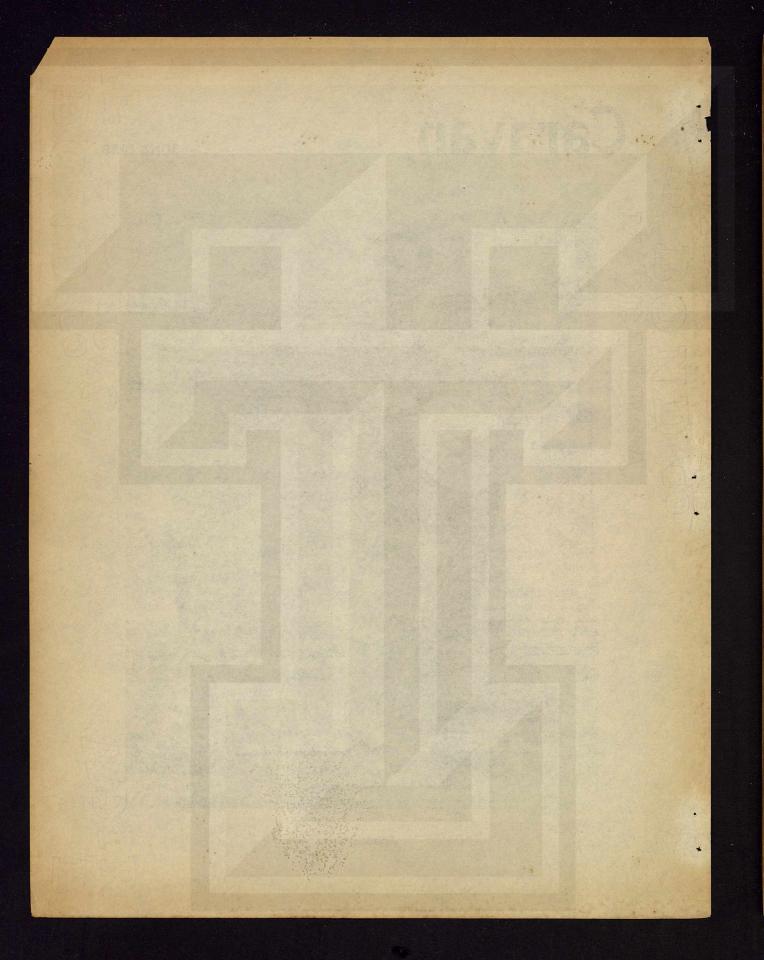
Caravan

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JUNE 1958



John Cohen



CARAVAN FOLKMUSIC MAGAZINE

JUNE 1958

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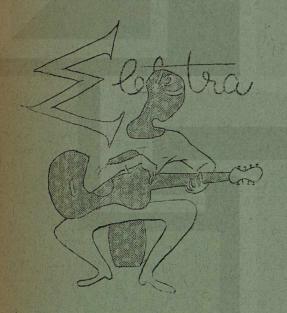
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JOHN COHEN

Whenever I want to lose money on a folk music concert I call upon John Cohen. I know I will not get a slick professional concert; but I also know I will get a sense of tradition, a feeling of continuation and permanence I rarely get in concerts. It is as if the Folk Music recordings of the Library of Congress were restored to their importance, if only for a night; as if picking 500 notes a minute isn't the only way to play a banjo; as if Alan Lomax's collections "Listen To Our Story" and "Mountain Frolic" were translated into present day life without self-consciousness.

A traditionalist at heart, John Cohen does not overlook other ways of looking at folkmusic. Witness his marvelous compliment to Billy Faier's "Art of the Five String Banjo" as "looking at the world through banjo-colored glasses" in the last issue of Caravan. Witness him in one of the Folklore Center Concerts, He was a natural bridge between the waif-like but sophisticated qualities of Gina Glaser on stage, and the straightforward, almost unemotional approach of Harry and Jeanie West. Some people still ask me when I will put on such a concert again.

What's great about folkmusic, to John, is that each person can sing what he likes in folkmusic without having to explain his ego or be professional. You can listen to what others like and learn from them. This attitude made John the best leader the famous "Yale Hoots" had. Tom Paley was the fabulous instrumentalist then and John the great coordinator. I do not mean to understate John's abilities as a singer or instrumentalist. He doesn't try to compete with all the banjo pickers in the Washington Square Sunday Song Fests, but sometimes he will borrow a banjo or guitar and play off to a side. People turn and listen — tradition has something to offer. A minute later you might find him learning a new banjo piece from Roger Sprung and then backing him up on the guitar. Yet, despite his leanings John is a professional folksing er. He doesn't sing only at parties. You can find him singing on all kinds of stages in front of all kinds of audiences, alongside polished and unpolished performers. He is at home everywhere. His ideas are not abstract, after all. He is still being influenced by singers around him; he is still ever ready to share his material with others.

——Israel G Young

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Joel Katz

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OH RAPTURE! MY FIRST RECORD! MY FIRST REVIEW!

When I first started reading John Cohen's "Billy Faier & 'Art of the Five String Banjo'" in the May issue of Caravan my first reaction was one of "John---buddy---how could you?" But after a few fleeting images of red hair waving from a noose from the Washington Square Arch, I settled down and re-read it and, you know what?, he's right in every one of his objective observations. The only thing is that there is only one objective observation in the whole article and that's where he says, "This record has no relaxed pace." But you don't have to keep "jumping along" with me. You can always remove the needle after one or two bands and put some Scruggs on. On the other hand perhaps banjo players shouldn't write about other banjo players unless they can sit and listen without wondering how he does it.

"Throughout the record the limitations on the music presented are those limits of the banjo and the cruel fact that Billy has only ten fingers which can move only so rapidly". The implication is that I've done all that can be done on the banjo which is simply not true. In fact, that whole paragraph embodies an assumption about what I would do if I could. In all the traditional dance pieces on the album (why dich't you get more specific, John?) I make a simple direct statement of the theme as I learned it, after which I usually played it again with a little of my own variation, but never leaving the melodic line. (Tell me, John, should I have left out some of the melody notes in order to have appeared more simple or "folksy"?) The only place where this assumption holds true (I am forced to apply John Cohen's criticism where I imagine he meant them to apply, since he failed to do this himself) is in the song "Hunt the Wren", or "The Wren Song" as it is titled on the record. Here I received my just deserts because I am not really happy about the way it came out on the record.

