
the Coop
The Fast Folk Musical Magazine
March '83
Vol. 2, #2
Story Songs
• JEF • CAF • LNM •

Winter Journals

Man can embody truth but he cannôt know it. I must embody it in the completion of my life. The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence..."

- W. B. Yeats

They are already calling it the blizzard of '83. All have their stories memorized, their excuses iron clad. People love myth, love to be a part of it. The snow is now melting, revealing the piles of garbage buried underneath. After the panic, the frolic, winter has now returned to its normal slow, studied pace: The dancer frozen in motion, a photograph on a cafe wall.

An unfamiliar, familiar voice on the radio. The D.J. claims to have discovered a new talent. My mind plays out an old scenario: disk jockey plays several songs to great response; sends demo tape to record company; first album critically acclaimed for material, though criticized for over-production; second album called a disappointment; record company and public loses interest; artist self-destructs. As David Massengill says, "God help us when we have a hit." This doesn't have to happen.

It is time for a new myth. A less destructive myth. Fame is a siege. It surrounds one with a polarized public. One has to rely on what provisions and friends one had "layed in" before the siege, as all new advances must be questioned. Life and work cannot go on as normal for the duration. After the siege is over, one is left devastated, controlled, or corrupted. There is no way out. Don't get me wrong. I am not against people helping their careers along, and I feel that many of our crowd will achieve fame and fortune, but, in terms of the siege metaphor, they have to store up as many provisions as possible beforehand.

At a political song conference I watch an old master at work. Infinite patience. There is a difference between honorable and foolish, between self-righteous and right, between pragmatic and pigheaded. There is more to getting along than being right. He takes the time to make each person feel important, he transcends the insults of time. This is a different myth; not the romantic, self-destructive song poet but rather the quiet leader. We have much to learn from this man. He argues the case for the "common folk," the "nonprofessionals" in folk music. I look around and these are they, even though they do not know it. I no longer feel the need to criticize their ineffectuality, their lack of vision. It is a fool who thinks that he will be judged by his opinions of others. These singers are representative of the 99 percent who live outside the myth, perhaps believing in it, perhaps not, rather than the 1 percent who insist on living the myth.

We travel through the blizzard to play a couple of group concerts in Connecticut. The poster bills me as "a legend in his own time." It seems that people want to perpetuate myths. (I would have been happier had it been meant collectively.) a hundred and fifty people brave the elements to hear us. These group shows are a good idea. With all of us playing a few songs together as well as solo, we transcend the critical comparisons of the audience.

From another city a call from a bookstore owner who has had an issue of The CooP fall into his hands by a circuitous route. The songs he raves about are all songs sung by interpreters, not their authors. More food for thought.

And last but far from least, the past couple of months has seen a revitalized songwriters' workshop at the Cornelia St. Cafe, still on Monday night, though at a new time slot so as not to interfere with dinner hour (art must never interfere with commerce). There are many new writers trying out new songs, dedicated to improving their craft and giving each other support. There is more to art than being good, or playing at being good. One learns as much from teaching as from studying. Music can be an end in itself. It does not have to be a means to achieve stardom, or a means to achieve a political or social end. One doesn't have to be good to enjoy playing music or to enjoy listening to it. Most of these writers are unknown, even in our small circles. Years from now, if this "scene" is written about, this small gathering at Cornelia St. will attain the mythic proportions it deserves. It is a quiet myth, a patient myth, built on substance instead of fanfare. The song is sacred, the singer can go to hell.

- Jack Hardy

the CooP
The Fast Folk Musical Magazine

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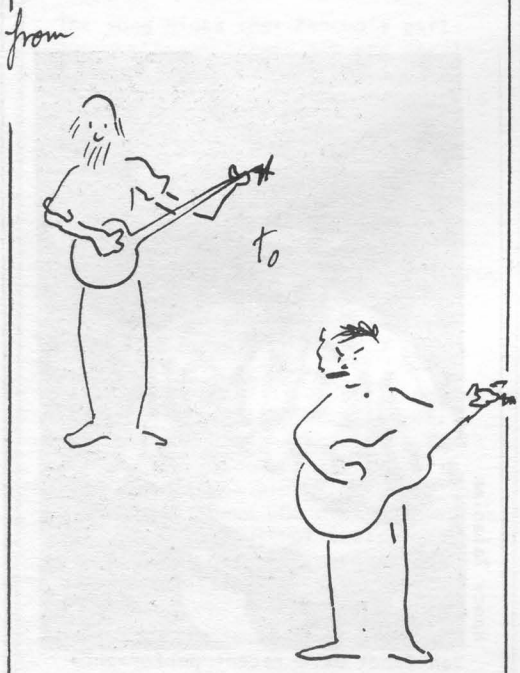
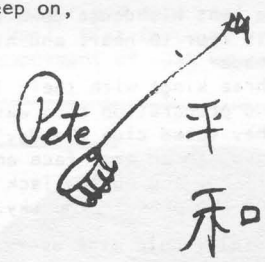


Dear Jack,

Rod MacDonald interviewed me (Dec./Jan. CooP), but I think I should have been interviewing him. The story of SpeakEasy and The CooP is an important one and should be widely known, so that others might attempt to repeat your success.

Rod's article didn't pinpoint the reasons for your success, but I suspect: a good location, good songs, discipline (coming out on time!), nobody getting rich. Youth-talent-energy-good-looks-good-food all help, of course, and I guess a few $ did too--but financial discipline is probably just as important. Am I right? Have been reading 10 issues of CooP all this week. Good interviews, in the main. Though I still lament the narrow definition of "folk," which I like to think of as including primarily nonprofessionals, kids on sidewalks, grandmothers rocking babies to sleep, and only secondarily pros or would-be pros standing before a microphone. Most folks, given the folkways of 20th Century U.S.A., assume the latter is the core, and the former only an old-fashioned and relatively unimportant fringe.

Keep on,



Pete Seeger
Beacon, New York

The CooP staff
congratulates
Bonnie Jo Blankinship
and Gary Boehm
on the birth of their son,
Tyler Reed Blankinship Boehm

To the Editors:

As a subscriber to the Fast Folk Musical Magazine over the past year, I have enjoyed each issue and have watched it flower in the weather of difficult times. Your efforts and remarkable success have been the topics of many conversations here at Godfrey Daniels among performers and nonperformers alike. I will continue to spread the word. I wish you all continued success.

Sincerely,

John Gorka
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Songbook!

The CooP Songbook is out. This book contains music, lyrics, and chords for over 100 original songs that are on The CooP February through November issues. The paper-bound book, comb-bound to lie flat on your music stand, also contains many beautiful ink drawings and makes a great gift for a musician.

To order, send a check or money order for $8 (ppd.) per copy to:

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The Ballads of Townes Van Zandt

by Nancy Talanian

Townes Van Zandt's ballads account for only a fraction of the hundreds of songs he has written; I know of only about a dozen. Some of his ballads are among his finest songs. Others, written early in his career, in the mid- to late-sixties, are precursors of better songs. A look at his ballads, beginning with the early ones, makes it possible to trace Van Zandt's development as a songwriter.

Van Zandt says that the ballad "Waiting 'Round to Die" was his first serious song and was inspired by a man he met in Houston. Like many of the men in Van Zandt's early songs, the character in this song started life relatively respectably and went steadily downhill:

> Sometimes I don't know where this dirty road is taking me
> Sometimes I can't even see the reason why
> But I guess I'll keep gambling
> Lots of booze and lots of rambling
> Well it's easier than just a waiting round to die

Similar characters are the central figures in other early ballads like "The Rake" and "My Proud Mountains." All these characters regret their falls and try to return to their innocent origins or at least ask pity from their audience. Van Zandt, during this period, seems to have been obsessed with the vices of drinking, rambling, and gambling, but had not yet succumbed to them to a great extent. The songs suffer somewhat from his lack of firsthand experience with his themes.

In more recent songs there are male characters who are also living on the edge, but they are different from the wretches in the early ballads in that they all seem to have come to terms with what they have become. Take, for example, "Dollar Bill Blues":

> Well mother was a golden girl
> Slit her throat just to get her pearls
> Cast myself into a whirl
> Before a bunch of swine....
> Always been a gambling man
> Roll them bones, lay that hand
> Seven is the promised land
> Early in the morning.

Perhaps by this time Van Zandt himself had become a source of inspiration for his songs, because the songs seem to be truer. Both his weakness for vices and his improvement as a songwriter, which may be closely related, were documented by a writer who was told by several people that Van Zandt was "a derelict, a rambler and rowdy, and more or less the greatest living songwriter in America."

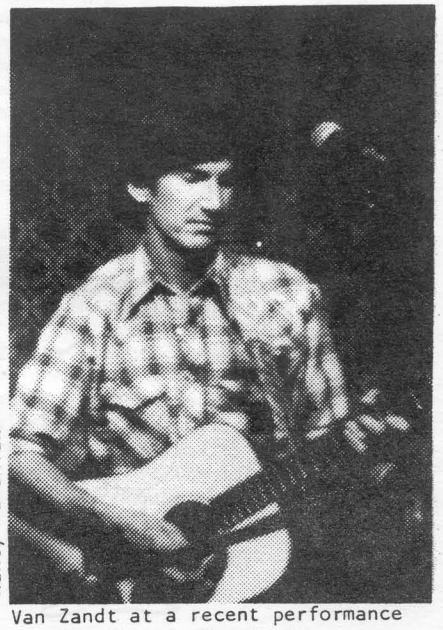
One of my favorite Van Zandt ballads is one that apparently drew on the songwriter's experiences as a gambler. This imaginative song, called "Mr. Mudd and Mr. Gold," is about a game of five-card stud poker. In writing this song, Van Zandt seems to be saying that the cards are in control, and the players are merely their victims, for in this song, the cards live--they organize battles for fun, and mothers, worried about their children, pray to angels for help. The gamblers, by comparison, have all the personality of a deck of cards.

The song begins as "the wicked king of clubs" organizes a battle:

> He sent his deuce down into diamond
> His four to heart and his trey to spade
> Three kings with their legions come
> And preparation soon was made
> They voted club the day's commander
> Gave him an army face and number
> All but the outlaw jack a diamonds
> And the aces in the sky.

Initially Gold wins every hand, but "Mudd's ordeal" reminds the outlaw's mother, the queen of diamonds, of "her long lost son." She prays to the aces, often called angels, and as a result, "the diamond angel filled Mudd's hole," followed by the other aces, while "the wicked king of clubs himself/Fell face down in front of Gold," followed by the other three kings. The queen of clubs joined her husband in Gold's hand, and the queen of diamonds was overjoyed when "the outlaw in the heavenly hall/Turned out to be her wanderin' boy."

> Now Mudd, he checked and Gold bet all
> Mudd he raised and Gold did call
> And the smile just melted off his face
> When Mudd turned over that diamond ace
> Here's what this story's told
> You feel like Mudd you'll end up Gold
> You feel like lost you'll end up found
> So amigo lay them raises down.



Nancy Talanian

Van Zandt at a recent performance at Folk City in New York.

