

PROFILES

with Jennifer Barr



"I'd better start writing all my happy songs now while I've still got time. 'Cause this sadness a-round me is getting to my mind."

James Gordon (known as 'Jim' to his friends), Rockwood singer, musician, song writer, and entertainer par excellence wrote that chorus in 1973. He's fortunately still writing his happy songs — the sadness hasn't completely affected his mind yet.

Although he's only 23 Jim has been on the musical scene for nearly seven years. He's now well-known as a Canadian folk singer in large areas of the States and Canada, although Guelph and Rockwood residents still have a tendency to ask, "Jim Who?"

When other teenagers were plugging themselves into vast amplifiers shrieking out fighting words, banging unmusical cords from their tortured instruments, Jim was tinkering effectively with his banjo, writing pure poetry set to music.

The Jeff Bird Band

Jim and two friends have an established group and are managing to make a fair living out of playing concerts, fairs, coffee houses, and folk festivals.

Jim plays a variety of instruments from the banjo, guitar, piano, trumpet ("whoops, the valve's stuck"), bongo, kazoo, tin whistle, and other assorted soundmakers. His partners include Jeff Bird, who bills himself as "The Jeff Bird Band" and does indeed play enough instruments for a whole band; and Randy Sutherland, singer, back-up guitarist and general "rounder out."

Lead singer is James who does most of the casual patter on stage but is well set off by Jeff, who reminds one of Tommy Makem with his easy whimsical sense of humor; and Randy, of the sexy voice and huge pseudo-innocent eyes.

In the past year, Jim and Jeff (Randy joined them in the fall) have entertained at festivals in places such as Memphis, South Carolina, New York, Georgia, and all over Ontario. Their concerts include Ontario Place, the C.N.E., Playhouse Theatre, Vancouver; Memphis; Atlanta, Alberta, New Brunswick. They also play at a long list of colleges, universities, libraries, and coffee houses. In fact, their list of credits for one year reads like an entire lifetime's work for most singers.

The group has also done radio shows in the States and Canada, including the CBC, and appeared on television.

Jim doesn't know how to describe himself or the group except that they are entertainers. They are much more than folk singers, combining traditional ethnic folk songs (done with their own twists), some of their own music, amusing fun-poking songs, a little gentle rock and musical ballads. He laughingly calls them "folky whimp."

"Whatever you want, we're it!" chuckles Jim, remembering the time they were hired for St. Patrick's Day in Windsor as an Irish Folk Band. For that engagement they were just that — totally Irish. They can also be pure Maritimers, genuine Ontarians, raunchy bar room singers, or total folk. In the States they are hailed as 100 per cent typical Canadian.

Jim often travels with the well-known group called Maple Sugar, playing banjo and singing.

But all these credits and professional lists are still small clue to the person who is Jim Gordon.

Music all Jim's life

I first met Jim when, at 18, he was running a summer theatre group for young children in Rockwood. The enthusiasm, charm, and general affability of this young lad was overwhelming. Even then, the amount of talent in his attractively small package of a body was nothing short of amazing.

He extended the drama group to include adults and produced one of Shaw's plays with his own touches, making temporary actors out of a group of

stiff up-tight business people (yes, I was one of them).

Jim was just graduating from Centennial High in Guelph where he was first introduced to organized music and band playing. Forming his own group, "The Rockwood Philharmonic," he used to play for any one who'd listen, trying out the songs he was learning to write.

This was followed by a musical education at the U of G, classical voice training, singing work including the University of Guelph singers, University Madrigal Singers, church choirs, and still more concert work.

To help finance this singing habit, Jim started the Garden Street Cafe two years ago. This Guelph coffee house and restaurant has become popular all over the province. Visitors came to partake of consistently excellent vegetarian food and hear folk-type entertainment.

The decor, bits of antique and nostalgia, came courtesy of his antique collecting parents, Don and Cathy Gordon of Rockwood.

In around this setting, between the rickety gables and jean-skirted waitresses, bounced a cheerful long-haired elf—the owner.

The cafe has recently been sold although it is being run in exactly the same way. Jim's musical



career has been taking off to the extent he had to make a choice between his two enterprises. He still maintains an interest in the entertainment booking of the cafe.

Appearing soon at "Mug"

This small column is no place to set down the professional biography of Jim Gordon. I haven't even mentioned the British concert tour, the operatic tour with the Vancouver Symphony, the antique instruments Jim used to experiment with, the sad protest songs and searing social comment Jim writes.

