



CLARY CROFT

MY CHARMED LIFE
in
MUSIC, ART,
and
FOLKLORE

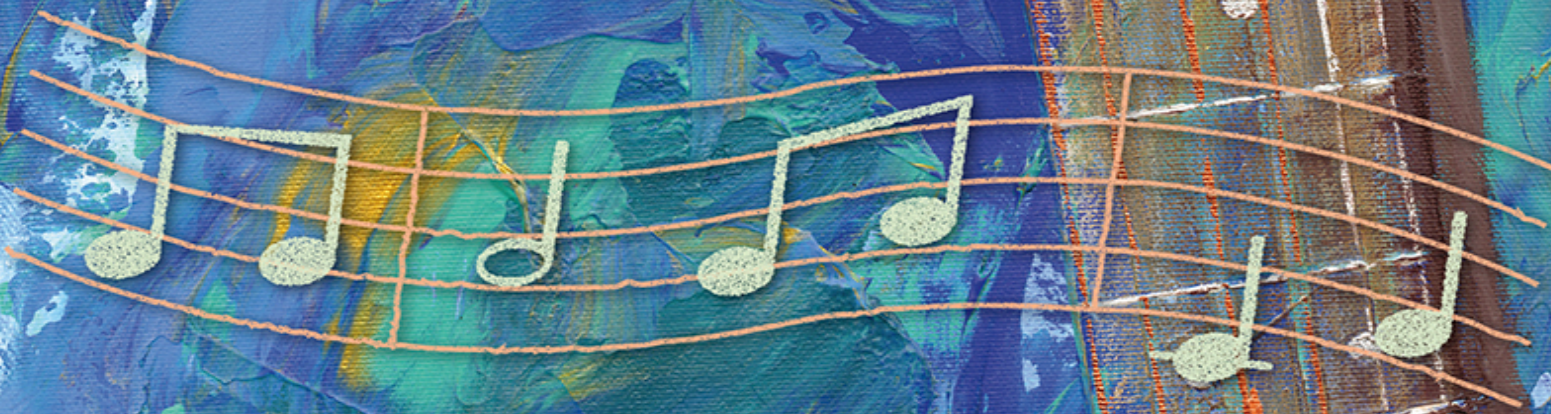


Table of Contents

Copyright
Dedication
Foreword
Introduction
It All Began with Music
The Privateers
Singalong Jubilee and Other Television Work
Radio
Sherbrooke Village
The Clipper Cay
Festivals
On the Road
Helen Creighton
Recordings
Theatre and Film
Arts and Crafts
Croft Designs
Childhood: A Writer's Training Ground
Writing
Sharing Experiences
Brickbats and Recognitions
Acknowledgements
Color Photo Insert



CLARY CROFT

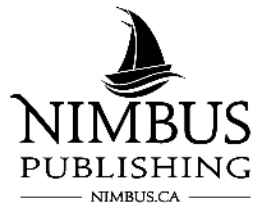
MY CHARMED LIFE
in
MUSIC, ART,
and
FOLKLORE



Clary Croft

*My Charmed Life in Music,
Art, and Folklore*

by Clary Croft



Copyright © Clary Croft, 2021

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission from the publisher, or, in the case of photocopying or other reprographic copying, permission from Access Copyright, 1 Yonge Street, Suite 1900, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1E5.

Nimbus Publishing Limited

3660 Strawberry Hill Street, Halifax, NS, B3K 5A9

(902) 455-4286 nimbus.ca

Printed and bound in Canada

NB1486

Design: Jenn Embree

Editor: Marianne Ward

Cover art: Clary Croft

All images courtesy Clary Croft

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Clary Croft : my charmed life in music, art, and folklore /
by Clary Croft.

Names: Croft, Clary, author.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20210097477 | Canadiana (ebook) 20210097574 |
ISBN 9781771089555 (softcover) | ISBN 9781771089654 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCSH: Croft, Clary. | LCSH: Artists—Nova Scotia—Biography. | LCSH:
Folklorists—Nova Scotia—Biography. | LCGFT: Autobiographies.