John discusses the "basic concepts" of the second in a paragraph which after six readings is still rather vague. But one implication is clear. He objects to the fact that I have chosen to play music which has already been more authentically performed. Perhaps John has heard "old time fiddlers, European folk dance orchestras and gin hall swing bands", but have You? Look folks, the "basic concept" of this album was to present the results of over ten years of pickin' and listenin', to try to make a living as a musician, and to satisfy my creative urges as well as my ego by making use of a medium through which more than a few or a hundred people at a time can hear me.

"Looking at the world of music through banjo-colored glasses". Now that's a dandy figure of speech. But what does it mean? (Actually the paragraph from which this quotation is taken doesn't seem to be especially critical, but just in case it was---) I despise, more than anyone, Beethoven sonatas on a five-stringer. With very few exceptions classical music doesn't belong on the banjo. Some exceptions: Seeger's "Goofing Off Suite", The Theme from Tchaichovsky's Cappricio Italian (originally

an Italian Folk Melody). The finale to the William Tell Overture is fun, but keep it among Banjo Players and Fellow Travellers please. Of course, it is, in the last analysis, a matter of taste what sounds good or not on the banjo. But in the main, I feel that if you want to play classical music on the banjo you should write it yourself (or play other music written for the banjo) which is exactly what I do. All in all, the above quotation seems to mean that I like to play all kinds of music on the banjo, which I do---

John starts his article dead set against me and softens up little by little until, at the end, he actually comes out and says that the album represents my approach and "is valid as such". The rest of the paragraph is, again, vague but seems to imply that it is OK for me to do what I did, or anyone else for that matter, as long as we don't touch the "traditional material". In other words, don't play folk music unless you play it as heard and no more. Don't be creative, be imitative! Sorry, John. You've got an uphill fight ahead on that track.

And in closing, back to the beginning of Cohen's article. "If you are a listener (as opposed to a banjo player) you will find it difficult just to sit back and enjoy the sounds of "folk music" here. Why did you put "folk music" in quotes, John? Did you think we (Riverside and I) were trying to pass off a banjo virtuoso album (Specialty Series) as a Folk Album, or is it really possible that you object to the use of folk material in any but a Folklore Series album!

--Billy Faier 28 April 58

The following "review" was written the night before I received the May Caravan in the mail, and I have left it unchanged since reading Cohen's article.

RECORD REVIEW

by Billy Faier

THE ART OF THE FIVE STRING BANJO--Riverside RLP 12-813, with notes by Pete Seeger. Guitar accompaniment by Frank Hamilton.

First of all, let's dispense with the recommendations. This is a damn good album, well worth your \$4.98. You know, the kind of thing you'd be proud to hand on down to your children. Anybody that thinks it presumtuous of me to write a review of my own album is very short-sighted and undoubtedly doesn't know me. (I ask you, who knows more about the album than me?) If you want to know how I play the pieces buy my book just published by Hargail Music Press--\$1.00. It has six of the pieces in it and if you buy enough books Harold Newman will publish the rest of them. I am writing this "review" to tell why I play them as I do. (I can hear some people, at this point, ask "Yes, I wonder why he played them?", but you know what I mean.)

In order to explain my treatment of each piece it will be necessar to briefly present my feelings concerning the modern "Urban Folksinger" relationship to the general body of traditional material with which he deals. As Sam Hinton says in his article, "The Folksinger and his Conscience" JAF, and reprinted in SING OUT last year: "If I try to imitate the authentic folksinger I am violating the spirit of Folk Song because I am not being creative but simply imitative; if I don't sing it as he sings it (the authentic folksinger) I am violating the Letter because the song is not from my cultural mileau" (I am paraphrasing Hinton, I don't have a copy of the article at hand). But Gosh Darn it all, I like folk music and I do not intend to stop singing and playing it even though my (and Hinton's) conscience tells me that I cannot present it as it really is. Therefore I must form a rational basis for a compromise and that is simply this: The closer I come to the original source of the material the more I will imitate the source from which I learned it. I haven't the foggiest notion of how The Wren Song (Side 2, band 5) is, or was, sung on the Isle of Man. I learned the song from Jim Leighton of San Diego, California, and I sing it as he did except for the beginning and ending which I do ad lib. The banjo strum was made up for the occasion, but I got the idea for the strum while fooling around with a thing that Pete Seeger does on one of his records. This is an arrangement in the fullest sense, that is, I consciously sat down and worked out the most effective way to play it.

Rakes of Mallow (Side 1, band 1), Garryowan, MacLeod's Reed (1-4) and the Sailor's Hornpipe (2-4) are all tunes that I have known as far back as I can remember and I make no attempt to "banjoize" them. I play them note for note as I knew them before I played banjo. At least every third note is a Hammer On or Pick Off in them and there is no "basic strum" used. H'Kotsrim (1-2) and the Greek Dance (2-6) got the same treatment except that I learned the former from Guy Carawan in his beach cottage in Santa Monica two years ago (don't try to dance to it, because I found out later that I leave the second and third melodic passage out of the middle part) and the latter was learned from Frank Miller of the Easy Riders in Los Angeles about a year and a half ago. I learned Haste to the Wedding (1-4) from a book of Irish tunes in La Jolla, California, three years ago and it, too, suffers the fate of the above.

Woody Wachtell taught me the Spanish Fandango and I play it as I learned it except that at the middle I start adding my own variations. Green Corn (1-3) is a thing I made up in my Fretless Banjo days ('51, '52). It really has nothing to do with the song but one day Frank Hamilton heard me playing it and commented that it could be used as an acompaniment to Green Corn. I never thought of it as a tune in itself so I use it to Green Corn, but I feel differently now. Yugoslav Kolo (1-5), I made this one up too, but I didn't know it was a Kolo (or in the Kolo idiom) until Frank Hamilton asked me where I had learned that great Yugoslav Kolo. Actually it was meant to be an exercise for hammering on. The Last of Callahan (1-3): here I am trying to imitate the spirit, and not necessarily the notes, of the fiddle tune which I learned from a Library of Congress record. I think I learned the Farewell Blues (2-1) from Tom Paley, but I could be wrong. The banjo technique used in this tune is practically all original with me, as far as I know. I learned the Dance of a Spanish Fly from a Flamenco record. Unfortunately I do not remember which one or who the guitarist was. The whole thing

Faier (4)

is done with the first finger (of the right hand--you gotta use all five of the left) except for the middle part at the end. On that part (which, by the way, is my own addition with Frank Hamilton's help) there is a lot of arpeggio which utilizes the thumb, first and second fingers of the right hand. The only thing I can say about the Lute Song for the Five String Banjo (2-8) is: Why Not? Being born and bred in the city, fairly mechanical minded and a lover of the banjo, I find my technique developing way past the bounds of both good taste and authenticity as far as folk music is concerned. So, also loving lute music and being a wee bit of a composer I give free flight to my fancy and I writ it. (The Wren Song is also included in this rationalization.)

