

What *do* children want in a record? The icy sparkle of a glittering background, enhancing a troubadour's mellow voice, which they might even have heard in person? Stagey yelps and yowls when ghostly goblin music is even suggested? Languid lullabies for the might-as-well-give-in phase of to-bedness? Presumably all three — and more.

Most of the artists who have created these records are experienced in direct contact with children and, for that reason, have carefully chosen the songs which have proved to be favourites. Not everyone can create a magic *rapport* with a crowd of children: yet, to do so does not necessarily mean that musical ability, choice of songs, delivery and background are first rate. I once knew a camp director who was tone deaf but managed to produce the most charismatic camp-fire singsongs through the sheer power of his personality. Remember Rex Harrison in *My Fair Lady!*

This is not to say that these artists are simply "saying a song": far from it; but, with the number of children's records on the market to-day, one has the right to be choosy and, at the current price, it would be wise to know what is available before paying that formidable price and slitting the cellophane, only to suffer instant disappointment.

For the very young (under three), who may be deprived of a variety of lullabies and play songs, Pat Carfra in *Lullabies and laughter*, has compiled an impressive collection of both. Both traditional favourites ("Hush pretty baby," "The fox") and new material ("Jennifer's rabbit" and "Wynken and Blynken and Nod") are included and Carfra's pleasant and crystal-clear voice is accompanied simply and effectively on the guitar. The record is designed for parents who might be reticent to sing to their children and who are not aware of the prodigious repertoire of bedtime songs.

Beginning with the simplest ("Bye, bye baby") and progressing to the more poetically complex ("Turn around," and the all-time favourite, "All through the night"), the lullabies are arranged into rhythmic cradle songs, journey lullabies, and sleepy songs. The rhymes and play songs on Side Two are probably more familiar to the average parent and there is plenty of opportunity for finger play, clapping and dancing.

I found that the spoken introduction to many of the songs, read in a very self-conscious, articulate, but flat voice, often broke up the continuity of the numbers, an impression that became increasingly disconcerting in repeated playing of the record. These comments are already included in italics in the accompanying pamphlet of lyrics. The spoken instructions are obviously directed toward parents and I found some of them rather intellectually insulting. Who needs, for example, to be told to change the words from "Mama" to "Papa" if the father sings the song?

Bob Schneider's first album, *Listen to the children*, was reviewed in *CCL*,

27/28 (1982), p. 201. His latest release, *When you dream a dream* is by no means a let down! There is the same variety of all-original upbeat rock, one standard (an impressive rendition of "Somewhere over the rainbow") with some new tricks thrown in, such as the reggae "Computer man" or "Kemo Sabe hobby song." The title song is beautifully done — as well as the sensitively nostalgic "Grampa's song." The heart of the record is, perhaps unwittingly, an exercise song, "Feeling alive." As in his earlier album, the underlying theme is a marvellous affirmation of life. Bob Schneider's youth, his creative versatility and his sincerity all make the affirmation credible. The 24-page lyric and activity booklet is definitely a cut above average and offers many suggestions to parents and teachers for creative play.

Two albums — one by Wendy Find and Judy Irwig, the other by Judy Irwig with vocal assistance from Kevin Irwig and Mike Pilot — make a significantly happy experience in music for young listeners.

*It's a small small world*, by Fine and Irwig with their pleasant British accents, is a relaxed and very professional collection of the most familiar and some new songs (to me, at least) as well. Voices blend beautifully; the background is as mellow and engaging as the vocalists and the record at no point grates on the ear. Both sides are well structured: they consist of group songs about being small ("I like being small," "Thumbelina"), toys, action songs, old nursery rhymes, nonsense, and lullabies. There is some spoken introduction, but the exuberance is infectious and actually becomes part of the continuity.

*There's magic everywhere* contains a host of original songs by Judy Irwig. They deal with all aspects of childhood: wonderful songs about individuality, feeling sad, marvelling at one's nose or wondering whether a grandparent could have been "just like me and you," and quiet lessons: "It doesn't really matter what you look like" (on the outside, at least), or the timely "Things I like to do" (a sexist ditty on being happy doing whatever feels right for you). Judy Irwig's pleasing voice is backed up by a capable children's chorus and the songs are designed to appeal especially to the 4-9 age group. One question: Why are only some of the lyrics printed on the back of the album cover?