This song, to me, is light-years better than Van Zandt's early ballads, in which broken men rued the day they'd ever taken up gambling (and/or drinking, rambling, fast women, etc.). The inspiration for those songs seems more likely to have been derelicts whom Van Zandt met when he was young than firsthand experience. To have written "Mr. Mudd and Mr. Gold," he must have played many games of stud and felt that his winning or losing was at the whim of the cards.

An interesting characteristic of Van Zandt's later songs about men with vices is that no judgment is ever passed, no blame is placed, and no purpose for individual actions or for life in general is suggested. The vices are never compared to old-fashioned values, as they are in the early ballads.

A good example is the ballad "Pancho and Lefty," which has been recorded by Emmy Lou Harris, Merle Haggard, and Willy Nelson. This song is about a pair of bandits, the leader of which is killed in Mexico. The first two verses express the glamor and drawbacks of an outlaw's life without laying any blame on him for his evil deeds:

> Pancho was a bandit, boys
> His horse was fast as polished steel
> Wore his gun outside his pants
> For all the honest world to feel

But Pancho met his match you know
On the deserts down in Mexico
Nobody heard his dying words
But that's the way it goes.

The song hints that Pancho's partner, Lefty, betrayed him and sacrificed his romance as an outlaw for the dubious privilege of growing old in a cheap hotel in Cleveland, but again no judgment is passed:

The day they laid poor Pancho low
Lefty split for Ohio
Where he got the bread to go
Ain't nobody knows....
Pancho needs your prayers it's true
Save a few for Lefty too
He just did what he had to do
Now he's growin' old

"Tecumseh Valley" is an early ballad whose character is typical of early Van Zandt female characters. A similar woman is the central figure in "St. John the Gambler." Both are sad songs about women who die young, presumably as a result of their love or lust for men. The character in "Tecumseh Valley" is the better developed:

The name she gave was Caroline
The daughter of a miner
Her ways were free and it seemed to me
Sunshine walked beside her

In the song, Caroline is sent by her father to Tecumseh Valley to look for work, and through her industriousness saves enough to return home to him in the spring. But before she is able to return, she learns that her father has died, and she falls apart:

So she turned to whoring out on the streets
With all the lust inside her
It was many a man who returned again
To lay himself beside her.

Van Zandt doesn't give us all the facts. Caroline is found dead in the next verse; perhaps she's killed herself, because there is a note in her hand "that cried/Fare thee well Tecumseh Valley."

The ballad "St. John the Gambler" gives even less detail: it is the story of a woman of 20 who announces to her mother, "I've given my soul to St. John the gambler/Tomorrow comes time to leave." With that, she heads off in search of the man, wearing only a beautiful calico dress to protect herself from the bitter cold. She dies in her search, presumably from exposure.

Whatever attraction Van Zandt ever had for such frail women was fortunately lost early, for they were soon replaced in his songs by women who are both stronger and more real. "Fare Thee Well, Miss Carousel" may be his denouncement of weak women:

"Won't you come and get me when you're sure that you don't need me/ Then I'll stand outside your window and proudly call your name."

After this song, Van Zandt's female characters seem to have more backbone, and the singer is as likely to need them as the women are to need him. A good example is the woman in "When She Don't Need Me":

When she don't need me
It makes me crazy
She say rest easy
And it makes me lazy
But when she please me
She please me all night long.

In summary, a few of Van Zandt's ballads are among his finest songs. A brief look at his early ballads makes it possible to trace his development as a songwriter--from an inexperienced young man bogged down with Christian values but fascinated by baseness to a writer whose life view is unencumbered by any need to judge, blame, criticize, or find meaning:

Don't you take it too bad
If you're feeling unloving
If you're feeling unfeeling
If you're feeling alone
Don't you take it too bad
'Cause it ain't you to blame, babe
It's some kind of game made
Out of all of this living
That we got left to do. ■

An Evening with Harry Chapin

by Alan Beck

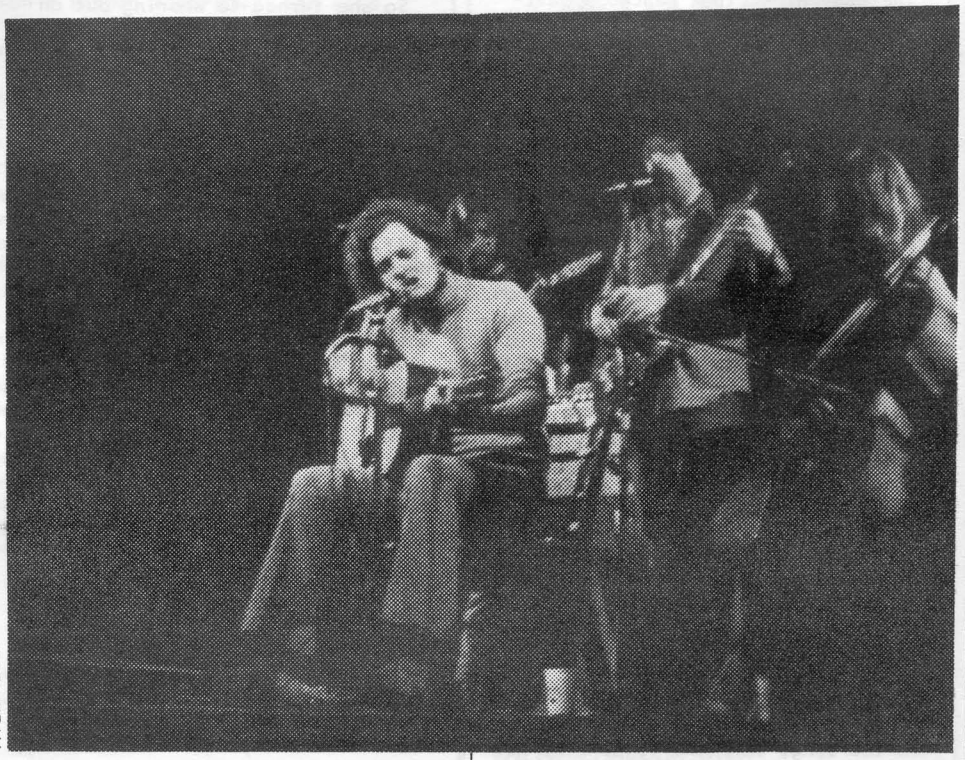
I first saw Harry Chapin in concert when he was the first act booked into a new club called the Great Southeast Music Hall in Atlanta, Georgia. It was a beautiful club. The room was warm and intimate, and sat about 300 people. Its sound system was one of the finest I've heard in any club. It was Harry Chapin and his band: Tim Scott on cello, Ron Palmer on lead guitar, and John Wallace on electric bass. The cello perfectly complimented Harry's voice and style of songs, giving his music a clear and distinctive sound.

He performed all the tunes on his Taxi album and his just released Sniper album. Harry was an exciting and electric performer. Onstage he was like a Jeckle and Hyde. He performed with fierce intensity, and between songs he sat with a big, friendly, warm grin, chatting with the audience like he was everyone's favorite big brother.

The big hits that night were "Taxi," "Dog Town," "A Better Place To Be," and "Sniper." "Taxi" got a big hand and was getting good airplay on the FM stations. In "Dog Town," he screamed with anguish as he portrayed the woman left alone while her husband/sailor was off at sea. In "A Better Place To Be," his voice cracked when the fat barmaid comforted her lonely customer. In his big number, "Sniper," the veins in his neck popped out as he acted in rage as the crazed sniper in the watchtower.

I knew right away that Harry Chapin was my kind of performer and writer. His songs not only told a good story, but he got in and explored the feelings and emotions of its characters. In his music, the lyric dominated the song and got you involved.

The next time I saw Harry was when he returned to the Great Southeastern Music Hall the following spring. By this time I had performed there and was privy to the backstage area and spent some time with Harry between shows. I also do a lot of story songs, and we talked about where ideas for stories come from. Basically he said they come from three areas: from personal experiences, as in his song, "Taxi," from newspaper articles as in "Sniper," and from history as in "Dog Town" and "Mail Order Annie." Once you find an interesting story, you develop your characters with background, feelings, and dialogue. A good story song is like a short five to ten minute musical or opera.



Alan Beck

That night he was trying out some new songs he had just written for his next album. He was still working on verses and polishing up arrangements. One of his most interesting new songs that evening was one called "30,000 Pounds of Bananas." The way he performed it that night was most powerful. The song is about a truck driver who loses his brakes and his life coming down a steep mountain with a full load of bananas. The song starts at a slow tempo and gets faster as he goes down the mountain out of control. The beginning is done in a light, country-western, humorous vein. He had the audience laughing at this poor driver even as he smashed through the carnage of destruction at the bottom of the hill. At this point the tempo was very fast. Then he shifted to a low, slow tone and told the story of the girl who was waiting for her driver who never came home, and from that time on she could never stand the smell of bananas. It was a powerful presentation in that he took hold of your emotions in the song and had you laughing through most of the story. When he had you up, he turned it around and hit you with the tragic reality that the driver was a human being, and his passing would leave an empty space in someone's life. I've never seen a song captivate and control an audience as this one did that night. Unfortunately, when the song came out on the album, the ending of the girl waiting at the bottom of the hill was dropped and the song remained a humorous piece.

Harry did all his popular numbers and had everyone singing along in "Circle," then brought the house down with "Sniper" as his encore. That evening's performance was one of the best shows I've seen anyone do in a long time.

We parted friends that night, and his career moved on upwards. I kept up with Harry through his albums and various TV appearances, but never got a chance to get back together with him again. When he lost his life in an auto accident a few years ago, he left behind a fine collection of story songs and tales. He also left behind a dimension of story song style that enables the listener to really get involved with the characters, like reading a good book.

Whenever I hear a Harry Chapin song, I think about that night he shared with me. As we shook hands, he said, "Alan, keep the change." ■

Moon Goddesses and Chinese Boxes

by Dr. Ann E. Chord

No, it is not true that I was a major when I was in the army, although my role augmenting the psychiatric staff of the 7th batallion was anything but minor. Like all branches of the services, we had a band that gigged at high school recruitment parties, parades, and other such ceremonious occasions. Needless to say, the military life is not particularly conducive to musical (or any other) creativity. It was my lot to listen to the often discordant views of the troubled souls who marched in our band.

The most serious problem confronting the writers in our small musical ensemble was material. It is a strange fact that few songwriters seem to know where a song comes from. The theories I've heard range from the mundane to the arcane. One mystically based theory has inspiration passed down by a moon goddess like gas in the night. Another is a complex theory, analogous to Chinese boxes, which holds that an uncharacteristic intelligence lurks deep within the dark recesses of a writer's mind and emerges only occasionally to write a song and then quickly recedes, many times leaving the songwriter in a fog. Most often, though, songs seem to emerge from some sort of turmoil within the writer.

Neither plagued with intelligence nor familiar with any goddess besides the insipid Green Goddess, my trusts were most often motivated by hardship. Their passions ran high with love affairs and losses, and the injustices of life seemed amplified by the quest to fulfill their youthful needs. After a few years of war, one inevitably becomes either sated or jaded, and contentedness creeps in. What does one write about after the glories of war have settled into the routines of office and orifice?

I remember one soldier who came to me with such a problem. "Doc," he said, "I love my wife, my kid is a gift, we have a washing machine and a new car. I like my job playing acoustic guitar with the marching band a whole lot. The only problem is I can't write."