I considered the Three Jolly Rogues (2-3) to be rather elf-like creatures despite their misdoings and the banjo background consciously reflects this mental image. Frank Hamilton suggested the treatment of the banjo behind the verses. My inspiration for the banjo on Darby Ram (2-7), came from the Folkways recording of Bascom Lamar Lunsford. The germ of the melodic idea between the verses comes from Mr Lunsford's playing and my inclination to develop it, and add to it. On High Barlary (1-6) what I'm doing on the banjo really doesn't come through so ask me about it when you see me.

I would like to thank Pete Seeger for the kind things he said on the back of the jacket, especially since I am indebted to him for most of the fundamentals upon which my playing is based. I would like to thank Earl Scruggs whose playing on the Bill Monroe recording of Molly and Tenbrooks led me to search out a three finger picking style of my own (Farevell Blues), but I do wish he and his kind would slow down long enough to listen to the Flatt and Scruggs recording of Down The Road (Mercury) which I consider to be the finest example of that style of playing (and also one of the most beautiful examples of any kind of banjo playing) that I have ever heard. I would also like to thank all banjo players, known and unknown, to whom my greedy ears have listened in order to "pick something up". In that category I especially think of Uncle Dave Macon and Tom Paley.

But most of all I want to express my indebtedness to Frank Hamilton, whom I consider to be the finest folk instrumentalist now going. His innate understanding of what music is and its manifestation in his guitar playing added beauty and dimension to the tunes on the record that I, alone, could never achieve.

Say, have you heard "Banjos, Banjos, and more Banjos"?

---Billy Faier

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RECORD REVIEWS

Three records have recently been issued which should appeal to anyone interested in mountain music, especially in banjo playing.

MUSIC FOR MOONSHINERS (Judson L3031) features The Laurel River Valley Boys, a superb mountain dance band. Their instrumentation is simple - guitar, banjo, and fiddle, and their material is standard - e.g. John Henry, New River Train, Cumberland Gap, but this is unimportant - good music well-performed is good, no matter how many times you've heard it. Their style might best be characterized as "pre-Bluegrass", with banjo which is largely Scruggs and partly something like Pegram, But descriptions of musical styles are rarely clear, so if you're curious listen to the record

The whole thing is superbly professional, in the non-pejorative sense of the word as applied to folk-music. They are thoroughly accomplished performers, polished but completely free from any trace of slickness or commercialism. Their playing is idiomatic, and full of an infectious vigor and bounce. Next to Riverside's BANJO SONGS OF THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS it is the most highly listenable and musically delightful album of its kind I have heard. Unreservedly recommended.

Buell Kazee's LP (Folkways FS 3810) is something of a disappointment to one whose impression of this singer was formed by the old recordings of The Wagoner's Lad and The Butcher's Boy. Kazee is now in his sixties, and time has considerably dimmed the luster of his voice and the agility of his fingers. The banjo no longer ripples as it used to, and his vocal line has lost its effortless flow.

This would not really be a legitimate objection if Kazee were important as a traditional singer, if his significance were to any great extent folkloristic, as an exemplar of either style or repertoire. But this is not the case. His is a trained voice, and his old recordings are more impressive as beautiful performances of beautiful songs than as pieces of tradition. But the esthetic value is largely gone and the record is more of a souvenir of the past, a somewhat crumbling monument, than a living piece of musical art.

And the hymns which he tries to sing in the "humored" highly ornamental style of southern Baptist singing simply do not come off. He tries too hard to capture a style that is not his and his voice is too operatic. Besides, when I hear him sing Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah I can't help thinking of Jean Ritchie singing it, and his forced efforts come off very poorly beside her effortless grace and traditional purity.

But I think this record does have its value, expecially in the light of some of Kazee's spoken comments, as a piece of Americana, and there is some solid old-time frailing on it of a type which is not often

Records (2)

heard nowadays. This is a record for the collector rather than the general listener, and possibly, in the way of a source, for the banjo-player more than anybody.

Obray Ramsay (BANJO SONGS OF THE BLUE RIDGE AND GREAT SMOKIES - Riverside RLP 12-649) is one of the most pleasing mountain singers I have ever heard, one of those rather rare traditional (?) performers who have voices that are truly pleasant to listen to. His delivery is quiet and unassuming, but sincere and deeply felt. His banjo-playing, a rather curious mixture of Scruggs and mountain-picking, is also quiet and essentially unrhythmical, and the combination makes for a record elmost totally lacking in drive and power. This is the one serious flaw in the disc, a kind of flat sameness about the numbers, all of which are good, but lacking in variety. Guitar backing, such as he has on BANJO SONGS OF THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAINS, would be a great help in at least some of the numbers. There is such a thing as being too relaxed.

I do think, also, that a somewhat more judicious editing of the tapes would have been in order, as there are a number of errors -- missed notes, sloppy intonations, etc., which should not have got on at all, and which are not due to Ramsay's lack of technique -- he is an excellent banjo player, but seem to be just those errors which every one makes at one time or another in front of a microphone. And in some cases, such as Lonesome Road Blues, a complete retake would have been desirable.

Generally, however, the level of performance is high and I would recommend this record unreservedly to anyone who likes good banjoplaying and/or good mountain music.

--Roger Lass

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WITH MY EAR TO THE GROUND

At the end of my last column I mentioned that I hoped to get together some time soon with Sandy Paton and discusshis impression of the folk music scene in Britain today. A few days ago he dropped in for dinner at 144, and we managed to cover the subject at considerable length.

First I asked him the most obvious question: what was his opinion of the state of the folk music field in general; and he answered succinctly, "Birthing! It's hardly under way yet. For example, take such singers as Ewan MacColl. Response to his work on the popular level is at beginning, even though he's been doing what he's doing now for many

"The Hoots and other sessions at the Princess Louise," I said, "probably represent the first occasions of their kind at which British singers of the calibre of MacColl and Lloyd have faced - and made a

mark with - a 'general public' audience."

"Yes, and the Louise is the only centre of its kind in London, although it's such a big city. You get 150 to 200 people there every Sunday night - but they've had to drop their weekday sessions through lack of support. Yet, for example, in Berkeley, California, there's a club which can count on a regular attendance of 30 to 75 people who come with or without instruments, and sing. You don't seem to get that sort of thing in England."

"Any particular reasons for this?" I asked.

