

## TAPE REVIEWS

Clemens, Linda: *"Une Chanson de vérité": Folksongs of the Prairie Métis*, Indian Head, Saskatchewan: Theother Opera Company, 1985, 19pp., \$3.50, Record No. ACR 4047 \$9.98, Cassette No. ACR 4-4047 \$9.98, Listener's Guide: 19pp. \$3.50

"Une Chanson de vérité" is a 1985 release of fourteen folksongs from the tradition of the Métis people, ten collected from a single informant, Mr. Gaspard Jeannotte, living near Lebret in Saskatchewan's Qu'Appelle Valley. According to the preface to the *Listener's Guide*, *Une chanson de vérité* is information such as a scout would bring back to camp after a reconnaissance tour of a new area. The presentation of these songs is to be seen as a preliminary report, not containing exhaustive information, but rather offering a glimpse into the field of Métis music.

The presentation format, that is to say the recording itself together with the insert and *Listener's Guide*, has been designed, according to the author, so that each part supports the others in order to make the music accessible to the general listener. Indeed, the *Listener's Guide* itself indicates that it *must* (emphasis mine) be used together with the recording and insert.

The author/performer, Saskatchewan-born mezzo-soprano Lucinda Clemens, holds a doctoral diploma in musical paleography from the University of Parma. She has participated in collecting Canadian folksongs, in making them known via concert tours in Italy, as well as preparing them for public broadcasting in both Italy and West Germany. During the period of her association with Mr. Jeannotte, Clemens recorded thirty of his songs, many of which came from the Devil's Lake area in North Dakota where the informant spent his childhood. Ten songs selected from this material are included on the recording along with four pieces from other sources. The selections are arranged and performed by Lucinda Clemens with assistance from Morwenna Minneci Jones on piano and harmonium, and Romano Pucci on flute and piccolo.

This review will address two concerns: the importance of the material itself, and the form in which it is presented.

Any discussion of new information on Métis folksongs must address what already exists on the subject. Until recently, that has been very little. Métis folk music has been almost totally ignored as a subject worthy of research, scholarly or otherwise. For example, the period between 1954 and 1985 produced only a handful of published works which included Métis folksongs.<sup>1</sup> Among those contributing to Canadian publications on the subject, singly or with others, we find Barbeau, Complin, Cass-Beggs, Fowke, Johnston,

Laforte, Beland, and Clemens. While eight may seem a considerable number, some of the works of these authors take the form of samplings of Canadian folksongs from many cultural groups. The mention of Métis folksongs, therefore, is sparse. The collaborative works of Fowke and Johnston are a case in point.<sup>2</sup>

Also, in looking at the varying ways the subject is treated, we find that references to the folksongs as specific to Métis people disappear when structural categorizations are used to analyze them. This is the case of a number of works written in the French language by authors including Barbeau, Laforte and Beland.<sup>3</sup> The songs become voyageur songs and are identified almost exclusively as being of French origin, with little mention of Métis people as owners of part of that heritage. Of the eight authors previously mentioned and of those publications which deal with more than a few songs, only two, Cass-Beggs, and Clemens, treat the material as pertaining to a people, the Métis people. This makes the publication of ten songs from the Jeannotte repertoire an important historical event.

The form given to their publication, however, becomes an extremely thorny problem when one considers the elements which must be taken into consideration when dealing with the culture of the Métis people. To do justice to the material, one must have an understanding of the different linguistic and musical elements involved. Also, a recording destined for sale to the general public must bear in mind the musical tastes of such an audience.

Clemens seems to have drawn together the songs from the repertoire most appropriate to the occasion for which it was published (the centenary of the 1885 Métis Resistance), to have approached the material from a point of view with which she herself is familiar (a classical form), and to have annexed supporting documentation for the purpose of interpreting the music to the target audience. Such an approach is very likely to irritate a number of groups interested in the subject.

Ethnologists, historians, Native and non-Native scholars or musicians could complain that the authenticity of the material has been sacrificed to the arrangements and that the interpretation using a classical voice is unwise, given the public for which it is intended.

In the arrangements, for example, the explanation for the choice of accompanying instruments seems somewhat arbitrary. As to the reason for selecting the various instruments, Clemens states that the piano and the harmonium, widely used in the nineteenth century, were chosen because of their availability for touring purposes. Two other instruments also used on tour, the flute and the piccolo, were chosen because they were mentioned in Métis records. Of the portable stringed instruments, the guitar was avoided because of its Spanish origin and appearance "in the Dakotas and the Canadian Northwest with the northern movement of the American cowboy." The fiddle, the instrument most familiar to the target audience in terms of their knowledge of Métis music, was rejected as well "because it was used more for dancing than for singing". Having

stated all these reasons for the choice of instruments, Clemens then goes on to say that singing “was largely unaccompanied”!

