

*The new music*

## A Penny for your songs

By Dick MacDonald

ONCE upon a time, in a large city built on the slopes of a mountain, a young man harbored fond thoughts of helping his fellow citizens enjoy the wide scope of music in the folk idiom.

With a profound love for the traditional and the contemporary, he proceeded post haste to provide a central meeting place where the popular as well as the lesser-known performer could display his wares.

The young man first opened a small room on Bishop street where as many as 60 people could gather to hear the ballads of chansonniers. One lad who eventually acquired a mass of followers in his own land and in the country south of the border did his first public singing at this club called the Penelope. His name was Bruce Murdoch.

Requiring more spacious quarters, a new location was found five streets to the east. Among the numerous troubadors who passed through was a minstrel named Gordon Lightfoot. A wandering



**Gary Eisenkraft**

band which dwelled on an aspect of rock-blues first performed at this second Penelope; the young men called themselves The Sidetrack.

Realizing that many changes were taking place in the music of the day, the youthful entrepreneur obtained still larger premises on the fringe of the downtown area. The diversified collection of artists appearing on stage at the New Penelope was impressive, with musicians of international repute being invited to perform before spectators from all corners of the multi-lingual city.

The young man, by now 23 years of age, began encountering problems of a financial nature. The difficulties grew until he was confronted by the necessity of closing the doors of his establishment, which sorely grieved his heart. For more than two months he received no salary whatsoever.

Finally, his locks were shorn, he accepted the offer of a friend to engage in paid public relations activities and he began formulating

than \$20,000. Without support, the coffeehouse will close.

First of the society's projects is scheduled for tomorrow at the New Penelope on Sherbrooke near Bleury.

A benefit concert between 6 p.m. and midnight will be broadcast on CFOX; guests will include Jesse Winchester and the Albert Failey Blues Band.

The society will strive for general donations for the coffeehouse, which is registered with the provincial government as a non-profit organization (which it certainly is at this point).

Remodelling will see uncomfortable benches replaced by tables and chairs; seating capacity currently is approximately 250. Musicians may be requested to appear at reduced rates, at least until the financial crisis has been resolved. It's difficult, after all, to survive when a one-week engagement may cost \$4,000, in addition to overhead of \$600.

Eisenkraft, rightly so, doesn't attribute the problems to a lack of press publicity. He does question broadcasting, however; for the most part, it highlights the Top 40 or a middle-age package without airing folk-oriented, experimental music of today. Unless the proper atmosphere prevails here — not one of apathy but of sympathetic concern — it will be impossible for any impresario to hobble along.

In a mood which only can be described as hopeful under the circumstances, Eisenkraft has announced that fall programs may include Odetta, Richie Havens, Joni Mitchell and The Fugs.

Should the New Penelope fold, it will be Montreal's loss.

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