"Several. For one thing, there's a shortage of work for folk singers in clubs - I don't mean coffee bars." (Even in them, I may say, a man with a guitar is equally likely to be singing pop numbers.) "So folksong doesn't get to that audience. And then it seems to me that the British record companies are waiting for a market for folk music records to develop, when they ought to go out and create one."

"Records are much more influential in the States, then?"

"No comparison," said Sandy. "It's been 17 or 18 years since Burl
Tyes opened the way, and now hack home there's plenty of apportunity.

Ives opened the way, and now, back home, there's plenty of opportunity to learn songs from records, and there's been time for an urban folksinging movement to get established. Now folksong records sell in quantity. What happens over here? Recently Peter Kennedy made some retty good recordings. One of the big companies said it was interested. hen it backed down and said it wasn't going to buy them because it was waiting for stereophonic sound."

"Which isn't exactly calculated to create a folksong market!"
"What Britain needs," Sandy suggested, "is someone with a personality like Burl Ives. Back home a lot of people won't admit it any more, but y first got interested in folksong through hearing his records. His due to the lack of some such singer as Ives that here in England you ion't find young people singing folksongs their own way, for fun. Either they don't care, or they aim too far towards the roughest type of singing. There's a sort of tendency to rebel against the smooth, Peter Pears manner, which maybe isn't rugged enough for modern youth."

"How much do you think this is due to the way kids have to sing the prettified and bowdlerised Cecil Sharp versions in school? I remember Bert Lloyd visiting the Louise before it became a folksong centre and it was still a skiffle club. He announced he was going to sing some English love songs. People who didn't know what was coming began to look politely bored. He sang about seven bawdy songs in a row and the audience loved it."

"I don't think that counts so much. Look at it this way. Back home a folksong fan goes from slick to rough; when he starts out, the guy next door hears him doing Ives's stuff, or something similar, and he thinks, 'That's pretty good! I like that!' Over here, if someone hears the neighbours' son trying to make like Bert Lloyd or Charlie Wills, he's more apt to say, 'That's a horrible noise!'"

"Speaking of morrible noises," I said, "why do you think skiffle, drawing on American folk material, succeeded pretty well? Is it only heaving of the glamour America has for the younger generation in Bri-

because of the glamour America has for the younger generation in Britain, or is there truth in the idea that whereas a British song in a British version has regional characteristics, in American versions it

has them ironed out so it can appeal to a wider audience?"

"Well, of course there is far too much American orientation in Britain, "Sandy agreed. "Rock n'roll, movies, imitating what the kids imagine to be American dress, and so on. But it's not a case so much of losing old characteristics as of acquiring new ones, and what the songs acquire is negro thythm. This does have an appeal for young people today, though why that should be is a question for the psychologists, not for me. And then, of course, a lot of English folksong is indisputably trivial - full of fol-de-rol-days - and so doesn't appeal to sophisticated modern youth."

"And then," I suggested, "there's the point that the ballad has lost one of its main purposes - telling its story. Competing against modern ways of telling a story - radio, TV, movies - it was bound to lose ground. And people read more, instead of listening to story-tellers."

"That's true," Sandy agreed.

"Reverting to your point that a lot of English songs are trivial," I said, "there's the point - a sore one with me - that while a lot of good American material is readily available in book form, if you want

good English material, you have to hunt."

"You do. But you know there are two forthcoming collections of good British songs due to be published: one by Lloyd and Vaughan Williams, and one, I think, by Pat Shuldham Shaw. By the way, Shaw's will include guitar chords; the other won't, which I think is a mistake."

"I think so," I said. "Not many people today feel happy about singing unaccompanied, and trying to work out an accompanient for a modal song particularly with no guidance can be a devil of a problem."

song particularly with no guidance can be a devil of a problem."

But a far worse lack is the lack of outstanding English singers," Sandy declared. "Lloyd can sing ten or fifteen good, lusty English songs straight off in a row. But who else?"

"After you've named Lloyd," I said, "you start mentioning Scots and

Trish singers. Not English ones."

"And another thing," added Sandy. "Back home a lot of my work is at colleges and schools. Everybody comes to hear folksingers when they visit. That way a new audience is opened up for folksong."

"You don't get that co-operation over here," I said. "Students who are interested do things for themselves, the way Stan Kelly and Rory

MacEwen and others did at Cambridge University. You certainly never find the authorities giving opportunities to folksingers the way you do in the States."

"So," Sandy summed up, "until maybe some personality of Ives's calibre comes along and opens up a mass market for folksong in Britain, I

don't see it growing very rapidly."

And I'm afraid I'm inclined to agree. A group like the Weavers wouldn't do so well in Britain. We haven't got the fabulously proficient young instrumentalists they have in the States; we don't seem to have the singers of English songs who will take over where Lloyd Leaves off.

But we do have people like Rory and Alex MacEwen, Robin Hall and many other young Scots, we have Stan Kelly and many more. We have an audience - if not a mass one, a growing one. We're throwing a series of parties to raise funds for the International Folk Music Centre, and the entertainment is mainly folk material; it goes down particularly well with visitors who've never heard much of it before. What will emerge from the skiffle movement is problematical, but even if only a tenth of the multitudinous skifflers acquire an interest in folk material, that will represent a huge gain over what's been before. And Heinemann's have just published a book (price 21/-) called The Idiom of the People, edited by James Reeves, which includes the texts of 115 songs from the notebooks Cecil Sharp left us. He's been dead for 34 years; he did a great deal for English folksong, but it's pretty certain the notes he never published are going to do a great deal more. And better.

Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee are currently in Britain, touring with Chris Earber's band. It's been an ambition of mine since I was about 15 to watch Sonny Terry getting those incredible noises out of his mouth-organ; I've now done it. I've seldom been more impressed by the work of any team than of those two. They're fascinating both to see and to listen to, and I'm delighted to say they've had a first-olass press. The New Statesman said, "One of the most satisfactory excesses in a long time," and I'll go along with that.

After hearing Terry and McGhee (at the Festival Hall), we went on

to look in at a students' carnival in Regent's Park, mainly because a steel band, two of whose members live a couple of doors from 144, was playing there. Most of the group (a very good one) hail, I believe, from Trinidad. Some of them were with the group that toured Canada and part of the USA for Imperial Oil a few years back, and they are now students at London University. The steel band tradition, though so short, is a fascinating one, and I should very much like to know if anyone has surveyed it properly. It seems to me quite extraordinary, and (especially as regards the nature of the instruments) very much of the twentieth century.

Memo to any oil company locking for increased sales: there is, I gather, a general desire that oil-drums should come in at least one larger size, so that they can put extra notes on the bass pans...

