

reference copy

newsletter of The Folklore Society

OF GREATER WASHINGTON

VOL. 2, NO. ~~3~~ 4

December, 1965

Linda Brennan, Editor

FOLKLORE SOCIETY PRESENTS JEWISH FOLKSONGS and some Anglo-American Counterparts, performed by Tossi and Lee Aaron, at its December 10 Meeting

Jewish folksongs, along with many of their Anglo-American parallels, will be the program at the monthly meeting of the Folklore Society of Greater Washington, held Friday, December 10, at 8:30 p. m. in Pierce Hall, All-Souls Unitarian Church, 15th and Harvard Streets, N. W. Lighted private parking lot is east of 15th & Fuller.

Accompanying themselves on guitar and mandolin, Tossi and Lee Aaron will perform and discuss examples of Jewish folk music in America and compare them with ballads and lyric songs of the English-Scots-Irish folk tradition.

Admission to this and other monthly programs is free to Folklore Society members. The public is invited and admission for non-members is \$1.00. Membership can be obtained at the meeting.

Jewish folk music comes naturally to the Aarons. Tossi learned many songs from her mother and grandmother, and Lee's father provided many more Jewish songs to the Aaron's store of material. The Aarons have been leaders in the folk-song revival in Philadelphia for over 15 years. They were charter members and officers of the Philadelphia Folksong Society. Tossi has done considerable teaching and performing along with her editor-singer husband, as well as solo singing around the country. They bring with them not only a traditional involvement with Jewish folksong, but a professional and scholarly interest and ability in the whole gamut of American folksong. They have made two recordings for Prestige-International Records: "Tossi Sings Folk Songs and Ballads" and "Tossi Aaron Sings Jewish Folksongs for the Second Generation". Tossi has performed previously in Washington at the Ontario Place Coffee House and Bassin's Top-of-the-Walk.

CALENDAR OF COMING FSGW EVENTS

There will be no open sing held during December.

January 14
(Friday) Reports on folklore research by students in the "Introduction to Folklore" course at the University of Maryland, along with their professors, Esther K. Birdsall and Douglas J. McMillan. Pierce Hall behind All Soul's Unitarian Church, 16th and Harvard Rd., N.W., Washington. Membership meeting held after intermission. Program starts at 8:30 p. m.

January 29 Open Sing - Union Methodist Church (basement), 814 - 20th St., N.W., Washington at 8:30 p. m.

P. O. Box 19174

20th Street Station

Washington, D. C. 20036

THE KICKIN MULE...

More Folk-Rock...the last Kicking Mule article about Folk-Rock must have kicked a sensitive spot somewhere. The FSGW Newsletter which went to Marc Silber, Fretted Instruments of New York City, came back with a couple of words scrawled on it having to do with the fecal products of a male bovine. I had thought that my comments might elicit some response but I had not expected any discussion as erudite as this one from New York. I hasten to add that I'm sure the comment was not from Marc Silber himself. He probably just left the newsletter lying around and some nut wandered in and picked it up. You can't be too careful these days.

Folk-Sayings...I don't know if anyone has made a collection and study of folk-sayings but it seems to me that this is an area worthy of more attention. Many sayings and expressions are very apt and call to mind vividly the desired image, e. g. , "Red as a fox's behind in pokeberry time!" but the original meaning of some is lost or obscure, e. g. , "He wouldn't know me from Adam's housecat!" Who was Adam and what does his housecat have to do with the price of cotton! Here are a few more I have picked up here and there--mostly from Panthersville, Georgia.

"He jumped on me like a duck on a June Bug!"

"She could talk the horns off a billygoat!"

"He couldn't tamp sand in a rat hole!"

"Colder than a krout tamp!"

CHUCK PERDUE

Folk Music, a catalog of folk songs, ballads, dances, instrumental pieces, and folk tales of the United States and Latin America on records, is available for 40 cents from: The Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 20402. The records listed in the catalog are for sale at the Library of Congress, Recorded Sound Section, Rm. G-158, for \$4.50 each (plus 45 cents postage each).

