

Entertainment

Blind singer detects rain amid the bluegrass

By Jim Irving

"It's raining," she said, with the suddenness of a bomb dropping.

Sudden, because it was said during a high point in the conversation. Also, because two TV sets were competing in the background against the suffocating wrap of wall-to-wall music.

There were no windows in the place either. The one person who heard her stopped what he was doing and leaned toward the door, straining for proof of what she had just said.

Sure enough, between the bluegrass and the TV commercials, something like rain could be heard. Or was that just the imaginings of someone wanting to be in agreement?

The person shouldn't have questioned her statement. Because stepping out of the door of the Richmond Inn a few minutes later, there it was, exploding on the sidewalk in flood-like splashes, as if it had all been dumped from the top of a high building in plastic bags.

Just the same, given the environment, only a person with extra sharp senses would have been aware of it.

And extra sharp senses are just what Jean Johnson, the lady in question, has in abundance.

For Jean Johnson is blind. And has been for 23 of her 30 years; 27, if you count when her weakening vision was first discovered.

Happy hobby
Still, that doesn't stop her from holding a job as a physiotherapist. Nor does it prevent her after work from enjoying her hobby of songstress, accompanying herself on her guitar.

"All therapists acquire a good sense of touch," she said. "I've been a little more aware that way."

"I just had to apply it." As for the singing, she says she likes to do that on a part-time basis.

"The job's important, but one needs a hobby on the side. You see people with greenhouses — well, the guitar is mine."

One of the places in which she occasionally able to indulge that hobby, is the Richmond Inn, where she's staying temporarily.

There, when one of the electronic groups has finally taken its cacophony break, she might be prevailed upon to come in and offer a bit of serenity in the form of "Galway Bay," or "Christian Islands," or whatever some of those in the upstairs rooms might request.

"Christian Islands," of course, is a Gordon Lightfoot song, and anything by Lightfoot is all right with her.

"He's the idol of my life," she says, sitting back in her chair and radiating the kind of smile that fits her ebullient personality, and makes her handicap even less evident.

"I have every LP he ever recorded," she continues. "He's a real writer."

Then she sits back in her chair and reflects a bit on what she has just said.

"I know it sounds stupid, but he's one of the people in this world I'd like to know. I don't worship him, but I have a genuine feeling for him. I know what he means."

Cried at concert
Then, as if to cap it off, she adds: "I was at his last concert, sitting there with tears in my eyes."

"Like an idiot." Born in Fredricton, New Brunswick, Jean has been a bit of a nomad most of her life.

She enrolled in the Halifax school for the blind when she was seven and stayed there till her teens.

Married young, she lived in Oshawa for eight years and then went to England when her marriage broke up.

There she studied physiotherapy and experienced some of the happiest years of her life, working toward a new career and enjoying the camaraderie of her fellow students, all of them similarly handicapped.

She also started to sing again, picking up where she left off 10 years earlier, because a singing teacher told her she should quit.

That the singing teacher was obviously wrong, was shown when she was later offered a part-time job singing in a London pub, "The Nightingale," in Woodgreens, North London.

Teacher or no, however, she'd probably never be able to drop it completely, it's too much a part of her. She loves to sing and when she went home to visit her parents in April, music was the bond.