> John Brunner. London May, 1958

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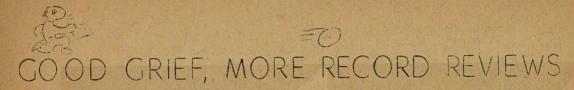
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Paul Clayton sings of UNHOLY MATRIMONY. Additional banjo and

cithern accompaniments by Bob Yellin. (Elektra EKL 147).

The contents of this album, Clayton's first on Elektra, are reflected by the cover: an attractive girl in bed — but in bed with a guitar. These songs are all traditional folksongs grouped around "the hazards of married life", hence Unholy Matrimony. The album has its bawdy elements, but its essential outlook is humorous and tongue in cheek. It contains a number of the songs one would expect like "I Wish I Was Single Again" and "The Charleston Merchant", but it also includes a number of hitherto unrecorded selections like "The Old Wife Who Wanted Spruncin'", "Home Sad Home", "The Mother-in-Law", "The Wooden Legged Parson", etc. The recording is excellently engineered and Clayton is in fine voice. Even more important perhaps, he seems to be in fine spirits. It is pretty clear that he had fun making the record, and this feeling comes across pleasantly to the listener. Bob Yellin's accompaniments are original and imaginative. The effects achieved in "Life on the Installment Plan" might be mentioned and the unique quality of the close work between cithern and guitar. If you're looking for an album with a change of pace, something refreshing and full of fun, pick up this one and give it a try.

THAR SHE BLOWS: sung by A.L. Lloyd & Ewan MacColl, accompanied

by Peggy Seeger and J. Cole (Riverside RLP 12-635).

This, along with the other shanty albums that Lloyd & MacColl have made, is the definitive collection of sea songs on record. Both in texts and performance the artists have kept as close to the spirit of their material as possible while stamping their own trademark on

every song.

As I see it. no single performer can really do justice to a sharty or foc'sle song per se. A ship's crew is a highly co-ordinated team and this is reflected in the nature of the music itself. Lloyd & MacColl are aware of this and work as a team. Listening to them, one is amazed at the full sound that they achieve with only two voices. This is accomplished by the use of very broad open 5th harmonies rapidly alternating with contrapuntal runs and sustained notes. The end effect of this style of singing is a suggestion of much more sound than is actually heard. Of course the powerful voices of the singers themselves may have something to do with it too.

The songs on this album were obviously not simply chosen at random from the old whaleman's repertoire. The banalities that sometimes appear in sea songs are rightfully eschewed and the texts have been pick-

ed, it seems, as much for the poetry as for authenticity.

Peggy Seeger, who plays guitar on the foc'sle songs, is as imaginative as ever and deserves much praise for the freedom which he playing ellows the singers. A harmonica is also on hand on some of the songs, which neither adds nor detracts.

A.L. Lloyd is responsible for the notes which are very good, but song texts are conspicuously absent. Highly recommended. -DVR

SCOTS DRINKING SONGS sung by Ewan MacColl (Riverside RLP 12-605)
If you are in the habit of singing while you drink or is you are
in the habit of singing at all, you'll probably like this album as much
as I do. As an artist Mr MacColl rates about as high as you can get in
his field and his singing on this album is a wonderful thing to hear.

The Scots, as you may have heard, are a hard drinking race and they have built over a long period a body of genuine drinking songs. The first song on the record sets the pace for the entire session; "We're A'-Jolly Fu!" From here MacColl takes off into the now well known "Calton Weaver", which he does best of all. Many of the songs are in rather heavy dialect but in this case Riverside has supplied a fine set of notes, with a glossary of terms after each text. The rest of the songs are every bit as good as the first two, except for "Blow The Candles Out" which is so overworked in folksong circles that not even Mr MacColl can interest me with it. There is some very fine concertina playing here and there--especially on "Calton Weaver" and some good guitar playing. I suspect Al Jeffey, but no credit is given and most of the songs are as they should be, unaccompanied. I hope Riverside will continue to print song texts in their future albums, since it facilitates learning and these songs were meant to be sung. I highly recommend "Scots Drinking Songs". It is an experience. --DVR

PETE SEEGER AND SONNY TERRY (Folkways FA 2412)
I think that, in all fairness, any record of Seeger's should be judged on two levels; the first being its value as musical art, the second its value as a sample of Pete Seeger. These two are my no means mutually exclusive, and every one of his recordings partakes of both, but some, such as DARLIN' COREY (in my opinion by far his best album) emphasize the music, while others, such as his concert recordings, are largely personality, at least his group-oriented personality. In the latter case the musical values are minimized, as might be expected. Seeger is a superb performer, possibly the best all-round folk musician we have, and it is a shame to have his records (and his concerts) cluttered with the extraneous Everybody Sing noises of the audience.

The record, PETE SEEGER AND SONNY TERRY is a rather uncommonly interesting record, because it shows Pete both as a musician and a group-leader, a folk-performer and a social director, and in a good light in both cases. I have a great distaste for Group Singing, but the material here is quite well done, if you like this sort of thing, and more important, clearly recorded. He also does some of his increasing-lu rare traditional banjo-playing here, which is pleasing, and a couple of excellent numbers with Sonny Terry.

But basically the record is pure Pete, including some well chosen and charmingly spoken passages from Whitman and the "Bells of Rhymney". Altogether a record for both the Seeger fan and the fairly general listener.

CHILDREN'S SONGS sung by Ed McCurdy, accompanied by Billy Faier. Tradition TLP 1027.

Frankly, this child was a bit bored by this offering, and also slightly puzzled by apparent grimness with which these two adults attack the problem of singing amusing songs for tiny tots (ugh!). The whole album seems to have been undertaken in a spirit of highly self-conscious ondescension, as exemplified by the jacket notes, which are just too rate to read without feeling slightly ill. I hope the reactions of

Reviews (3)

other children, especially the younger ones for whom this basket of goodles is intended, will not be quite as surly as mine. Nice banjo work by Billy Faier.

SONGS OF IRELAND - Mary O'Hara, with Irish Harp. Tradition TLP 1024.

A very very lovely album. Mary O'Hara has a trained and polished voice, but she also is gifted with a deep understanding of and sensitivity to the art of traditional singing. And she is truly an artist -- every one of these songs is a perfect and complete entity, self-contained and self-existent, wrapped in its own magical atmosphere.

The Irish harp is a beautiful instrument, and Miss O'Hara uses

it with taste and sensitivity.

This record is an artistic delight of a very high order.

