

CARAVAN

NOVEMBER 1957

The Folkmusic Fanzine

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CARAVAN, The Folkmusic Fanzine, is a non-profit amateur publication. It is published as close to monthly as conditions will allow. The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the editor-publisher and do not necessarily reflect the policies of this publication except insofar as we believe in freedom of opinion.



Typos this issue are due to previous commitments on the part of the proofreader.

Due to the increased cost of producing Caravan, it is becoming necessary for us to make a charge for this zine. So starting with #5 (the next issue) CARAVAN will cost 10¢ a copy. Subscriptions of \$1 or less will be accepted by the publisher. Woe and sad alas's!

CARAVAN can be obtained from the publisher:
 And from FOLKLORE CENTER
 110 MacDougal Street
 New York 12, N.Y.

Lee Shaw
 Apt 5P
 780 Green
 New York

Deadlines for the next issue:
 Articles - November 20th
 News items - November 25th

If you have any or notices per field, we will them, no ch advertisements

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NEW YORK SCENE:

THE Tom Paley - Paul Clayton CONCERT

It was cold the night of Saturday, October 26th, but even so there was quite a crowd queued up in front of Actor's Playhouse waiting to be let in for the midnight folkmusic concert. Paul Clayton and Tom Paley would be singing under the auspices of Folklore Center, and a lot of us had come early to be sure of getting good seats.

Actor's Playhouse is a hole-under-a-wall, a tiny theater in a basement on 7th Avenue South. Its misshapen auditorium seats about 150 people, and it filled up rapidly. Several members of the audience were carrying banjos or guitars, and a goodly number of the faces in the crowd would have been familiar to frequenters of Washington Square or Spring Street.

At 12:28 the stage lights came on, one of them set in such a manner that it blazed into the eyes of the first row, and Israel Young of Folklore Center, came onstage and introduced the singers.

Paul Clayton entered, carrying a guitar and a 3-stringed mountain dulcimer. Paul, one of the most-recorded folksingers around, is a slender young man with a trim mustache, and a great deal of stage presence.

Tom Paley, unfortunately, is rarely heard on record. He's well known in the NY area (and a few other fortunate sections of the country) as one of the best banjo-pickers around. He is a stocky young man with a casual manner, as if he were at a party rather than a concert. He brought both guitar and banjo onstage with him, and took the banjo in hand for the opening number, "Sailaway, Ladies" which he and Paul sang together.

Tom was obviously sick: at the least, it must have been a bad cold. It was more apparent in his appearance than in his singing. He was pale, and looked completely exhausted. He lacked the vitality usually associated with his performances.

Paul took the second song of the evening, "Looking for the Bully of the Town", which is extremely well suited to his style. Paul has a full, rich voice and somewhat clipped enunciation. He is an excellent singer of ballads and lyrical folksongs. And he has another rare talent as well. He takes songs which are originally, or best-known, in Negro idiom, and translates them entirely into his own style, which is as quite beautiful songs of the white man's idiom. He has no false pretense of maintaining some part of the Negro's style, but sings entirely in his own manner. The results are proof positive that there can be more than one valid way of presenting a piece of music. The "original" version is not necessarily the best.

... few words on the eccentricities of banjo
... I Lose, Let Me Lose".

John Brunner
London Correspondent

With My Ear To The Ground

Meet the most frustratingly versatile guy I know.

I got to know him about a year ago, when he was leading a skiffle group at the now defunct Nancy Whisky Club, here in London. Guitar, he was playing. Sometimes he would haul out a banjo or a mandolin. Then one time he showed up playing country-style fiddle...then he dragged a harmonica out of his pocket...then he sat down at the piano...another time someone yelled at him to take over the bass.

Finally got around to asking him just how many instruments he does. "Oh, all the fretted instruments," he answered casually - guitar, banjo, mandolin, balalaika, et cetera - "most of the woodwind" - clarinet, flute, sax, Rumanian peasant's flute (authentically, he declares "the strings" - violin, viola (this, when he was at school, he played in the Tottenham Central Orchestra in London), bass, both tub and orthopedic "and a few other odds and ends" - harmonica, washboard, Swanee whistle...

"What's more?" I inquired sarcastically, and for the first time he told me...

What's more - he sings too.

This character's name is Henry (but more usually Hyam) Morris. He's tallish, thinnish, with a long head, bald at the crown, and a long face of a most unusual cast. He's not a guy you can overlook in a crowd. By profession, he is a chiropodist, but he is also one of the brighter stars in the folk music firmament in Britain.

For this, he tells me, he has to thank his first girl friend. At the tender age of 15½ he was taken by her to a folk dance meeting. He was so impressed by the innate simplicity and the spirit of communal enjoyment which pervaded the gathering, his interest was sparked, and he has remained firmly involved with folk dancing in Britain ever since. Now, in fact, he is musical director of the Society for International Folk Dancing, the largest body of its kind in Britain.

Round about the same time, he was engaged in learning guitar, which brought him into contact with a folksong fraternity. Meetings from abroad and learning their songs kept him busy for quite a while until he decided he had better have some songs of his own. He has - by the score.

Parenthetically, I don't see that learning guitar took him more than a few weeks. His mother was a pianist in his early life more or less followed the pattern of some of the washboard, aged three and tinkling out tunes. Me,

Brunner (2)

years and end up playing one instrument badly, he makes jealous! ((As unofficial spokesman for the Three-Chord Fraternity of American Guitar Players, I second this...ed))

Early last year, he met John Hasted, and with him was one of the founders of the old 44 Club, which laid down a pattern later followed by many others. This association didn't last long. Owing to what Hyam defines as "individualism and natural leanings towards comedy" (he's telling us) he tried himself out as a solo performer and is now doing very nicely thank you as a cabaret artist.

In between, while leading his own short-lived skiffle group, he found time to write arrangements of rock'n'roll numbers for Britain's (rather rude) answer to Elvis Presley, young Tommy Steele. But skiffle is not one of his main interests; he likes playing it, but not performing, stuck up in front of a captive audience. He has strong opinions on skiffle, as on many other subjects - for him, it goes right wrong as the skiffle craze persuades people that making music for themselves is fun (and I go along with this; it goes wrong, as soon as it turns into just another kind of canned entertainment. You meet people by the hundred who've heard of Lonnie Donegan's Rock Island Line, or Nashville Whisky and Chas McDevitt's Freight Train, but you have to go a long way to find someone who's ever heard of Leadbelly's version of the former, and the version of the latter which Peggy Seeger brought to Britain. (Though I'm pleased to say Peggy's authentic version is done quite nicely on Topic, a minor label devoted mainly to folk music and giving it a much-deserved shot in the arm). Most of the ordinary amateur skiffle groups wouldn't think of doing the less well-known versions; for them, Donegan, or the Vipers, or Dick Bishop, or Johnny Duncan, is God, and the way he does it, they do it. Only not quite so well.

I shall be reverting briefly to Freight Train later.

I tackled Hyam, while I was preparing this column, on a subject which is of special interest to me: whether the revival of interest in folk music in Britain is doing anything to give us back a live folk tradition, or whether it's simply produced more people to nurture the tender, hot-house growth planted by such men as William Chappell and Cecil Sharp.

He came back with an attack on English audiences in general, saying they will bear only with performers who do something either spectacular or showing great versatility - this he notices mainly in the folk dancing field. (This, I suspect, is due to their being no real live folk tradition in Britain except in isolated areas). However, American, and especially negro, folk music has become very popular - according to me its rhythmic nature is essentially suited to the tempo of the dance and here, provided the taint of commercialism can be avoided, there is some hope for something more to come of the present interest in folk music than simply a renewed attempt at

...for a considerable time, arguing with him in his
...it one thing which he has recently notified me

Erunner (3)

of demands inclusion in Caravan.

Pursuant to his belief outlined two paragraphs ago, he is engaged in the foundation of an international folk music centre in London.

London, as he points out, is probably the one city in the world where such a thing is possible - because there are so many national groups already (such as the India Arts Society, the Asian Music Circle, various students' unions, and minorities of every kind from African to Cypriot). Broadly, what he hopes to do is enlist the support, both moral and financial, of these bodies or their representatives, together with the already existing societies for folk music and folk dancing, to found a centre where people from all over the world will meet, where courses, lectures and concerts will be given, and which will serve as a nucleus for everyone either from Britain or abroad who is interested in folk music and dancing of any kind.

