

A Canadian quality is conveyed by the importance of extremes of weather and of vast space in Casey's fantasy. Many critics – for example, John Matthews in *Tradition in Exile* – have remarked that coping with a severe environment is part of the Canadian identity. The interactions between character and environment here reflect this strenuous coping, and provide an element of excitement. Casey demonstrates the gift of imagination and the possibility that each child can become her own storyteller. Susan Marcus is to be congratulated for an excellent story.

Both Dressup books present Casey as a boy rather than as the puppet of the television show. Thank goodness! Casey lives for the children in the same way that Chekhov's characters live for adults, by representing internal life, or externalizing the emotions. It is the internal landscape which surely has the most significant reality for any of us.

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## Canadian Children's Records, Continued

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“Sensitivity, humour, craftsmanship, and honesty”: in an earlier article,<sup>1</sup> I attempted to list some requirements for success in children's records. The list still makes good sense, although admittedly, it is extremely difficult to do everything well all at once! Just the right amount of emotion or sentiment, exactly the appropriate *rapport* with an unseen audience, touches of humanity and comedy, smoothness, and an all-encompassing professionalism that makes the whole performance seem simplicity itself: whew! Is it possible to produce a flawless gem that meets all these standards, to attain magnificent Mozart without going through the stages of merely bad Boccherini? I think so – and here's some proof.

Jim Duchesneau and Rosalie Moscoe have been performing in the Toronto area before delighted audiences for several years. Although they admit their individual styles to be different, they do make a most

intriguing musical team. Jim's voice is comfortably folksy, mellow and easy-going but always controlled even when the tempo is up. Rosalie's clear mezzo balances this well, and together the voices blend successfully.

*Listen to Me* appeared in 1980, followed a year later by *The Music Factory*. In both records, most of the songs fall into four categories: those that deal with feelings, with identity, those that exploit the imagination and just plain fun songs, suitable for singing around a campfire. Such titles as, "I'm Scared," "I'm Still O.K.," and "Listen to Me" suggest the feelings that need to be expressed. Learning to let out all kinds of emotion is part of the aim of the accompanying activity booklets, capably put together by Jean Harrison. One feeling song, "I Wish My Brother Liked Me," comes close to a resolution when the brother puts up a defence against some bullies, but ends up, probably like life, with the younger child crying.

Songs of identity suggest possible future occupations (including "a retired millionaire" or "unemployed"! ) and a completely liberated "Andrea the Astronaut." My all-time favourite – in every respect – is "Alexander Squirrel," who is small but mighty, kind and thrifty too!

The imaginative songs, such as "Let's Pretend," "Orky Oak Tree," or "Two Sailors in the Tub," are extremely well conceived. Some, such as "This I Find," are purely delightful nonsense: "A purple elephant, a pink reindeer . . . / A bird that sings in shades of blue . . ." Others allow the child to see reality from a new perspective. "When I Stand on My Head," for example, leads to the problem of the furniture hanging from the ceiling and the ultimate crucial question: "Will my feet grow hair?"

Jim Duchesneau's long experience at the Taylor Statten Camps has paid rich dividends in his renditions of campfire songs. The very first song on *Listen to Me*, "Did You Ever?" sets the carefree, infectious mood and you can practically hear the fire crackle and smell the smoke rising from the record player.

Almost every song on both records was written by Rosalie and/or Jim and they show great versatility and inventiveness from the quietly melodic ballad, "Butterfly, Flutterby," to the heroic "Alexander Squirrel." Both as composers and performers, Jim and Rosalie are definitely a duo to watch.