Record reviewers this month are Glen Ellsworth, Roger Lass and Dave Van Ronk.

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Chicago - Al Grossman, 753 North Dearborn St.
Montreal - Robban Theatre Travel Reg'd
1005 Sherbrooke Street West
Elsewhere - Vivienne Stenson, 41 Collier St, Toronto 5

THE QUEST FOR BABYLON

"Babylon, or the Bonnie Banks o' Fordie" is so named because of the following circumstances: In one of the better texts of this old ballad given in Motherwell's Minstrelsy the third sister states that she has a brother in the wood and if the "rank robber" kills her, that brother will kill him. He demands the brother's name and is told it is "Baby Lon". He is that brother, and realizing he has killed his two sisters he kills himself. Motherwell gives the title in caps at the head of the ballad (perhaps by mis-spaced type) as "BABYLON, OR THE BONNIE BANKS O' FORDIE". When Child reprinted this text as his A version he naturally gave Motherwell's title to the general ballad. He gives the title exactly as it appears in Motherwell even though he reprints "Baby Lon" in the text. Elsewhere Child writes "Babylon" in lower case at least eight times when referring to the title of the ballad. It is difficult to see Child's reason for perpetuating this error -- if it be one.

The title might better be written "BABY LON, OR THE BONNIE BANKS O' FORDIE". However since scholars accept Child's titles to assist identification (since there are many local titles to a ballad -- "The Three Sisters" being the most common for this one) and since this is a minor point it seems not to have yet been remarked upon. Perhaps all that need be pointed out to those not especially interested in the ballad is that Babylon is not a city, but (presum_ably) a younger brother.

-- Paul Clayton

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. EDITORIAL MESSAGE

Things have been happening around the Caravan office. And more things will be happening in the immediate future. Caravan is growing. In fact it has already outgrown its present method of production and its present format. To survive it must change--evolve--and it is changing.

Caravan is increasing its size and its circulation. It is going to give wider coverage of the folkmusic field, discussions of subjects of interest to folkmusic enthusiasts, singers, and instrumentalists. It will be enlarged to include words, music and chords of rare and interesting folksongs, departments featuring information for instrumentalists (including self-accompanists), letters of comment from our readers, news about people in the field, and reviews of books and records.

This big new Caravan will be photo-offset printed, which means that we'll be able to bring you a thick, handy magazine containing not only text but also photos, drawings, diagrams and music notation.

To give this wider coverage and handle the added details of producing a printed magazine, we've got to re-adjust our publication schedule. As a newssheet Caravan has been appearing monthly. As a magazine Caravan will appear bi-monthly. In effect you'll be getting a double issue every second month, and you'll get the new features that only a bi-monthly schedule will make possible. The new Caravan will cost you more. Thirty five cents a copy, to be exact. You'll receive a full year's subscription for two dollars. (In sterling countries the price will be 2/6 a copy.) And those of you who already have subscriptions to Caravan will receive the magazine for the period of time remaining on your present sub at no increase in price. If you have six monthly issues coming, you'll receive the new Caravan for the next six months, i.e., you'll get the 35¢ magazine for 20¢ a copy.)

The wheels are rolling. This expansion is under way. Because of this, there will be no issue of Caravan in July. The next issue will be out at the beginning of August and will cover the period of August-Beptember. We want to make it a really great issue, so if you've been sitting on an idea for an article for Caravan, hatch it and get it into the mail quick, before the postal rates go up.

If you want to get your advertisement into this big issue, write now for our rate card and layout information.

---Lee Shaw 27 May 58

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folkmusic scene

The Folksingers Guild is a non-profit organization consisting of folksingers and folkmusic enthusiasts whose purpose is to perpetuate folkmusic in New York City and ultimately throughout the rest of the United States. In order for folkmusic to attain the degree of popularity achieved by other forms of music, people must be able to devote their full time to the field. The only way that this can be accomplished is for these people to be paid. By holding frequent, inexpensive concerts, the Guild gives employment to these musicians and also popularizes follows ic.

On Friday, June 6th, the Folksingers Cuild is presenting the third in a series of Folkmusic at Midnight concerts. Logan English, recording artist for Riverside and Folkways; Phil Rhodes, Bostonian folksinger, and Doris Stone, will appear. The concert is being held at the Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., Friday, June 6th, at midnight. Tickets are available at the Folklore Center, 110 MacDougal St, phone GR 3-7590, or at the Sullivan Street Playhouse boxoffice, OR 4-3838.

A Folk Music Festival and Seminar combined with vacation facilities is planned for Labor Day Week-end at Indian Hill Camp at Stockbridge, Mass.

Invited to participate as "festival staff" is Lee Hays, Fred Hellerman, Erik Darling, and many other folk music artists, writers and performers. A complete staff is expected to develop an interesting program for folk music enthusiasts.

Reservations are limited to 150 people and the week-end fee will probably be \$50. For further information and brochure write to Mr Mort Bauman, 8 West 13th St., New York, N Y.

Some news about GRAND CONCERT OF FOLK MUSIC (Sunday evenings, 10 to midnight, WNCN-FM -104,3- The Concert Network) which will have completed its first sponsored half-year in June. Folksingers Guild artists ROY BERKELEY, DAVE STERNLIGHT, DORIS STONE, JOCK ROOT, SYLVIA BURNETT, and BEN RIFKIN appeared as guests during May along with noted composerballadeer EARL ROBINSON, Folkway's recording artist LORI HOLIAND and the world famous folk dance specialists MICHAEL and MARY ANN HERMAN. JIMMY MacDONALD sang and was interviewed about his Square Dance Services concert, said interview heard by a NYTIMES newsman resulted in a big page one section 2 story in the issue of May 8th.

I would like all folksingers who feel they are ready for an on-their showcase to contact me for an audition toward a future appearance. I ould also like presidents of folk song clubs at schools and colleges to register with me for inclusion in a panel idea not fully hatched, but their cooperation will help. Also folk broadcasters in other parts of US and world to contact re: exchange of tapes, etc.

There is a strong possibility that FOLKLORE WITH LORRIE will return to the FM airwaves of a 4-station network (New York, Hartford, Providence, Boston). Address all inquiries to George Lorris, c/o the Concert Notwork, 28 West 44th St., N Y 36.

News (2)

I am making dulcimers which can be seen at Folklore Center (110 MacDougal St., NY). I will also make these to order, choice of woods, etc. --Clark Voorhees, Old Lyne, Conn.

Pete Seeger is no longer a member of The Weavers. On Vanguard's latest release "The Weavers At Home" his place in taken on several items by Erik Darling.