Classification: LCC NX513.Z9 C76 2021 | DDC 700.92—dc23

Canada



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

NOVA SCOTIA

Nimbus Publishing acknowledges the financial support for its publishing activities from the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, and from the Province of Nova Scotia. We are pleased to work in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia to develop and promote our creative industries for the benefit of all Nova Scotians.

*Dedicated to my dear sister Carol Secord with love from
her Bub.*



Contents

Foreword
Introduction
It All Began with Music
The Privateers
Singalong Jubilee and Other Television Work
Radio
Sherbrooke Village
The Clipper Cay
Festivals
On the Road
Helen Creighton
Recordings
Theatre and Film
Arts and Crafts
Croft Designs
Childhood: A Writer's Training Ground
Writing
Sharing Experiences
Brickbats and Recognitions
Acknowledgements

Foreword

It's been fifty years since I first met and performed with Clary Croft. And for all that time I've watched him evolve from a young singer with a delightful voice and a charming personality into a treasured Nova Scotian artist with incredibly broad experience: folklorist, singer-songwriter, radio commentator, author, public speaker, researcher, archivist, and artisan. He's worked closely alongside the eminent collector Helen Creighton, travelled over much of the world with the folk groups The Privateers and The Musical Friends, appeared on national television with *Singalong Jubilee*. He has been a frequent headliner at the Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival. Clary has trod the stages of top international venues as well as the creaky boards of dozens of Legion halls and school auditoriums of his native Nova Scotia. Remarkably, the appeal of his talents has meant that he has never had to seek a salaried job: something few freelancers in the arts can claim. There has always been a strong market for Clary's work.

Although he is known and applauded well beyond his native province, it is Nova Scotians who have benefited most richly from Clary's talents. His devotion to his birthplace, Sherbrooke, has helped make that historic village a famous attraction. His books have detailed, in his readable and entertaining style, a treasure trove of the

province's superstitions, folkways, yarns, and peculiarities. His compositions ring with the fullness of our history. Who else could have made a beautiful song based on a traditional weaving pattern, as Clary has done with "Sun, Moon, and Stars"?

Success like this can lead to self-importance and conceit in some who have spent their career in the public eye. Not Clary. He retains the same modesty, puckish sense of humour and innate friendliness that he radiated when he burst upon the scene as a youth. The life and career that followed has been packed with lively interest and much variety. So, naturally, is this book—another bounty from a remarkably creative man.

Jim Bennet
August 2020

Introduction

While many memoirs begin at the beginning with “I was born...,” this one takes a different approach.

On February 11, 2019, I visited the Public Archives of Nova Scotia and deposited my entire life’s work of career highlights, book research and manuscripts, songs, and the documents covering the myriad of experiences I have had over the years. Material from 1959 to 2019—a lifetime in two boxes and thousands of items on a flash drive. So small when you look at it that way, but to me it was huge.

Most importantly, it gave me an opportunity go over the life and career I have had so far. And since all those memories are now front and centre, it gives me an opportunity to reminisce and reflect. I have led a charmed life. I know that, and I am grateful every day.

I have been fortunate in the love and support my family and friends have afforded me over the years. My sincere thanks to everyone mentioned who gave advice, clarified points, and shared their anecdotes and photos. Any errors are mine, and I suspect, after seventy years on the planet, a few have crept in.

So, before I head off to new adventures, let me share with you my journeys of discovery, amazing experiences, and the fulfillment of so many dreams.

It All Began with Music

Mothers are often blind to their children's foibles and are quick to recall the first hints of light emanating from whatever talent their little darlings might step into down the road. Mine proudly boasted that I was making musical sounds before I could talk. It would make sense. I grew up in households filled with music. I was weaned on traditional songs overridden with the musical pull and tug of Baptist firebrand extortions to repent, balanced by the pious and, to my mind, joyless Presbyterian hymns that, even in exaltation, could make one feel gloomy.

These were put against old-time music on the radio and live renditions from Grandmother MacKay, who sang some of the old parlour songs such as "Annie Laurie." Her mother, my great-grandmother Burns, sang hymns and old-time songs with moral lessons. When she was a teenager in Port Hilford, she babysat for the Baptist minister and his wife. She would rock the baby and sing the old songs she was weaned on. When I came along, some fifty years later, she sang many of those same songs to me as I snuggled into her bosom and we rocked together in the chair my great-grampy Burns built. The Baptist minister's son went on to musical fame. Wilf Carter, also known as Montana Slim or the Yodelling Cowboy, is considered the father of Canadian country music. Nice to think he and I learned our

early repertoires from the same woman.



