

RECORD REVIEW

Cowboy Songs. Featuring Frances Roberts, Dave Branch, Joe and Bennie Rodriguez, and Gail Gardner. Commentary by Keith Cunningham. Produced by Arizona Friends of Folklore, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, 1971.

AFF Limited Edition 33-1. \$5.00 to non-members of AFF.

Reviewed by Howard Wight Marshall.

The first record produced by the Arizona Friends of Folklore (see "From the Reviews Editor," Folklore Forum, 4:5, Sept., 1971) is a collection of eleven traditional or original cowboy ballads, collected and recorded from performers in the Flagstaff area. Several of these ballads will be familiar to listeners versed in American cowboy folk music traditions ("When the Work's All Done This Fall," "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie," "Zebra Dun"), but are invested with each performer's individual performance skills and emphasis.

Gail Gardner's "original poems set to music" are perhaps the most entertaining cuts on the record, due to Gardner's folk diction and strong singing style, and due also to his ballad-making abilities. "Tying Knots in the Devil's Tail" - a veritable catalog of cowboy vocabulary and speech - turns out to be not simply another variant of the ballad noted by Laws (Native American Balladry, p. 141), but in fact is apparently the original one, written by Gardner in 1917. Gardner's "Cowman's Troubles" expresses commonplace folk complaints against bureaucrats and meddlers in such verses as:

With the bankers and lawyers and forest officials,
The land office men and inspectors as well,
A-ridin' the cowman all over the county,
No wonder his business had all gone to Hell.

and

There come to my ranch house a young forest ranger,
A slim scissor-bill in some leather puttees;
He had him a hatchet tied onto his saddle,
And all that he knew was the herding of trees.

The Rodriguez brothers' contributions, vocally and instrumentally (guitar and fiddle), add interest due to their Mexican-American ethnic orientation, and to performance in Spanish of "Felipe" - a "Mexican cowboy song...just like Anglo cowboy songs."

All five performers on the record have either been working cowboys or have had long and close acquaintance with the balladry and lifestyle of cowmen.

As ramrod of the recording outfit, Cunningham has continued the quality of organization and production initiated several years ago when he was teaching English in Moberly, Missouri, and produced Stone County Singing (SCB1, Shoestring Tape) from his field work in the Arkansas Ozarks. A fifteen-page booklet accompanies the well-engineered album, and is complete with capsule biographies, photos of performers, and text transcriptions. The transcribing was at times inaccurate and jumbled. But this fault detracts

only slightly from this excellent recording, which will be a welcome addition to the folklorists's record stack.

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If Ambrose Bierce were alive today, and maybe he is, he might include these terms in The Cynic's Word Book.

Bath, n., what every folklore student has coming to him.

Material culture, n., the growth of material.

Fakelore, n., washed folklore.

Oracle, n., see entry for Thompson, Stith.