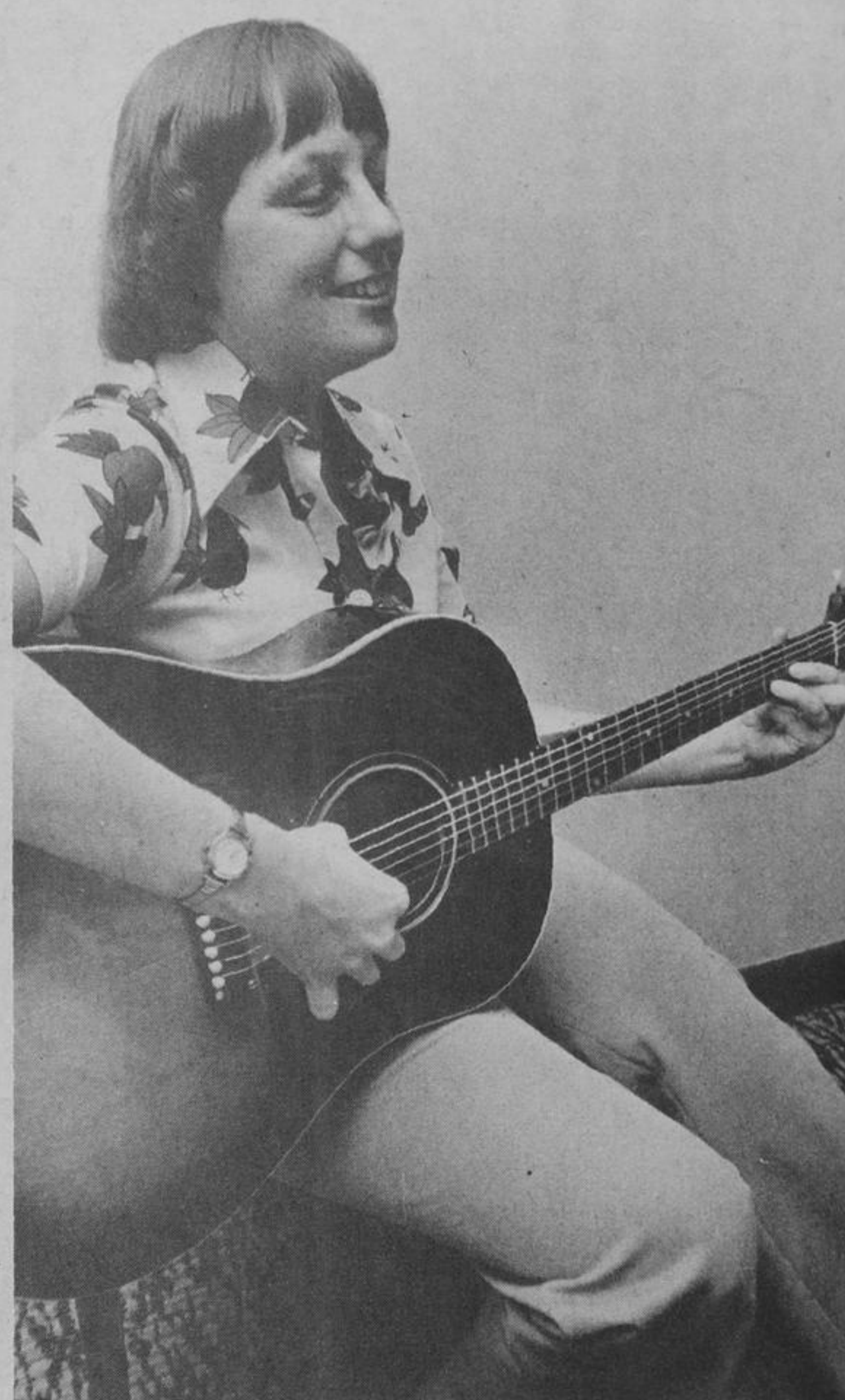
There, with her parents, sisters and cousins — "Mother got out the spoons and I had my guitar" — they spent many a happy evening conducting their own family festival.

Misses family
Now she hopes to get together with her own family of two — Angela, 11, and Andrea, 8 — and have those happy get togethers just closer to home. Just as they did when they were small.

"If I hadn't done it then, I wouldn't be able to do it now," she says.

And one is suddenly reminded once more that she is blind.

Will it always be that way? "There's no way of knowing what's going on



(Photo by H&K)

Some people have greenhouses

After work's all over for the day, Jean Johnson likes nothing better than to get out her guitar and sing. Some people have greenhouses, singing and playing the guitar is her hobby, says the young, blind singer.

in my eye," she says. "The window's opaque — you're writing this down, aren't you? — they can't see in."