John Dildine Starts New Folk Music Series

After producing and announcing a folk music radio program over radio station WASH-FM on Sunday evenings since early 1957, John Dildine has discontinued the program on that station because of the all stereo policy recently inaugurated by the station. He feels that confining the program to records available in stereo would severely limit the material for the program. Beginning on Friday, January 7, 1966 at 9:00 p.m. he will start a new series of programs over WAMU-FM, American University's Educational radio station. The programs will be one hour long and will be produced in cooperation with the Folklore Society of Greater Washington.

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TAYLOR VROOMAN is writing an article on songs across national boundaries and is looking for any counterpart examples or other information. Anyone with contributions, write him at: Research Department, Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Virginia 23185.

On Censoring Folk Songs

Leroy Aarons' report of Nov. 6 on how a Washington music firm sought help from the FBI to identify "distasteful" songbooks suggests the firm hasn't a lot of confidence in its own judgment about such things, and maybe it should be selling something less controversial than music—for instance, soup. Those whose business it is to distribute works of music, literature or art, by which emotions get stirred and opinions get formed, might be thought to have a responsibility to the public not to censor them. The Supreme Court has thought so more than once. Our local music firm evidently doesn't recognize such a responsibility; fortunately, others do.

In 1939, John Dewey noticed how totalitarian governments in Europe were bringing the theater, the movies, the music hall, and popular parades under their regulation, and commented: "Indeed, long before the present crisis came into being there was a saying that if one could control the songs of a nation, one need not care who made its laws." By inviting criminal law enforcement officials to survey the songbooks it sells, a music store bids the Government to beat a similar path, in fact to exercise control over the songs Americans sing. This is a job which the FBI must avoid, a role which the President ought disavow—at the risk otherwise of moving the Nation closer to lock-step political thought and cultural expression.

Today, it is of heightened importance that the Government learn ways of keeping "hands-off" the images and ideas which get expressed in artistic forms, for it is taking new and important steps toward official support and encouragement of the arts

through the establishment of a National Arts and Humanities Foundation and substantial new programs for employing art in education and the cultural recovery of the poor.

Self-restraint and constitutional circumspection will not come easily or naturally; the Government can expect to be repeatedly tempted, by individuals and well-organized groups, to support tasteful art, decorous productions, wholesome exhibitions, scrubbed poets and shaved folksingers. Of course, such governmental "guidelines" lay a curse on true art and any honest artistic spirit; they also work to segregate art and artists from their rightful audience, the people. And they form the official, fictitious standards by which new and important political, religious, and racial ideas get suppressed.

"Freedom is an essential condition for the artist . . ." President Johnson has said. If his wishes and the Constitution's requirements can't be realized, in fact; better, perhaps, no Government assistance to the arts at all.

If, as is said, the White House would be glad for our Robert Lowells and Arthur Millers to drop in, not march or sit in, perhaps it should offer other than garden concerts, afternoon teas, and poetic poetry readings. It might, for example, try to conceive of ways to stimulate, not still, peaceful discussion, controversy and dissent wherever it may appear and whatever its political and artistic form. It could even begin by asking itself and its law enforcement agencies how, under the Constitution, it can be any legitimate part of the business of Government to investigate folk and civil rights songs.

EDWARD DE GRAZIA.
Washington.

FRANK PROFFITT (1913-1965)

Frank Proffitt of Reese, N. C., whose grandmother had known Tom Dula and Laurie Foster and who first sang the song Tom Dooley to Frank Warner in 1939, died in his sleep on November 24th. Proffitt, along with Warner, never realized large financial returns from Tom Dooley (although a percentage of returns from the song since January 1, 1962 was directed to him.)

Beginning with his appearance in February, 1961 at the first University of Chicago Folk Festival, he won the admiration and affection of countless followers of traditional music and lore. He recorded for Folkways and Folk-Legacy and appeared at folk festivals, but never stayed for long away from his mountain home, where he farmed and worked as a carpenter and made dulcimers and fretless banjos.

His survivors include his wife, Bessie, and children Oliver, Ronald, Franklin, Phyllis, Eddie and Gerald.

FBI Checks Folk Songs —Then Mum's Word

By Leroy F. Aarons
Washington Post Staff Writer

Two FBI agents took an interest yesterday in a line of folk music books—including social protest songs—on sale at Campbell's Music Co., Inc., 1108 G st. nw.