*Cora McDiarmid Burns,
Sherbrooke, c. 1959. (CLARY CROFT
COLLECTION)*

My great-grandparents, Cora McDiarmid Burns and Edward Burns, were a major influence on my life. As a young child in Sherbrooke, I spent hours at their house, which was adjacent to the one my parents built with Grampy's help. They delighted when I tried my hand at step-dancing to the music on the old tube radio, and Grammy was always singing around the house as she made her famous molasses cookies, enriched

with bacon fat. My early life in Sherbrooke was idyllic. Grandparents and great-grandparents doted on me and my siblings.

At the age of four, I was slated to sing my first public performance at the Presbyterian church Christmas concert. It was a duet with my friend, Linda Scott. Linda might have been a couple of years older than me, and we had the song well-rehearsed. The blue curtain that separated the "stage" part of the basement hall from the audience was drawn open, and we two little mites, dressed to the nines, were front and centre. The piano accompaniment began. We froze. It started up again. Linda looked at me and we began to giggle. Long story short, we got the hook; we never did sing the song. Any lesser performer would have taken the



My great-grandfather Edward Burns's painting, believed to be my grandmother, Maxine.
(CLARY CROFT COLLECTION)

hint and looked for another career path. Not me. I had hit a glitch but felt there were better moments ahead. For the nonce, I was still in training.

The following summer, in 1955 when my sister Carol finished the school year, my family moved to Halifax and we lived with my dad's Aunt Delila and her family. Everyone in Dad's family seemed to have nicknames, and hers was "Lilee." She also kept boarders, including a genial fellow from Liscomb named Eldon ("Eldie") Rudolph. Eldie played guitar and sang country and western

songs—and he was good. My sister Nancy was an infant then, and he would walk the floor with her in his arms and croon cowboy and hurtin' songs. I'm sure I gained a solid repertoire from him merely by osmosis.

In 1959, my family moved back to Sherbrooke for a year, where I attended second grade in the two-room schoolhouse. By that time I was eight, soon to be nine, and was being recognized for my singing. With a typical boy soprano range, I was encouraged to enter the regional music festival. The song chosen for every boy to sing was not something most lads in the 1950s would choose.

Written in the mid-nineteenth century by a Scot named James Hodd, "The Boys' Song" was a staple of music festivals in the 1950s and for many years after. I hated the damn thing: "Where the pools are bright and deep, Where the grey trout lies asleep, Up the river and o'er the lea, That's the way for Billy and me." I would have happily chosen one of Eldie's songs over that one. However, I did win the competition, though I have no recollection of it. I only have my dad's memories to verify the fact.

This was also the time when I was first aware of the biased and cruel categories laid upon children by music teachers who were, I suppose, taught to categorize children's voices according to their impressions of quality. Not that it was necessarily a bad thing to appraise a child's vocal abilities and talent. My issue was with the public humiliation of categorization into the bird family, bluebirds being the best and blackbirds or crows being the worst. I was always a bluebird but even then cringed when I heard others denigrated as blackbirds. Many years later, I still meet people who say they never sing aloud because of being put in what was deemed a less-desired bird category.

We returned to the city and I resumed my education back at Joseph Howe School. It was a wonderful place with a mix of children from several socio-economic and racial backgrounds. Our teacher, Miss Vail, taught us songs in French, which began my love for languages. Touring theatre companies livened up our small auditorium, and our own Christmas concerts were major productions. Two brothers were always featured doing a tap dance routine. They were good and I wanted to learn tap. When they

offered after school classes, I paid my quarter and signed up. I was pumped for the first class and couldn't wait to dance. However, in their youthful attempt at establishing some kind of decorum for the class, the brothers started with an opening prayer followed by the singing of "O Canada." A Bible reading ensued, and by the time we ended the class with "God Save the Queen" there was hardly a step-toe-shuffle in the works. That first class was my last.