At the time of writing, the project is in its planning stage: by the time you read this, the organisation's aims should be settled and a fair idea of the support for it obtained. A.L. Lloyd has expressed the strongest interest in it; two meetings of interested persons have already been held.

If anyone who has not previously heard of the project and wishes details will write to me either c/o Caravan or at my home address (144 Fellows Road, London NW 3), I'll see the letter gets to the right quarter.

Celebrated my birthday with a party recently. Hyam was there and starred - he is a wonderful guy to have at a party, being a natural-born entertainer and singing, as he does, songs from all over the world - many of them picked up on hitch-hiking tours of Europe, when he pays his way with his guitar.

Also on the bill was a girl called Jennie Leathers, who sings mainly Irish songs, especially well without accompaniment. She is a friend of Margaret Barrie, who figured in my last column. In fact, it turned out to be a very Irish evening, for we discovered unexpected talent in the shape of the girl friend of one of our guests, who was overhead playing Irish cuntry dances on Hyam's fiddle in another room of the apartment and was persuaded to perform for us.

I had a letter from Peter Seeger anent the question of the suit over Freight Train which I mentioned in my last column but telling me that he and Mike were instrumental in bringing F. Cotton to a publisher. "With all the money being made on these days," he says, "it's a shame that so rarely any of 'the folk'." I agree; the trend in Britain of treating material as one's private property is rife, and to be of I said in my reply to Pete, the traditional jazzmen never ties comparable to those taken by the skiffers here; the the grace to give the credit line on a record label to "

Brunner (4)

or at most "Traditional, arranged Heinz Q. Schunk". But I imagine most of the people in Britain who like skiffle along with rock'n'roll groups and the dance bands accept that Jimmy Nasal or whoever, actually composed the songs he has recorded with his Washboard Wombats.

And yet - you know, I wonder what would have happened if someone had come along and sued, say, Dvorak, for making use of traditional material which turned out not to be, after all...

Further to the last column: the negro songs I was hoping to get from Mrs Rory Faulkner have gone back to California with her. She wasn't well enough to record them for me, suffering as she was from one genuine English cold and a cracked rib.

Two days before the writing of this column, I found a banjo in a second-hand shop not far from where I work. I have never seen anything like it - though I knew, vaguely, such things existed. It's a lovely instrument, and considering its age (I would guess it can't be younger than around sixty-five years) in fine condition. To start with, though, it is a seven-string banjo (of which I had never heard before) - six carved ivory push-fit heads, like flamenco heads on a guitar, and another peg in the same position as the fifty string on an ordinary banjo. It has, moreover, a smooth fingerboard - something I'd heard of, but not seen. The position dots are inlaid mother-of-pearl, and the metal parts, including the entire body, are silver-plated.

Since I bought the darned thing, I'd be obliged if some reader of Caravan can answer a few questions about it.

Mainly, how would you string the thing? I could, of course, string it guitar-style and ignore the seventh or fit it with an octave E. But I suspect that it's intended for bastable tuning - probably to the open chord of C major, to judge from the layout of the position dots.

Secondly, how old is it likely to be? In other words, when did they quit making smooth fingerboards?

And thirdly - has anyone else ever seen, heard of, or owned a comparable instrument? Say, in some one-horse town in the back of beyond where a smooth-talking travelling salesman went through about once a year and left behind - for once - a musical instrument as well as a story?

Only following the writing of this column, I shall be able to answer a couple of weeks. I hope to be able to title the next column EAR TO THE BEACH.

at the wild waves calling....

John Brunner
London
October 1957

FROM THE DEAD



"KAFKA"

Anyone who has tried to categorize folksongs knows that there are many lines of division. There is division according to area of origin, song type, and/or function, for example. There is another parameter of recent origin which a performer or programmer of folk music must consider; that is group songs vs. non-group songs.

Unfortunately there is a tendency today to emphasize group singing and omit the non-group songs. It is a sad fact to face but New York folk audiences just won't sit still and listen. They are ever heard to cry, "Sing something we know!"

Obviously many folk forms just do not lend themselves to group singing. Blues, ballads, hoedowns, a large proportion of lullabies, spirituals, etc., can't be song-led and they are, therefore, not being sung at all.

"But what's wrong with group singing?" somebody asks. Nothing. I like it very much. But not when it becomes a mechanism by which some of the best and finest folk music is excluded. Secondly, too much group singing fosters a uniformity of material. A group song must be easily taught or already in the group repertoire. There is a limit to the number of easily taught song forms, and there are few song leaders good enough to teach even the easily-taught songs. Result? The repertoire of the group stagnates, grows stale. The group becomes bored and folk music decays another notch. Any steady Washington Square addict will tell you that.

I've asked myself how this came about and come up with an answer which makes me very unhappy -- Pete Seeger. It is ironical that the man who did so much toward developing folk music in this area should be the one to foster its deterioration. I think that Pete is a great artist, and I remember his earlier concerts when he mixed good group singing with fine solo work. But for some years now he has been pushing this "lets-everybody-sing" bit, and has made it a sin to just sit and listen. -- At the last Seeger concert I attended there was one -- count them -- one non-group song.

Since Pete is such a strong influence on today's folk music scene the group cry has spread to all.

What is the future of folk music in N Y? I don't know. Traditions are being kept alive at small, private gatherings by singers and musicians who enjoy the folk music for itself, not as a vehicle for mass noises. But as for folk music outside of New York, to you!

A Reader Writes from NYC:

190 Spring Street

Dear Lee:

A pox on all of this quibbling (I am referring to the commercial versus ethnic controversy). Though in these days of a multitude of upper respiratorial ailments I am hesitant to put words into anyone's mouth, I feel that what Rafferty was getting at in making his distinctions was that there can be no substitution of bad art for good art, and that there can be, and is, so much art in the field of folkmusic that more people should be given the chance of hearing it. Naturally, the brunt of the attack then must go to the record companies who pollute the field with ersatz.

Art in singing involves a certain adjustment between the two variables that come into influence in the art; i.e., the singer and the song. If the singer is bad the result is bad art; if the song is bad, more often than not, the result is bad art. But here I am interested in the quality of the singer and not the song.

In folkmusic, there are a number of traditions of presentation and audience-communication. In the ballad, the material is narrative and objective. The singer serves merely to present. The art involved (beyond learning how to use his voice) is one of recognizing the nature of the song and inserting himself into the song so that it sings through him. If he subjects his own personality of the ballad, then he is adding something superfluous and often annoying.

This is not true of either the blues or the lyric (the folksong). These are subjective in nature and allow a freer use of the singer's emotions, but in using them he should realize that it is the emotion of the song and not the singer. (Ideally, of course, the two coincide).

The singer, if he violates the original purpose of the song, (and I do not mean the original style, for that is something for the performer to work out) is creating either a bastard art form, or its usual follower, bad art. In other words, if a ballad singer subjects the song with his own personality or the blues singer does not allow us the required inward glimpse, then the audience has a feeling of division between the singer and the song and too often the strain is too much.

Folkmusic, then, is just like any other art-form. It is something that must be approached through tradition and only can good art be created when the tradition is thoroughly assimilated and the innovation can be allowed. Dave Van Ronk is a good case in point. His art at this point is still showing traces of strain. First of all, his art originally must be a bastard one, (he being the first Irishman to do the Negro street-singing style.) Nevertheless, by a certain amount of his part in observing the nature of the street-singer he has nearly obtained the necessary tools for a constant innovation. His own innovation has yet to rear its full fair head. He is unable (to complete this disgusting metaphor) to see the end of his silken locks.

(Letters -- 2)

What then is that which we see in Pete Seeger, The Weavers, Odetta (when she sings blues), and sometimes in Van Ronk, that we so sorely miss in Clarence Cooper and the raft-full of others. INTEGRITY. The result -- a lot of bad art. The cause -- an unfortunate emphasis on the part of the American public for the singer, the great personality, and not the song. The need -- more folksingers whose words are understandable, whose manner is winning and whose attitude toward folkmusic is the same reverence that any artist must have toward his material.

