

the huge roomful of people in “Solidarity Forever”. Most are singing it, including Buzz Hargrove, and all are clapping along. A small parade of older, retired distinguished members comes in and sits in the honorary guest section. The whole thing is very impressive and surprisingly moving.

And then it’s all over. Or at least, that part is over; the three-day convention is about to begin. The Travellers pack their instruments and leave, Cathy and I gather up our tape recorders and notebooks and leave. Jerry Gray and I hug, the Travellers drift off to breakfast, and Cathy and I survey the now empty lobby. Many groups have set up information tables, including the Make Poverty History group, the CAW Eastern Women’s Network, Women Unite, PRIDE, Women and Power and Politics, CAW Legal Services, Workers Health and Safety Centre, the Council of Canadians, and Club 200 Youth Activities. A book stall is selling children’s picture books, including *Dim Sum for Everyone*, *This Land*, *Black Canada History*, Pete Seeger’s *Abiyoyo*, a book about Woody Guthrie, and *What Does Peace feel Like?* Adult books include some by Linda McQuaig, Judy Rebick’s *10,000 Roses*, a book on Tommy Douglas, and *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, by Barbara Ehrenreich. A CAW Conference is a big thing.

But now it’s time to head back out onto the muggy streets of Toronto. Is union song singing still alive? It certainly is in Canada’s largest private-sector union (265,000 members across Canada). Are the younger people singing them? The jury is out on that one, but from the passion I’ve witnessed from the older members for these old songs, don’t count them out just yet.

Lorne Brown

[Lorne Brown is a Toronto storyteller and ballad monger]

Letter to the Editors

In her review of *Dear Companion: Appalachian Traditional Songs and Singers from the Cecil Sharp Collection* (Canadian Folk Music Bulletin. Winter 2005-5, pp. 20 – 23) Rosaleen Gregory makes a number of points that should, I feel, be answered or else explained.

Firstly, her ‘chief criticism’, namely the ‘deliberate omission’ of songs from the singer Jane Gentry, on ‘the pretext that these are currently available

elsewhere’. My dictionary defines ‘pretext’ as ‘a reason put forward to conceal one’s true reason’. I can assure Ms Gregory that there is no hidden agenda here. As there are over 1,600 songs in Cecil Sharp’s Appalachian collection there seemed little point in duplicating songs that were, indeed, available elsewhere. We were only asked to choose 50 songs, although in the end we managed to include 53, and I am sure that purchasers will not wish to find songs that they may already have in Betty Smith’s splendid *Jane Hicks Gentry* book.

Secondly, I am taken to task for offering an explanation behind the song title *The Foggy Dew* that Ms Gregory finds ‘far-fetched’. I am asked to supply further details. Well, let’s start with Bert Lloyd. In his seminal book *Folk Song in England*, published almost forty years ago, Bert gives a version collected by John Bell in the early 19th century. Here the song is about a youth who, as I said in the notes to *Dear Companion*, persuades a friend to dress up as a ghost (or Bugaboo) in order to scare a girl into the youth’s bed. During the summer of 1979 I recorded the Appalachian singer Dan Tate singing a version that he called *Bugerboo* (*Musical Traditions* MTCD 321-2 *Far in the Mountains*. Volumes 1 & 2) and in the notes to *Far in the Mountains* I referred listeners to Bob Thomson’s paper “The Frightful Foggy Dew” that appeared in *Folk Music Journal* IV: 1 (1980), pp. 35 – 61. Rosaleen will find full references to early broadside versions of the song in Bob Thomson’s paper.

Finally, I am asked why I did not mention Hedy West’s Topic recording of “The Wife of Usher’s Well” in the song notes. I too like Hedy’s version, but, as the Topic LP is no longer available, I did not list it. I only tried to list recordings that were currently available.

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Rosaleen replies:

No ulterior motives in omitting songs by Jane Gentry were implied in my review; I used the word ‘pretext’, which also means ‘excuse’, because I was using the word ‘excuse’ a few lines later. As to the substantive issue, I still think that *Dear Companion*, as an *introduction* to Sharp’s Appalachian song-collecting, should have been as representative of that collecting as possible. Readers not familiar with all Sharp’s informants may never get as far as Betty Smith’s fine book if they have not had their appetites whetted by an example of Jane Gentry’s artistry. *Dear Companion* had the opportunity to supply such an illustration and I regret it did not do so.

Older recordings like the Topic one of Hedy West’s “Wife of Usher’s Well” are continually going in and out of availability. In view of the very sad news of Hedy’s recent passing, it is to be hoped that someone will bring out a retrospective CD set showcasing her impressive talent and introducing her to younger listeners who may never have heard her.