*Christmas 1960 on Charles Street with my sister
Nancy.*

(CLARY CROFT COLLECTION)

I sustained a slightly longer stint with guitar lessons. I wanted to learn to accompany myself, and when the opportunity arose to take classes from a man who operated

a studio in our neighbourhood, I begged for the funds. This was the era of the “Hawaiian guitar,” more commonly known today as a lap-top guitar. A number of musicians in Halifax played this style, with the guitar flat on their lap and a slide bar to cover the frets and make chords; it was popular with country singers. Although I saw this style of playing in local parades and on television, I wanted to play Spanish-style guitar, holding it against my body as Eldie Rudolph did, or like the cool guys I saw pictured in the song-lyric magazines that were so popular.

But, sadly, economics won out. We could afford fifty cents a week for Hawaiian lessons but not the dollar for Spanish. The guitar rental was a one-time fee of five dollars—a lot of money for my parents when my dad was bringing home around fifty dollars a week. I knew the sacrifice that was being made and held my tongue. The guitar was so cheap I could barely push the steel bar against the frets; my fingers got sliced like they’d been run through a deli-meat machine. Our teacher, and the owner/operator of the Halifax Hawaiian Studios, was Mr. Fred Shebib. He was a nice enough fellow who crammed the room full of kids playing such songs as “On the Wings of a Snow-White Dove.” But even with his kindness, I loathed every minute of the lessons. I lasted until after Christmas. That year, our family photo, posed under the Christmas tree, featured me holding the hated guitar. But I held it proudly in the Spanish position. I gave up soon after, returned the instrument, and left guitar lessons behind me. But the damage was done. I never picked up a guitar again until I was eighteen and began to frequent the Privateer Coffee

House. Now, whenever I am asked to give advice to someone buying a guitar for a child, I tell them to get something they can play easily.

Post-guitar lessons and midway through grade three, my parents bought a house in Spryfield, and we left the big city for what many believed was a terrible place for responsible parents to raise their children. Sections of the Halifax suburb had a reputation for being tough, but in fairness, so did areas of the inner city. My folks bought where they could afford, and to this day I defend Spryfield as a great place to have grown up. And besides, the city was merely a thumb-ride or bus-ride away.

When we first moved to the city, we attended Knox Presbyterian Church on Agricola Street. I made many bus trips back into the city for Young People's youth group meetings and choir rehearsals. The church organist/choir director was a lovely man named Mr. Hiltz. He straddled both sides of the musical fence, which was hard to do in a Presbyterian congregation where the majority wanted only the old hymns and balked at the introduction of the newer pieces that had to be read out of the hymnal and not sung by rote. I began in the children's choir and, even before my voice changed when I was around twelve, also sang with the adult choir. I'm sure this was partially due to the fact that, with a small congregation, there were many Sundays when the choir consisted of less than a sextet. I enjoyed the group singing and was frequently given solos. My mother used to gauge the success of my solo efforts by the number of old ladies (her words not mine) I made cry with my musical offerings.

Mr. Hiltz kept waiting for my voice to descend into the starling-like crackle of puberty, but, perhaps because of my constant singing, I never did experience any significant loss of singing voice. It merely seemed to evolve from boy-soprano range to tenor with a solid lower register as well.

My musical tastes were varied, but like most young people, I gravitated toward the popular sounds heard on the radio. I had a good group of friends—gangly boys trying to find a balance between cool and school, and girls on the cusp of womanhood who filled us with wonder. We boys had a camp in the woods, and many summer nights were spent in what we thought back then was a fairly sophisticated bachelor pad. Rock 'n' roll was our musical soundtrack, mixed with soul and R & B. And then it all changed with The Beatles. This was music that went deep into the teen soul. It was raw, yet tender.

At that time, my friend Rod Kirby was dating a girl whose cousin Linda was visiting from England. Not only England, but Liverpool. Not only Liverpool, but she had been in a crowd scene in the first Beatles movie. She was practically Beatlemania royalty. We four hung around together that summer, and I had a cool factor attached to me because I was hanging around with Linda. She was a nice kid, and we continued a pen pal correspondence for a bit, then lost touch. But I never lost touch with my love of Beatles music. I still hold fond memories of Rod and me standing on the roof of the camp playing air guitar and singing at the top of our lungs “I Want to Hold Your Hand” and “She Loves You.”