The audience which Clemens targets for this recording, teachers and students of Métis literature, history and the arts, as well as the general listener, might also have some criticisms. Francophones in particular would question the usefulness of translating French lyrics into English. Although popular French folksongs were not usually sung in English, scholars such as Cass-Beggs, Fowke, and even the eminent scholar Barbeau himself did publish works containing such translations. However the translation of poetry and song is arduous even for those fluent in the source language. In this repertoire, Clemens would have had to deal with the French language and probably also Mitchif, since she indicates that the informant sang in dialect. Although the Bilingual Center did assist in translating these songs, some problems persist. For example, in *Les Voyageurs sont arrivés*, the first two lines of the first stanza of the French version are exactly the same:

*Les voyageurs sont arrivées,  
Les voyageurs sont arrivés!*

These two lines are, in fact, the repetition of a first line in a three line stanza structure.

In the English translation, however, these two lines inexplicably become:

*Here come the travellers!  
Have the travellers arrived?*

In other places, transcription problems may have added to the difficulty of translation. Such an example can be found in *Petits enfants* where, for example,

*C'est pour cela vous enterrez des fleurs*

becomes

*That's why you are planting flowers.*

and

*La vie si courte aussi de plus d'argent*

becomes

*Life runs through your fingers faster than pieces of silver.*

One may ask whether Clemens received these interpretations from the informant himself as some of the equivalents she offers are most unusual. For instance, in the first example, *enterrer* usually means to bury; in the second example, the French version as transcribed is so obscure that the English version must be considered an extrapolation of what is said.<sup>4</sup>

Métis people themselves might voice some of the same concerns, including the choice of a classical singing voice incorporating elements of Mitchif into a French language interpretation of their traditional songs. Although Clemens did workshops when the recording was released, and it is available for sale or for consultation in several institutions, the material is unfortunately being little utilized. It must therefore be assumed that the needs of the target audience are not being served by this recording.

What could be done in the future to meet the needs of the audience Clemens has targeted? First and foremost, a collaborative approach is essential. Because individual researchers with knowledge in English, French, Mitchif, Cree, history, and music are likely to remain rare, scholarly works on Métis folksong will also remain rare unless groups interested in these areas of research join forces and work together. This means that Métis people themselves would have to indicate on what terms they would accept and participate in such collaborative endeavors, while non-Métis scholars would have to be sensitive to and accepting of those requirements if research is to advance.

Clemens is continuing her work on the recordings she has collected. Hopefully, plans for future publications on the Jeannotte repertoire will include input from others in fields related to Métis history and language. In the case of this collection as with others, such collaboration would contribute much to the advancement of knowledge of Métis music as well as do justice to the communities from which it comes.

## NOTES

1. These include Canadian works in existence prior to the release of *Une chanson de vérité*.
2. A number of unpublished collections exist. Among them, one can refer to the Johnston and Letourneau collections in the holdings of the Canadian Centre for Folkculture Studies at the National Museum in Ottawa. A third collection compiled by Mary Loretto Weekes is located at the Saskatchewan Archives Board in Regina.
3. Among the works of these authors one can find, for example, *Jongleur Songs of Old Québec*, *En roulant ma boule*, *Chansons de voyageurs, coureurs de bois et forestiers*, and "Le Réperoire authentique des chansons d'aviron de nos anciens canotiers (voyageurs, engagés, coureurs de bois)" in *Presentation...à la Société Royale du Canada*, 1982-83.

4. Other versions consulted during the course of doing this review bear no resemblance to the Clemens version. This is not to say that her version is incorrect, but rather that questions remain about the transcriptions, particularly as Clemens indicates that Jeannotte sang his songs "in dialect".

Marie-Louise Perron,  
Saskatchewan Archives Board,  
3303 Hillside Street,  
Regina, Saskatchewan,  
Canada, S4S 0A2

*Dakota Hotain Singers: Dakota Hotain Singers.* Sunshine Records Ltd., 228 Selkirk Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2W 2L6.

The Hotain Singers, composed of Henry Hotain (lead singer), Edward Hotain, Micheal Hotain, Ronald Hall, Brian Pratt, Karl Essie, and Kenneth Pratt, can be very proud of this traditional musical production. They have accomplished a notable achievement in traditional Indian music. Although the recording fails to capture some of the dynamic levels of which these singers are capable, it is certainly a production worth owning. These singers have developed a group that truly captures the spirit of Powwow. I strongly recommend it as an excellent example of traditional Dakota music.

Arthur W. Blue,  
Department of Native Studies,  
Brandon University,  
Brandon, Manitoba,  
Canada, R7A 6A9.

Gu-Achi fiddlers. *Old Time O'odham Fiddle Music.* Canyon Records, Cassette # CR-8082, 1988.

Contemporary Native American music assumes many different forms, shaped by a variety of traditions. Powwow songs, country and western ballads, gospel music and even heavy metal rock music have all been recorded by Native performers and are currently available on tape. To this growing list can now be added the old time fiddle music of the Tohono O'odham (formerly known as the Papago Indians) of Southern Arizona. Popular at dances and fiestas in the Tucson area for over a century, this instrumental music is currently experiencing a revival. The Gu-Achi Fiddlers (a band consisting of two fiddles, a guitar, a snare and a bass drum) are among those responsible for the renewed interest.

Specializing in polkas, two-steps and mazurkas, their sound has a rough homemade quality to it that is, no doubt, part of its appeal.