Now this fellow, let's call him Joe, was a prolific and sensitive songwriter in his youth. But he was very unhappy. One woman or another was jilting him, and he had grave concerns about the war. Now his wars have been won and the treaties signed, and contentment has settled in like soot on the sheets in a factory town. "Have you ever been visited by angels or madonnas?" I asked.

"I'm not mystically inclined," said Joe.

"Do you ever surprise yourself by writing things about which you know nothing?" I was searching for signs of higher intelligence.

"I dunno," said Joe.

It was then that I settled on my formula for continued creativity. "Look, Joe, you've got to leave your wife and beat your kid. Run off with someone and quit the band. You've got to create need where it once was. Deprive yourself. Do for your mind and body what Reagan has done for the country."

"But I love my wife and kid," he argued. "Why can't I write about my love of my family?" He was whining.

"What good songs have been written about happy love since Sinatra?" I asked. "Good songs are about unrequited love, murder and love, and tragic love. Think about 'Chelsea Hotel,' 'Goodnight, Irene,' 'Norwegian Wood,' 'Frankie and Johnny,' and 'Little Sadie.'" "No, Joe," I thought, "it's not in the cards for a songwriter to be happy."

And so I think songwriters should band together and insult one another, compete with each other, and talk behind each other's backs. I also recommend, for the sake of the song, that songwriters run off with each other's lovers and that they do anything possible to emancipate the contented. ■

Writers' Block

by Bill Neely

Almost all songwriters have at one time or another suffered from that mysterious disorder known as writers' block. Even though it seems to be a widespread phenomenon and is accepted by most of us as a fact of life, very little is known about this occupational hazard that can stop a productive songwriter dead in his or her tracks.

What causes writers' block? The simplest explanation is that there are a fixed number of ideas in the universe; thus a songwriter may draw a blank simply because an idea for a particular song may be occurring to a colleague instead. (Note that this is not the same as plagiarism, which does not involve the creative process.)

A more climical diagnosis is related to hardening of the arteries: as ideas leave the Trenchancy Generator and pass through the Neo-cortex on their way to the Writers' Wrist, they tend to leave behind a sort of waxy build-up in the Channels of Communication, especially if the ideas are fuzzy or half-baked when they leave the Generator. After a while this condition can slow the rate of ideas to a mere trickle or in more severe cases shut them off altogether.

Yet another type of writers' block is a specialized form of amnesia: the writer simply forgets how to write. Or why.

Writers' block has a lot in common with the common cold; there is a plethora of home remedies that treat the symptoms but have no effect on the malady itself. Some songwriters prefer to work through it; others prefer to sleep through it. Some recommend listening to the Great Masters as a source of inspiration, but this can backfire and increase the frustration. Still others point out that the Great Masters themselves all suffered from writers' block, and certainly these historic interruptions held more serious consequences for Western Civilization than our own petty little shutdowns. A little perspective is some consolation.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to recovery is the nagging fear that the Muse is gone for good. Certainly there are recorded cases of terminal writers' block, but for the most part it is a temporary condition. Songwriters in late-Twentieth Century America are necessarily a self-motivated bunch. We write because we want to--and when we don't write, it may be for the same reason. ■

LA Opportunities

by Richard Meyer

Los Angeles is the city of record companies, music publishing, and Hollywood film soundtracks. Hundreds of songs are recorded and released every month, and bands by the score form, disband, and re-form in the hope of connecting with the "right" record companies, clubs, and music publishers.

What, one might ask, is there for the acoustic, 'folk' musician in this city by the sea? What follows is an overview of opportunities for songwriters in LA, for there is not much to be had for the musician who does not write, outside of studio work or lounge bands.

The first place one generally looks for encouragement is a music publisher. They are in the business of supplying songs to artists who record or have an act that requires new hit material. It is the objective of these artists to find hit tunes that will make their act, carry their records, and build their reputations. Music publishers are looking to purchase the rights to such songs.

Songs by the thousands are brought to publishers by songwriters, friends of songwriters, and singers who have songwriter friends. There is a glut of songwriters in any major music town, and LA is hardly an exception. The stakes are high. If a publisher can gain a reputation for finding hits, i.e., hearing that elusive quality that makes a hit, he will have more clout when offering songs to artists.

A publisher makes his money when a song he owns the rights to becomes a hit and earns royalties. The music publisher is not in the business of filling out albums with songs that are not felt to be hits. Writers going to these publishers must bring hit material to establish reputations as saleable songwriters.

There is not much room for the writer who does not subscribe to the various rhythmic and lyric formulae generic to the hit song. A songwriter pitching material may run into any number of responses. He may be told that his material is too derivative of other artists but not suited to those artists because they write their own material. He may be told simply that his material has no commercial punch, that the songs have no 'hooks,' the catchy line that ingrains itself in the public's memory. A writer may be told to listen to those records currently on the charts with an ear to anticipating what trends will be upcoming. All of these suggestions, criticisms, and opinions are offered honestly by publishers looking for saleable songs for a mass audience that has little interest in the more esoteric products of the contemporary songwriter.

There are organizations in the Los Angeles area that cater to songwriters, directing, encouraging, and teaching the ins and outs of the business.

Songwriters Resources and Services (SRS), 6772 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA 90028, is an organization that offers a wide variety of services to the songwriter. The most widely known is the Songbank, a registration service that provides an impartial depository for original material at a cost cheaper than the ten dollars per song required by the Library of Congress to secure a copyright.

SRS also holds seminars on subjects of interest to the songwriter. They also offer a telephone hotline to SRS members on legal or technical questions. SRS publishes a newsletter detailing their activities and providing information they feel will be helpful. They provide members with inexpensive legal counsel and a computerized collaborators matching service. SRS is ready to offer help to songwriters regardless of the material they present, but they are not a publisher and do not pretend to offer professional deals of any kind.

An organization that is a hybrid between the music publisher's world and that of the songwriter's workshop is the Los Angeles Songwriters Showcase, run by John Brahaney and Len Chandler. What they do is screen songwriters with original material, and from this group of writers a few are chosen for a weekly showcase to which people in all areas of the record and publishing business are invited.

In addition to this, a weekly seminar with a prominent music business personality is featured, at which it is possible to get a better understanding of what that person is after in terms of sound, style, and content in the songs he or she purchases. Recording engineers and record executives are among the people featured at the seminars, and from them one can get a good sense of the realities of the record/publishing business in Los Angeles today.

There are a number of classes in the technique of songwriting offered in the Los Angeles area. One of the most popular is taught by Jack Segal who is best known for the song "When Sunny Gets Blue." His class is held at UCLA in West Los Angeles. Other classes are listed in the show business trade papers.

The most unusual, personal, and stimulating songwriting class in LA is Tracey Newman's song improvisation class. A visitor to the class (and visitors are invited) can see and hear anywhere from ten to twenty writers, singers, actors, or what-have-you making up about two albums worth of songs in the space of three hours.

Ms. Newman provides a pianist, a stage in a recording studio, and a video tape recorder. The class provides the material. Tracey picks class members at random, puts them on stage, and has the pianist play a song chord progression in a style of her choosing. Then she will ask the class for a title, first line, or subject. The singer is then on his own to make up the melody and words to a complete song on the spot. It is hard work, and a visitor to the class can see people struggling with their inhibitions--vocal, lyrical, or personal.

What overrides these inhibitions is their desire to complete the song. As the music plays there is no time to stop and edit. Great lines come out, great stories grow (as do terrible ones), but these class members have the pressures and joys of an immediate songwriting deadline and an audience to perform for all at once. Duets are formed, sometimes the whole class alternates lines all directed by Ms. Newman's experience as an improvisation teacher and songwriter. She has specific exercises for individuals with special problems.

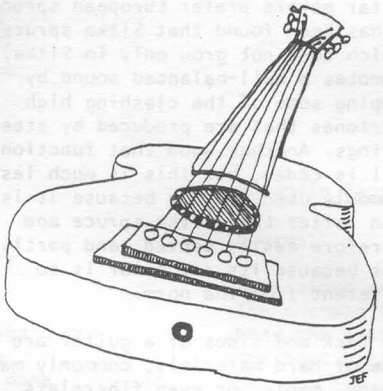
Song subjects range from the traditional to the absurd in as many forms as the pianist of the evening is able to play. Exercises are done that concentrate on hooks, poetic language, story, and humor.

The class is videotaped so that the improvisor can see himself onstage, in performance. He can use the video as a tool to correct posture and distracting stage mannerisms, and so improve stage presence.

For a songwriter who wants some mental exercise, Tracey Newman's class is a great way to get him thinking. The class is used by actors who want to learn song presentation as well as singers who want to learn to write.

After all this, one might wonder where the songwriter goes to perform. This is a problem. There are many rock clubs around LA that feature rock in all its current varieties, but the venues for the solo musician are few and far between.

In recent years many of the clubs that had stages open to folk/acoustic musicians have bowed to the pressure of the music business and either closed entirely, such as the BlaBla Cafe, or limited their showcases to bands. Even the legendary Troubador no longer has the open stage it had for so many years. The Ice House in Pasadena and the Natural Fudge Company in Hollywood have stages for acoustic shows and showcases, but these are exceptions.



The most notable exception is McCabe's guitar store in West Los Angeles. They have, in addition to a fine guitar selection and repair shop, series of classes and music programs. The back room of the store is fitted with a stage and a fine sound system, and formal concerts are presented there along with showcases of local musicians. The clientele and staff of McCabe's are the most receptive to the material and styles that acoustic songwriters generally present.

In conclusion, what the songwriter faces in LA is a bias within the music business toward material that is most easily accessible. For the writer who can fit the formula, it can be great; but for a writer less interested in pop format, it can be very frustrating. There are a lot of good writers with nowhere to showcase their songs or hear others who write in their style and learn from them.

Los Angeles offers many services to the songwriter, but it is basically a business town. ■

"Mixed Bag"

Pete Fornatale and WNEW are showing glimmers of their past glory days in a new Sunday morning program called "Mixed Bag." While not strictly a folk music program, it comes damned close--playing the likes of Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Arlo and Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, The Weavers, et al.

The program is aired from 10 to 12 every Sunday morning and features either an interview or an album. In its first six weeks there have been interviews with Don McLean, Joni Mitchell, Tommy Smothers, and Richie Havens. While the focus of the program seems centered on the past, there has been a smattering of newer songs played from time to time.

Guitar Woods: A Short Primer

by Paul Kaplan

A few years ago, I became acquainted with a young man from Alaska. He was a likable enough fellow, but when I found out that he came from the small town of Sitka, I suddenly began to look on him as a magical figure, with a mystical connection to The Source.

A couple years later, I met a guitarist who had a smuggling scheme that was more likely to land him in a tropical jail than to make him rich. What he was willing to risk his freedom for was not drugs or ancient artifacts, but simply several logs of Brazilian rosewood. What is the connection between these two instances of seemingly irrational behavior?

The flat-top steel-string guitar was quite uncommon until the early years of this century, when the C. F. Martin Company started to produce them, though only by custom order. Through the years, as this instrument became more and more popular and highly refined, many different materials were used in its construction. Between 1917 and 1935, for example, Martin made guitars whose tops, backs, and sides were fashioned from koa wood, imported from Hawaii. But by far the most prized materials have been Sitka spruce for the top and Brazilian rosewood for the back and sides.

