mother, “A voice from the past!” It was the first time, Perry told me, his bass-baritone had been called that. He was between flights at Montreal airport on his way from Vancouver back to East Berlin where he'd lived for the past decade. Assisted by the telephone directory and my mother's good ear, he'd decided it was time to track me down. When I answered the telephone in my London flat, he began:

“Before I was so rudely interrupted—”

“Don't you think it's about time—” I replied.

“The day after tomorrow,” he said.

By the time Perry arrived I'd arranged a short tour of rural Suffolk. I wanted to show him the medieval village where my wife and I had lived for several years before moving to London. I thought he'd also enjoy revisiting Cabaret Canada, and I set up a few gigs in old Suffolk haunts: a minimum security prison where I'd worked with prisoners on their “creative writing,” a Cambridge college where I'd done the same with inmates there, a peace camp near an American nuclear airbase.

When we got back to London, Perry insisted that my wife and I accompany him to a particular pub on the outskirts of the city. An old friend of his, a Canadian guitarist and singer who had been the most talented and committed member of a Vancouver folk music group in Perry's youth, had moved to England and was performing there. Perry wanted to arrive unannounced and deliver a shock. A shock was delivered. In a suburban tavern featuring wide-screen football and ice-cold American beer, a disconsolate man on a stool strummed inaudibly and shouted the lyrics of Las Vegas show tunes over the clang of an adjacent gaming machine. When he recognised Perry, he brightened visibly and launched into a bossa-nova version of "Joe Hill." After his set, he dropped into the available seat at our table. "Not bad was it," he sighed, "after eight hours behind the wheel of a taxi?" On the drive home Perry was uncharacteristically silent.

Our lives had diverged. Perry had re-established his career in the G.D.R., and work was plentiful. He had a new wife and family, two homes, several telephones, and a wide circle of friends. When I visited him in Berlin, as I did many times over the subsequent decade, I received the benefits of them all. When he visited me in London, he received the benefits of London. Ten years before East Germans abandoned their Trabants by the roadside and flocked across the broken Wall to pick up the inevitable BMWs that unquestionably awaited them, he was no more prepared than they for the reality of life in the West.

On the other hand, my friend seemed safe where he was. During dinner near the end of this first London visit a limousine arrived at the front door of our basement flat. The East German government required the immediate presence of our guest. Perry seemed not at all alarmed. I noticed he took along his banjo. When he returned, the chauffeur accompanied him in and joined us for a late night cup of cocoa. He told us about the impromptu concert Perry had given the staff at the Embassy, and of how pleasant it had been to hear the songs of one's homeland so far from home. Then, on behalf of them all, he presented my wife with a dozen roses—to thank her, he said, for taking good care of Perry. Jackie looked at him. Then she looked at Perry. Then she looked at her flowers. "Thank you," she said, "for exactly the same reason."

In this new and last phase of our relationship Perry and I saw each other for a few weeks every year, his lifelong love affair with the telephone filling in the gaps. That our exchange of visits was unequal was only partly due to the fact that I was more comfortable in his adopted country than he was in mine; a short while after we'd

found each other again, somewhere on a G.D.R. concert tour someone in the rural medical establishment had decided a heart attack was the flu... and for six long years my friend was bravely dying.

Perry was very irritated at dying—irritated but not surprised; he had always preserved a profound Canadian disrespect for bureaucracy and a basic prairie certainty that, when life and death were the issue, some functionary somewhere always would make the wrong diagnosis. Faced with the inexorable progress of chronic heart failure, he just got on with his job—helping a new country to reclaim its honourable folk songs from a generation of maniacs who had transposed them into marches and, when the Wall fell and live concerts dried up, turning his attention to Cabaret Canada's old standby, radio, making imaginative documentaries which utilised his skills as interviewer, musicologist, editor, producer.

In fact, on my last visit Perry had one more live concert scheduled. He had kept the engagement pending until the last possible moment, making me promise to get him to the venue by any means and, if necessary, to carry him on. Once he got behind the microphone, he insisted, he knew he'd be all right.

The elder of his adopted sons had had enough of adult stupidity. "Do you want him to die on stage?" he screamed. Perry and I looked at one another. There were worse places.

For a man in his late fifties with one kidney and a medical record of diabetes and three separate bouts of cancer, a heart transplant was not an option. With his physician-wife monitoring his treatment and monitoring his monitors, he was never left in doubt about his chances or, indeed, his itinerary. When he was pretty certain about the amount of time remaining, my telephone had rung once more.

Perry and I were never easy on one another. It was he I turned to when my mother died, and insisted that he witness my legacy of futile fury and nameless guilt. It was me he ordered to his side to wait out the last two weeks of his life.

Other than his work and mine, which somehow had come a little together again, we talked about nothing of consequence. At the time he was planning a radio adaptation of my poem-sequence entitled (prophetically) "Kaddish,"<sup>19</sup> which is the name of the Yiddish prayer for the dead. We argued about the music... and the script... and the translation... and the editing... and the production. Otherwise, as usual, we were in total agreement.