Sincerely,

"Child 183"

Dick Weissman
NYC 25, NY

Dear Editor;

This letter is meant to be a follow-up to the letter of Child 183, with which I am in substantial agreement. I would restate one of his points in the form of a query not as to how commercial a singer is, but whether he is musically interesting. Of course I am not here considering entertainment value as a criterion of musical worth. Let's consider then, just what these criteria are. For one thing it is necessary to know the origin of a song, that is where it comes from, who sang it, if possible where and how it spread, and, most importantly, what it means. Take a song like Down The Old Plank Road; how many times have you heard this song absolutely butchered by someone who regards it as just another hillbilly song. And while we are referring to the musical meaning of a song, let's not forget that songs mean something musically as well as intellectually. It isn't always necessary to play resonated banjos with multiple fingerpicks, and it also is not always necessary to drown everyone else out. On the other hand one does play for people, presumably, so it may be helpful to talk about a song and to interest people in it, rather than assuming that they have to listen to you. It is also possible to sing a song without going through a ritual of acting it out, or of looking far away vaguely into space so as to avoid a view of the audience. Most of all, one must work on building a repertoire, learning new instrumental styles, and trying to understand the songs. This requires such time-consuming devices as reading books on folklore, studying (!) harmony, and instrumental techniques, and perhaps even studying voice.

My next point, which I am afraid I have already implied, is that most folksingers, amateur or even professional, do not meet the standards, or even approach them. Session after session at the Street, in Washington Square, and in various other places, I use my intelligence to the point where I can usually predict what each singer will render, what chords and strums will be made, what dramatic pauses will be made. If you think I am a little or no audience in New York for creative folk

Dick Weissman (2)

correct. I am also saying that most folksingers seem to have little or no contact with the feeling of spontaneity that makes folk music so dynamic.

But enough criticism. What I do like: listen to Billy Faier and Frank Hamilton, and see their ability to transmit their rather complex understanding of a song, and let's face it, transform it into an artistic expression. Also listen to their compositions and those of Daryl Adams, and you will see that folk music is not dead, it is only dormant because most of us refuse to listen to something new, or to do something new, or to attach serious consideration to folk music as a creative art. And finally let us try to encourage Mr Peter Seeger, one of our most creative musicians, to write and perform more things like the Mexican Blues and the theme to the Goofing Off Suite. And let's remember that group singing is great, but it is not where folk music ends, and try to think of it as folk music.

Dick Weissman

Irwin Lutzky
Brooklyn, NY

Dear Lee,

Please thank Dave Van Ronk for the words to "Don't Roll Those Bloodshot Eyes at Me". I know that this is not a folk song, but it appeals to me. There are some songs that are so corny and ridiculous that they are funny and have an appealing quality as a result. Also thank Mary Corby for the words to "The Three Ravens". There are, indeed, many versions to this song. I have heard one version where the fallow doe is a young girl. Ever since I first heard "The Three Ravens" I have had a feeling that this song is allegorical in nature. That is, there is a hidden meaning to the words which actually refer to something else. I have asked several people about this but no one seems to know. I hope one of your readers can help me solve this puzzle.

I would also like to pour a little more kerosene on the already blazing inferno started by Blind Rafferty. Both sides of the "AUTHENTIC FOLK MUSIC" question have used the term "folk singer" rather freely. I would like to ask, "What is a folk singer?" Is there a difference between folksinger and a "singer of folk songs"? Does a singer have to sing only the songs of his specific environment the way they have been sung for generations in order to be called a folk singer? Is a singer of folk songs someone who likes to sing folk songs even though these songs may not be part of his actual surroundings? I'd be interested to hear what others think about these ideas.

Sincerely,
Irwin

Lionel Coats
Richmond Hill
Queens, N.Y.

Dear Editor,

To judge from your third issue, Robert Coulson is the only one of your writers not too ashamed of his own opinions to admit that they are his. This is not surprising as he is one of the few of your writers with a sound, intelligent, unprejudiced attitude toward the music we enjoy so much. And in folkmusic, it certainly is the musical content which is of value to the listener, and not the mildew-covered archaeological aspect of a song as sung by some gravel-voiced field hand. If the latter aspect of folkmusic were the more important, then it would be feasible to do away with "folksingers" altogether, and have our recordings of folkmusic sung and played by people picked at random from the streets. To carry this line of reasoning another step, why have skilled craftsmen and artisans in any field? Why not have all out "as provided by the untrained, natural folk? The answer to this is simple. The untrained, unskilled "folk" just aren't good enough. For this reason we want trained artists, trained craftsmen, and trained singers, all using their material to the best possible advantage.

O can't say that I blame Rafferty, Kafka, et all, from hiding themselves behind the bushels of pennames. If my opinions were no more reasonable than theirs, I'd use a penname too.

I am curious about this "writer", "Kafka". If this is, as the title of his column implies, the same Kafka who died some thirty odd years ago, I suppose one cannot expect his ideas to be anything but moldy and unimaginative. But if, as I suspect, this is Rafferty in another disguise, I am shocked that he is allowed to take up so much space in your publication -- unless, of course, you yourself are Rafferty/Kafka. (Kafka gave himself away by knowing so much about Rafferty's tastes, i.e.: "Mr Rafferty has a great appreciation for... Buddy Stearns..." when Mr Stearns is not so much as mentioned in any of Rafferty's previous writings.)

I suspect that Rafferty/Kafka is none other than the person signing himself Tom Conduct ((Condit--ed)) in your letter column, and I also suspect that he is one of the group of hog-callers who parade their fishmongering voices on Sunday afternoons in Washington Square. Conduct's expressed taste in folkmusic is certainly as bad as Rafferty's, and he is familiar enough with obscure and unknown folksingers. (I assume this Roy Berkeley is a folksinger. And Conduct himself calls attention to the obscurity of this Pick Temple.)

Another aspect of Rafferty/Kafka/Conduct's nefarious personality is revealed in the column headed by the Rafferty name. I thought that the UnAmerican Affairs Committee had put an end to the use of the folkmusic field for the dissemination of Communist propaganda, but I see that it hasn't. I hope that you, the editor, will have the taste and decency to spare us Rafferty's RED ravings in the future, and confine your publication to the field for which it claims to be intended.

Yours sincerely
Lionel

Eliot Kenin
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Lee,

You might have heard about the Gilded Cage. If not, here goes. The "Cage" is a coffee house, the first to open in Philadelphia, on the corner of 21st St and Rittenhouse St in Philly. It's been going for about three years. In addition to its other activities of which I know nothing, it has folksinging every Sunday afternoon. People who are interested in playing, singing, listening, or any combination of the three, come down and jam from 3 PM 'till about 7 PM. Various of the town's professional folk artists are usually there, plus people who occasionally drop in from New York.

You can do me a favor by spreading the word that people living in the University of Chicago area can get guitar and banjo lessons from me. Also I have two banjos for sale. One has not so good tone which can be improved by replacing the head and also has Scruggs pegs. The other one just has good tone. I think so anyway.

If anyone has the words to "Dupree Blues" and/or a song which I believe starts: "A-walking and a-talking, A-walking goes I, For to meet my dear lady, I'll meet her by and by..." I'd appreciate the change to learn them.

One more thing: for anyone who is interested, there is in Philadelphia, a folk chorus of the same type as the Jewish Young Folksingers. They are probably meeting at the YMHA at Broad and Pine Sts in Philly. If anyone wants to know how to contact the chorus, I'll be glad to tell them whom to call.

Keep pushin',
Eliot Kenin
741 Linn
Burton Judson Court
1005 E 60th St.
Chicago 37, Ill.

Dear Lee -

Anne Silverstein
Chicago, Ill.

Rafferty refers to a John Greenway Riverside LP - "American Industrial Ballads". I think he's got 2 records confused. Greenway's Riverside RLP 12-607 is called "American Industrial Folksongs". "American Industrial Ballads," sung by Pete Seeger, is Folkways FH5251.

Yours truly,
Anne Silverstein

((The name is not Rafferty's, but the typographer's, for misreading Thanks for the correction. --ed))

London, England

Dear Lee;

...I have been reading his (John Br nner's) articles with great interest...and his articles strike me as being very accurate accounts of what is going on over here in the folksong world -- as far as they go; but that's not far enough.

From reading John's reports, one might easily get the impression that skiffle is the only (or at best, is the most important) manifestation of the folksinger's art at present functioning in England. I should say, however, despite its present wave of popularity with the non-folksong-conscious majority of our population, that skiffle is, at best, a minor and unimportant branch of folksong. At worst, which is rather how I regard it, skiffle could be summed up by John's comment on Lonnie Donnegan -- it has all the faults of Hillbilly singing, with none of its virtues. Except in the hands of a really good group, it becomes folksy, pretentious and dull - dull because of the monotony of its beat and characteristic refrains. Any strict-tempo record with a meaningless chorus; played on an odd assortment of improvised instruments is sold over here as skiffle, even if it's of a song written the day after tomorrow by the biggest hack in Wardour Street!