With that, the next logical step (at least in our minds)

was to form our own band. Rod's brother, Barry, played guitar and had a little combo. That was our inspiration. Various guys came and went, but the combination I remember most was Rod on drums, Doug Ingram on rhythm guitar, and a lanky fellow named Bill Strum on bass. The musical leader and lead guitarist was Jim Todd. With the addition of me on vocals that gave us the perfectly logical name of Just Five. We rehearsed in our homes and built up a set of standard rock 'n' roll classics, pop songs, and surfer music mixed with Beatles tunes. Rod excelled in The Surfaris' drum showpiece, "Wipe Out"; Jim did a mean guitar solo on Chuck Berry's "Johnny B. Goode"; and I fronted the vocals singing through an old bass amp my parents bought for me.

I remember the excitement when we were asked to play our first teen dance. We loaded our meagre gear into someone's car and drove down to debut at St. Peter's Parish Hall in Ketch Harbour. My sister Carol came down with friends, guaranteeing we had a fan base. (Until her death in 2020, she was a constantly wonderful and supportive fan.) We only knew enough songs for one set, so we repeated it the second time around. The kids didn't mind, and I quickly learned to say we had requests to repeat numbers. This was show biz.

We played a few school dances, including at my school, Pinegrove Junior High, and added some of the borderline psychedelic music to our repertoire. Then someone thought it would be interesting (and no doubt cheap) to invite us to play at a dance at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. That was an eye-opener in more ways than one. We

set up our gear and, on either side of the stage, the organizer had placed go-go cages. While we played our first set, girls in white boots and miniskirts danced in the cages. We were a pretty straitlaced group, and this was entering into a cool factor that was out of our league. After all, I wasn't in a flowery shirt with love beads but wore a green sports jacket bought from the Simpson's catalogue. This being the art college, and it being the mid-1960s, the crowd reflected the experimentation that was going on with drugs and sexual freedom. By our second set one of the go-go girls had removed her top and, in the other cage, the girl was replaced by a naked, hairy hippie. We must have looked like deer in the headlights!

Our band days were over when I entered high school in grade nine. I began to work during the summer for my dad. He was the superintendent at Swift Canadian Company, a large meat plant tucked under the Macdonald Bridge. Most of the guys at the plant were big—they needed to be to hoist sides of beef on their shoulders. I was as skinny as a rat and not very strong. But that didn't matter. Every year the engine room that created the coolant for the plant needed to be painted with glossy white enamel. I could do that. Alone with the sounds of the engines, and with ammonia fumes and who knows what else leaching into the air, I painted and sang—at the top of my lungs. Dad told me later that the guys would stand outside the door and listen. The fumes didn't seem to do any irreparable damage. Maybe that job is why I still have good breath control.

B. C. Silver High School opened many musical doors for me. For a small school, it was filled with music. We had an

energetic dynamo of a teacher we called Frau Morgan. She made certain we had variety shows and gave encouragement wherever she could. We were just entering the second wave of the folk music revival, and a group of us would meet in the biology lab and sing the latest “hootenanny” songs. Gordon Lightfoot and Simon and Garfunkel were popular, and we covered many of their tunes. By 1967 we had a folk club at school, and out of this large group of kids came a quartet we called The Silver Change in a pun-like homage to our school. Charlene Roma, Jay Gallant, and I sang along with Clark Brown who, even as a teenager, was a guitar whiz. We were, modestly speaking, good. Charlene wasn’t able to commit to the group so, after she left, we kept up our work as a trio. We began to garner a reputation at local coffee houses and even got a regular weekend paying gig entertaining diners at The French Casino, at that time one of Halifax’s poshest restaurants. An iconic neon Eiffel tower blazed the restaurant’s location on Gottingen Street, and we entertained by placing ourselves in strategic locations about the dining area. The owner, Camille Dubé, was an affable French Canadian; his wife, affectionately known as Mama Camille, operated her end of the restaurant business closer to the naval yards. For years, Camille’s Fish and Chips was a home-away-from-home for service people and civilians alike. Her small shop with colourfully painted seashells on the wall was just up the street from Swift’s, and I would often have lunch there. The Dubé family introduced me to the “highs and highers” of fine dining. At Mama Camille’s, I had my choice of fish and chips or

delicious clams; at The French Casino, I developed a taste for escargots. A sophisticated palate and a music gig to boot—a whole new world was opening up for me.

