



## An omnibus of country episodes

by Deborah Quaille

Quaille Reviews

I have reviewed author Marsha Boulton before, and her "Letters from the Country" series. McArthur & Company has recently released an omnibus of "Letters" so that the collection can be enjoyed in one thick hard-cover.

More than 130 of the best-selling tales are inside, written by a woman who 20 years back traded high heels for wellies and encountered the most amazing adventures in country life. Whether she is scooping up baby chicks with a soup ladle, foiling mailbox murderers, or planting two acres of pickle cucumbers by hand, Boulton maintains a keen sense of observation, affection for her rural landscape, and an immense wit.

The tales are arranged seasonally, and should evoke chuckles from anyone who has a hint of rural life in them. In the tradition of Garrison Keillor, Peter Mayle and James Herriot, this collection of short stories inspires as it informs. Who would imagine that a blow dryer would become one of her indispensable farm tools, or that a chance encounter in a local tavern would result in the founding of the World's Largest All-Female Marching Kazoo Band? Whether serving as

midwife to her pregnant ewes, judging the snowmobile chili contest, or analyzing the questionable IQ of turkeys, Boulton propels the reader into her hilarious world, yet often with the most tender consequences.

"Letters from the Country" first received the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour in 1996, and all three in the series have been bestsellers.

Marsha Boulton is the only person listed in "Who's Who of Canada" who states her occupation as Shepherd/Author. A former People section editor at Maclean's magazine, Boulton raises sheep at Lambs' Quarters Farm in southwestern Ontario, where she also pens bestselling anecdotal Canadian history books. She has been a contributor to CBC Radio's "Fresh Air" for more than a decade. She also likes to quip that she can often be found "out standing in her field" with partner and fellow bestselling author Stephen Williams.

LETTERS FROM THE COUNTRY  
OMNIBUS  
MARSHA BOULTON  
TORONTO: MCARTHUR & COMPANY, 2001.  
\$24.95 H/C, 595 PGS.  
ISBN 1-55278-196-8

## Idle



## Pursuits

### First Annual Poetry Contest: "Imagination Matters"

by Deborah Quaille

The Eden Mills Writers' Festival and the Bookshelf in Guelph wish to announce the first annual poetry contest for children, in conjunction with the writers' festival. In their own words, children are invited to tell the judges why they think "imagination matters." There will be three grand prize winners of \$100 and three runners-up of \$50, one from each level: Primary (gr. 1 to 3); Junior (gr. 4 to 6), and Intermediate (gr. 7 and 8). Prizes are donated in memory of Ishar

Singh.

The judges - three Canadian children's authors - will pick the prizewinners and they will be announced and read by famous authors at the 13th annual festival on Sunday, September 9, 2001.

There are several rules to guide entrants:

- one poem per person
- one page maximum
- provide two copies of the poem:

Copy 1 includes title poem with name, address, phone number, age,

grade, teacher's name and school

Copy 2 includes only the title poem.

- entry deadline is June 27, 2001
- entries are confidential and non-returnable.

Mail entries to Eden Mills Poetry Contest, c/o 94 Alma St. South, Guelph, ON N1H 5W9.

For further information please call 519-826-0876, email edenmills@hotmail.com or you can visit the website at: www.sentex.net/~pql/eden

### CD release by Lesley Andrew

by Donna Danielli

Only when our Arts Editor is out of town do I get the opportunity to attend and review concerts, and the concert and CD release party by Lesley Andrew is one I was grateful to be able to attend. Andrew's new CD is titled *Dream a Little Dream* and is a collection of lullabies for the young and old, ranging in style from Jazz to Classical, Contemporary to Traditional.

In a concert at Mississauga's Living Arts Centre on Saturday May 12, Andrew performed all but one of the songs from her new CD, including Fairy Lullaby, a relatively new piece composed by Laura Burton of Stratford for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This haunting and mesmerizing song done with Andrew's rich and emotional voice was, for me, the

highlight of the evening.

"I used to be an alto who could sing really high, and now I'm a soprano who can sing really low," laughed Andrews in her introduction to Fairy Song, adding that "this is probably the only concert where it's going to be okay to fall asleep because it's all lullabies."

Andrew, who graduated from Wilfrid Laurier University with an Honours Bachelor of Music, Voice Performance and an Opera Diploma, ran a full range of emotions throughout the concert, from the wistful passion of "Good Night my Someone" to the rollicking good fun of "The French Song." The depth and beauty of a mother's love shone in her renditions of "Baby Mine," "Slumber Song," and "A Wish is a Dream Your Heart

Makes." Her performance of "Senza Mamma" in Italian evoked clear images despite a language barrier, carrying the audience through sorrow and joy, with the final ending on a wistful note. Other songs performed in a variety of languages, including "Wiegenlied," "Solviogs Vuggesang" and "Apres un Reve" carried the audience to another world with each note. Her incredible range and heartfelt emotions enhanced each song and the audience responded with thunderous applause. Andrew was accompanied masterfully by Paula Ortelli on piano and Anthony Christie on the cello. Both of these gifted accompanists complemented Andrew's performance without overshadowing it with their own remarkable talent.

The title song of the CD, "Dream a Little Dream," was a full-hearted finale. The audience however, had other plans. Overwhelming applause and a standing ovation brought her back on stage to launch into Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World." The perfect choice to end a spectacular concert, the song had the added dimension of Andrew using sign language along with the vocal lyrics of the song and I left the concert desperately wishing the arts editor would go out of town a little more often, so I can attend more fantastic concerts like this one.

Anyone wishing a copy of Lesley Andrew's CD can call 1-866-LANDREW (526-3739). You can check her concert schedule on her website www.dreaminprogress.com

See picture on page 17

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