Fortunately, contrary to the impression which John might (repeat, only 'might') have given, there are many other flourishing forms of folksinging over here. Folksongs, in fact, are sung in all kinds of places, and by all kinds of people. 'Highborw' folksingers give recitals at the Wigmore Hall (one of our most popular classical-music recital halls) - I recently heard Victoria Kingsley there, giving one of her 'Songs with a Guitar & Drums' recitals (the best things she did were unaccompanied - a series of Hebridean folksongs, sung in Gaelic). And, at the Edinburgh Festival this year, I heard the Deller Consort sing an admirable version of Bow Down, sandwiched in between their madrigals and lute solos.

At the other extreme, one of our most popular TV stars is Shirley Abicair, who sings folksongs to the accompaniment of (of all things) a zither.

Straight folksinging is also popular in all strata of society here - every student frequented coffee bar in London (and, probably, other cities too - I found one in Edinburgh) has its guitarist. The 'smart set' (debs and things) have taken to having a folksinger as cabaret at their balls and parties - Peter Gronau, Hyam Morris, Rory McEwen and many others, are often to be heard in the stately homes! And I sing myself fairly regularly in a very fashionable French restaurant in South Kensington.

Oh yes, folksinging here is on the up-and-up (and I don't mean skiffle). And one of the most encouraging things is the proportion of those interested in it over here do it as if it is just bristling with amateur and semi-professional folk.

Yours Sinc

Mich

ll

L

New York Scene

BOB BRILL writes: "Your English correspondent John Brunner might be interested to know that as a result of his last article in Caravan, someone on this side of the Atlantic (namely me) has taken up playing the paraffin funnel...A proof that Caravan is serving well as a means of cultural exchange." Late carrier pigeon brings us news of a further development in this direction. Bob has added to this basic design, a kazoo played with a trumpet mouthpiece and muted with the funnel. I have heard this instrument played, and to judge from its carrying power, so has everyone else in the general area. It is quite impressive. With a blues guitar accompaniment, it is an experience long to be remembered. Bob also mentioned that they have not yet decided on a name for this device. Under consideration are "trumpoo" and "kazumpet". Caravan readers who have strong feelings on this subject might care to express them. Comments and name-suggestions are welcomed. Please do not suggest "Brillophone".

As of this writing, SANDY PATON, well-known West Coast folksinger, is in NYC, passing through on his way to England for a year of study. He has been denying the rumor that he would open soon as Wandering Troubadour in the Elizabethan Room of the Gore Hotel.

PAUL CLAYTON has taken up residence in New York for an indefinite period. He and ISRAEL YOUNG of FOLKLORE CENTER are considering the compilation and publication of a collection of approximately a thousand folksongs with words and music, not as a scholarly work, but as a handy reference book for the folksinger. They'd like to know what you think of the idea, and if you have any specific suggestions and/or requests. Write to them at FOLKLORE CENTER, 110 MacDougal St, NY 12 NY

LIFT EVERY VOICE! the 2nd People's Songbook is back in print and available from Folklore Center at the above address.

On the NY stage: LOGAN ENGLISH is appearing in THE GIRL OF THE GOLDEN WEST, a play by David Belasco, starring Chester Morris and Peter Cook, opening at the New Phyllis Anderson Theatre on Tuesday, Nov 5.

The Washington Square folksinging season is over until Spring. With the coming of cold weather, this means dozens of folksingers searching for backrooms (preferably with heat) wherein to gather and sing. Be warned!

The PHILADELPHIA SCENE: The Gilded Cage, 261 S 21st St., Philly 3, Pa. has folksinging on Sunday afternoons. For more details on this and the Philadelphia scene in general, see the letter from Eliot Kenin in this

On the GO SCENE: The same Eliot Kenin is offering banjo/guitar lessons to people in the University of Chicago area at nominal rates. And he has a couple of banjos for sale. See his letter (page 16) for more details and the address.

EVERYBODY EVERYWHERE: Sandy Paton, who's travelled this wide world over, has come up with an interesting idea. Folksingers in general are a travelling lot, and many other them come into and pass through unfamiliar towns without knowing about interested people or active groups in such towns. So Sandy's suggested that we ask for, and publish information on who to contact. Sort of a "who's Where" of folkmusic. So if you're in with an organized, unorganized or disorganized group that would welcome strangers, or would like to be contacted by folksingers passing through or living in your area, drop me a line, with your name and address and phone number, and in no time at all you may find road-weary travelling troubadors at your door.

FOLKSINGERS, FOLKMUSICIANS EVERYWHERE: Riverside records, 553 W. 51 St, NY 19, NY, is interested in hearing audition tapes.

Back to the NEW YORK SCENE: Concerts expected in the near future, but at present in the rumor stage include appearances by Odetta and by John Greenway. For more information on concerts and activities in the NY area, keep in touch with the FOLKLORE CENTER, 110 MacDougal St, NY 12 NY. News of coming events is posted there, and tickets to most folk concerts, etc., are available there.

Speaking of Folklore Center, you can get a 30-odd page bibliography/catalogue of folklore publications, etc., from Israel Young (c/o Folklore Center) for the asking. This is highly recommended.

Among other items available from the Folklore Center, are both of the People's Songbooks (THE PEOPLE'S SONGBOOK & LIFT EVERY VOICE), The NEW SONG FEST by Dick and Beth Best, current and back issues of SING OUT, and a great many other folkmusic publications, hardcover & paperback books, etc. Write for the catalogue and prices.

CARAVAN is pleased to be of service whenever possible, in helping you obtain information about the folkmusic field, texts to songs, names of records containing particular songs, etc. So if you have any questions, write, and we'll try to obtain the answers for you. If you see any questions asked in Carvan, and you have the answers, song texts requested, etc., we'd be obliged for your assistance in providing this information to the people who've asked for it.

FOLKSONG FESTIVAL, The Folkmusic Magazine of the Air, heard on Sunday evenings at 6 PM over WNYC AM & FM, and presided over by Oscar Brand, will celebrate the beginning of its 13th year soon. This is an excellent program, featuring and guests. Many of the local folksingers, and people in town, have appeared in the latter role. There's no telling who will show up behind the mike at Oscar's. Give a listen.

Still the New York Scene - 3
With incidental remarks by the editor

The collected songs of the Bosses' Artists, in chapbook form, mentioned last month as rumored to be due off the presses soon, is still rumored to be due off the presses soon. There is said to be no truth behind the rumor members of Bosses' Artists are forming a union.

SPEAKING OF SONGBOOKS: I'd like to recommend a pocket-sized volume titled SONGS OF ALL TIME, published by Cooperative Recreation Service, Inc., Delaware, Ohio. This 80 page booklet contains almost 90 songs, words and music, and is one of the handiest collections I've seen. It cost a mere quarter (25¢) and can be had from Folklore Center.

MOUNTAIN DULCIMER FANS: A reader has asked us where he can get a 3-string mountain dulcimer. If you know where one (new or used) can be had and/or approximate price, we'd be obliged for the information.

EDITORIAL-TYPE INFORMATION: Remember, if you've got any news or notices pertinent to the folkmusic field, we'll be glad to publish them for you. And if you've got the urge to write an article or letter, do so. We can't pay cash, alas, but there's the fame and glory! And don't forget that all letters are considered for publication, unless specifically marked otherwise. (A simple DNQ, for Do Not Quote, will suffice.) If you know anyone who'd like to receive Caravan, send us the name and address and we'll send along a sample copy. As to back issues: Caravan # 3 (October 1957) is still available, but previous issues are about gone.

If you want to receive the next issue of Caravan by mail, send money!

If you live in (or have immediate access to) the New York area, take note of the fact that Caravan is available at Folklore Center, as soon as it is published.

--LS

THE TORONTO, CANADA SCENE: A handbill from the House of Hambourg Cellar, Bloor St West & Avenue Road, announces that it presents, every Thursday from 9 PM to Midnight, Roy Guest (guitar) and Dick Smith (bongos & bass) "singing your favourite calypsos, ballads, blues, skiffles & flamenco. Club membership \$2.50, no minimum or cover charge".

MEANWHILE, BACK IN NEW YORK, on TV, Greenwich Village Party (channel 5 10 PM Fridays) occasionally features local folksingers, and other familiar Village faces. It is mc'd by Art Ford.

BEST WISHES for the coming holidays, to all. And my regards to Willie McIntosh.