Sound is produced in a flat-top guitar (as distinguished from an archtop) by a complicated chain reaction. When the string is struck, its vibrations are carried into the saddle, which sits in the bridge slot. The saddle in turn carries the vibration to the bridge, which vibrates the soundboard. The vibration of the soundboard pumps the air in the body cavity, and the result of all this activity comes pouring out the soundhole. The saddle and bridge are most efficient when made of hard material such as ivory (now ivory substitutes) for the saddle, and ebony, rosewood, or mahogany for the bridge. The top must be strong enough to withstand the enormous pull of the strings (up to 240 pounds) but flexible enough to respond effectively to the vibration of the bridge. (If A-440 is played, the top must vibrate 440 times per second.)

It is easy to produce a three-layer plywood with the requisite strength, and this is what is used in almost all guitars, classical or steel-string, that sell for under $250. But among steel-string guitar makers who want a truly rich sound, the favorite wood is Sitka spruce. While classical guitar makers prefer European spruce, it has been found that Sitka spruce (which does not grow only in Sitka) promotes a well-balanced sound by damping some of the clashing high overtones that are produced by steel strings. Another wood that functions well is cedar, but this is much less commonly used, partly because it is even softer than Sitka spruce and therefore easily dented, and partly just because its red color is so different from the norm.

The back and sides of a guitar are made of hard materials, commonly mahogany, maple, or even fiberglass (as in the Ovation, first designed by aerospace engineers in 1966). But by far the most favored material, both for its resonance and for its beauty, is rosewood. And the most favored rosewood comes from Brazil. But since the mid-sixties the Brazilian government, more to help the country's sawmills than to protect its trees, has not allowed rosewood to be exported in log form. Not wanting to pay extra high prices for wood over whose cutting they had no control, guitar makers outside of Brazil switched to East Indian rosewood, which is generally less beautiful but also less affected by changes in temperature and humidity. Like guitar tops, the backs and sides are often constructed of plywood, and some inexpensive guitars are being produced with rosewood laminates, which are striking to look at, if not to hear.

The last decade has seen a great deal of experimentation in the construction of steel-stringed guitars. As a result of many factors, among them the guitar boom of the sixties, a long strike at C. F. Martin in the mid-seventies, and the general increase in crafts in America, there are more luthiers now than ever before. New bridge designs, new body and soundhole shapes, and new materials are being researched in an ongoing effort to improve and adapt for today's musicians an instrument that is still less than one hundred years old. But, at the moment, the great majority of the finest steel-stringed guitars are made of two woods: Sitka spruce and rosewood.

Note: Much of the information contained in this article, and much, much more, can be found in Guitars--From the Renaissance to Rock, by Tom and Mary Anne Evans, published in 1977 by Paddington Press (distributed by Grosset and Dunlap). ■

Three genuine cowhands. The guitarist is probably playing a cheap Sears Roebuck guitar.

Bernardine Dohrn: Heroine?

by Brian Rose

In the November issue of The CooP, Marc Berger presented a song called "The Ballad of Bernardine Dohrn," a short, three-verse comment on the recent jailing of the former Weather Underground leader. Two months later, in response, Peter Spencer recorded "Revolution Merit Badge," a song that attempts to refute Marc Berger's point of view regarding the Brink's robbery and the subsequent murders of three Nyack, New York, policemen.

I have been disappointed by the lack of interest shown in these two controversial songs. Nary a letter has crossed my desk in the weeks since Peter Spencer issued his sermonette condemning those who "play 'Revolution' in the land of the free." And no one has bothered to question the stance of Marc Berger, slipping eel-like through the labrythine political reef of the Brink's incident.

The facts please: In early 1981, Bernardine Dohrn emerged from hiding after many years on the run from the FBI--she was wanted because of her participation in anti-war demonstrations in 1970. After turning herself in, Dohrn was given a ninety-day suspended sentence by the court. Later in the year, in October of 1981, former members of the Weather Underground robbed a Brink's armored truck of a million and a half dollars and, in the getaway, brutally murdered three policemen. The government quickly rounded up suspects and, fearing conspiracy, exerted pressure on many innocent members of fringe political groups. Bernardine Dohrn, although not suspected of direct involvement in the Brink's case, was subpoenaed by the grand jury because of her past association with the alleged killers. Because she refused to cooperate with the grand jury, she was held in contempt of court, jailed, and not released for seven months.

Marc Berger's song addresses the potential for injustice in the present grand jury system. Berger believes that grand juries can engage in witch hunts, summoning witnesses to testify against unindicted suspects, and doing so without the structural constraints imposed in a full-fledged court of law. For instance, witnesses are not allowed to appear with counsel, and because of the preliminary nature of grand jury hearings, questions that would ordinarily be considered irrelevant or prejudicial are allowed. Others argue that the grand jury system protects the public by requiring a jury to review the facts of a case before prosecuting. They defend the practice of informal questioning because the purpose of the hearing is to establish probable cause rather than guilt or innocence. Whether grand juries adequately provide enough protection to the accused is certainly open to debate. All too often, the publicity surrounding a grand jury hearing will destroy a person's reputation, even if the whole case is thrown out before it goes to trial.

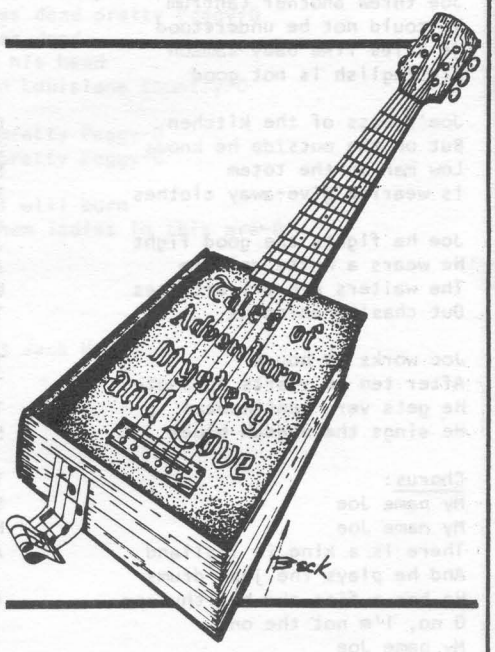
In any event, Bernardine Dohrn was caught in the crease between these arguments. Berger believes that she was being politically harassed, and he defends her noncooperation with the grand jury. Hence the song "The Ballad of Bernardine Dohrn." Unfortunately, the song is so bereft of background information that it fails to stand on its own. Like a news photograph with a caption, it is full of possible interpretations, but lacking in specific meaning.

"The Ballad of Bernardine Dohrn" ultimately fails because it takes the tack so common in folk songs, of creating heroes where there are none. Bernardine Dohrn may in fact have been unjustly treated, but depicting her as a heroine, simply because she refuses to give in to the authorities, ignores the full story of Bernardine Dohrn and her political beliefs. I am prepared to agree with some of the things Dohrn has to say, and to disagree with some, but I am not yet prepared to project her into the pantheon of folk gods riding that Great Plains in the sky with Jesse James, Pretty Boy Floyd, and Robin Hood. The true "Ballad of Bernardine Dohrn," I suspect, would be a sad and twisting tale leading to some uncertain and unheroic end.

None of which excuses the misdirection of Peter Spencer's "Revolution Merit Badge," which starts with "Come gather 'round people, and listen to me/I'll tell you a story of an armed robbery." This opening line, campers, is a clue letting us know that this song fits into the folk tradition--maybe even the "folk process." Spencer never mentions Bernardine Dohrn's name, but there is little doubt who he is talking about.

Spencer seems convinced that Berger was defending the actions of the Brink's robbery gang despite there being no indication of that in "The Ballad of Bernardine Dohrn." Although I can understand how one can object to the heroicizing of Dohrn, I can't see how Spencer is justified in taking such a high falootin' patriotic stand. Who is advocating the "support of these cop killers flight" anyway? If you aren't familiar with the precedent of Berger's "Ballad," Spencer's "Merit Badge" comes off sounding like a right-wing tirade against all those people who support the Brink's murderers. I hope there are about three of them in the country.

"Revolution Merit Badge" was written, I think, as a retort, not as a definitive song about the whole Brink's episode. This is a mistake, however, because Spencer leaves the song dangling out there alone--fair game for anyone to skewer and roast over an open flame. The problem with Spencer's tack is that he takes what he sees as the "opposite side" in an issue that is multifaceted and terribly complex. Both he and Berger have chosen jingoism over elucidation, and they have done themselves and their listeners a disservice. ■



No Reason to Cry

There's a bright young song my heart hears often
Sounds so clear, I can hardly ignore.
Young light, old light, gray light silver,
As long as there's love
I won't have to reach far.

Chorus:
Smooth easy eyes
You got the style
There's no reason to cry now
Just open your eyes
Look into mine
There's no reason to cry
No reason to cry
No reason to cry

The sun's gonna set and I'm gonna win her
With a spell she used, that I cast on her
So many kisses she really deserves
I think that love is a less she won't have to relearn.

Chorus

Bridge:
When she wants me
She'll touch me
When she touches me
It taunts me
When she kisses me it haunts me
When she's lovin' me
It's taught me
There's no reason to cry
No reason to cry
No reason to cry
No reason to cry

Chorus

My Name Joe

Joe threw another tantrum
He could not be understood
He cries like baby Samson
His English is not good

Joe's boss of the kitchen
But on the outside he knows
Low man on the totem
Is wearing give-away clothes

Joe he fights the good fight
He wears a white uniform
The waiters are all artistes
Out chasing unicorns

Joe works 14 hours
After ten he starts to booze
He gets very sentimental
He sings the Buddah blues

Chorus:
My name Joe
My name Joe
There is a king in Thailand
And he plays the jazz drums
He has a fine and healthy son
O no, I'm not the one
My name Joe

On the wall by the time-clock
Joe is beaming from a photograph
Someone drew across his face
The waiters began to laugh

Joe picked up a hatchet
And he tenderized the wall
When he got through with it
Time-clock wasn't punching any more

The waiters ran for cover
The maitre d' began to lisp
The drunkard in the corner
Said his lettuce was not crisp

The owner called Immigration
Said, "Here's someone you should know
He's an illegal alien
And I think his name is Joe"

Chorus

Came the man from Immigration
Said, "I've got a job to do
Easy questions, easy answers
Just point me to the kitchen crew"

He asked the black from Harlem
He asked Cisco from Mexico
He asked the white trash from Tennessee
They all said, "My name Joe"
("My name Joe, my name Joe, my name Joe")

Immigration man he sputtered
The kitchen crew they roared
And while they were arguing
Joe slipped out the back door

Down the beach Joe tries to listen
To the heartbeat of a whale
How it echoes his own heartbeat
And the distance he has sailed

Chorus

Spotlight

I like the way you play your songs
I like the way you sing
You look so good in colored lights
And the brilliant spotlight ring.
And up there your eyes are fiery
And hotter by degree
But weary and confused
When no one else can see.
So you need to feel the fire
When you fear it starts to go
To feel the heat of all those lights
Long after the show.
And you need it so much now
You don't even know
If all the world's a stage to you
Then where else can you go?