Two earlier records by Jim Duchesneau and Rosalie Moscoe were recently reviewed in *CCL*, 27/28 (1982), pp. 199-200. Their latest album, *Songs in action with Jim and Rosalie*, presents songs performed in concert across Canada which do not appear on the earlier recordings. Although the majority of songs are traditional or, at least, not original Jim and Rosalie, there is plenty of variety. Game or action songs can be found in "Brown girl in the ring," "Happy and you know it," and "Napoleon." Lively, fun songs are represented in the danceable Newfoundland Medley and the "Chicken song." More introspective are the two concluding songs of each side, "It's alright to cry" and "We're growing together." The voices harmonize professionally as always, but I found that in most of the up-tempo songs, there was a certain holding back or lack of exuberance especially noticeable in "Turn on the sun." Canada is represented

by three French songs ("Mon Merle" is so beautifully mellow) and the Newfoundland medley — no complaints in the Canadiana department. I found, however, that with the exception of the chorus in the "Chicken song," nothing really let loose completely. Surely a little rowdiness can still be professional!

Valdy (*Valdy's kid's record*), with a voice that is a folksy combination of Gordon Lightfoot and Burl Ives, gives us yet more of the familiar material ("Working on the railroad," "Quarter-master's store") as well as new items ("Synthy and me" — about a bathroom encounter with a synthesizer). Gentle lessons are suggested in "Acorn song": after all, a bear cub grows into a grizzly, a scowl into a grouch — but, a giggle *does* become a laugh! The songs represent a variety of feelings, but the mood is most often the middle-aged troubadour's nostalgia ("King of Candyland"), Kenny Rogers style. My only criticism here is that, with the exception of "Daddy's ok," there is no really rousing song. The continuous ballad tempo is listenable for adults, but the child might find Valdy more appealing if he had a wider range of movement. A commendable first record, nonetheless!

Another first record received a Juno Award nomination for Fred Penner in 1980. *The cat came back* is essentially a singalong and shows Penner perfectly at home with a chorus of school children. Variety is the keynote here: the folk quality of the title song is matched by the roguish Irish lilt of "Sandwiches" and two beautifully performed lullabies: "Winken Blinken and Nod" and the original Penner "Teagan's lullaby." The synthesizer and string accompaniments on the last two are especially effective. Side Two gives us the familiar "Ghost riders in the sky," and "It ain't gonna rain no more" as well as "The story of Blunder," the adventures of a misfit narrated by Penner and interspersed with his original songs.

This most enjoyable listening experience deserved a sequel and in 1981, *The polka dot pony* appeared. The successful formula of the singalong is immediately evident here and most of the songs are written by Penner. The mood is definitely up-beat and would be especially useful for indoor physical activity on a rainy day! Another misfit here: "I'm a bump. . . / In the middle of the prairie" with dreams of being a real hill, mountain or a volcano which are, in the end, happily resolved. The energetic atmosphere is rarely broken and there is little time for reflection with the exception of the title song-story, a finely presented narrative of an enchanted pony who becomes free and alive through friendship with a little girl, Julie Gerond. The tone is mysterious and very out-of-step with the rest of the record; however, it is best, perhaps, to relax after all that energetic activity and dream a little.

Two attractive records from "Down Under" by Patsy Biscoe are for special occasions. *Patsy's Christmas album* presents gentle, easy listening renditions of the most famous traditional carols juxtaposed with modern popular Christmas songs: "Once in Royal David's City," for example, is sandwiched between "Santa Claus is coming to town" and "I saw mummy kissing Santa Claus." The

effect is not jarring, however; Patsy Biscoe's voice is like honey and the record may well find its way into the adult Christmas collections! Her latest (1983) release is *Games and songs to sing on your birthday*. Side One gives us the old favourites, "For you're a jolly good fellow," "Marvellous toy" together with tried-and-proven birthday games, "Musical chairs" and "Pass the parcel." Throughout, Patsy Biscoe provides a pleasing spoken commentary between songs. Side Two consists of ten songs involving numbers from one to ten and ends with Edward Lear's winner, "The owl and the pussy cat." Both records certainly fill a void in a child's record collection and, even though they are appropriate for only a limited amount of playing each year, they will be long-standing preferences over a number of years and, therefore, well worth the investment.

