

bought Jackson's *Red Maple*, their first purchase demonstrating the new direction of the Group, and the following year they bought Thomson's *Northern River*. It was through Eric Brown and the National Gallery that a selection of paintings by members of the Group came to be included among Canadian works sent to Wembley in 1924 for the British Empire Exhibition.

The outcome was a triumph for the modernists, with the British press enthusiastically acclaiming the "new school of landscape painting." Members of the Group were singled out for praise, along-

side Morrice, Tom Thomson, Gagnon and others, and the critics were agreed that Canada was at last developing a national style of its own.

The members of the Group of Seven each had their own distinctive feel for the landscape, which emerges as one grows familiar with their work. Travelling together on walking expeditions, and later in a railway box-car that they used as a shared studio in Algoma, two or three would often paint the same scene. To compare and get to know them is a huge and rewarding study, taking one through

so many layers and moods of Canada — and in Varley's case, of its people. Of course one needs to see the originals, but the subject is given broad scope in Peter Mellen's lavishly illustrated book *The Group of Seven* (published by McClelland and Stewart, 1970, and available at Books Canada, London W.1). The Seven were A. Y. Jackson, Franklin Carmichael, Lauren Harris, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J. E. H. MacDonald and Frederick Varley.

# Quebec pop star quits: too old to trust at 30

By J. M. Greene

Robert Charlebois, the love-child of the Quebec hit parade, has announced his retirement from the pop scene, declaring that he wants to get a house in the country and grow vegetables. The reason? "I'll be 30 in a month and a half and you can't trust anybody over 30," was what he told Blake Kirby of the *Toronto Globe and Mail* when the decision was announced.

It is not often that someone carries the cult of youth to these lengths. One has to admire his integrity, if not his reasoning, as he lays down his plans and his pearls of wisdom over two columns on a section front page of one of Canada's leading newspapers.

"What I'd like to do is build a big musical comedy, for 1976, for the Olympics (to be held in Montreal in 1976). It would be called *Look at the Music*, but maybe I wouldn't even play in it. Just be a concealer and direct the acts. And if I play in it, it would only be because I feel like it, you know? Not because it's a contract signed six months in advance."

Spontaneity has always been part of Charlebois' image — which might lead the cynical to wonder if he will just as spontaneously return to the pop stage in a year or two. Never mind, for the moment his plans lead in all sorts of other directions, with a wildness and lack of logic that are also characteristic.

He is "burning" with enthusiasm for another idea, which is to write a "no-language musical 'movie'" (no language because he doesn't believe in the vehicle of words, in any language). It would be a spy movie with a super-hero played, or at least sung, by Charlebois himself. It would be called *The Singing Spy*. But "you never see *Singing Spy*. Sometimes you may see his foot . . ."

Because it will be a "no-language musical," all the people of the earth will be

able to get it, says Charlebois. The songs would be in French or English, but the rest would be in "Explorian sounds."

We shall see. Just because he invites ridicule so openly, people tend to pause instead and wonder if after all he *has* got something. It has always been his way to give free rein to his ideas and his sensitivity, behaving as if he was emotionally naked.

This was how he became Quebec's biggest international star. His songs have been notable for gentle feelings, not limited to love affairs, as well as unusual sounds. Yet with his round, lumpy face and huge halo of brassy-coloured curls he is not an obvious love object.

He says that Sergio Leoni, maker of a string of successful westerns, has already offered to produce *The Singing Spy*. When he thinks of himself in films, Charlebois would like to go in by the biggest door — "which would be Leoni."

"I'd like him to train me as an actor. Leoni has offered me a role in another movie for next (this) summer, and he'd be the best teacher I could wish. I've made some movies already, but always I was playing me, though sometimes it wasn't my name. I'd ask him more to make a good actor out of me than to make a rich man out of me."

That's not his only visual idea: he also wants to produce what he calls "visual records."

"The images I see in my head when I write a song or a word are never communicated. My visual sense is frustrated. These images are not at all realistic. I'd like people to look at these objects as often as they like to listen to my records."

"And micro-cinematography — that's what I'm interested in. Showing people things that are part of themselves, which they see but have never looked at. For

instance, bacon sizzling, the size of a planet. Or bread. If you look at it through a microscope, you won't notice it's bread."

All this, and vegetables too. Not so surprising, since growing vegetables (preferably by organic means) seems to be taking the place of macrobiotic food in the young ideology on both sides of the Atlantic. A pop singer turned builder recently remarked to me that there were "some interesting things going on in Wales" — by which he meant, as it turned out, a lot of people were growing organic food.

Charlebois is also after a country place — "a big earth, lots of acres, with a tractor. With this inflation . . . The French Canadian expression, we use the word tomatoes instead of dollars, and I'm afraid it's going to come true. When you can produce your own vegetables, even if money fails completely at least you're safe".

If Charlebois is anything of a prophet in his own field, it could be a timely opting out. For he believes that young people are about to turn against pop music — that they are losing faith in it as a symbol of a better world.

"There was a time in Quebec's tranquil revolution when everybody went speedy. But the whole pop music scene is the biggest screwing youth ever had. They'll realize it this year. Everybody was expecting something great from Hollywood or San Francisco that would affect politics or change life. But unfortunately it didn't change anything. It just made a few posters and amplifiers sell, and that's all."

As a "real revolutionary" committed to opening people's minds, he has therefore decided to do everything but pop music. He added that anarchists these days must have problems because they must realize we already have anarchy.