But the doctors are going to look at it again. And, although they're not offering hope, they want to see if the retina and the optic nerve are in "reasonably good shape."

"If they could eliminate the opaque... it might be able to perceive some light."

"So, I thought, why not have a go."

Nobody there had to answer, "Why not?" To anyone who can hear the rain across a raucous room, and the silent slide of a pen across a piece of paper, any reply would probably only be redundant.

Inspector Who?

Directing *The Real Inspector Hound*, which will be shown at Richmond Hill Curtain Club, Aug. 10-13, is Heather Mann of Rich-

mond Hill. The play is part of a summer acting workshop conducted by Dave Phillips of Richmond Hill.

Calendar

Mill Pond — *The Real Rully Quintette*, Toronto; TONIGHT, Aug. 3 at 7:30. Admission free. Presented by town recreation department.

Curtain Club — *The Real Inspector Hound*, finale to a summer workshop in acting, conducted by David Phillips; Aug. 10-13. Tickets from cast members. (See picture this page.)

Georgina College Theatre, Barrie — *The Daughter-in-Law*, by D. H. Lawrence; to Aug. 6. Call (705) 728-4613.

Red Barn Theatre, Jackson Point — *The Man Most Likely To*, by Joyce Rayburn; the infernal, eternal triangle and then some — to Aug. 6. Call 1-722-3741.

Noon concert series — Dorothy De Val, piano,

Innis College, University of Toronto; 12:45 to 1:45 p.m., Aug. 10. Last in series. Call 978-7023.

York Symphony Orchestra — two outings this month, Aug. 7 and 28, Sharon Temple Museum; 3:30 p.m. Also crafts, display. Admission \$1.

C. W. Jeffrey and Franz Johnston — a selection of works on loan from the Canadian War Museum, by these two great ar-

tists; Fort York, to Dec. 31. Jeffrey also has exhibition of drawings, water colors and oil paintings at Art Gallery of Ontario.

Black Creek Pioneer Village — a demonstration of pioneer crafts from pre-confederation, rural Ontario; weekends in August, between 2 and 4 p.m. Jane St. and Steeles Ave.

Sunday afternoon outings

The past and the present will be together in more ways than one at a couple of Sunday afternoon outings this month in York Region.

That's when York Pioneer and Historical Society and York Symphony Orchestra present afternoon

recitals of Haydn and Mozart, plus demonstrations of pioneer crafts at Sharon Temple Museum in Sharon, just north of Newmarket.

The programs will be held Aug. 7 and Aug. 28, with crafts on display at 2:30 p.m.,

and the recital following an hour later.

Featured in the latter will be a trio and a quartet. Members are Eileen Bourdessa, violin; Betty Thomas, cello; James Knowles, violin; Karl Rohowsky, flute. Included in the

demonstrations of crafts, will be spinning, rug hooking, open hearth cooking, rug weaving, chair caning and quilting.

Admission to the above is included in the regular \$1 admission fee to the grounds. The grounds are open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Lawrence play at Barrie

Nuala Fitzgerald and Dan MacDonald star in "The Daughter-in-Law," now playing at Barrie's Georgian Theatre until Aug. 6.

Written by D.H. Lawrence, the play takes

a "warm, intimate" look at family relationships, plus a mining crisis in the midlands of England in 1912.

Miss Fitzgerald plays the daughter-in-law,

Minnie, who fights to get her weak husband, Luther, (MacDonald) away from his mother's apron strings.

Joan Orenstein plays the dominating mother. Others in the cast are

John Peters and Doris Petrie.

Artistic director, Ted Follows, directs.

The Barrie theatre is at Highway 400 and the Duckworth exit.

Three-week workshop in mime, clowning

A three-week intensive workshop for performers in theatre acrobatics, mime, mask and clowning, is now being held in Toronto at The Unlimited Space, Danforth and Broadview Aves.

There is also a three-week introductory workshop in mask and mime.

Both programs started

Aug. 1 and run to Aug. 19. Those interested are asked to call 461-6551.

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