Chorus:
You could come away with me tonight
I can make it all alright
You don't need a spotlight
You just need a home.

I want to drive away with you
Far from New York streets
And hit on a highway
Where sky and road still meet.
And the sky out there is bright
And the moon's about to rise
It's all there waiting
If you'd look into my eyes.
Cause here in the city
There isn't much to see
And here in this apartment
You can hardly breathe.
And the only lights you see tonight
Are on the ceiling moving slow
Flashing signs and headlights
In an eery neon glow.

Repeat chorus twice

Nancy Reynard

John was a sailor for the Coast Guard
He sailed into Portsmouth on the Nancy Reynard
He took a room at the Hollymead Inn
And an apple faced chambermaid Katheryn Quinn

Kate she was used to new blokes in this town
But this young man Johnny seemed like none around
So she gave him her heart with the wind as their guide
And wished to remain by his side

Snow fell that evening and bitter winds blew
The waves almost snowcapped churned white where once blue
But for young John and Katheryn Quinn
The storm and the evening did never begin

The snow joined the sea, the sea the sand
John spoke of his love, and asked for Kate's hand
But awaking at sunrise Kate was alone
Her Johnny had vanished, her lover had flown

So quick to the dockside ran Katheryn Quinn
A dressing gown covered her soft milk-white skin
Barefoot in the snow, her heart it was scarred
Half way out of the harbor the Nancy Reynard

The morn it was still, as those waves leaped towards shore
Kate thought of her bed bare and the night before
As sea spray to shore, so came her youg John
Then return to the ocean, for now he is gone

Clancy

What do you see when you open your eyes
How do you live with such a terrible surprise
He was lying there so cold on the floor
With no money in his pockets
And no change in the drawer

And it looks like Clancy won't know when we're leaving
Looks like he won't say goodbye
Looks like Clancy won't know that we're grieving
But he'd damned sure want to know the reason why

Saw him walking down the street the other day
He was swinging it along in his usual way
He had no tales to tell and not much to say
And it never crossed my mind that he'd end this way

And it...

Where do you hide in the deep of the night
When the blood on your hands is so red in the light
Who do you know that you can call friend
Who'll stand beside you when you reach the end

And it...

Pretty Peggy-O

As we marched down to Fenerio
As we marched down to Fenerio
Our captain fell in love
With a lady like a dove
And the Name she was called was pretty Peggy-O

What would your mother think pretty Peggy-O
What would your mother think pretty Peggy-O
What would your mother think
For to hear those Guiness clink
And them soldiers all marching before ye-O

Come along with me pretty Peggy-O
Come along with me pretty Peggy-O
In coaches ye shall ride
With your true love by your side
Just as grand as any lady in this are-O

You're the man I adore handsome Willie-O
You're the man I adore handsome Willie-O
You're the man I adore
But your fortune is too low
And I fear my mamma would be angry-O

Come trippin' down the stairs pretty Peggy-O
Come atrippin' down them stairs pretty Peggy-O
Come trippin' down them stairs
And tie back your yellow hair
And bid a last farewell to handsome Willie-O

Our captain he lies dead pretty Peggy-O
Our captain he lies dead pretty Peggy-O
Our captain he lies dead
His own bullet in his head
And he's buried in Louisiana country-O

If ever I return pretty Peggy-O
If ever I return pretty Peggy-O
If ever I return
Your damn cities I will burn
And destroy all them ladies in this are-O

repat first verse

Traditional

The Swimmer

we sat together
on a stone wall
both of us broke
we shared a Pall Mall
shivering...in the morning air
at the Fisherman's Wharf
near Ghirardelli Square

he stubbled and gray
forty-five years old
told me he's a swimmer
i said, "the water is so cold"
he said, "it is, but once i get in--
all i do is swim..."

he used to write poetry
and played the clarinet
when he had a couple published
he thought he was a poet
but he laughed and said,
"that was ages ago
and i sold my clarinet to come to San Francisco"

"in the fifties i was young
and New York was my town
and for me, Hemingway was the only one
who knew what was goin' on...
ah, but when he suicided, man,
it sorta brought all that
to an end"

he told me he was married once
but couldn't take the games
of competition he and his wife were playin'
he said, "she was a dancer, and i was a drunk,
she owns an art gallery now
and i'm still a drunk"

he asked me what I thought of Bob Dylan
said he liked one i might know
something about, "Desolation Row"
we walked to the showers in the silver sun
and when i left him
he was putting his swimming trunks on

we sat together
on a stone wall
both of us broke
we shared a Pall Mall
shivering...in the morning air
at the Fisherman's Wharf
near Ghirardelli Square....

Miami

Being trapped by times and places
that had laid their claim to me,
I threw away my heart's desire
and I called that being free.
Now I am trapped behind this freedom
that I won at such a cost.
I found out how to win so much
that I'm completely lost.

Chorus:
Sing to me, Miami, it is hard to be alone.
Your force is unfamiliar,
and your ways are all unknown.
It's been many miles and many days
since I last felt at home.
I used to think I was a rock.
I'm sinking like a stone.

Love came laughing to my door
and called me by my name.
I let him walk inside my walls,
for a while he did the same,
'Till I became confused and frightened
by the anger in my soul,
So I went out and broke his heart.
He had to let me go.

Chorus:
Sing to me, Miami, there is summer
in your eyes,
And my throat is hot and aching
from the tears I cannot cry.
Your palm trees stand serene
against your shining southern sky.
I need to find your fountain.
My well is running dry.

There's redemption for the sinner.
There's salvation for the fool.
I'm some of both, but I had no
intention being cruel.
And I lost more with that man
than I can ever hope to find.
If he were her, I'd settle for
some simple peace of mind.

Chorus:
Sing to me, Miami, of the dreams
you had that died,
And how the sea sustained you
in its arms so warm and wide.
I have come here to your open shore
with no one at my side,
To lose myself in your embrace
and drift out with the tide.

Shale City Line

Well, she walks down by the Shale City Line
With the wind in her hair and a tear in her eye
Well, she loved a young man, a love so strong
She loved a young man, now he's gone

They were just two kids in love with life
In June they would be man and wife
And the families gave their blessings true
And smiled upon the joys of youth

Chorus:
Nothin' comes from nothin'
That was something they'd always say
Workin' hard and livin' clean
Until their dying day
'Cause you never know when the Good Lord's
gonna call you away

On the Shale City Line stood the house they'd own
In the Shale City mine he dug black stone
And they'd meet when each day's work was done
And dream up names they'd give their son

Well it made TV and it made the Times
"Mine collapses with men inside"
And the radio gave the dead men's names
In between commercials for razor blades

Chorus

Repeat first verse

Falling from Grace

Falling from Grace
And tryin' to trace
The way that she laughs
Careless misplacing and suddenly eracing
The name on the face
Running in place and getting nowhere
Away or beyond
Watchin' her leave and being deceived
Not knowin' she'd gone
Oh...it was a very short while
Oh...but I remember her smile
It was a very nice smile
Fallin' from grace as if fallin' through space
Or a hole in the ground.
Lookin' for ways to turn back the days
And leave without a sound
Oh...didn't I say I don't dance
Oh...but if you give me a chance
I could learn how to dance
Falling from grace and looking for ways
To turn back the days
Falling from grace and looking for ways
To turn back the days
Oh...don't I look paralyzed
Oh...but it was just my disguise
And you seem so wise
Please close your eyes

Repeat first verse

Mandolin Band

Chorus:

Come along and hear the band
The one-man traveling mandolin band
Hear the little children giving him a hand
The best band in the land.

They say he was a farmer once
From the hills of Tennessee
Had a wife and a little girl named Beth
A perfect family
Supper done, he'd just relaxed
From his hard work all day long
Took his mandolin off the fireplace
And played little Beth a song

Break:
And her eyes would sparkle
And she gave a little squeal
As he plucked his strings
To a lively country reel
And her tiny hands
Kept time on his knee
It made him happy
As a man could be
As happy as a man could be

Chorus

One day while he was in the fields
A storm thundered across
A flash-flood swept the house away
His wife and little Beth were lost
So now he roams from town to town
His world strapped on his back
On the corner he pulls his mandolin
From his old and tired rucksack

And he plays his songs to the children there
His sad face turns to glee
He's playing for little Beth again
Reliving a memory

Break

Chorus (twice)

Lyrics to "Mary Elizabeth" appear on page 20

The Black Sheep Review

by Randy B. Hecht

That whispering you hear in the background is probably the sound of the latest rumor of a folk music revival.

Those pesky rumors, which sprout as easily as crabgrass and are twice as persistent, seem to crop up every time anything even remotely visible appears on the folk scene, and The Black Sheep Review is far from remotely visible. The new Boston-based magazine "on folk and acoustic music in New England and the Northeast" has already found friends as far west as Manitoba, Canada.

Published five times annually (bimonthly, with no July/August issue), the magazine is available in dozens of stores in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, upstate New York, Pennsylvania, and even Minnesota. Not half bad momentum after only three issues.

Editor Kari Estrin and her small staff have, with the help of friends and freelance writers, assembled an attractive, informative, and enjoyable magazine for folks who can't get enough of the stuff. Regular features include "Folk Food," which "features favorite recipes from musicians and folk establishments," "On the Spindle" (record reviews, if that's not belaboring the obvious) and concert and book reviews. The magazine has also enjoyed a healthy--and steadily growing--stream of letters to the editor. The mix of interviews, feature articles, and song sheets keep The Black Sheep Review highly readable.

Volume 1, Number 1 was released in September, sporting a cover story about Bill Staines and a second interview with Bob Holmes; both stories were accompanied by song sheets. Another article announced the decision of Kaleidoscope Records to release some of the music of Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys. The following issue bore the face of Tom Rush on its cover and an in-depth interview with him inside.

In a break with the tradition of the straight question-and-answer format established by the first two issues, the current issue's cover story on Rory Block was written as a feature article. Bob Holmes's article on Bill Morrissey, also in the latest issue, is enormously entertaining, walking some indefinable territory between irreverence and all-out hero-

worship. ("The first time I saw Bill Morrissey I felt like someone had set my hair on fire. This is what Henry James called 'the shock of recognition.'")

Had the magazine limited itself to features, interviews, and reviews, however, it might have grown tired already. The great appeal of The Black Sheep Review is in its approach to folk, which has its editors scrambling eternally to squeeze just one more thing onto its pages. It's not strictly and exclusively about folk music; it's about brass stencilling, calling instructions for traditional New England dances, fiddling for contra and square dances, and even the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society --and that's just in the current issue.

There are some drawbacks, such as an editorial policy that frowns upon most critical writing--constructive, malicious, or otherwise--and a too-heavy reliance on interview transcripts in the first two issues.

The flaws are minor, however, and easily outnumbered by the magazine's better qualities. Aspiring dulcimer players will find Lorraine Lee's column (aptly titled "Dulcimer Player's Notebook") invaluable, and even a novice who doesn't know which end to strum ought to enjoy the column. Those who wish to master the dulcimer will probably agree that the notebook is alone worth the price of the magazine.

