

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CANADIAN FOLK SONG COLLECTIONS

DEAR SIR,

The interesting article by Dr. Barbeau on Canadian folk-song collections printed in your last number omits any reference to the traditional Gaelic folk songs recorded by the writers in Cape Breton and on the adjacent mainland in the autumn of 1937, using an Ediphone.

This collection was made with the express purpose of comparing the oral tradition of Barra, in the Outer Hebrides, with that of the descendants of emigrants from Barra living in Cape Breton, the two having been almost entirely separated by then for about a hundred years. In that respect, the following conclusions were reached: (a) the older people in Cape Breton spoke very good Gaelic, (b) but the tunes of the traditional songs sung there had been somewhat simplified; (c) very good versions of the words of old waulking songs were extant there, closely resembling the Hebridean versions. There were no songs we recorded from Uist and Barra people in Cape Breton that were not known to Uist and Barra people at home.

Altogether 102 items, including over eighty songs, were recorded from eighteen different reciters on this expedition. The tunes of about fifty of these songs were transcribed by Séamus Ennis of the Irish Folklore Commission in the winter of 1946-47; photostatic copies of this transcription are in the possession of the School of Scottish Studies, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, and the Canadian National Museum at Ottawa. Some of the other tunes were transcribed by the late A. Martin Freeman and others by the second of the undersigned. These MSS, and also the transcription of the words, which was made at the time of collection, are in the possession of the writers.

Celticists and folklorists possessed a magnificent potential field in pre-second war Gaelic-speaking Cape Breton, but it was practically ignored.

Yours truly,

J. L. CAMPBELL.
MARGARET FAY SHAW.

Isle of Canna,
Scotland.

17.5.61.

BARTÓK MEMORIAL CONFERENCE

DEAR SIR,

In March of this year the Music-Folklore Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences organized a Memorial Conference in honour of Bartók.

I enclose a list of the papers read which may be of interest to readers of the *Journal*.

The conference was held on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th March.

GYÖRGY KERÉNYI and BENJAMIN RAJECZKY: Bartók népdal-lejegyzései (Bartók's Folk-song Transcriptions).

ILONA RÁ CZ: Bartók Béla utolsó évei a Magyar Tudományos Akadémián (Béla Bartók's Last Years at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences).

PÁL JÁRDÁNYI: A magyar népdalok új rendje (The New Order of Hungarian Folksongs).

LAJOS KISS: A várpalotai munkásság zenei hagyományai (The Musical Traditions of the Worker Inhabitants of Várpalota).

GYÖRGY SZOMJAS-SCHIFFERT: A finnugor népek közös tánczenei hagyományai (The Common Dance Music Traditions of the Finno-Ugrian Peoples).

LÁSZLO VIKÁR: Hegyi-mari dallamtipusok (Mountain Mari Melody-Types).

IMRE OLSVAI: A déldunántuli dallamdialektus (The Melody-Dialect of Southern Transdanubia).

BÁLINT SÁROSI: Egy Fővárosi étterem népi zenekara és közönsége (The Popular Orchester (i.e. Gipsy Band) and Its Audience in a Budapest Restaurant).

RUDOLF VIG: Dur-kvintváltó dallamok a magyarországi cigányok népzenejében ("Fifth-Changing" Melodies in the Folk Music of Gipsies in Hungary).

Yours faithfully,

JOHN S. WEISSMANN.

47, Witley Court,
Coram Street,
London, W.C.1
1.6.61.

DANCE NOTATION

April 19th, 1961.

DEAR SIR,

The articles on dance notation in the IFMC *Journals* of 1958 and 1959 have only recently come to my attention. I was very pleased to learn of the extent of the interest in and acceptance of this indispensable tool. I would like to add a few items of information on the activities in this field here in the U.S.A.

The Dance Notation Bureau, founded in 1940, has devoted itself to the development and propagation of the Laban system—here called Labanotation. For the first time a choreographic work (the dance sequences from *Kiss Me Kate* by Hanya Holm) was accepted for copyright in Washington, D.C., in 1952—made possible by this standardized and recognized notation. Since then many dance-works have been so protected.

The general use and acceptance of the system is growing at a great rate. Ethnologists—notably Dr. Gertrude Kurath and John Mann have found it a useful adjunct to their research.

The application of Labanotation to Folk Dance is a recent development here. Folk material has been used for some time as a means of teaching reading and writing in notation, but its use for collecting, recording, etc., has been less actively pursued. However, there is a tremendous interest in the practice of all types of folk dance in this country and leaders have felt the need for a common language and a permanent one. The recent book—*Ten Folk Dances in Labanotation*—has found a good welcome and is being used extensively. I have just completed a course for folk dancers and hope to start another in the fall—and will present it at Pinewoods Camp, the summer school of the Country Dance Society of America, this August. Additional books of folk dances in LN are being planned—a volume of English Country Dances as well as those of other nations.

In your discussions on Labanotation the question of difficulty was raised. Albrecht Knust commented that the system could be simplified. I would like to stress this point. Since the study starts with a general description of movement and progresses to any degree of subtlety and detail, the novice or amateur can write correctly from the beginning, amplifying as knowledge or movement-awareness increases. *Ten Folk Dances in Labnotation*, written for the beginner in notation, is in the most simple and general terms. It does not show arm- or body-movements or any stylistic detail. All of this can be added later, and there will be nothing to re- or un-learn. Children as young as five or six accept and use the simple descriptions:—direction, level, timing, quick-fast, etc.

We hope this information may prove interesting and useful to your members. Any inquiries or news on this subject will be heartily welcome.

Sincerely yours,

MIREILL BACKER,

Vice-President, Dance Notation Bureau.

Secretary, Country Dance Society of America.

Dance Notation Bureau, Inc.,

47, West 63rd Street,

New York 23, N.Y.