"What is it about the Raffi records that make one want to play them long after the children have gone to bed?" The answer may well be found in a unique recording by that acknowledged master of children's revels. *Adult Entertainment*, packaged in simulated brown paper, might seem to be out of place in a child's record library. A couple of indecent Anglo-Saxonisms aside, it is not inappropriate for young listeners. Thematically, the content is wistful nostalgia for the lost innocence of childhood and love songs, mostly about love and loss. There is also a lovely lullaby to "Little Kristin January 28," the

saga of "Starvin Marvin," country-folk-rock down-and-outer, who makes good but forgets his hunger and his friends, and the ancient standard, "Undecided." Five of the ten songs are composed by Raffi; the mood is relaxed; the professionalism secure.

A relatively new face in children's recordings appears blissfully blowing bubbles on the cover of *Listen to the Children*. Bob Schneider, a native New Yorker, has been living in Canada for the past ten years and, more recently, has been working with children in the Toronto area. His songs are all original and communicate a sincere warmth and gentleness that is borne out by the comments in the activity book. Although the album cover sticker announces the school yard hit, "Listen to the Water," I found this inferior musically to either the title song or the beautifully simple ballad, "Listen to the Raindrops." Bob Schneider's voice is engaging, John Denverish, and always listenable; his songs, such as "Sunshine Man" and "Ali's Lullaby," speak of friendship and hope.

Dennis Lee needs no introduction either to adults or children and the excerpts from *Alligator Pie*, *Nicholas Knock*, and *Garbage Delight* contained in this record should by now be part of every Canadian child's education. The juggling with words ("Billy Batter"); the cumulative nonsense ("On Tuesdays I Polish My Uncle"); tongue twisters ("Someday I'll Go to Winnipeg"); Spoonerisms ("The Big Molice Pan and the Bertie Dumb"); skipping and ball bouncing chants are all there in full force. Dennis Lee's recitation invites participation (especially with the insistent three-fold repetition of "Alligator Pie") and the reading should be especially meaningful to the child who has personally seen Lee in action. The background voices enhance the production, but the music, while never intrusive, is rather monotonous and uninspired. The heart of the record, of course, is Lee's poetry itself - and as Sheila Egoff writes, "these poems are made to be *recited* or *shouted*, not just read." Every Canadian child knows that!

Nonsense, romance, crazy rhythm, fantasy, and good old-fashioned sentiment: there should be something here for every taste. The standard is very high throughout and if it is not exactly *magnificent* Mozart, there is never a touch of bad Boccherini or, for that matter, bad *anything*.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Canadian Children's Records: a Survey," *CCL*, No. 20 (1980), p. 33.

## RECORDINGS DISCUSSED

*Listen to Me.* Jim and Rosalie. Flutterby Productions, 1980.

*Jim and Rosalie at the Music Factory.* Jim and Rosalie. Flutterby Productions, 1981.

*Adult Entertainment.* Raffi. Troubadour Records, 1977.

*Listen to the Children.* Bob Schneider. Almada Corp., 1980.

*Alligator Pie and Other Poems.* Dennis Lee. Caedmon, 1978.

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## Wilfred Eggleston: Frontier Novelist

DAVID W. ATKINSON

*Prairie Symphony*, Wilfred Eggleston. Borealis Press, 1978. 271 pp. \$10.95 paper. ISBN 0-660-00124-1; \$15.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-660-00101-2.

An insightful critic of Canadian literature and one of the most important Canadian journalists of the first half of the twentieth century, Wilfred Eggleston is not generally remembered for his two novels of the Canadian prairies. The first of these, *The High Plains*, was written and originally published in the mid-1930s and subsequently republished in 1975. Eggleston's second novel, *Prairie Symphony*, was written a decade later, but, unlike *The High Plains*, remained unpublished for over thirty years until 1978.

*Prairie Symphony* recounts the childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood of Christopher Niles, who from his very early school days aspires to be a poet. An orphan, Christopher is brought up by his uncle, who farms in the desolate southeastern part of Alberta known as the Palliser Triangle. Christopher is a misfit, too sensitive for the harshness of farm life, and he is constantly subject to the abuse of his cousins, who perceive him as a burden and who scornfully reject him as a "book worm" and "teacher's pet". Eventually driven to leave the farm,