C. A. Astle, general manager, said yesterday the two men, showing FBI identification, visited him yesterday afternoon. After a brief conversation they took with them three songbooks published by Oak Publications, of New York City, and a combined record album-guitar instruction book.

On his desk yesterday Astle had six or seven different Oak publications, including Negro songs of Alabama, Scottish folk songs, songs by Peggy Seeger, (half-sister of folksinger Pete Seeger) and a "People's Song Book," containing mostly union songs.

Astle refused to give any details and would not identify the books. He said only that the three songbooks were "not in keeping with the Campbell image" and added that he had all copies of them removed from the shelves. He said other Oak publications were being reviewed.

The FBI had no comment. From other sources it was learned that the Campbell firm asked the FBI to look at the material.

An employe of Campbell's sheet music department said that about six months ago a customer had complained about the contents of three of the books and they had been returned to the Oak company. She remembered one of the books was "We Shall Overcome," a collection of civil rights freedom songs.

"We Shall Overcome" was compiled by Guy Carawan and his wife, both active in militant civil rights causes, for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee.

The Campbell employe said the songs in the three rejected books were "distasteful" and that they concerned "civil rights and then some."

A nearby stationery store and two music stores that stock Oak Publications said

yesterday they had had no inquiries about them.

Oak is the largest publisher of folk music material in the field. Their catalogue ranges from traditional British to blues, and contains a heavy larding of civil rights, union and contemporary social protest songs.

Oak's two owners, Irwin Silber and Moses Asch, are also the principal owners of "Sing Out!" considered the definitive folk song magazine. "Sing Out!" regularly prints articles and songs about the pacifist movement by such people as Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger, an editor and part-owner of the magazine.

Silber said yesterday he had no knowledge of an investigation of his firm. Nor did he recall that any Washington outlet had returned some of the books.

Silber was questioned in 1958 by the House Un-American Activities Committee regarding left-wing connections. He refused to answer claiming the protection of the First Amendment.

Seeger, a well-known folksinger who published songbooks with Oak, was cited for contempt by the Committee about ten years ago, but an appeals court threw out the case.

Seeger, whose father is Charles Seeger, prominent folklorist and collector, refused in 1954 to tell the Committee whether he was then or ever had been a Communist. He was cited for contempt in July, 1956, and cleared in May, 1962. His troubles with the House Committee affected his career, however, and prevented his appearance on network television shows.

Seeger was a founder of the popular folksinging group, The Weavers. His half-brother, Mike, is also a folksinger. The Seegers lived in the Washington area several years ago.

an open letter to open minds

The report in the Washington Post Saturday, November 6th, by Leroy Aarons, is very disturbing to us. A clerk in a music store called on a Federal Agency to pass judgment on the contents of folk song books put out by the country's largest folk publisher. There are two culprits here: the one that asked the Government agency whether certain books should be handled, and the Government Agency that would take on such a responsibility. We at the Discount Record Shop read, play and advertise many things that we disagree with, (have you ever heard rock and roll?) on the principle that our customers are intelligent and can decide for themselves what is good or bad. The fact that an otherwise reputable store would call a Federal Agency to tell them what they should stock—in other words, to act as "thought police"—is expected in the Soviet Union, not in America. How was Oak Publications undermining our country—by using the wrong kind of chords in their folk music books?

Let's never forget that Democracy thrives on controversy and dissent. In our opinion, there is nothing so sacrosanct that it is above discussion. It is very important to recognize McCarthyism as it develops, not lament it when it is here and criticize it when it recedes.

Bob Bialsek

discount record
and book shop

1340-42 connecticut ave., n.w.

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TOSSI AND LEE AARON

IN A PROGRAM OF

JEWISH FOLK SONGS

(WITH ANGLO-AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS)

8:30 P.M., FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10TH

PIERCE HALL
ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH
15TH AND HARVARD STS. N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C.

GENERAL ADMISSION: \$1.00

MEMBERS: FREE

Presented by
THE FOLKLORE SOCIETY OF GREATER WASHINGTON
P.O. BOX 19174, 20TH ST. STATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036

Note:

Private lighted parking lot just east of 15th & Fuller Sts.