The price for single issues, incidentally, has risen from $1.25 to $1.50, but the annual subscription rate of $8.00 has not changed. Subscription orders, with checks made payable to The Black Sheep Review, may be sent to 27 Dana Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138, Atten: Kari Estrin.

Pump Boys and Dinettes: A Re-review

by David Massengill
research by Elize Tribble

In the premiere issue of Volume 2 of The CooP, Brian Rose (co-Editor) gave an off-hand dismissal of the Broadway musical Pump Boys and Dinettes. Oh, yes, it was a professional pan--mis-informed, hideous and froth-mouthed--with the sort of odious earnestness better suited to the Village Voice.

Brian seems well adept at using the tongue in a Bronx cheer--How is it he overlooks its contingent place-ment, firmly in cheek?

J'acuse! En garde! Bingo! Just testing.

Ironic--even Oedipal, isn't it, that he chooses to smear the first Broad-way show in History to make it an informal policy to hire bona-fide Folk Singers in the long-run leading parts, rather than the customary Actors Who Sing...Top talents like Loudon Wainwright, Erik Frandsen, Ronee Blakley, Maria Muldaur, Tom Chapin and Shawn Colvin have all, at one time or another, made the parts their own.

Of course, he's entitled to his opinion. And here's mine (re said review): #%ZYETCH#@. (You can quote me on that.)

But to be fair--Here is a brief replay of his review:

He was "disappointed in just about every aspect of the play." The set-ting (filling station and diner in South) "is cliche"; the set (same) "attracts more attention than the action." The songs are "peppy but unmemorable" and "mediocre parodies." The cast is "stiff and colorless" and "barely up to the movement that is called for." The characters seem "brainless." The whole thing was less than "constructive theatre"--cause for "sad tidings" and feminists to "beware."

My initial reaction to this was: What calcified snot...A bad case of cot-tonmouth...Been licking one too many ashtrays...Sticking out his lower lip at success...A prim and proper knee-jerk...Musta been listening with a rock in one ear and a sponge in the other...A deadfish on the warpath... Sounds like a damn Yankee to me.

But Brian is a friend of mine, so I decided not to go that route.

Next to sheer delight in the sights and sounds of PBs--a feeling that's lasted through 4 viewings--my main emotion has been overwhelming pride that such people have (show-biz-wise) "made it," as Jim Wann, John Foley, Cass Morgan, Mark Hardwick, Debra Monk and John Schimmel. I'd love to work with this company. With a back-ground in bands as much as in the theatre, they created from scratch and on their own the characters with those familiar-sounding names: Jim, Jackson, Eddie, Rhetta, Prudie and L.M.

I feel like I was there when it all started. I remember Jim Wann and John Foley as members of the "South-ern States Fidelity Choir," bringing down the house at Cat's Cradle in Chapel Hill, N.C. I saw their early theatrical coup, the one that brought them to NYC and to meet the others: Diamond Studs on the life of Jesse James. A gem.

PBs celebrated its 1st anni-versary last month with the good news that ticket sales are passing $3½ million in the fast lane. NBC is making a special with the cast. Woody Allen has chosen that Dead-Pan Man L.M. Hardwick (with the "farmer tan") for his next film. There's a TV series in the works that's bound to redeem the honor of every South-erner who cringes when he hears "kiss my grits."

And for every honor they get, they reinvoke their "nice guy" image by insisting that Industry Bigwigs hire the original "extended family" of 6 whose baby the whole PBs thing was, rather than shipping in Suzanne Somers and Jim Nabors for the film version, for starsake.

A word about the songs Jim Wann and cast wrote: they're not Broadway show tunes as much as pop-rock-folk, which makes the album fit right on your shelf in between the Randy New-man and The Country Gentlemen records. They're delightful, even thrilling songs. "Highway 57," "Tips," "Mona," "Catfish," "Drinkin' Shoes," and my favorite, "Mamaw." The genre, we're told, is "pump rock" --and the lyrics work a sly change on the typical Southern portrait that Hee-Haw and PTL give us.

PBs, see, has modern references. The Pump Boys offer "your choice" of marijuana, beer or moonshine. (A nice alternative to free road-maps.) One of them takes a joy-ride with a movie star. They hit the disco road-house on Saturday night, instead of squaredancing. They live in a world of touring rockstars, as the song "T.N.D.P.W.A.M." attests; not just county fairs. When they go on a vacation, it's to the beach and color TV in a motel.

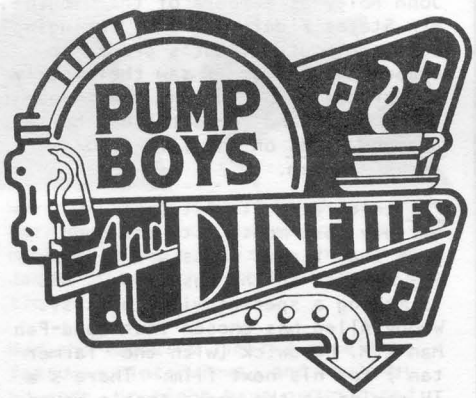
Still, they have not become so bush-whacked with notions of urban sugar-plums as to be absorbed into the militantly middle and upper class shopping-malled burghs of Wilkesboro and Southern Pines, whose citizens are as likely to look down the nose at the pump boy type as are their Northern counterparts. Herein lies the charm of PBs: they don't look down their nose at Anybody. Oh, not because there's nobody lower--but because they don't play urban status games. They like, they prefer, they poke fun at things...but more than anything else, they display a good-humored tolerance and reverence for life, without getting "het up" (heat, het, heaten) or overanxious. They know how to wink.

There's not many displaced Southerners in NY, nor many Yankees either, who don't recognize as "the lifestyle that got away" that mood of easygoing, less than punctual, tall-tale-telling, affectionately sarcastic, crazy-like-a-fox eccentricism that PBs portrays. One of the pleasant surprises for the audience is the implicit invitation to a workaholic, hurryup world chasing emblems of urban success (which, by the way, Brian, are never cliches to the people that live them)--to slow down, get loose, pull up a ringside table and a pitcher of beer, hang on to your raffle ticket--and see how the other half lives.

The life of gas jockeys and diner waitresses still persists, wherever small towns like "Smyrna" and "Frog Level" pepper the land. (Here, as ever, truth serves the play the way fiction never could.) And, yeah, traditional values abound--Love, Honor, and Muleheadedness. The family cohesiveness, the tendency to raise hell right on into the Hillsboro Jail, the lack of cash in dirt-farming and red-clay crops, the quitting school to help at home or to marry early, the landlocked nature of a state like N.C. that is 14 hours wide (the Interstate's N-S, folks) over blacktops and roar-roads (the ones that scream under your wheels)--all these things contribute to a rural lifestyle that is self-perpetuating.

Those hilarious billboards in PBs' set are cultural icons: I never felt the same about the road from Mocksville to Hickory after they arrested the giant Eat-at-Smiley's sign as a "public eyesore" and carted it away. The very idea that the Iron Boy overalls and pink waitress uniforms in PBs are "fashionable" send-ups of "retro" punk-chic or intentionally sexy would be news to a region of the country where they still stock (I swear) eyebrow stencils for that Joan Crawford look, at Kress's 5-and-dime.

As to the charge of "unregenerate sexism": well, admittedly, the South's slowness to give up the distinct sexual roles that in many cases both sexes will say they prefer, lays it open to that charge. But PBs goes out of its way to correct what is by and large a regional fault. The Cupp sisters in a painfully intimate song, "Sister," bemoan the taboo that has kept them from being confidantes. In the ultimate account of Woman's Pride, Rhetta tells off Jim with the furious "Be Good or Be Gone" ("I've been good too long to be done wrong...I'm hanging a sign, 'No Turkeys Allowed'"). The most impotent human symbol of the play is the invisible Uncle Bob, who the Boys fool at every turn ("We're taking your Winnebago on a little test drive--to Miami")--and the most powerful is the matriarchal Mamaw ("I was a child in her household").



Orbs peeled for sexist symbolism, our crusading reviewer unearths the damning instance that in PBs the men play guitars and piano and the women are stuck on pots-and-pans percussion. Now, when Martha Davis of the Motels tackles this point--i.e., that strapping on an electric guitar in an all-male band is, for a woman, a wonderfully blatant act of aggression against limiting expectations...I find myself in sympathy. But when the Dinettes let loose with their surprise "drum" solo (duo), I lean back and laugh and applaud, and so do the rest of the audience. It no more occurs to me at that moment to feel sorry for them than it does, on the other hand, to compare them favorably with Gina Schock of the Go-Gos. For all I know, actresses Cass Morgan and Debra Monk don't know how to play a stringed instrument. It's certain that their characters don't, as sole owners and operators (hardly a sweet, helpless job, is it) of the open-all-day Double Cupp Diner. They're not slaving over a hot stove for love: the motive's clear in "Tips"--purely mercenary. ("Don't you bother to come back if you haven't left a tip.")

It's true that Agnes DeMille and Jerome Robbins did not collaborate on choreography for PBs; just as Rodgers and Hammerstein and Lenny Bernstein weren't around to do the music. And how many musicals these days are Oklahoma or West Side Story? But until they are, I for one am relieved to enjoy one musical that doesn't depend on Bob Fosse bumps and grinds and Reeling and Writhing to keep one attentive.

The South that PBs shows is still there, all right, and it will be as long as all those independently owned Little Pigs Bar-B-Qs and Bob Ledford's Used Cars ("You'll never find abused cars") and Buster's Edge of Towns and Bide-A-Wee Motels and Double Cupp Diners don't sell out to McDonalds or Fords or Holiday Inns. I know times are hard and modern--even folk singers know that, ya know--but...I don't think they will (sell out), not all of 'em. PBs reminds us that the South is a territory in love with speed only when it comes to taking the old tooled-up Rambler out and gunning it. When it comes to Time, though, we can take it or leave it, as long as we got better things to do. "Sure, Uncle Bob," say the Pump Boys, "we'll get right on it--Say, in 2 months."

And one of those better things to do--the kind of thing that's worth rushing to--is to see Pump Boys and Dinettes.

The Sounding Board

by Rosemary Kirstein

Fran and Len Domler had never heard of folk music until the day, ten years ago, when their son Bill came to Len asking if he could take a look at the basement of the Methodist church of which Len was an officer. Mystified, Len led him down, and after inspecting the setup, Bill announced to his father that he wanted to start a coffeehouse there, to feature folk music. In response to Len's "What's folk music?", Bill took his parents to a club called the Barn in Ridgefield, Connecticut, where a folk group was performing.

Neither Fran nor Len recall the name of the group. What they do remember is how wonderful the music was, how happy the audience seemed, and what a good time they had. They were won over. Len got the okay from the church, and the Sounding Board was born.

Bill Domler, too, had been unfamiliar with folk music, when quite by accident he happened to notice at the local record store an album with a black-and-white cover and unfamiliar names on the label. It was "The New Golden Ring," a Folk Legacy album that featured several Folk Legacy artists. Bill was an immediate convert. Soon he was learning the guitar and noticing, sadly, the conspicuous lack of performance opportunities in the Hartford area. His solution was straightforward: if there is no place for the music, create one. From the beginning Len and Fran were equally involved. When Bill moved to a less convenient part of the state five years later, the responsibilities fell into his parents' willing hands, and they became the heart and source of the Sounding Board's energy.