--Domino--

The Rover Boys Sing At Actor's Playhouse (2)

Tom's singing style is easy-going and simple, his banjo picking is complex and brilliant. Even this night, under rugged circumstances, he was excellent.

Paul introduced us to his dulcimer, with "Lord Bateman". You can hear him do this song with the dulcimer accompaniment, on Folkways' "Cumberland Mountain Folk Songs" (10" FA 2007). This instrument is probably best known outside of its natural habitat through the playing of Jean Ritchie. Unlike Jean, who uses a quill in the right hand and a bar in the left, Paul strums with a thumb pick and fingers the frets.

As Paul sang, Tom sat hugging his guitar in his arms, resting his head against it, and rocking very slightly to the rhythm of Paul's playing.

The program continued, with Tom and Paul taking turns and singing duets. Paul uses some quite distinctive strums on the guitar and during one duet Tom, beating the banjo like crazy, was gazing intently at Paul's right hand.

There was one major distraction throughout the whole concert (aside from the spotlight focused on the front row) and that was a photographer who kept bobbing out from the wings. Admittedly, he spared us the misery of flashbulbs, but the presence of a person moving about the general area of the performers is a nuisance, and this fellow even took time during the concert to argue for a moment with another photographer in the front row. And, as usual in Actor's Playhouse, there were the frequent rumblings of passing subway trains, and the attendant slight dimming of the theater lights.

During the intermission most of the audience held to their seats. A young couple, well-known in local folkmusic circles, walked onto the stage area (which is level with the first row of seats) and strolled about it, arm-in-arm, carefully keeping in step with each other.

Israel Young dashed across the stage bearing a couple of orange-juice type containers backstage. When he came out again, the house lights were turned off. For a moment Israel stood onstage, lit only by the spill from the "lobby" when he called out, "Let's have a little drink!" The audience roared, and the stage lights came on.

The show continued with Tom and Paul singing lively "Cumberland Mountain Folk Songs" during the intermission. The program was quite a bit more than Paul seemed to expect for the evening.

Merrily We Sing Along (3)

Tom sang "Barbara Allen" in a handsome Americanized version, and held the audience through it, which is a feat few folksingers would dare attempt at a concert nowadays. He followed it with a 5-night version of "Our Goodman". (No, he did not sing the traditionally unsung fifth verse. He ended on the "cabbage head with a mustache on" verse.) It was a rollicking song, and he was singing with enthusiasm and animation now, and the audience loved it.

They sang quite a bit more, then matched their guitar tunings and barreled headlong into "Worried Man Blues" together. Tom gestured with his guitar, calling the audience in on the choruses.

Unlike the typical Hoot audience, which merely shouts, this audience sang. A goodly part of the assembled group consisted of folksingers of varying degree, who knew what to do with a chorus. They followed Paul and Tom, singing softly and well, and it made an excellent ride-out.

But the audience wasn't ready to be ridden-out. They demanded an encore. They were quite insistent, so Tom and Paul came back onstage, and Paul sang "Pay Day At Coal Creek" which is a wonderful song for his voice and style.

Tom gave us "Jackero" (you can hear this on Elektra's "Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians"), and then they left the stage.

The audience begged for more, but there was no more. Between them they'd already sung almost forty songs. Certainly Tom didn't seem in shape for an evening of encores. So we forgave them their refusal. And as the house lights came up, we began filing out of the theater.

Although neither singer had been at his best, it was still quite an enjoyable concert.

28. October 57

Lee Haring, folk singer
small professional singer
all kinds of folk
men, women
ideas
to arrange
prestige

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CARAVAN

NOVEMBER 1957

The Folkmusic Magazine

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CARAVAN, The Folkmusic Fanzine, is a non-profit amateur publication. It is published as close to monthly as conditions will allow. The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the editor-publisher and do not necessarily reflect the policies of this publication except insofar as we believe in the freedom of opinion.

BAD
NEW

Typos this issue are due to previous commitments on the part of the proofreader.

The increased cost of printing Caravan, it is becoming necessary for us to make a price increase for this zine. So starting with #5 (the next issue) Caravan will cost 10¢ a copy. Contributions of \$1 or less will be accepted by the publisher. Sad alas's!

CARAVAN can be obtained from
And from FOLK

Lee Shaw
Apt 5P
780 Greenwich Street
New York 14, N.Y.

If you have any news, announcements, or notices pertinent to the folkmusic scene, we will be glad to publish them at no charge. This includes small advertisements.

NEW YORK SCENE

THE Tom Paley - Paul Clayton CONCERT

It was cold the night of Saturday, but even so there were quite a crowd queued up in front of the Actor's Playhouse on 26th, but let in for the midnight folkmusic concert. Paul Clayton and Tom Paley were singing under the auspices of the Folklore Center, and we had come early to be sure of getting in.

Actor's Playhouse is a hole-under-basement on 7th Avenue South. Its mission is to bring in 150 people, and it filled up rapidly. Several of the people were carrying banjos or guitars, and a good many of the crowd would have been familiar to frequenters of the Folklore Center or Spring Street.

At 12:28 the stage lights came on, one of them set in such a manner that it blazed into the eyes of the first row, and Israel Young of Folklore Center, came onstage and introduced the singers.

Paul Clayton entered, carrying a guitar and a 3-stringed mountain dulcimer. Paul, one of the most-recorded folksingers around, is a slender young man with a trim mustache, and a great deal of stage presence.

Tom Paley, unfortunately, is rarely heard on record. He's well known in the NY area (and a few other fortunate sections of the country) as one of the best banjo players around. He is a stocky young man with a casual manner. He was at a party rather than a concert. He brought both guitar and dulcimer onstage with him, and took the banjo in hand for the opening number, "Swallowtail, Ladies" which he and Paul sang together.

Tom was obviously sick. It must have been a bad cold. It was more apparent in his playing than in his singing. He was pale, and looked completely exhausted. He lacked the vitality usually associated with his performance.

Paul took the second number, "Looking for the Bully of the Town", which is exactly in his style. Paul has a full, rich voice and some excellent phrasing. He is an excellent singer of ballads and has a great deal of talent as well. He takes the songs in the Negro idiom, and sings them as quite beautiful. He makes no false pretense of being a Negro, but sings the songs entirely in the Negro idiom. He has enough of the fact that there is something about sending a lovely piece of music to the world, and he sings it as if it were the "only" version.

Tom followed with a few waltzes and tunings, and then sang "If I Had a Heart Like a Miner's"

Actor's Playhouse (2)

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by the spill through the stage door. Then he called out, "Let's
have a little more light." The audience roared, and the stage lights
came on.

The second half of the concert was led with Tom and Paul singing a
lively "Candy". During the intermission had
quite a bit more gusto than
And Paul seemed more relaxed
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"ey" which Paul followed with a
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28 October 57

Lee Haring, folk singer and arranger, is looking for a small professional singing group to perform at a concert. He is hearing all kinds of folk songs and is interested in hearing a group. Men, women, or mixed groups are all welcome. They already have ideas for songs and arrangements. He is looking for specific arrangements and is mainly interested right now in hearing groups. Contact Lee Haring at the following phone number.

phone

RECORDS BY

PAUL CLAYTON

...: Classic British and American Murder Ballads
...: Native American Songs of Outlaws and
.../Desperados
... shortly: an album of lumberjack songs, as yet untitled.)

... Whaling & Sailing Songs from the Days of Moby Dick
TLF ... American Folk Tales and Songs (A companion to the Signet
(with Jean Ritchie and Richard Chase) /Key Book)

Folkways (12")

FA 2310 The Folkways-Viking Record of Folk Ballads of the English
(A companion to the Viking Book /Speaking World
by Albert B. Friedman)

FW 8708 British Broadside Ballads in Popular Tradition

Folkways (10")

FA 2007 Cumberland Mountain Songs
FA 2106 Bay State Ballads (FP 47/2)
FA 2110 Folk Songs and Ballads of Virginia (FP 47/3)

Stinson (10")

SLP 70 Waters of Tyne: North Country English Songs

SLP 69 Whaling Songs and ... (This has been re-released on 12")

RECORDS BY

PALEY

... Paley are available.

... Ritchie, Oscar Brand and
... Harry & Jeanie West
... Appalachian Mountains
... of a 12" LP: EKL-122)

... from FOLKLORE CENTER
110 MacDougal St.
New York 12, N Y

A song of the Tyne Keelmen

The Sandgate Lass's Lament

I was a young maiden truly,
And lived in Sandgate Street;
I thought to marry a good man,
To keep me warm and neat;

Some good-like body, some bonny body,
To be with me at noon;
But last I married a keelman
And my good days are done.

