

Canadian children's records IV

Gary H. Paterson

If, as she found herself growing out of all proportion, Alice felt "curiouser and curiouser", "how much of muchness" would she have experienced from recent Canadian records for children! From pure rhythmic fun, to the communication of significant and permanent human values; from the joy of being part of a warm, accepting group, to learning about how other people live, think and feel: surely this ought to be enough to arouse the curiosity of young Canada.

Part of this warmth comes from two records by "Matt," *Comment ça va* and *Quand tu seras grand*. Matt is an engaging young singer with a clear, natural voice. There is a blend of traditional and original songs (all in French) and, occasionally, an up-dated version of an old favourite such as "Rock and Roll Frère Jacques." The original material is most appealing. "Quand tu seras grand" suggests three possible occupations of the twenty-first century; there are other songs about colours, things to eat, modes of transportation, the seasons. The final impression of both these records, however, is a sense of wonder at the universe and ultimate well-being. The lyrics of one song, "Je ne sais pas" sum this up:

Je sais que le monde est grand
Et que je suis petit
Et que j'aime la vie.

Lyrics are included and *Quand tu seras grand* has a pleasingly illustrated lyric-activity booklet.

April and Susan are a duo who have become well known to Canadian children not only because of their television appearances (Susan Marcus is "Susan" on the Mr. Dressup show, where April Kassirer has made frequent appearances), but also through personal performances across Canada. Their albums, *Join in* and *Homefree!* are a listenable mixture of musical styles and moods and it is obvious from the very first cut that these are seasoned professionals. *Join in* contains all original music and two well-told stories, amusing updates of familiar fairy tales. Most of the titles of Side 1 suggest participation ("Join in," "I'd go dancin'," "Shake! shake! shake!") and probably the most successful is a rock-parody, "Snappin' our fingers." There are quiet moments, too. I especially like the "Lullaby" with its simple lyrics and very effective accompaniment. There is a Hallowe'en song, one about making pizza, but the catchiest is the concluding

song about making Latkes (potato pancakes) for Chanukah. Beneath all the action and rhythm, there are some subtle observations about life: the differences in people and the need to accept them, the cycle of the seasons and the potentialities of Nature as well as the beauty of clean water and pristine animal life.

Homefree! continues the same high quality of entertainment. If anything, the performers seem more relaxed and to be really enjoying themselves. Again, with the exception of a traditional French song, "L'arbre est dans ses feuilles," all the music and lyrics are original. This record depicts, more fully, a child's point of view: getting dirty while playing hide-and-seek is definitely worth it; sloppy shoes feel wonderful because they're *mine*; spending a quiet day indoors playing imaginatively and listening to the "falling rain" can also be fun. The variety of musical styles ranges from bop to calypso to soft shoe; there is even an Irish jig ("Ocean motion"). Canadian content is not absent either; the conclusion is a rousing jive, "Canada beat," a new twist for the exercise song. These records should provide plenty of diversion for children ages four to ten.

While Patsy Biscoe's Christmas and Birthday albums have their own unique appeal, her collection, *Fifty favourite nursery songs* Vol. two, should, as well as its predecessor, be a staple in any children's record library. Patsy Biscoe's pleasing voice briefly introduces and provides light continuity between each song. Most of the material is traditional but there are some relevant messages for to-day's child as well: "Fasten your seat belt" and "Stop says the red light." Reassuring and inventive for ages three to five.

A fine complement to Patsy Biscoe's collection is *Mainly Mother Goose*, with Sharon, Lois and Bram of *One elephant deux elephants* fame, a trio that needs no introduction to young Canadian listeners. The "mainly" of the title is significant: included are some twentieth-century material such as "Three little fishies" (1939), "Dr. Tinker Tinker" (1910), and "Move over for Marty" (1962). All the favourites, nevertheless, are here, most professionally performed. Highlights include "Oh dear, what can the matter be," "Old King Cole," and "Lavender's blue." There is plenty of variety between solo and combined voices, recitations and contributions from a capable children's chorus. Some very fine research is also evident in the handsome accompanying booklet. All the music is printed here, as well as an interesting historical commentary on the songs and a bibliography of other collections of nursery rhymes.

If your record collection needs an antidote for too many lullabies and quiet ballads, here's a suggestion: try *Jibbery jive* with Deborah Dunleavy. With few exceptions, this is definitely toe-tapping upbeat music with plenty of action, dance, nonsense and letting go. Deborah Dunleavy's rich and versatile mezzo voice is perfect to lead such carryings-on. Of the traditional material, "Patsy-atsy-orie-ay" is one that hasn't been overly recorded recently and I couldn't believe my ears when I heard

Chair bom bair
Tea-air, gal fair
Tea-legged, tie-legged
Bow-legged chair.

In spite of all the playful hijinks of this rollicking record, a high-point is the beautifully sung ballad, "I gave my love a cherry." The activity book, with its glossy paper, is the most elegant I have seen and the suggestions for activities show a keen feel for dance, movement, drama, and art.

For more fun and playfulness, two lively performers, Kim and Jerry Brodey, provide songs for every mood in *Simple magic*. The traditional material includes "Aba daba honeymoon," "Pop goes the weasel," "Vive l'amour," and "Zip-a-dee-doo-dah," while certain old favourites like "Shortnin' bread" have been done up with new words. Outer space is represented by "There is a robot;" there are songs from Uganda and the Hopi Indians; Side one ends with a relaxingly beautiful "Nature's lullaby." The voices are fresh, clean cut and versatile, although they are perhaps at their best in such swinging numbers as the title song, "Simple magic."