Also from Australia and brought to Canada by Sharon, Lois and Bram, comes a husband and wife duo performing on the "Elephant" label. Mike and Michelle Jackson have just embarked on a two-month tour of Canada and their record, *Bunnyips, bunnies and brumbies*, presents a variety of children's classics with special accent on Australian tunes. Some of these are well known to Canadian listeners ("Waltzing Matilda" and "Kookabura"); others, such as "The bondi tram" and "The drover's dream" are refreshingly new. The voices are clear and harmonize well, although, occasionally, a little more enthusiasm from Michelle would be appreciated. The accompaniment (concertina, minimouthorgan, jaw harp, spoons, bones, hammered dulcimer, cittern, mandolin, banjo, piano, washboard, ukelele, wow) favours the button accordion and concertina, and occasionally this, together with the country-style fiddling, tends to wear on replay. One song, especially, will drive overhearing adults crazy: almost four minutes of "The doggie stole a sausage"; fortunately, this is followed by a soothing lullaby, "Little fishes." It will be interesting to see if the bunnyip will become as permanent a part of the Canadian musical scene as the elephant has *via* Sharon, Lois, and Bram.

A novelty album for children 3-9 is the *Rugrat rock*, created by Ronney Abrahamson, Fred Mollin, and Ron Garant. Full of catchily rhythmic background ("mellow rock"? "rock candy"?), the children's voices bring fifty-six all-time favourites to a new generation of rock and rollers. All of the permanent collection is there in a surprisingly easy listening album. Occasionally, however, the voices are overridden by the enthusiastic background. Structurally, the selections are compiled in sections: "Rugrats on the farm," "Rugrats on the road," etc. Because of the upbeat tempos, it would not be best to introduce all these classics to a child with the "Rugrats"; much of the charm of the record lies in familiarity with a twist. The end of Side Two is ingenious!

For fans of Mr Dressup (and what Canadian child 3-7 isn't?), the recent release, *Wake up Mr. Dressup; It's time to do your show* should be a runaway hit. Mr. Dressup's television and live stage exposure make it possible to capture the imagination of children familiar with his routines on this record, which

is arranged in the form of a typical show. All the old tricks are here: the tickle trunk, the magic of becoming someone else through costumes and props. While Side One presents some original work by Terry McManus (the best is "Scubadub U"), the second side relies chiefly upon some tired chestnuts ("She'll be coming round the mountain" and "Old Macdonald"). There is one exception, however, in "Mrs. Jones (At the city zoo)", about a wise old lady who loves animals. This has a nice swing and is decidedly the best of the original songs.

Mr. Dressup's formula is undoubtedly successful — as proven by his lengthy television career — and he manages to convey that magic on this record adequately. If he intends to follow up with another, however, I would suggest he dig further into the tickle trunk for some new song and routine ideas; the competition from other Canadian recording artists is getting fiercer each year, as can be seen by the other releases in the review. Together, they make a feast of song and creative fun to suit the tastes of most young listeners and interested parents.

#### RECORDINGS DISCUSSED

*Lullabies and laughter.* A & M Records Ltd., 1982.

*When you dream a dream.* Bob Schneider. Almada Corp., 1981.

*It's a small world.* Wendy Fine and Judy Irwig. EMI, n.d.

*There's magic everywhere.* Judy Irwig. EMI, 1980.

*Songs in action with Jim and Rosalie.* Jim and Rosalie. Flutterby Productions, 1983.

*Valdy's kid's record.* Valdy. A & M Records, n.d.

*The cat came back.* Fred Penner. Troubadour Records, 1979.

*The polka dot pony.* Fred Penner. Troubadour Records, 1981.

*Patsy's Christmas album.* Patsy Biscoe. A & M Records, n.d.

*Games and songs to play on your birthday.* Patsy Biscoe. A & M Records Ltd., 1983.

*Bunnyips, bunnies & brumbies.* Mike and Michelle Jackson. Larrikin Records, 1980.

*Rugrats: rugrat rock.* A & M Records Ltd., 1983.

*Wake up Mr. Dressup!* Butternut Records, 1982.

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