

INTRODUCTION

Of all the provinces of Canada, Quebec has the richest store of folk songs. In our first book, *FOLK SONGS OF CANADA*, we wanted to give a cross-section from all parts of the country and had, therefore, to restrict the number of songs from Quebec lest they overshadow the others. Our regret at having to exclude many fine French-Canadian songs led us to prepare this second book.

There are, of course, a great many collections of French-Canadian folk songs, but very few which have the same purpose as ours. That purpose is simply to introduce to English-speaking people some of the best-known songs of the French-Canadians in a form in which they can use and enjoy them. Most existing collections are, naturally enough, in French, and, unfortunately, few English-speaking people can speak or read French with ease. There have been a few previous books with English translations, but most of these were designed for the concert stage rather than for the living room or community hall. This book, like its predecessor, is designed primarily for the enjoyment of the general public, although we hope it will also be useful to musicians.

The songs we have chosen are almost all ones that are very well known in Quebec. We have tried, for the most part, to keep to songs which are suitable for group singing: this meant excluding many fine songs because of their impractical vocal range. However, the intrinsic beauty of certain songs, such as "Au bois du rossignolet", "Si l'amour prenait racine", "Papillon, tu es volage", and "Blanche comme la neige", persuaded us to include them even though they are most effective when sung as solos.

In *FOLK SONGS OF CANADA* we gave the preference to songs which originated on this side of the Atlantic: the native Canadian as distinct from the imported songs. But only about one in twenty of the Quebec songs is native, so this time we have included also a great many that came here from France and are Canadian only because they have been sung in this country for several hundred years. Still, in a very real sense they are more Canadian than French. Many of the songs preserved in Quebec have disappeared completely in the land of their origin. Others still known in France have changed markedly over the centuries, while in Quebec they have been handed down almost unchanged, and thus have retained their original seventeenth-century flavour.

With few exceptions, the rhythm of French-Canadian songs is incisive, which makes them excellent as work songs and dance songs. On the other hand, the length of the musical phrases is frequently irregular either because of an impatience with the last word of a line which has not been given an extra beat to round out the rhythm (as in "Les Raftsmen"), or because of an imaginative treatment given to a word which extends a phrase (as in "A Saint-Malo"). These irregularities do not present any performance problems, but actually make the songs more attractive.

As in every folk-song collection, the particular form of each song we use is only one of many versions. In general, the songs best known in Quebec today are the ones first noted by Ernest Gagnon in 1865. Hence we have drawn heavily upon his collection, although it represents only a small fraction of the many thousands of French-Canadian songs which have been discovered since then.

If these songs are to be sung by English-speaking people, it is necessary to provide singable translations. This presents many problems. Translation is no easy

task under any circumstances, but nothing is more difficult to translate than poetry of any kind. In folk songs, the words and melody have been moulded together through many generations until they are a complete reflection of the people who made them. No other language can hope to catch this reflection perfectly, but every effort has been made to keep the translations as close as possible to the spirit of the originals.

That the songs to be translated were French presented additional problems. The French language is far richer than English in rhyming words, so it is not uncommon to have a complete song in which all the lines rhyme. Needless to say, this is almost impossible in English. Further, the French are free to vary the accents on their words according to their use: thus the same word may be pronounced in different ways to fit different metrical patterns. Without these advantages, it is difficult to give the English lines the easy fluency of the French, but the words have been fitted to the music as closely as possible in order to make them singable. Of course, if you can sing the French, your pleasure will be doubled.

In a few of the English versions ("Auprès de ma blonde" and "En roulant ma boule", for example), the French refrains have been retained to give some of the flavour of the original. Usually the repetition so characteristic of the French "ronde" has been omitted in the translation because the form is less natural to English singers and makes the song excessively long.

As for the musical arrangements, each song is cast in a key suitable to the song itself and yet practical for singing by an untrained voice. The accompaniments have been written with the ability of the amateur pianist in mind — though the professional musician need not hesitate to depart from the printed page in the interest of variety in a concert or radio performance. Guitar chords have been added for the guitarist or the pianist who wishes to improvise his accompaniment. The guitar chords do not always follow the harmonization of the piano part. A minimum of dynamics and other performance helps has been included to allow the greatest possible freedom of interpretation. It should always be remembered that folk singing is a vocal art and no accompaniment at all is actually necessary.

In conclusion, we wish to say that this book would not have been possible without the pioneer work done by such people as Ernest Gagnon, Marius Barbeau, and Luc Lacourcière. Gratitude is also due to Mesdames Madeleine Fohy St.-Hilaire, Marie Gagnon, and Muriel Hall Plamondon, of L'Alliance Canadienne. Indeed, one purpose of this collection is to assist in a small way in the work of L'Alliance Canadienne — a vital organization dedicated to achieving a greater understanding between the two main ethnic groups of Canada — the English and French speaking people.

EDITH FULTON FOWKE
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NOUS ÉTIIONS TROIS CAPITAINES

(We are Three Young Captains Jolly)

With bravado

A min A min G F

1. We are three young cap - tains jol - ly; We are three young
1. Nous é - tions trois ca - pi - - tai - nes, Nous é - - tions

F E min F C D min 7 G 7

cap - tains jol - ly; From the war we have re - turned. Let us cheer now!
trois ca - pi - - tai - nes, De la guer - re re - ve - nant, Bra - ve, bra - ve,

A min A min F A min A min D.C. A in last time

From the war we have re - turned. Let us cheer!
De la guer - re re - ve - nant, Bra - ve - ment.

D.C. last time

1. We are three young captains jolly;
We are three young captains jolly;
From the war we have returned.
Let us cheer now!
From the war we have returned.
Let us cheer!

1. Nous étions trois capitaines,
Nous étions trois capitaines
De la guerre revenant,
Brave, brave,
De la guerre revenant,
Bravement.