FRETTS Magazine, from Randall Pub. Co., PO Box 928, Santa Ana, Cal. contains artisles about, and music for, banjo, guitar, mandolin. Mostly jazz and classical music. Bi+monthly. \$1.50 per year.

Joe Bennardello writes: You can get some real fine 5-string banjo instrumentsls (mail order) from the Jimmie Skinner Music Center in Ohio. Most of their stuff is of the bluegrass nature though. Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, Don Reno, Red Smiley, Stanley Bros. McCormick Bros. Sonny Osborne, etc. (list for \$1.00) They also have some Carter Family records and books. They have the "Grandpa Jones 5-string Banjo Instructor". It is my personal opinion that this book offers nothing in the way of instruction. However they do have another book of instruction on the 5-stringer, the contents of which I am unfamiliar (it costs \$.75). A catalog of the aforementioned information can be obtained from: JIMMIE SKINNER MUSIC CENTER, 222 East 5th St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Billy Faier writes: My community singing nights in Berkeley will be at the Northgate Coffee Shop and on Friday nights instead of Wednesdays. The place holds over 200 people and I'm going to have special programs each week consisting of one folksinger giving an hour recital, concert or whathaveyou. Any folksinger coming this way should get in touch with me as far in advance as possible (at least two weeks) if you are interested in doing a program at Northgate. ##Any folksinger or folklorist that would like to prepare a half hour tape to be used on my program is hereby requested to do so. It should be in line with the "Story of Folk Music" from any perspective (historical, musical, lyrical, etc.) and may include speech to explain songs and make points, etc. Any point of view on controversial issues will be used (as in Caravan) as long as they show some thought behind them. Tapes must be single track (use only one side if ½track) and recorded at 7½ ips with reasonably good equipment (Webcor, Bell, Wollensak, or better). KPFA is a listener subscribed station and I receive no pay for the program and therefore cannot pay for tapes but I will return them if so requested. Sing yourself or use recordings and present the material in any way you see fit. Just bear in mind that my audience is made up of interested laymen, so on't get too technical and far out. Tapes will not be edited before using, except for extraneous clicks and obscenities.

NOTE: Billy's new address is Billy Faier, 126 Macondray Lane,

San Francisco 11, Calif.

CANADIAN RADIO: CBL-out of Toronto, Thurs 6:30 PM "Folk Song Time" series based on folksnng records, prepared by Edith Fowke. CBM out of Montreal, Sun 1:00-1:15 EDT, "Folk Songs for Young Folks" sung by Alan Mills.

New York Scene, like ...

FOR SALE: large Gretch F hole orchestra and band guitar, full size, 20 frets, excellent fingerboard & sunburst finish, in good condition. \$50. call Perry Lederman, 736 Dumont Ave., Brooklyn 7,NY. DI 6-2049.

SUSIE SHAHN writes from England: "I've just been reading some back Caravans and I noticed that in the April issue, I believe, you mentioned something about my telling Bob Yellin that lying on his back playing the banjo is bad for the digestion. What I meant was Scruggs picking was bad for the digestion—frailing is a different story—it actually aids the digestion."

Art D'Lugoff's new place THE VILLAGE GATE, 183-5 Thompson St (between Bleeker & Houston-through the gate and down the stairs) is turning out to be the place. His pre-opening party was the biggest thing since the burning of Rome,

Aaron Rennert?...Country Dave Sadler, is expected in town, on leave from the Army, within the next few weeks (we hope)..."He has a third Scruggs peg, right in the middle of his forehead"...Roger Lass picked up a handsome little banjo in good condition at a local antique shop for a price too low to put into print. It's a Nelson (The Chicago Music Co., 148 & 150 Wabash Ave). Anyone familiar with them?...A limited number of leather-bound complete files of SING OUT are available from them for \$50 a set. Contact SING OUT Inc., 80 East 11th St., NY 3, NY...The concert Folklore Center presented with Barry Kornfeld (boy banjo tuner) and Tony Saletan (the man with upholstered capo) was the Center's most successful to date.

It packed Carnegie Chapter Hall. --gardyloo!--

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MUSIC ART DANCE THEATRE

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Indian Hill announces a new department in folk music, under the direction of Dick Weissman, one of New York's best known folksingers and instrumentalists, and recording artist for Riverside, Esoteric, and Stinson Records. The program will include material on the history, analysis, and collecting of folk songs, and the present direction of American folk music. Instruction will be offered in folk guitar and banjo techniques, and in folksong repertoire. The department will also include classes in classical guitar taught by Ralph Freundlich of the Music Committee of the Classic Guitar Society, and instruction in jazz guitar by Chuck Israels, outstanding Boston musician.

ANNOUNCES A NEW DEPARTMENT

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JOHN A LOMAX JR

I some ways this is becoming an increasingly enchanting age. For a few dollars we can buy lp records which capture forever the magic of all sorts of wonderful sounds.—sounds of politicians and public figures; sounds of nature and of mechanical wonders like steam locomotives; and of course sounds of people. John A. Lomax, Jr., of whom I write, falls securely into the last category. There is not an artificial or insincere cell in his whole body. John is a real, unfaltering, and unashamed numan being; open, honest, and proud; with all the strengths and weaknesses, all the meanness and tenderness which such a human being possesses. And he has been remarkably preserved for all the world to hear on a Folkways album called: John A. Lomax, Jr. Sings American Folksongs. I have been wearing the needle of my new phonograph thin relistening to this record, and though it sounds a little strange to hear John!s warm Texas tones so far north of his usual habitat, the record sounds even better than I had remembered it.

Generally speaking, there are three types of folksingers. There is the professional singer who uses some or a great deal of folk material tailored to suit his particular style of singing (James Melton, Harry Belafonte, etc.) Then there is the sophisticated (musically educated) singer of folk sings with a real affinity for the people from whom the songs spring (the Seegers, Jean Ritchie). And finally there is that type which I call the <u>UN</u> mean--UNsophisticated, UNinhibited, UNaffected --the folk performer who might join us in our modern world of polish and pretense physically but who is spiritually linked with our past and our collective animal soul. Woody Guthrie belongs here, as do Sonny Terry, Leadbelly and John Lomax.

John has lived in cities. He has attended schools, even held jobs in offices on occasions. But he has never really joined in our civilized foolishness with his whole heart. His spirit soars clean and free, and it finds its greatest expression on a handball court or in singing an old folk song. He does both with intense devotion, great power, and unfaltering accuracy.