I thought to marry a parson,
To hear me say my prayers--
But I have married a keelman,
And he kicks me down the stairs.

I thought to marry a dyer,
To dye my apron blue;
But I have married a keelman,
And he makes me sairly rye.

I thought to marry a joiner,
To make me chair and stool;
But I have married a keelman,
And he's a perfect fool.

I thought to marry a sailor,
To bring me sugar and tea;
But I have married a keelman,
And that he lets me see.

from MUSIC OF THE
MUSIC OF THE WATERS
Laura Smith
published in
London 1888



John Brunner
London Correspondent

frustratingly versatile guy I know.

Now him about a year ago, when he was leading a skiffle
at the now defunct Nancy Whisky Club, here in London. Guitar, he
sometimes he would haul out a banjo or a mandolin. Then
he showed up playing country-style fiddle...then he dragged a
piano out of his pocket...then he sat down at the piano...another
guy yelled at him to take over the bass.

I finally got around to asking him just how many instruments he
does. "Oh, all the fretted instruments," he answered casually -
guitar, banjo, mandolin, balalaika, et cetera - "most of the woodwind" -
clarinet, flute, sax, Rumanian peasant's flute (authentically, he de-
clares) - "the strings" - violin, viola (this, when he was at school, he
played in the Tottenham Central Orchestra in London), bass, both tub and
orthodox - "and a few other odds and ends" - harmonica, washboard,
Swanee whistle...

"Bagpipes?" I inquired sarcastically, and for the first time he
told me no.

What's more - he sings too.

This character's name is Henry (but more usually Hyam) Morris. He's
tallish, thinnish, with a long head, bald at the crown, and a long face
of a most unusual cast. He's not a guy you can overlook in a crowd. By
profession, he is a chiropodist, but he is also one of the brighter
stars in the folk music firmament in Britain.

For this, he tells me, he has to thank his first girl friend. At
the tender age of 15½ he was taken by her to a folk dance meeting. He
was so impressed by the innate simplicity and the spirit of communal en-
joyment which pervaded the gathering, his interest was sparked, and he
has remained firmly involved with folk dancing in Britain ever since.
Now, in fact, he is musical director of the Society for International
Folk Dancing, the largest of its kind in Britain.

Round the time he was engaged in learning guitar, which
brought him into contact with a folksong fraternity. Meeting people
and their songs kept him busy for quite a while,
but he better have his own songs of his own, which he now

don't see that learning guitar can have taken
... His mother was a piano teacher, and his
... followed the pattern of sitting up at the key-
... plucking out tunes. Me, who struggle away for

Brunner (2)

years and end up playing one instrument badly (unofficial spokesman for the Three-Chord Frigid Players, I second this...ed))

Early last year, he met John Hasted, another founder of the old 44 Club, which laid down by many others. This association didn't last. Hyam defines as "individualism and natural leaning (telling us) he tried himself out as a solo performer very nicely thank you as a cabaret artist.

In between, while leading his own short-lived skiffle found time to write arrangements of rock'n'roll numbers (rather rude) answer to Elvis Presley, young Tommy Steele is not one of his main interests; he likes playing it, singing, stuck up in front of a captive audience. He has strong opinions on skiffle, as on many other subjects - for him, it goes right as the skiffle craze persuades people that making music for them is fun (and I go along with this; it goes wrong, as soon as it turns into just another kind of canned entertainment. You meet people by the hundred who've heard of Lonnie Donegan's Rock Island Line, or Nancy Whiskey and Chas McDavitt's Freight Train, but you have to go a long, long way to find someone who's ever heard of Leadbelly's version of the former, and the version of the latter which Peggy Seeger brought to Britain. (Though I'm pleased to say Peggy's authentic version is doing quite nicely on Topic, a minor label devoted mainly to folk music, and giving it a much-deserved shot in the arm). Most of the ordinary amateur skiffle groups wouldn't think of doing the less well-known versions; for them, Donegan, or the Vipers, or Dick Bishop, or Johnny Duncan, is God, and the way he does it, they do it. Only not quite so well.

I shall be reverting briefly to Freight Train later.

I tackled Hyam, while I was preparing this column, on a subject which is of special interest to me: whether the revival of interest in folk music in Britain is doing anything to give us back a live folk tradition, or whether it's simply produced more people to nurture the tender, hot-house growth planted by such men as William Chappell and Cecil Sharp.

He came back with an attack on English audiences in general, saying they will bear only with performers who do something either spectacular or showing great versatility - this he notes mainly in the folk dancing field. (This, I suspect, is due to the fact that live folk tradition in Britain except in isolated areas has become very particularly negro, folk music has become very much more so for him, because its rhythmic nature is essential to modern life - and here, provided the taint of it is avoided, he does see hope for something more to the revival of interest in folk music than simply a preservation.

I could go on for a considerable time, arguing the case for its absence, so to speak, but one thing which he has

Caravan.

belief outlined two paragraphs ago, he is of an international folk music centre in

As he points out, is probably the one city in the thing is possible - because there are so many nation- (such as the India Arts Society, the Asian Music students' unions, and minorities of every kind from (riot). Broadly, what he hopes to do is enlist the support, financial, of these bodies or their representatives, the already existing societies for folk music and folk found a centre where people from all over the world will courses, lectures and concerts will be given, and which a nucleus for everyone either from Britain or abroad who ed in folk music and dancing of any kind.

At the time of writing, the project is in the planning stage: by the time you read this, the organisation's aims should be settled and a fair idea of the support for it obtained. A.L. Lloyd has expressed the strongest interest in it; two meetings of interested persons have already been held.

If anyone who has not previously heard of the project and wishes details will write to me either c/o Caravan or at my home address (144 Fellows Road, London NW 3), I'll see the letter gets to the right quarter.

Celebrated my birthday with a party recently. Hyam was there and starred - he is a wonderful guy to have at a party, being a natural-born entertainer and singing, as he does, songs from all over the world - many of them picked up on hitch-hiking tours of Europe, when he pays his way with his guitar.

Also on the bill was a girl called Jennie Leathers, who sings mainly Irish songs, especially well without accompaniment. She is a friend of Margaret Barrie, who figured in my last column. In fact, it turned out to be a very Irish evening, for we discovered unexpected talent in the shape of the girl friend of one of our guests, who was overhead playing Irish cuntry dances on Hyam's fiddle in another room of the apartment and was persuaded to perform for us.

In a letter from Peter Seeger anent the question of the suit over which I mentioned in my last column but one, we were instrumental in bringing Elizabeth With all the money being made on folksongs 's a shame that so rarely any of it gets to the trend in Britain of treating traditional property is rife, and to be depreciated. As be, the traditional jazzmen never took liber- taken by the skiffles here; they at least had credit line on a record label to "Traditonal"

Brunner (4)

or at most "Traditional, arranged Heinz Q. S. ...
most of the people in Britain who like skiff
groups and the dance bands accept that Jimmy ...
composed the songs he has recorded with his Was...

And yet - you know, I wonder what would have
someone had come along and sued, say, Ivorak, for ma
tional material which turned out not to be, after all...

Further to the last column: the negro songs I
get from Mrs Rory Faulkner have gone back to California w
wasn't well enough to record them for me, suffering as sh
one genuine English cold and a cracked rib.

Two days before the writing of this column, I found a banjo
in a second-hand shop not far from where I work. I have never seen
anything like it - though I knew, vaguely, such things existed. It's
a lovely instrument, and considering its age (I would guess it can't
be younger than around sixty-five years) in fine condition. To start
with, though, it is a seven-string banjo (of which I had never heard
before) - six carved ivory push-fit heads, like flamenco heads on a
guitar, and another peg in the same position as the fifty string on an
ordinary banjo. It has, moreover, a smooth fingerboard - something
I'd heard of, but not seen. The position dots are inlaid mother-of-
pearl, and the metal parts, including the entire body, are silver-
plated.

Since I bought the darned thing, I'd be obliged if some
reader of Caravan can answer a few questions about it.

Mainly, how would you string the thing? I could, of course,
string it guitar-style and ignore the seventh or fit it with an octave
E. But I suspect that it's intended for bastable tuning - probably
to the open chord of C major, to judge from the layout of the position
dots.

Secondly, how old is it likely to be? In other words, when
did they quit making smooth fingerboards?