In the past, fiddle bands sometimes incorporated Yaqui ritual dance melodies into their repertoires to produce an interesting blend of European and Native traditions. On this tape, creative blending of tradition seems limited to the titles given various musical selections. My favorite titles are the "Hohokam Polka" and "Pinto Beans Two-Step".

Allan J. Ryan,  
Department of Anthropology  
and Sociology,  
University of British Columbia,  
Vancouver, British Columbia,  
Canada, V6T 2B2

- R. Carlos Nakai: *Changes*, Canyon Records, Cassette #CR-615, \$8.98; *Cycles*, Canyon Records, cassette #CR-614, \$8.98; *Journeys*, Canyon Records, Cassette #CR-613, \$8.98; *Carry the Gift*, Canyon Records, Cassette #CR-7006

R. Carlos Nakai is Navajo-Ute. He is also a creative and performing musician, an educator, and a "keeper of the way" who has now produced several commercially available tapes (all produced and distributed by Canyon Records, Box 17911, Phoenix Arizona 85011). Each of the tapes, but most poignantly the first (1982), entitled *Changes: Native American Flute Music* (cassette CR614-c), and the most recent (1989) entitled *Carry The Gift* (cassette CR-7006) make startlingly clear the enormous complexity and sensitivity of issues raised by his music. His primary performance medium, the Native American flute, constructed of red cedar heartwood, is both an eloquently simple and eloquently expressive instrument. But the complexity of Nakai's music lies in neither acoustics nor style, but in the artistic purpose he has claimed for himself.

All of Nakai's music is based on "traditional" models. But, in the "tradition" of many European composers, he has cleverly appropriated these models for his own artistic purposes. In the most narrow sense, there is nothing even remotely controversial about Nakai's purpose. It is simply to create non-mystifying, assimilable, evocative music which does not present barriers to either Native or non-Native listeners. The instrument is beautifully played while the musical ideas and formal plans are imaginatively and intelligently conceived. There is always the presence of an expressive framework especially gratifying to the listener who anticipates in this music values such as spaciousness and tranquility.

But Nakai has more broadly ranging purposes. Of these, he says, the most fundamental is "to express qualities about my culture and ideas that relate to our own value system" (Arizona Republic, June 6, 1985). Nakai's press interviews make clear his desire to use his music as a bridge leading to comprehension and understanding of

Native culture for the dominant culture, as well as, of course, a music rooted in significant ways in traditional Native music. Despite the awesome assumption that music can be a vehicle by which the dominant culture develops understanding of minority cultures, or that non-texted music of any cultural group can communicate information as abstract or monumental as culturally defined ideas and values, Nakai's music is to be valued for its sheer appeal and for the seriousness and integrity that Nakai brings to his compositions. Nakai has covered an impressive span of musical territory in the course of his five releases. He has included the synthesizer in a number of works, and in *Carry The Gift* has collaborated most successfully with the gifted guitarist William Eaton. He has also been actively engaged with *Jackalope*, an "ethnic improvisational jazz ensemble." In all of this, he has been very deliberate and perfectly honest in his choice and usage of techniques and materials (the instrument itself is not Navajo in origin) that serve his purpose. He has not been caught in the net of conceptual or stylistic "purity" and looks to Navajo history itself as a model of progressive cultural assimilation.

In the world of recent popular music, style categories are broadened and eventually reinvented through the calculated appending of the "habits" of one style upon another ("fusion"). This "creative" procedure is then coordinated with market development and packaging efforts dedicated to the production of an efficient and powerful corporate product. The regular invocation of terminology such as "fusion" or "new age" in the description of Nakai's music may be understood as representative of the current impoverishment of corporately-based popular music and the critical atrophication that parallels it. The strength of Nakai's very accessible music, however, lies both in its freedom from corporate determinants and in its specific concerns with preservation or study. Its genuineness is confirmed not only in its sensitive reference to the authentic, but in Nakai's thorough understanding and creative deployment of the authentic. His music is, in the most respectable sense, "contemporary" in that it captures, without artifice or illusion, a musical/cultural amalgam from which he has forged an art that is uniquely personal.

R. Carlos Nakai's contribution is most impressive. His continuing development will be observed with great interest.

Alfred Fisher,  
Department of Music,  
University of Alberta,  
Edmonton, Alberta,  
Canada, T6G 2C9.

*The Woodland Singers: Traditional Mesquakie Songs.* Canyon Records Productions, Inc., 4143 North 16th Street, Phoenix, Arizona, 85016.

The production of the Woodland Singers is by far the best that this reviewer has heard. The quality of both the singers and the recording is excellent. Although the tape does not follow the ceremonial routine that is familiar to me, ceremonial routines vary from area to area and it may well be that this is a routine that is common to Mesquakie people. The production offers the listener a rare opportunity to feel included and at the same time to enjoy the drum with the clear precise voice of the lead singer and his assistants. This traditional musical production rates with the best of symphonic productions.

Arthur W. Blue,  
Department of Native Studies,  
Brandon University,  
Brandon, Manitoba,  
Canada, R7A 0V3