In setting up the coffeehouse, Bill's next move was to contact Sandy and Caroline Paton, founders of the Folk Legacy label. They offered invaluable assistance and encouragement, and with their permission Bill copied from their mailing list three hundred names of Hartford-area people interested in folk music. The massive mailing paid off, and the first night was packed. The Patons themselves were the first act to perform there.

The following months, however, were not as promising. The crowd dwindled, and the Sounding Board reached the point where it barely took in enough to pay the rent. It took about a year, according to Fran, to build up the kind of following the establishment now has.

The Sounding Board recently moved for the third time, and the new hall in the basement of the First Church of Christ Congregational seats nearly three hundred. The night I was in the audience, the large meeting room was packed. Certain artists can be counted on to fill the room--Sounding Board favorites like Lui Collins (who was performing that night), Stan Rogers, Utah Phillips, Gordon Bok, and David Mallet. The average crowd is around one hundred and fifty, but a full house is no rare occurrence. Len estimates membership in the Sounding Board Society at about five hundred.

The Sounding Board is first and foremost a listening room. No smoking is permitted, and no refreshments are served while the performance is in progress. Conversation is discouraged while the artist is onstage. "We figure we hire the artist," Len told me. "The artist is there, and people pay good money for that artist. We feel that courtesy to the artist is the way that it should be."

Len and Fran are a strong, warm couple in their sixties who broadcast by voice, expression, and gesture the enthusiasm and creative force that has kept their establishment growing.

The Domlers receive a lot of assistance in running the performances. The Sounding Board has a central core of about fourteen volunteers, who can be called on at any time to assist. Len and Fran feel that such a core is essential to the running of a successful establishment. When a coffeehouse depends on only a couple of people, the strain becomes too great, and the people tend to burn out.

The Sounding Board started out strictly traditional, including some truly unknown backwoods-style performers. "It got to the point," Fran said, "where people were getting bored with it, and the other type of music started coming in. It was still folk music, but it wasn't that real traditional kind. So, if we have a real traditional artist now, we know we're not going to have a big crowd. It's nice to hear once in a while, though."

The acts that perform at the Sounding Board come from a wide geographical area. Artists from Scotland or Australia are as likely to be heard as Connecticut performers like Nancy Tucker, the Morgans, or Bill Crofut. "Not too many from California, though," Fran observed.

"National" names are no strangers to the coffeehouse either. Pete Seeger and Odetta have both appeared. On such occasions, the Domlers have the church's permission to use the main section, which seats about four hundred.

Each show begins with an unauditioned guest set of about fifteen minutes, and performers have sometimes been booked on the basis of their guest set. The Sounding Board is very open to people asking for guest sets; Len says he has yet to turn down any such request. Shows also feature a brief open hoot in intermission.

Len mentioned the increasing number of new coffeehouses appearing. "It really makes us happy that people are getting involved with folk music. It's very pleasing. It really thrills us to see, like, New Harmony (in Canton, CT)...a new (coffeehouse) opened up in Pomfret Center (Hocus Pocus Arts)...and Westport, one opened up in Westport. I think it's terrific. I'd love to see more of them opening up...it's a wonderful thing." Fran agreed. "It's really spreading...it helps all these artists out."

Bill Domler has also continued generating good ideas. Since leaving the Sounding Board, he has gone on to create the New Harmony Coffeehouse (since passed on to other hands) and a new series of concerts at Auerfarm in Bloomfield.

Bill also hosts the Monday segment of a folk show from the University of Hartford that airs Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. (WWUH, 91.3). There seem to be plenty of folk features in the low end of the FM dial in central Connecticut. Susan Hansen, for example, is a voice well known to the folk audience in the area. Her shows

often include tapes of performances at the Sounding Board, and she has helped both the Sounding Board and The CooP gain the attention of the public. She can be heard on WHUS (91.7) Sunday nights 7 to 11. Other stations with regular folk shows include WFCR (88.5), WPBH (90.5), and WRIU (from the University of Rhode Island, 90.3).

But despite the growing grass-roots interest in folk music, recognition still lags in some ways. Although the Sounding Board is strictly non-profit and all donations are tax-deductible, corporate grants have been slow in coming. Local large businesses like United Technologies in East Hartford seem always willing to donate to the opera and jazz festivals, but express no interest in folk endeavors. The Sounding Board's building fund, for example, has been supported so far by member contributions and benefit concerts. They're now up to $2,400, and are hoping that by 1986 they will be able to leave church basements forever. Some assistance has been promised by the Connecticut arts commission, in the form of surveying and engineering services, but this must wait until the land is acquired. "It won't happen tomorrow," Len said, "but we're working on it. That's our dream."

You can join the Sounding Board Society for a mere $9 a year, $14 for a family membership. The address is: The Sounding Board, 290 Middletown Avenue, Wethersfield, CT 96109. (Same address for correspondence and tapes.) Telephone (203) 563-3263. Membership includes a subscription to their monthly newsletter, Folknotes (if you're a musician, this alone might be worth the price, as it lists the various folk clubs and coffeehouses in southern New England), one dollar off the regular admission price of $4.50, and reduced prices on the many albums they have available at the coffeehouse, some of which are very difficult to get elsewhere. ■

Mary Elizabeth

When I was eighteen I met Mary Elizabeth,
Freshman semester at Saint Thomas Moore.
I saw her in history, she lived right next to me,
Just down the hall from me, on the same floor.

I soon became good friends with Mary Elizabeth.
I laughed at her freckles. I loved her red hair.
I liked how she talked to the teachers so easy,
Convinced all the boys that she walked upon air.

I took an apartment with Mary Elizabeth,
Second semester at Saint Thomas Moore.
Her parents so nervous because of the neighborhood,
Brought an enormous new lock for the door.

And nights there was Dylan, the Beatles and Beethoven.
Sweet marijuana smoke hung in the air.
We would talk of the things we no longer believed in,
And of what we would do, and of what we'd not dare,

And oh how we cherished our beautiful freedom.
We'd both been the victims of terrible nuns,
Whose discipline struck with the sharp love of Jesus,
For the length of a skirt or an unholy tongue.

I loved the apartment and Mary Elizabeth.
We did everything and we went everywhere.
And walking back home late at night in our neighborhood,
Never a stranger and never a care.

When Mary Elizabeth made love with Thomas,
They'd met at the game at the end of the year.
Afraid that she soon would be drifting away,
I feigned and I fought back an envious tear.

Then Mary Elizabeth made love with Thomas,
Under the crucifix over her bed.
I know that she did 'cause she begged me to promise,
Never to whisper a word that she'd said.

Then something was troubling Mary Elizabeth,
A lump in her throat as her dinner grew cold.
Too frightened to ask for the fear of the answer.
That something was late because something took hold.

Then Mary Elizabeth borrowed some money.
She'd just started school and she would not be wed.
She learned of a man who helped women in trouble.
She wished it were different and she wished she were dead.

I walked a dark hallway with Mary Elizabeth.
We looked for the number and climbed up the stairs.
Let go of her hand when the man she'd be going with,
Counted our money and showed me a chair.

But Mary Elizabeth couldn't go through with it.
She took my hand as I followed outside.
She told of her fear of the knife or the wire.
And all the way home in confusion we cried.

The very next day I found Mary Elizabeth.
Red on the porcelain, red everywhere.
She died from a needle she'd read that they do it with,
Knitting the purls of her hopeless despair.

Once I believed I saw Mary Elizabeth,
Under the leaves of our favorite tree.
So sadly deceived without Mary Elizabeth,
With only the eyes of a stranger on me.

And at the reunion no Mary Elizabeth,
Only sad rumors and whispers of shame.
I do not take communion since Mary Elizabeth,
But I still light a candle and whisper her name.

Coffeehouses: The Enduring Alternative

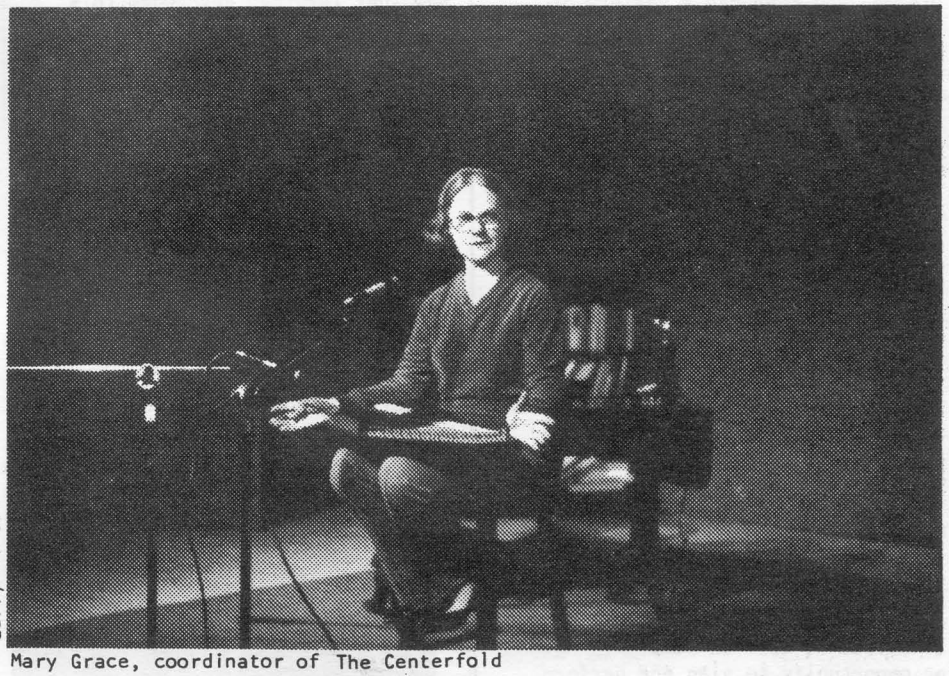
by Gerry Hinson

About ten years ago, I scanned the "Cheap Thrills" section of the Village Voice for some new adventure. There I saw an ad for a 'folk concert' at the Focus II Coffeehouse on West 74th Street in Manhattan, and having been neither to a coffeehouse nor to a folk concert, this certainly met my standards for exotica.

I found my way there one weekend night when Dan Daley (the songwriter of "Still in Saigon," recorded by Charlie Daniels) was performing, and was intrigued by the intimate ambience: a dark, red-brick room, candlelit tables, quiet artistic and collegiate audience, a downstairs sitting room for lounging and conversing during intermission, an informal house staff, and a talented performer who was distinctly unfamous. A week later, I heard a New York-based folksinger named Rod MacDonald perform, and was instantly addicted.

I became a devoted habitue of Focus II over the next five to six years, and both my musical and social exposure broadened greatly. Alas, memories and old flyers are the only monuments to many such stages in New York and elsewhere: The Rosebud, Focus II, Middle Earth, Fair Harbor, The Night Kitchen, The Rainbow Sign, The People's Warehouse, Cockroach Art, and intimate cabarets like the Cafe Wha? and The Metro. Yet many musicians survived and continued to grow, and remain to share memories of what these way stations meant to their lives.