And thirdly - has anyone else ever seen, heard of, or owned
a comparable instrument? Say, in some one-horse inn at the back of
beyond where a smooth-talking travelling salesman ... about
1880 and left behind - for once - a musical ins
new dirty story?

Directly following the writing of this
off to Nice for a couple of weeks. I hope to be
next one WITH MY EAR TO THE BEACH.

Hark at the wild waves calling...

THE DEAD



"KAFKA"

Who has tried to categorize folksongs knows that there are
of division. There is division according to area of origin,
and/or function, for example. There is another parameter of
in which a performer or programmer of folk music must con-
sider his group songs vs. non-group songs.

Unfortunately there is a tendency today to emphasize group singing
over non-group songs. It is a sad fact to face but New York
folk singers just won't sit still and listen. They are ever heard to
cry "something we know!"

Obviously many folk forms just do not lend themselves to group
singing. Blues, ballads, hoedowns, a large proportion of lullabies,
spirituals, etc., can't be song-led and they are, therefore, not being
sung at all.

"But what's wrong with group singing?" somebody asks. Nothing. I
like it very much. But not when it becomes a mechanism by which some
of the best and finest folk music is excluded. Secondly, too much
group singing fosters a uniformity of material. A group song must be
easily taught or already in the group repertoire. There is a limit to
the number of easily taught song forms, and there are few song leaders
good enough to teach even the easily-taught songs. Result? The
repertoire of the group stagnates, grows stale. The group becomes
bored and folkmusic decays another notch. Any steady Washington Square
addict will tell you that.

I've asked myself how this came about and come up with an answer
which makes me very unhappy -- Pete Seeger. It is ironical that the
man who did so much toward developing folkmusic in this area should be
the one to foster its deterioration. I think that Pete is a great
artist, and I remember his earlier concerts when he mixed good group
singing with fine solo work. But for some years now he has been push-
ing this "lets-everybody-sing" bit, and has made it a sin to just sit
and listen. -- At the last Seeger concert I attended there was one --
count them -- one non-group song.

Seeger has a strong influence on today's folk music scene,
and to all.

of folk music in NY? I don't know. The solo
is kept alive at small, private gatherings of folk
who enjoy the folk music for itself and not as
uses. But as for folkmusic outside...that's up

--"Kafka"

23 October '57

A Reader Writes from NYC:

19

Dear Lee:

A pox on all of this quibbling (I am referring to the controversy versus ethnic controversy). Though in these days of upper respiratorial ailments I am hesitant to put words in your mouth, I feel that what Rafferty was getting at in making his point was that there can be no substitution of bad art for good art; that there can be, and is, so much art in the field of folk music that more people should be given the chance of hearing it. Naturally the brunt of the attack then must go to the record companies who have filled the field with ersatz.

Art in singing involves a certain adjustment between the singer and the variables that come into influence in the art; i.e., the song. If the singer is bad the result is bad art; if the song is bad, more often than not, the result is bad art. But here I am interested in the quality of the singer and not the song.

In folk music, there are a number of traditions of presentation and audience-communication. In the ballad, the material is narrative and objective. The singer serves merely to present. The art involved (beyond learning how to use his voice) is one of recognizing the nature of the song and inserting himself into the song so that it sings through him. If he subjects his own personality of the ballad, then he is adding something superfluous and often annoying.

This is not true of either the blues or the lyric (the folksong). These are subjective in nature and allow a freer use of the singer's emotions, but in using them he should realize that it is the emotion of the song and not the singer. (Ideally, of course, the two coincide).

The singer, if he violates the original purpose of the song, (and I do not mean the original style, for that is something for the performer to work out) is creating either a bastard art form, or its usual follower, bad art. In other words, if a ballad singer subjects the song with his own personality or the blues singer does not allow us the required inward glimpse, then the audience has a feeling of division between the singer and the song and too often the strain is too much.

Folk music, then, is just like any other art-form. It is something that must be approached through tradition and only can good art be created when the tradition is thoroughly assimilated. Innovation can be allowed. Dave Van Ronk is a good case in point. At this point is still showing traces of strain. His style, which originally must be a bastard one, (he being the first to attempt the Negro street-singing style.) Nevertheless, with diligence on his part in observing the nature of the tradition, he has nearly obtained the necessary artistic creation. His own innovation has yet to be heard, but we are able (to complete this disgusting) to hear the first shock of his silken locks.

...hat which we see in Pete Seeger, The Weavers, Odetta
(...es), and sometimes in Van Ronk, that we so sorely
...oper and the raft-full of others. INTEGRITY. The
...bad art. The cause -- an unfortunate emphasis on
...American public for the singer, the great personality,
...The need -- more folksingers whose words are under-
...manner is winning and whose attitude toward folkmusic
...ference that any artist must have toward his material.

Sincerely,

"Child 183"

Dick Weissman
NYC 25, NY

Dear ...tor;

This letter is meant to be a follow-up to the letter of Childe 183, with which I am in substantial agreement. I would restate one of his points in the form of a query not as to how commercial a singer is, but whether he is musically interesting. Of course I am not here considering entertainment value as a criterion of musical worth. Let's consider then, just what these criteria are. For one thing it is necessary to know the origin of a song, that is where it comes from, who sang it, if possible where and how it spread, and, most importantly, what it means. Take a song like Down The Old Plank Road; how many times have you heard this song absolutely butchered by someone who regards it as just another hillbilly song. And while we are referring to the musical meaning of a song, let's not forget that songs mean something musically as well as intellectually. It isn't always necessary to play resonated banjos with multiple fingerpicks, and it also is not always necessary to drown everyone else out. On the other hand one does play for people, presumably, so it may be helpful to talk about a song and to interest people in it, rather than assuming that they have to listen to you. It is also possible to sing a song without going through a ritual of acting it out, or of looking far away vaguely into space so as to avoid a view of the audience. Most of all, one must work on building a repertoire, learning new instrumental styles, and trying to understand the songs. This requires such time-consuming devices as reading books on folklore, studying (!) harmony, and instrumental techniques, and perhaps even studying voice.

My ...h I am afraid I have already implied, is that
...ur or even professional, do not meet these
...each them. Session after session at 190 Spring
...quare, and in various other places have sharpened
...point where I can usually predict what songs
...r, what chords and strums will be utilized and
...will be made. If you think I am saying that there
...ence in New York for creative folksinging, you are

Dick Weissman (2)

correct. I am also saying that most folksingers see no contact with the feeling of spontaneity that makes folk music dynamic.

But enough criticism. What I do like: listen to Frank Hamilton, and see their ability to transmit their understanding of a song, and let's face it, transform artistic expression. Also listen to their compositions. Daryl Adams, and you will see that folk music is not dead, dormant because most of us refuse to listen to something new, or to attach serious consideration to folk as creative art. And finally let us try to encourage Mr Peter of our most creative musicians, to write and perform more of the Mexican Blues and the theme to the Goofing Off Suite, remember that group singing is great, but it is not where it ends, and try to think of it as folk music.

Dick Weissman

Irwin Lutzky
Brooklyn, NY

Dear Lee,

Please thank Dave Van Ronk for the words to "Don't Roll Those Bloodshot Eyes at Me". I know that this is not a folk song, but it appeals to me. There are some songs that are so corny and ridiculous that they are funny and have an appealing quality as a result. Also thank Mary Corby for the words to "The Three Ravens". There are, indeed, many versions to this song. I have heard one version where the fallow doe is a young girl. Ever since I first heard "The Three Ravens" I have had a feeling that this song is allegorical in nature. That is, there is a hidden meaning to the words which actually refer to something else. I have asked several people about this but no one seems to know. I hope one of your readers can help me solve this puzzle.

I would also like to pour a little more kerosene on the already blazing inferno started by Blind Rafferty. Both sides of the "AUTHENTIC FOLK MUSIC" question have used the term "folk singer" rather freely. I would like to ask, "What is a folk singer?" Is there a difference between folksinger and a "singer of folk songs"? Does a singer have to sing only the songs of his specific environment the way they have been sung for generations in order to be called a folk singer? Is a singer of folk songs someone who likes to sing folk songs even though these songs may not be part of his actual surroundings? I am interested to know what others think about these ideas.

Si

Lionel Coots
Richmond Hill
Queens, N.Y.