At the time I was working on a new book-length collection of poems.<sup>20</sup> Unbidden, he stayed up reading it for one entire precious



night— he had three nights left to live—and at breakfast he delivered a critical appraisal so sharp and clear and full of insight that the manuscript was left ten pages shorter and six months further from completion, and all the better for it.

The worst moment of the visit was Perry's final realization that he didn't have the strength to leave the flat, much less to take the stage... and he cancelled the concert. The best was every other moment.

The morning after I returned to England, the telephone rang.

"Jack—." Brigitte's voice began, then dissolved.

"When?" I managed.

"We were sitting in the living room having a drink and he went white and he closed his eyes and—."

"When?"

"A few hours after you left."

It was as if I'd given him permission.



This essay is the first time in print that I've revisited those years. Perry helped me through them, and the memory of Perry has helped me through this chronicle of my time with him. I've sent a copy of the manuscript to my adult daughters, busy in Toronto with their own careers and families. The note accompanying it reads: "Consider this an educational matter—yours now, mine then." It was also and is also a matter of the heart.

I miss him entirely. I think of him daily. He is foremost in the handful of people I address when I write. ❁

## NOTES

- 1 Perry Friedman (1935-1995), Canadian folksinger. Perry's life and career in Canada and Germany is documented and examined in Friedman (See Works Cited). The present essay, published here for the first time in English, is included in that book in German translation as "Mein Bruder Perry," 110-39.
- 2 A topic I explored again in a later play, *Ten Lost Years* (1974).
- 3 Lindsey Crickmay, John Dickie, Jean Gauthier, and Mohamed Marrakcki. Calvin Butler (actor) and John Eckert (technician) joined the company later.
- 4 *Waiting* played from May to June, 1972. Venues included: (in Toronto) eight campuses of George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology; the College Street United Church; (in Campbellford) Warkworth Institution.

- 5 *My Bathurst*, C.B.C. RADIO (“Ideas”), one hour, 1972.
- 6 C.B.C. RADIO (“Ideas”), one hour, 1974.
- 7 During 1972 and 1973 *CABARET CANADA* appeared on C.I.T.Y. TV.
- 8 The Vietnam program was broadcast early in 1973.
- 9 Such as Jaldati and Rebling, Raupach, and Kahlau. (See Works Cited.)
- 10 Including: Edith Anderson (writer), André Asrael (composer), Benno Besson (theatre director), Walter Felsenstein (opera director), René Graetz (artist), Heiner Müller (theatre director), Lin Jaldati (singer), Heinz Kahlau (writer), Matthias Langhoff (theatre director), Dieter Mäde (film director), Hans Mauersberger (musicologist), Irmtraud Morgner (novelist), Ulrich Plenzdorf (playwright), Eberhard Rebling (musicologist), Dieter Süverkrup (singer), Falko Warmt (artist), Paul Weins (poet), Dieter Wien (actor).
- 11 Matthias Langhoff, the son of Wilhelm Langhoff (theatre director). For insights into G.D.R. theatrical and literary life from the perspective of an expatriate North American of the generation before Perry’s—the generation of Wilhelm Langhoff and Bertolt Brecht—I suggest Edith Anderson’s autobiographic *Love In Exile*.
- 12 *Arts and Letters in the G.D.R.*, C.B.C. RADIO (“Between Ourselves”), one hour, 1973; *Women in the G.D.R.*, C.B.C. RADIO (“Ideas”), one hour, 1974.
- 13 This is the occasion and the subject matter explored in my 1975 play *You Can’t Get Here From There*. Between one and three o’clock on the morning of November 5th 1974, the eve of the premiere, Toronto Workshop Productions was fire-bombed. The theatre was re-built and the play, which examined the role of Saint Trudeau’s incumbent administration in the murder of Allende’s Chile, opened three months later than scheduled.
- 14 The live concert at TWP took place in September, 1973.
- 15 *Mr. Pickwick* opened in December 1972 and played through January 1973. It was revived in 1974 and 1982.
- 16 Otherwise known as the “World Congress of Peace Forces,” for several decades an annual international gathering of non-governmental largely self-selected delegates that represented many national “Peace Movements.” The first Congress was held in Melbourne in 1950, the second in Warsaw in 1951, the third in Berlin in 1952. The twenty-fourth, which Perry and I attended, took place late October 1973.
- 17 *Letters From The Earth* (1973), *Ten Lost Years* (1974), *You Can’t Get Here From There* (1975), *Summer Seventy-Six* (1975), *The Golem of Venice* (1976).
- 18 The university concerts were in Montreal at McGill and Loyola in December 1973. The records were two singles, produced in November 1972, featuring four Cabaret Canada songs: “Man Of Worth” (regarding Pierre Trudeau’s re-election), “Man In The Street” (regarding the

Printers' Strike), "Promises" (regarding Canadian immigration), "A.Y" (regarding A.Y. Jackson). The outdoor rally was in support of NABET technicians and took place in June 1972 at the old C.B.C. building on Jarvis Street in the no-man's-land of the parking lot.

- 19 The first section of *Misplaced Persons*. (See Works Cited.)  
 20 *Nomad's Land*. (See Works Cited.)

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