It was also around this time, while I was still in high school, that I received an invitation to sing with a dance orchestra. The venue was the popular Jubilee Boat Club overlooking the Northwest Arm. I can't remember how they found out about me, but there I was, sporting my ubiquitous green jacket, singing standards and popular tunes with a combo consisting of a rhythm section—piano, bass, and drums—and a small horn section. The players were all much older than me. Many of them were senior musicians and active union members.

We were a quirky ensemble: a kid crooning ballads from another era and elder musicians playing an almost sedate form of rock 'n' roll. Both out of our element, but having a good time making music together. "The Jube" was licensed, so I was only permitted to be in the dance hall while onstage. During breaks I had to wait in the kitchen lest the taint of liquor pass through my teenage lips. Still, it was a fun job that paid union wages—far more than I ever made with The Silver Change. It gave me another layer of experience but didn't have the camaraderie that my peers in our little folk group offered.

We had some grand times with The Silver Change. The highlight was an invitation to open for iconic folk legend Oscar Brand when he was booked for a show at the Halifax Forum. This was the big time! Brand was famous for his hootenanny-style television show on CBC called *Let's Sing Out*. He also had quite an underground following for his

vast collection of bawdy songs. But, make no mistake, he was a bona fide star, and here we were, kids still in high school, being invited to be his opening act. Imagine the possibilities: hang out backstage with Mr. Brand; him listening to our well-rehearsed set; being invited to appear on his television show. We dreamed big.

Imagine our surprise to find out he wouldn't be enraptured by our songs. Like many major acts, he didn't show up until we were almost finished our part of the show. We didn't actually meet him until intermission in the green room. After a quick handshake with us he bounded on stage, missing what we believed to be a wonderful opportunity to discover some young Maritime talent.

But I had my own moment in the spotlight at that gig. To set the stage, let me explain that the forum was "the" venue for everything from the Ice Capades, wrestling matches, and concerts by such luminaries as The Beach Boys. But no matter how you dressed the venue, it was still a hockey rink, and it came complete with the requisite number of pigeons flying in the rafters.

The concert was packed, we were in the groove, and I stepped to the mic to introduce our next number. The spotlight followed me and illuminated my cherubic face. But as I looked over at Jay, she was wide-eyed in horror. Apparently, splatted on my hair was an enormous glob of pigeon crap, made all the more obvious by the glare of the spotlight. Jay, bless her, helped wipe it off and I stepped forward, chin held high, and said something about divine inspiration. It got a great laugh and I learned the valuable lesson every performer has to experience some time or

another: get lemons, make lemonade. Get shat upon, turn it to your advantage. By the way, there is a folklore belief that if a bird poops on you it will bring good luck.

And that has certainly held true. My time with The Silver Change was where I honed my folk chops. I learned to sing harmony and to listen hard to get a good vocal blend. But the bonus was, singing with them gave me a door to the coffee-house and folk-circuit world. The Privateer Coffee House became a second home for us, and the relationships I made there would last throughout my lifetime.

The Privateers

By 1968, the silver change was becoming a staple presence at the coffee houses in the Halifax area. There were many to choose from, from multiple venues in church basements and schools operated mainly as outlets for youth, to professional venues. All were genuine hot spots for the folk music scene. The two main venues were heads above the rest. The Swordsman was run by Coleman Day on a nebulously functional schooner moored at a pier in Halifax. Coleman was, to say the least, a character. He was a genuine swordsman, so I couldn't have imagined anyone arguing with his house rules. The music was great and was mainly supplied by him and a talented group of local artists.

The second was the Privateer Coffee House. Opened in 1967 by Ken and Cathy Partington with their business partner, Wayne Fader (who played the requisite banjo and acted as host), it was the most professional of the venues and welcomed such performers as Gordon Lightfoot and John Allan Cameron, both in the early days of their careers. A stable of regular acts took the stage: The Windsmen; the Clements sisters, Paula and Glenda; and Robbie MacNeil. Not long after the coffee house opened, we became part of that regular group of singers. We were the new kids on the block but were heartily welcomed. The atmosphere was

relaxed, the coffee cheap—unless you sprang for the exotic Viennese coffee and paid the extra twenty-five cents for the addition of hot chocolate—but it was the music that drew people back time and time again. It was in this mix of pro and semi-professional musicians that I found a home. It molded me and set me up for the remainder of my career. And to think it all began with a wish to entertain for free at Christmas.