From your third issue, Robert Coulson is the only one of
not too ashamed of his own opinions to admit that they are
not surprising as he is one of the few of your writers
with an intelligent, unprejudiced attitude toward the music we
enjoy. And in folkmusic, it certainly is the musical content
of value to the listener, and not the mildew-covered archaeo-
logical aspect of a song as sung by some gravel-voiced field hand. If
the aspect of folkmusic were the more important, then it would
be to do away with "folksingers" altogether, and have our
recording of folkmusic sung and played by people picked at random from
the streets. To carry this line of reasoning another step, why have
skilled craftsmen and artisans in any field? Why not have all out "art
produced" by the untrained, natural folk? The answer to this is simple.
The untrained, unskilled "folk" just aren't good enough. For this
reason we want trained artists, trained craftsmen, and trained singers,
all using their material to the best possible advantage.

I can't say that I blame Rafferty, Kafka, et al, from hiding
themselves behind the bushels of pennames. If my opinions were no
more reasonable than theirs, I'd use a penname too.

I am curious about this "writer", "Kafka". If this is, as the
title of his column implies, the same Kafka who died some thirty odd
years ago, I suppose one cannot expect his ideas to be anything but
moldy and unimaginative. But if, as I suspect, this is Rafferty in
another disguise, I am shocked that he is allowed to take up so much
space in your publication -- unless, of course, you yourself are
Rafferty/Kafka. (Kafka gave himself away by knowing so much about
Rafferty's tastes, i.e.: "Mr Rafferty has a great appreciation for...
Buddy Stearns..." when Mr Stearns is not so much as mentioned in any
of Rafferty's previous writings.)

I suspect that Rafferty/Kafka is none other than the person sign-
ing himself Tom Conduct ((Condit--ed)) in your letter column, and I
also suspect that he is one of the group of hog-callers who parade their
fishmongering voices on Sunday afternoons in Washington Square. Conduct's
expressed taste in folkmusic is certainly as bad as Rafferty's, and he
is familiar enough with obscure and unknown folksingers. (I assume
this Roy Berkeley is a folksinger. And Conduct himself calls attention
to the obscure in this Pick Temple.)

Rafferty/Kafka/Conduct's nefarious personality is
headed by the Rafferty name. I thought that the
Committee had put an end to the use of the folkmusic
propagation of Communist propaganda, but I see that it
you, the editor, will have the taste and decency
to stop the RED ravings in the future, and confine your
field for which it claims to be intended -- folkmusic.

Yours sincerely,
Lionel Coots

Dear Lee,

You might have heard about the Gilded Cage. If not, the "Cage" is a coffee house, the first to open in Philadelphia corner of 21st St and Rittenhouse St in Philly. It's been open about three years. In addition to its other activities of nothing, it has folksinging every Sunday afternoon. People interested in playing, singing, listening, or any combination of the three, come down and jam from 3 PM 'till about 7 PM. Various town's professional folk artists are usually there, plus people who occasionally drop in from New York.

You can do me a favor by spreading the word that people in the University of Chicago area can get guitar and banjo lessons from me. Also I have two banjos for sale. One has not so good tone which can be improved by replacing the head and also has Scruggs pegs. The other one just has good tone. I think so anyway.

If anyone has the words to "Dupree Blues" and/or a song which I believe starts: "A-walking and a-talking, A-walking goes I, For to meet my dear lady, I'll meet her by and by..." I'd appreciate the change to learn them.

One more thing: for anyone who is interested, there is in Philadelphia, a folk chorus of the same type as the Jewish Young Folksingers. They are probably meeting at the YMHA at Broad and Pine Sts in Philly. If anyone wants to know how to contact the chorus, I'll be glad to tell them whom to call.

Keep pushin',

Eliot Kenin
741 Linn
Burton Judson Court
1005 E 60th St.
Chicago 37, Ill.

Dear Lee -

Anne Silverstein
Chicago, Ill.

Rafferty refers to a John Greenway Riverside LP - "American Industrial Ballads". I think he's got 2 records confused. Greenway's Riverside RLP 12-607 is called "American Industrial Folksongs". "American Industrial Ballads," sung by Pete Seeger, catalog # FH5251.

((The mistake is not Rafferty's, but the typographer's in the manuscript. Thanks for the correction.

London, England

...been reading his (John Brunner's) articles with great
...his articles strike me as being very accurate accounts
...ing on over here in the folksong world -- as far as they
...s not far enough.

...reading John's reports, one might easily get the impression
...e is the only (or at best, is the most important) manifest-
...e folksinger's art at present functioning in England. I
...however, despite its present wave of popularity with the
...t-conscious majority of our population, that skiffle is, at
...r and unimportant branch of folksong. At worst, which is
...regard it, skiffle could be summed up by John's comment
...on ...nnegan -- it has all the faults of Hillbilly singing, with
...n no virtues. Except in the hands of a really good group, it
...be folksy, pretentious and dull - dull because of the monotony of
...its ...and characteristic refrains. Any strict-tempo record with a
...meaningless chorus, played on an odd assortment of improvised instruments
...is sold over here as skiffle, even if it's of a song written the day
...after tomorrow by the biggest hack in Wardour Street!

Fortunately, contrary to the impression which John might (repeat,
only 'might') have given, there are many other flourishing forms of
folksinging over here. Folksongs, in fact, are sung in all kinds of
places, and by all kinds of people. 'Highborw' folksingers give recitals
at the Wigmore Hall (one of our most popular classical-music recital
halls) - I recently heard Victoria Kingsley there, giving one of her
'Songs with a Guitar & Drums' recitals (the best things she did were
unaccompanied - a series of Hebridean folksongs, sung in Gaelic). And,
at the Edinbrugh Festival this year, I heard the Deller Consort sing an
admirable version of Bow Down, sandwiched in between their madrigals
and lute solos.

At the other extreme, one of our most popular TV stars is Shirley
Abicair, who sings folksongs to the accompaniment of (of all things) a
zither.

Straight folksinging is also popular in all strata of society here
- every student frequented coffee bar in London (and, probably, other
cities too - I found one in Edinburgh) has its guitarist. The 'smart
set' (debs and things) have taken to having a folksinger as cabaret at
their balls and parties - Peter Gronau, Hyam Morris, Rory McEwen and
many others to be heard in the stately homes! And I sing
myself in a very fashionable French restaurant in

...here is on the up-and-up (and I don't only
...of the most encouraging things is, that a fair
...erested in it over here do it as well. London
...amateur and semi-professional folksingers.

Yours Sincerely,
Michael Myer
11 Harrington Gardens
London SW 7, England

New York Scene

BOB BRILL writes: "Your English correspondent John Br... be interested to know that as a result of his last article someone on this side of the Atlantic (namely me) has taken the paraffin funnel...A proof that Caravan is serving well of cultural exchange." Late carrier pigeon brings us further development in this direction. Bob has added to design, a kazoo played with a trumpet mouthpiece and mutes funnel. I have heard this instrument played, and to judge carrying power, so has everyone else in the general area. impressive. With a blues guitar accompaniment, it is an experience long to be remembered. Bob also mentioned that they have decided on a name for this device. Under consideration are "kazoo" and "kazumpet". Caravan readers who have strong feelings on subject might care to express them. Comments and name-suggestions are welcomed. Please do not suggest "Brillophone".

As of this writing, SANDY PATON, well-known West Coast folksinger, is in NYC, passing through on his way to England for a year of study. He has been denying the rumor that he would open soon as Wandering Troubador in the Elizabethan Room of the Gore Hotel.

PAUL CLAYTON has taken up residence in New York for an indefinite period. He and ISRAEL YOUNG of FOLKLORE CENTER are considering the compilation and publication of a collection of approximately a thousand folksongs with words and music, not as a scholarly work, but as a handy reference book for the folksinger. They'd like to know what you think of the idea, and if you have any specific suggestions and/or requests. Write to them at FOLKLORE CENTER, 110 MacDougal St, NY 12 NY

LIFT EVERY VOICE! the 2nd People's Songbook is back in print and available from Folklore Center at the above address.

On the NY stage: LOGAN ENGLISH is appearing in THE GIRL OF THE GOLDE WEST, a play by David Belasco, starring Chester Morris and Peter Cook opening at the New Phyllis Anderson Theatre on Tuesday, Nov 5.

The Washington Square folksinging season is over until Spring. With the coming of cold weather, this means dozens of folksingers searching for backrooms (preferably with heat) where to sing. Be warned!

The PHILADELPHIA SCENE: The Gilded Cage, 261... has folksinging on Sunday afternoons. For more Philadelphia scene in general, see the letter in... issue.