John's place in folk song is real and unique. He can sing both a cowboy song and a Louisiana holler, and make each live in a real and eithertic way. Yet he is not really from either a rural or rance environment. One reason for his accomplishment was his exposure at an early ease to the roots of folk music—the people from whom his father and brother collected their songs. This is not the whole story, however. There is also a kinship of spirit which John shares with the people who originally made up the songs. This is a kinship of feelings and emotions, not words and intellect, for John has never been glib with words. When introducing his songs on a program he usually reads word for word his father's comments on them. But all this changes when he starts singing. In his heart John knows the feelings of the factory girl who longs to get married and thereby escape the drudgery of her daily existence, the dreadful lonliness of the cowboy crooning to the herd to keep away the fears and uncert

ainties of the night, and best of all the feelings of the primitive soul of man roaring mightly against the ever-looming encroachments of the civilized world. He feels as one with them and when he begins to sing he becomes as one with them. And if you are among those who see through the veneer of the cultivated, and who find beauty in the real and naked human soul, then you too will become as one with John and his songs and the entire family of the human race.

The fact that John has never attempted to capitalize commercially on his singing, but rather has kept it along with his handball as a hobby, has served to enhance it. Singing has remained to him a very fresh and personal thing. Both his hobbies mean much more to him than whatever task he happens to be working at at the moment to make the family living. It is this devotion which has made him keep his songs "pure" (i.e., intact) and as a result words which are generally not used in polite society are generously sprinkled through his repertoire. It never would occur to him to delete a word here and there to make a song more publicly acceptable. "This is the way they sang it" John says, and so it is. However, as a result of this devotion to the material, our programs in Houston would occasionally produce red-faced Texans of the old school of chivalry hustling wives and daughters bodily from the hall I first saw this reluctance to tamper pointed up six years ago at an outdoor evening of singing our Houston group give in a public park. There were many children there. Someone asked for "Sam Hall," and John obliged with each and every "God damn his eyes". I was hoping he would delete the last verse which went "Holy Christ it is a cell, all the whores are down in Hell..." just for the children. But he sang it intact. I've often wondered since what replies the mothers made the next day to the inevitable question: "Mommy, what's a whore?"

Another of these words, nigger, was also a source of constant criticathe dispute was brought to a head several years ago when we were holding a benefit to raise funds for a tape recorder. We were showing the films "Tall Tales" and "To Hear My Banjo Play", and several of us were to follow with livie singing. John was planning to do "John Henry", a character with whom he identifies very strongly, and the song which h does best. His version, a slow haunting worksong, is sprinkled with the word "nigger" and several persons bitterly opposed his doing it for the reason. His wife Margaret was against it too, but for a different reason. She thought it was too long. The argument was broached that the song appeared in both films and that twice in one evening should be enough. But John countered that his version was different and therefore would not be repetitious. At first I was neutral, but I was finally drawn to John's side because I felt that he was not deliberately using the word to offend. (The word was used by the Negros from whom he had learned the song.) Also I knew how well John could do the song and how much it meant to him. John finally won out, the night came upon us, and then it was John's turn for "John Henry". The lights were down amd everyeye was on this huge man singing now softly, now loudly, this American epic of man's fight against the machine. John used verses I had never heard him use before. His mood was now proud, now bitter, now strong. Six and a half minutes later when John finally reached the closing lines "John Henry had a little baby, he could hold him in the palm of his hand, the very last words I heard the poor boy say, my daddy was a steel driving man, oh Lord. my daddy was a steel driving man." sobbing broke out openly in the audience. Yet even this was no distraction. When the song ended and

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the lights came up we noticed that every woman in the hall was softly crying. This included even those who had heard John do the song before --even his wife, Margaret. And the men were red of eye and dry of throat also. And this little incident of John's triumph over all opposition has remained in the minds and tales of those of us around Houston and has become a bit of our own folklore.

However, progress has won out and John doesn't use the word "nigger" any more. The profanity still crops up though. Two years ago I produced a series of three concerts in Houston featuring John along with myself and two others. In the printed brochure the song "Frankie and Johnnie" was listed for the second program of the series. When rehersals came around we were faced with those old friends, the words "whore", "goddam', and "slut" There could be no question of dropping the song, for we had advertised it. And John was adamant about changing the text. And his wife Margaret was adamant about his singing it as is in a public hall, in a university, to a concert-going audience. However, Lomax stubbornness is no slight adversary, and John won out again, A local and highly esteemed music critic who thinks John Jacob Niles is the leading exponent of folk songs and who likes to think of these songs as something quaint, had written a column about us. and lo and behold, on hand was the cream of Houston's concert-going gristo cracy, Gentle people, mostly elderly ladies, had turned out in droves to examine at first hand these quaint little folk songs that they had read about. John attempted to lighten the shock of the song by going into great detail concerning the controversy that preceded its inclusion. much to Margaret's embarrassment. Then he launched into it, and all its profanity was shiningly intact. The audience was a little shocked. And John must have sensed this, for in the song that followed, acting completely on his own on the spot, he changed "son of a bitch" to "crazy old witch". It brought down the house.

John, a massive tower of strength and virility, had never been sick a day in his life until a handball accident two years ago. He got hit in the eye with a fast moving ball and it began to bother his sight in that eye. It was during this period, with this on his mind, that he recorded the songs in his album. He chose the songs himself, and intuitively picked many of his best numbers. When the engineer signalled the go-ahead forgotten were his eye and troubles, and off his spirit soared. I had just returned from a summer camp job in Vermont when I got a call from him about the record. He wanted me to do the answerback part in "Long John" with him. He had told no one about his eye then, and he didn't seem particularly different when I waw him, except that his manner seemed just a little absent. We did a good take the first time through, and I left John to himself to finish the other song. Two weeks later I got another phone call from him. He was flat on his back in the hospital, recovering from a delicate eye operation to reattach the receding retina of his injured eye. He lay there completely blinded for one month. For another six months he could move around only the slightest bit, and he had to peek at the world through two small pin-holes in his black goggles. But worst of all for John was the news that he would have to give up handball. This was a severe blow to him, but one which he will take in his stride, I'll wager.

The phrase "I hear America singing when I hear such-and-such" has



John A. Lomax, Jr.

been greatly overused. I suppose I hear America singing (or one aspect of it anyway) when I hear Bing Crosby, Perry Como, or even Elvis Presley. I hear another aspect of it when I hear James Melton, or Paul Robeson. But I really sit up and listen, and pat my foot, and hum, and feel warm inside and out and all over when I hear Woody Guthrie, or Sonny Terry, or Huddie Ledbetter, or any of my other "UN" singers. I feel especially warm and happy when it is John A. Lomax, Jr.