You'll just have to listen to Jim yourself. And you can, for he, Jeff and Randy are appearing at the Mug coffeehouse in Acton on Saturday, May 12.

Even though Jim and his group are becoming very well-known and successful performers commanding "decent" salaries, they love to "get back to their roots" and perform for intimate groups in coffee-houses where the audience becomes part of the act. That's where Jim, Jeff and Randy sing their best—where they can give and take with their own, because they're still basically simple folk singers entertaining you and me.

I hope they stay that way.

Parents air concerns during bear-pit talk

Several parents' education concerns were aired during a bear-pit session last week at M.Z. Bennett school.

The school's principal Doug Magwood and Acton-Esqueving school trustee Betty Fisher were there to field questions and explain some of what goes on at Halton Board of Education to concerned parents.

The health hustle, the popular in-class exercise has been side-stepped recently in the school because of parent's concern about the appropriateness of the exercise for children, according to Mr. Magwood. The parent is a highly qualified physical education professor, said the principal.

"We're looking at continuing it, but with more direction," Mr. Magwood told the group. The principal also indicated children will soon be spending more physical education time outside in such activities as track and field and soccer.

Meanwhile, Trustee Fisher indicated she would find out from the board the latest information regarding the health hustle.

Private schools draining away pupils from the public system was a concern raised by Harold Andros, Principal Magwood said he knows of one or perhaps two pupils who have switched to private schools. And there was one who later returned.

In North Halton trustee Fisher said she could see more pupils going to the Georgetown District Christian School or the separate school rather than to a private school, because of the distance.

"Other parents feel they (private schools) do a better job of teaching. I don't know if that's true," said Lynn Whitten, a parent and para-

professional in the school.

Concerning the quality of education in private schools, trustee Fisher said she could not say if the answer has been proven. There are more private schools being established, but Mr. Magwood said he does not believe there is significant competition between private and public schools.

Mrs. Fisher shared an observation with the parents, concerning schools.

About half of them could be described as conservative and the rest liberal—attitude reflecting the local community.

Police beat

Chase results in man's arrest

A high speed chase in the Acton area ended Saturday with the arrest of a 23-year-old Meadvale man.

The man is charged with dangerous and impaired driving.

A routine police check of a car turned up a 4 1/2-inch dagger in the possession of a 22-year-old Milton man. Police charged him with possession of an offensive weapon. The man was released on a promise to appear at court later this month.

Three town youths were charged with causing a disturbance on Mill Street in front of the 747 Restaurant Saturday.

A 50-year-old Ransom St. man was arrested on a liquor charge by police

"Until society figures out what direction to go, we're caught in the middle," she said. She went on to say some schools are a bit more laissez-faire, usually as a direct reflection of the community. She indicated the board could pursue a course to uniformity, except she did not know if people would like school not reflecting the community.

Teacher job security and budgets figured in a discussion concerning the use of the school library.

The underlining reason for M.Z. Bennett school

having a librarian for a half-day is the allocation of staff. The teachers' federation is not keen on para-professionals who could man the library. It's cheaper labor, Mrs. Fisher said.

Mr. Magwood agreed that a para-professional could manage the library. However, having a teacher step into the librarian's role posed problems. It's not difficult to handle a book exchange, but as far as operating a resource centre, that job requires training, and Mr. Magwood said he did not think teachers could do the job with all else they have to do.

The question arose regarding any plans by the Board of Education to charge for the after hours use of schools. Mrs.

Fisher said the answer is up to the town's recreation department. "Do middle schools cost more?" was one of Mrs. Whitten's questions. "I think so," replied Mrs. Fisher. She went on to say there are pros and

cons regarding the middle school question. That is one reason why she is in favor of the middle school study being carried out by a hired consultant—someone to look at it without bias.

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TENDERS

The Trustees of the Village of Rockwood invite bids for the installation of water and sewer services at the Village office, 118 Guelph Street.

Bids should be in by May 25, 1979.

Lowest or any bid not necessarily accepted.

M. Adema
Secretary
856-9562
P.O. Box 67
Rockwood

\$4000 for Helping Hands

A letter from Halton Helping Hands thanked Halton Hills council for their grant of \$4,000, but admitted to disappointment that the town could not grant the required \$6,300.

Valerie O'Hara, executive director, said she realized the town's position, but added they would not be able to meet the ever-increasing demands on their service.

The organization plans to approach service clubs in an effort to raise the additional \$2,300.

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