Privateer Coffee House, Sackville Street. (CHRIS JOHNSON COLLECTION)

Christmas, 1967. A merry band of performers from the Privateer thought it would be a great idea to go to the Halifax Shopping Centre, array ourselves on the spiral staircase, and let loose with the joyous sounds of holiday music. What could be wrong with that? Lots, as it turned out. We were asked to leave. What did we know about securing permission before showing up at a commercial establishment and throwing their security people into a frenzy? Fire regulations on spiral stairs? No permission to just show up and sing? Our naïveté was only matched by our exuberance. In retrospect, I can certainly understand the position of the management. But at the time, we felt we had been put upon by “the establishment” for trying to bring a little peace and joy to the Christmas shoppers.

We retired to the Privateer to lick our wounds and sing into the night. But what this did was seed the idea for a group—a folk chorus that we would name for the musical home we had come to love. It was only logical to call ourselves The Privateers.

We were a large group at first. Basically, if you sang at the coffee house, you were in. As we began to get a few engagements (read: gratis) our numbers dwindled. Still, it didn’t take long before we were performing for Natal Day celebrations in Halifax and Dartmouth and leading singalong sessions on the radio with lyric sheets supplied by CHNS. This local station also provided us with rehearsal space. We would meet in the evenings and learn our repertoire in the large studio on Tobin Street.

Our musical director was one of the Privateer regulars, and a man who had a reputation of being a wonderful

musician and songwriter. Robbie MacNeil, who had worked quite a bit as John Allan Cameron's guitarist and was currently working as guitarist with Anne Murray, took us on as our fearless leader, choosing repertoire and teaching harmonies and arrangements.

It wasn't long before we also had the help of a local actor, promoter, and all-around yeoman of the arts and cultural scene. His name was Dixon Ray Pierce—D. Ray to his friends. Not only did he work to get us gigs, he taught us stage techniques often used by professional actors. We learned to stand and sing in a line in a way that allowed us to observe someone four bodies away. Our movements were choreographed, not in a dance style but in a professional manner that, oddly, morphed into what some came to call "The Privateer Bounce." It was Ray who also gave us the moniker "Canada's only professional folk chorus."

It was this large group that headed off for our first major gig. Ray had booked us at the 1969 Mariposa Folk Festival in Toronto. This was a big deal. At the time, it was Canada's most important festival for folk and roots music. So, ten performers, a musical director, and a husband of a band member who acted as an additional driver packed into cars and station wagons and took off, heady with excitement. We were not booked for the main stage but were more than happy to play a couple of sets at the smaller venues. We got to see some of our biggest idols: Joan Baez, Taj Mahal, and, for me, the biggest thrill of all—Joni Mitchell. You have to understand that I believe, to this day, that Joni is the best singer-songwriter on the planet. I am an admiring fan now. Back then I was an eighteen-year-

old boy smitten by this talent. It wasn't love. I'm not that naive. It was awe that such a person could write and sing that way. And when she stepped out onto the stage for her evening concert wearing a green velvet dress with a silver cross at her breast and sang, I was enraptured. Here I was, a kid folksinger from Halifax, sharing the same bill as Joni Mitchell. Okay, I know my name wasn't on the poster, but the name of The Privateers was, and I was part of The Privateers.

We came back from Toronto with our heads in the clouds but with a serious decision to make. What now?

Not everyone was, or could be, committed to a full-time group. But there were enough of us who decided that we were going to try and make it a career. This was to be a huge change of direction for me. I had finished high school and my plans for the fall were to pursue music while attending the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. I talked it over with my parents, and they told me to go for the experience of being in The Privateers. They said I was young enough to go to college later if that was the direction I chose. They certainly had a strong belief in my abilities, and I appreciated their trust in my maturity to take on a career with no financial prospects. So, with their blessing and encouragement, I proceeded with the group full-time as its youngest member.