For those who found that Pat Carfra's first album, *Lullabies and laughter*, filled a void in entertaining the very young, her second collection, *Songs for sleepyheads and out of beds* will present similar delights. Side one has yet more lullabies with Carfra's clear, warm voice and simple plectrum accompaniment. Most of the traditional material is nationally eclectic: there are lovely Scots melodies, Edward Lear's "The owl and the pussy cat" and, though not really a lullaby, the Shaker hymn, "Simple gifts" as well as a beautiful rendering of "Sunrise, sunset." There is no commentary on the record to interfere with the lulling process; notes are included in the lyric booklet. The "wake-up" side includes all kinds of songs for finger plays, knee bouncing and ankle riding. Many are familiar: "Sally go round the sun," "When I was a baby" and two poems of R.L. Stevenson have been successfully set to music. Things get most rollicking with "The goops" and the Irish folksong, "She didn't dance." This is a fine collection for parents of very young children.

For fans of TVO's programme, *Today's Special*, the record of the same name will be most appealing. The magic mannikin, Jeff Hyslop, who comes to life each night in the deserted department store, shares his fine baritone with the listenable voice of Nerene Virgin in a host of fast-moving songs that celebrate a common theme of friendship and the wonder of being alive. Special mention should be made of the hummable music composed by Clive VanderBurgh. Often reminiscent of some of Elton John's better moments, the chord progressions are striking and memorable ("In the twinkle" is a good example).

"Sesame Street's" Bob McGrath has become a fixture in the livingrooms of young America. In *If you're happy and you know it sing along with Bob Vols*. one and two, his capable, natural voice is backed up by some interesting accompaniment and he sings all the well-known nursery songs. I would suggest the

Sing along with Bob series as part of the foundation of every child's record library. There is nothing gimmicky here; the songs do not wear even after many replays. From the simplest of nursery rhymes to the haunting strains of "Hush little baby," this album should be a winner.

It is now possible to get selections of various performers on one record/cassette! *Car tunes*, featuring Sharon, Lois and Bram, The Travellers, Eric Nagler and Mike and Michelle Jackson quite properly bills itself as a "front-seat solution to back-seat boredom." Sharon, Lois and Bram are represented by cuts from earlier recordings going back to *One elephant deux elephants*. In keeping with the travel theme, they offer a Newfoundland Jig Medley, "Sur le pont," and "It's a small world," while The Travellers go all out with a "Round the world medley." Mike and Michelle Jackson's selections have been previously reviewed.¹ From *Fiddle up a tune*, Eric Nagler presents plenty of fun with "Momma don't 'low," "Ice cream orgy time" (the Howdy Doody march theme) and "Cindy." The entire cassette should keep children from the very young to about age seven very well occupied.

Another disc of this type, *Sing and play*, features the best of Fred Penner ("The cat came back"), Jim and Rosalie, Rosen Shontz, Chris and Ken Whiteley, the Polka Dot Door, Sandra Beech, Sandy Offenheim, Sharon, Lois and Bram, and Irene Parikhal. Geared toward children ages three to seven, the songs invite involvement in singing, dancing, and clapping. While most of the performers should be familiar, an interesting newcomer is Irene Parikhal, whose song, "Tails," shows warmth and promise.

Finally, for this special issue of *CCL*, brief mention should be made of a storyteller's record. The art of storytelling is as old as mankind. Happily, even in these days of instant and generally worthless entertainment via afternoon television, the storyteller's art has not been lost. Laura Simms presents six tales of varying lengths and origins and, as they unfold, we become enchanted not only by the movement of the stories themselves, but also by the virtuoso performance of Ms. Simms. Beginning with an African fable, "Five mean and ugly men," and proceeding to an elaborate traditional fairy tale, "The flower of life," Laura Simms is able to adapt her tone from the incessant rhythmic chanting of "The king of Togo Togo" to the lilting southern-belle drawl of little green ugly frog in "Moon and otter." While most of the stories can be listened to purely for entertainment's sake, there are some important values being conveyed as well: honesty, obedience, generosity and courage are all communicated meaningfully. To recognize these vibrant aspects of life within the strict structural demands of the fairytale, "The flower of life," is to appreciate a real work of art. This record is highly recommended for ages five to adult.

All in all, the amount of variety is immense and it is quite clearly matched by the quality of performance throughout. Children should be vastly entertained, their emotional horizons broadened and, like Alice, their curiosities pleasantly whetted.

NOTES

¹ *CCL*, No. 37 (1985), p. 91.

RECORDINGS DISCUSSED

Comment ca va? Matt. A & M Records, n.d.

Quand tu seras grand. Matt. A & M Records, 1983.

Join in. April and Susan. Kiddin' Round Records CBS, 1984.

Home free. April and Susan. Kiddin' Round Records, 1985.

Laura Simms tells stories just right for kids. Laura Simms. Kids' Records, 1984.

Fifty favourite nursery rhymes, Vol. 2. Patsy Biscoe. A & M Records, n.d.

Mainly Mother Goose; Songs and rhymes for merry young souls. Sharon, Lois and Bram. Elephant Records, 1984.

Jibbery jive. Deborah Dunleavy. Kids' Records, 1984.

Simple magic. Kim and Jerry Brodey. Kids' Records, 1984.

Songs for sleepyheads and out-of-beds! Pat Carfra. A & M Records, 1984.

Today's special. Jeff Hyslop *et al.* A & M Records, n.d.

If you're happy and you know it sing along with Bob, Vol. 2. Kids' Records, 1984.

Car tunes. (Cassette) Sharon Lois and Bram *et al.* A & M Records, 1984.

Sing and play. Fred Penner *et al.* Pram Records, 1984.

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