

Ted Ashlaw — Adirondack Woods Singer, Recorded and edited by Robert D. Bethke (North Ferrisburg, Vt.: Philo Records (Philo 1022), 1976. One 12" 33 1/3 rpm disc with liner notes by Robert D. Bethke.)

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Record Reviews

Ted Ashlaw — Adirondack Woods Singer
Recorded and edited by Robert D. Bethke
(North Ferrisburg, Vt.: Philo Records (Philo 1022), 1976. One 12" 33 1/3 rpm disc with liner notes by Robert D. Bethke.)

This album contains seventeen songs, sung by Ted Ashlaw, a native of St. Lawrence County, New York, just south of the Ontario border. Ashlaw worked as a lumberman until an accidental injury forced his retirement at the age of 47. He was 68 when Bethke (a folklorist at the University of Delaware) made these recordings in 1972-3. He is one of a group of traditional singers from northern New York State recorded by Bethke, who states that the notes to the record (and, I hope, the texts and tunes of the songs on the disc) will form part of a chapter in his book *Bunkhouse Singers and Barroom Bards*, "in preparation" (no publisher is listed).

Ashlaw sings without accompaniment (in Atlantic Canada this is called "singing without music" — "music" meaning instruments). Bethke describes his style as a "full-throated, non-ornamental manner of straight-forward singing," typical of his region and different from the *parlando rubato* style often found in the Scotch and Irish singing traditions of the Ottawa Valley and further east in Canada. In voice and style Ashlaw reminds me of Indiana singer Vern Smelser (on Folkways FS-3809, *Fine Times At Our House*). There is a spoken ending on only one song on the

record, and somewhat surprisingly this occurs not in a broadside or Child ballad but in the comic stage-Irish ditty, "Mickey Brannigan's Pup."

Bethke notes that the songs on the record "illustrate the exchanges in Anglo-American folksong tradition found in the northeastern United States, Eastern Ontario and the Canadian Maritimes." English language traditions of rural Quebec and Newfoundland could be added to this list. About half of the songs are variants of those listed in the standard indexes of Francis J. Child and G. Malcolm Laws, Jr.: two Child ballads (84, 278); three British Broad-sides (Laws J12, N24 and N38); and three Native American Ballads (Laws B3, B4 and dC29). The latter all derive from North American broadsides, or similar popular publications. Among the remainder of the ballads and lyrics on the record are two locally composed ballads. One is a lumber camp "moniker" song of the kind so popular in Anglo-American occupational traditions. The other, a satirical ballad, conforms to the satirical song tradition in that associated with it is a legend about the conflict which ensued when the composer sang the song in front of its subject. Five other songs either clearly or apparently come from Britain and are reported for the first time or have been encountered rarely in this region. Of these several have been recorded in Atlantic Canada. One wonders at the lack of sentimental ballads like "The Baggage Coach Ahead," "The Blind Child" and other

popular numbers from the turn of the century and later. Perhaps they are in Ashlaw's repertoire but were passed over for this recording.

The selection of songs was made by Bethke in consultation with Ashlaw, and is based on the collector's recorded sample of some sixty songs, approximately a quarter of what Ashlaw says he knew back in his youth when he "could sing all night and never sing the same song twice." A list of the songs Bethke recorded but did not include would have enhanced the reference value of the notes. How does his repertoire compare with those of others from the region (like Lawrence Older and Sara Cleveland) and with those from neighbouring regions (like the Ontario informants of Fowke and Puckett)? It would also have been useful to have song texts to follow while listening to the record. Neither texts nor the list would fit onto the liner, however; a brochure would be needed.

The liner notes do contain much useful information: a biographical sketch, a discussion of Ashlaw's attitudes about and experiences with his own and related musical traditions, a description of circumstances in which the songs were recorded and edited for the record, brief annotative notes for each song, and a photo of the singer. We look forward to further information in Bethke's book. Texts an extended discussion of repertoire (or at least a list), and a more detailed analysis of the role of music in Ashlaw's life would be welcomed. An accident ended "his days of informal group entertaining;" one wonders what kind of impact his discovery and recording by Bethke caused.

Considering that these are field recordings, the quality is good. On a few songs some background noises can be heard, but these are well in the background and reflect the high quality of the recording equipment and microphones used. In summary, this is a useful addition to the growing body of recordings of traditional singers from Eastern North America. I plan to use it in the classroom, contrasting Ash-

law's version of "Mantle So Green" (Laws N38) with that of Marie Hare of New Brunswick (Folk-Legacy FSC-9). I hope that in future productions of this sort Philo will be able to provide space for song texts and additional documentation, for that is the only aspect of this album which fell below expectations.

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Rufus Guincharde, Newfoundland Fiddler
(Portugal Cove, Nfld.: Breakwater Productions (Breakwater 1002), 197-. One 12" 33 1/2 rpm disc).

Dedicated to publications and recordings from out of Atlantic Canada, Breakwater Productions has released as its second lp, this album of Newfoundland fiddle music. Mr. Guincharde is 77 years old, from the northwest coast of the island, and his playing is first rate. Untrammelled on this recording by an accompaniment other than his own beating feet, Mr. Guincharde soars and gallops through reels, jigs and breakdowns, pausing once or twice for a slow waltz or song tune, then racing off again. His phrasing is as natural as air, his playing clean and his intonation sure; his rhythms are crisp and his energy unbounded. One hears more Scottish than Irish or French influence in Mr. Guincharde's playing. He ornaments less with turns or triplets than with canny double stopping, punctuating the melody lines with swipes down to the lower strings, letting them sound sometimes in chordal accompaniment, sometimes as melodic drone. It is a technique also heard among Scandinavian fiddlers, especially when they play in pairs. Mr. Guincharde's judicious use of it adds depth and variety to his solo playing without sounding heavy-handed or clichéd. Altogether, Mr. Guincharde is a joy to listen to.