The fortunes of the cafe and coffeehouse scene have generally followed the same waves of interest in folk music. An extremely condensed history of the New York-area folk scene may explain the development of the different venues for each kind of performer. Early 'folk' singers (until the 1930s) were basically community members whose singing was either recreational, religious, or personally therapeutic--the exceptions being the 'penny sheet' broadsiders who were basically singing journalists. Performance settings could be farms, ships, prisons, taverns, churches, or public 'commons.'



Gerry Hinson

Mary Grace, coordinator of The Centerfold

By the 1930s such wandering minstrels as Leadbelly, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston, Sonny Terry, Gary Davis, and Burl Ives often played for labor audiences, miners' camps, and schools. Distinct audiences for their music were developing as well, the songs having evolved into a mixture of topical lyrics and sometimes traditional tunes. 'Graduation' to the concert halls and radio shows came during the 1940s for the likes of the Almanac Singers, the Weavers, Cynthia Gooding, 'Sis' Cunningham, and others. Their fortunes crested with the peak period of left-wing labor and political influence, with which most of them had associated themselves. However, in the McCarthy Era, access of many artists to concert halls and broadcast outlets was closed off. But the story doesn't end here; folk music was to ride into the modern era on the waves of three great 'Folk Revivals.'

Alternate scenes began to appear in cafes and colleges in several major cities, among them Boston, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. A roster of nearly legendary names included The Bitter End, The Gaslight, Gerde's Folk City, Figaro Cafe, The Hungry i (San Francisco); these spawned a new generation of singers who were now often college educated, and in their early days congregated around college campuses or associated in cafes and pubs. Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Fred Neil, Judy Collins, Richie Havens, Bob Gibson, and John Sebastian made frequent rounds of the cafes, which had an intimacy impossible to find in concert halls. In Boston and other cities David Crosby, Steve Stills, Tom Rush, and Tom Paxton often sang in 'basket houses' where audiences paid for the entertainment by putting donations in a basket after a show.

By the mid-1960s, the record companies discovered the best of these performers, and the loose community disintegrated. This wave of prosperity receded in the late 1960s as the interest of young record buyers turned toward rock and folk-rock, the cafes began losing money, and the folksingers either adapted to the rock era or faded into bargain-bin obscurity. Still, lesser-known performers hungered for stages which didn't require 'stars' or high admission fees, and audiences that

they could be comfortable with. Meanwhile, churches were looking for ways to attract the falling-away young congregation.

'Coffeehouses' began to sprout in New York, Boston, Cambridge, Hartford, Chicago, San Francisco, St. Paul, and Ottawa, and that had a variety of management structures: church members, artistic cooperatives, college students, and individual folk 'doyens.' A veteran Greenwich Village singer/actor, Erik Frandsen, recalled that "in New York, cafes were the major centers of the folk scene, and that disappeared in the early 1970s when The Four Winds, The Gaslight, and The Bitter End disappeared. The coffeehouse scene was peopled by folkies left over from the cafe retrenchment. Some were fairly successful in economically viable times, though."

There also were different expectations about such ventures, as The CooP's editor, Jack Hardy, remembered. "Back in 1965 we were more idealistic; so a club with which I was involved in Hartford, called the Forum, even dared to publish three issues of a folk magazine, without the ambition or economic desperation which inhibits many others from doing likewise. It was fun simply to have an opportunity to sing and perform. Modern songs, such as those by the Beatles or the Byrds, served as new folk songs, which reflected our group's interests. And there was much more mutual support--something which I hope the musician's cooperative will generate; nobody desperately wanted to become famous!"

By the early 1970s there was an audience looking for musical alternatives as much as many aspiring performers were; the sheer relentless energy and volume of electric rock and roll made the public collectively yearn for a breather. So the pendulum swung to the other extreme, and 'The Mellow Sound' oozed into every corner of the airwaves. Several former denizens of the New York cafe and early coffeehouse scene achieved sudden fame, among them, Melanie, James Taylor, Carly Simon, and Joni Mitchell. At the same time, there was a revival of interest in earlier folk musicians like Dave Van Ronk, Pete Seeger, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, and Odetta. Coffeehouses benefitted immensely from this trend, which emphasized a return to accessibility. This did not become simply a revival of the early folk scene, however; a major mutation would soon increase the diversity of this circuit. Paul Kaplan, a well-traveled young veteran folksinger and CooP Songbook editor, explains:

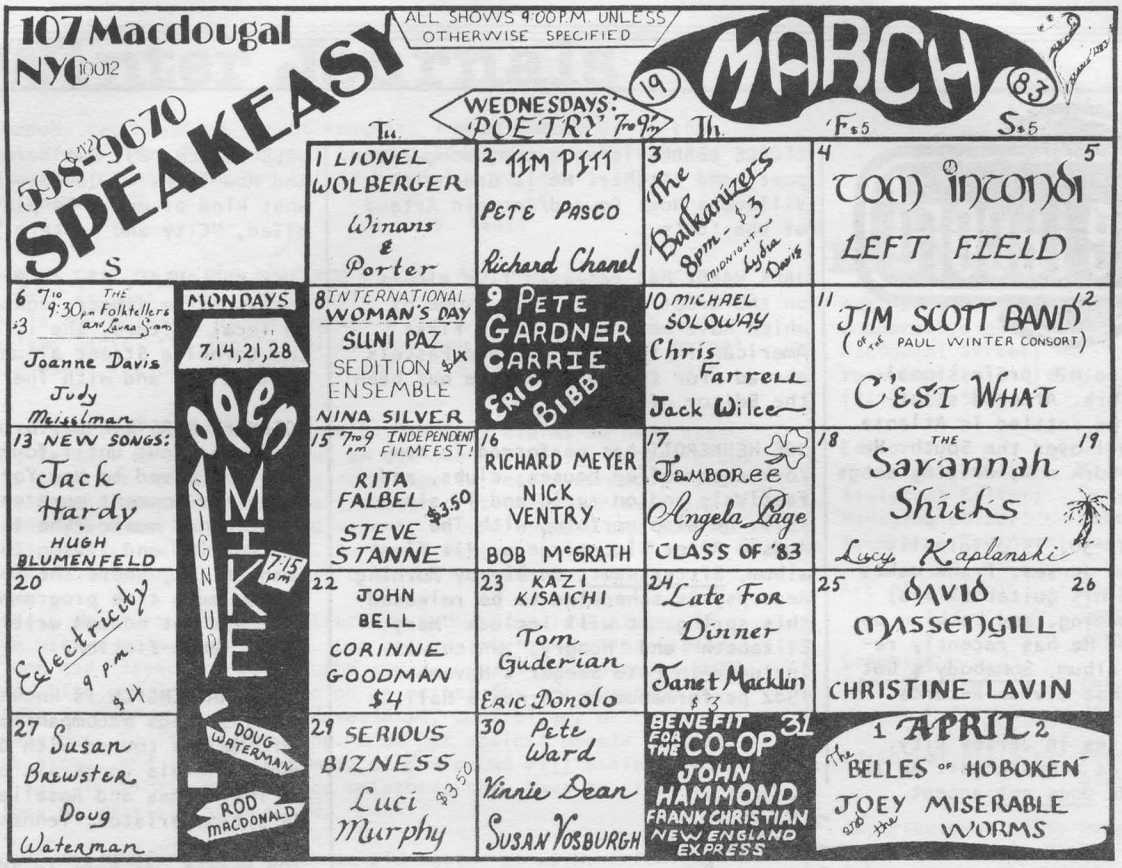
"Most of the earliest coffeehouses existed to preserve traditional music, which was thought to be dying out. Traditionalist clubs like the Folklore Center, the Pinewoods Folk Music Club, and the Long Island Traditional Music Association opposed the 'star system' of folk and rock notables, who they felt had abandoned this music. A distinct separation between modern and traditional coffeehouse audiences developed; for the traditionalists, preservation of the old songs and tunes was a serious hobby and avocation, and they would not book modern coffeehouse songwriters during most of the 1970s. Eventually, this changed; flexibility in booking developed as they realized that modern songwriters often adapt traditional melodies. For example, Pinewoods hosted David Mallett, and I played at Long Island; modern songwriters are gaining acceptance in folklore clubs, while traditional singers are doing new songs."

Gerry Hinson

Debby McClatchy at Focus II Coffeehouse in 1975

Most of the coffeehouses mentioned in this article survived until the late 1970s. Some noteworthy graduates from this circuit include Maggie and Terre Roche, John Guth (who has accompanied The Paul Winter Consort, Tom Paxton, Bob Gibson, and Suzanne Vega), Jack Hardy, Debbie McClatchey (a fine singer who booked traditional concerts for both Focus II and Pinewoods), and Michael Cooney, an articulate, literate West Coast multi-instrumentalist who once wrote an article for Sing Out! magazine advising those who wished to start coffeehouses: "Don't!" By 1979 most of the New York coffeehouses had folded because of diminishing income, high rents, staff 'burnout,' and conflicts over control. Of all those locales only The Centerfold and The Good Coffeehouse were to survive into the 1980s, partly due to being church-run, while the rest of the folk scene retreated to the Village bars and cabarets, maintaining a small but fairly constant audience.

Despite the revival of the Greenwich Village club scene, not all folk performers or listeners were satisfied by it. The cabarets, being 'mainstage' enterprises, could not avail many novice performers of enough performing experience to develop or make a living. Many people wanted relief from the noise, liquor, cigarettes, and formality of the bar scene. Thus, in the 1980s, once again coffeehouses have proliferated. ■



credits

side one

1. No Reason to Cry (Richard Meyer)
   Richard Meyer/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass, Keyboard & Vocal
   Judy Molner/Vocal
   Jack Hardy/Vocal

2. Nancy Reynard (Frank Christian)
   The New England Express:
   Rob Strachan/Vocal & Guitar
   John Strachan/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass & Keyboard

3. My Name Joe (David Massengill)
   George Gerdes/Vocal, Guitar & Percussion
   Mark Dann/Bass

4. Spotlight (Lucy Kaplanski)
   Lucy Kaplanski/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass & Keyboard

5. Clancy (Tom McGhee)
   Tom McGhee/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass & Tenor Guitar
   Lucy Kaplanski/Vocal
   Jack Hardy/Vocal & Mandolin

6. Pretty Peggy-O (Traditional)
   Jack Hardy/Vocal, Guitar & Tin Whistles
   Angela Page/Vocal
   Mark Dann/Bass

side two

1. Falling From Grace (Pete Gardner)
   Pete Gardner/Vocal & Guitar
   Alecia Arcello/Vocal
   Mark Dann/Bass & Guitar

2. Miami (Josh Joffen)
   Rosemary Kirstein/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass & Guitar

3. Shale City Line (Bernie Shanahan)
   Bernie Shanahan/Vocal, Guitar & Keyboards
   Mark Dann/Guitar & Pedal Bass

4. The Swimmer (Bob Warren)
   Bob Warren/Vocal & Guitar

5. Mandolin Band (Alan Beck)
   Alan Beck/Vocal & Guitar
   Mark Dann/Bass

6. Mary Elizabeth (Joe Heukerott)
   Joe Heukerott/Vocal & Guitar