

# COURIER-JOURNAL

## Southern Tier-Auburn Geneva

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### Children's Songs Are Folk Composer's Specialty

By MARTIN TOOMBS  
Southern Tier Editor

Corning—Playing her guitar in religious education classes and noticing that the songs didn't fit the way the children were being taught was the realization that launched the career of singer-songwriter Mary Lu Walker.

She decided to write songs herself that did fit the instruction, she explained, and "found that I could do it."

And she continued to write songs, perform, and then record them. Her first album "Songs for Young Children," was released in 1973, and her second, "Dandelions," followed in 1975, both released by Paulist Press. In 1977, she released "Families are Fun" through the United Methodist Publishing House. Her latest, "Peaceable Kingdom," was released earlier this year by Joral Records, a division of Our Sunday Visitor.

Her musical endeavors began at St. Patrick's Parish, where she has been the leader of the folk group for the past "seven or eight years," she noted, and has continued frequent appearances in religion classes.

It was the children who were the initial inspiration for her work. "That type of involvement was instrumental" in getting her started, she said, speaking in her South Corning

home recently. "The children came first," she recounted, "they're very nice to work with."

The emphasis on children's music has continued through her albums, and she reports that her music often is used in religious education programs for elementary-age students. She pointed out that "my songs are used extensively by the Methodist Church."

When she attends conferences around the country "people come up to me and tell me how they're using my songs," she related, adding that "I look upon that with some wonderment."

Pointing out that her work also is used in public schools, she commented that "my songs don't mention God too much." They are "not specifically religion songs," she said, "not Jesus songs—just anybody's God," and reflect her own view of religion.

"Peaceable Kingdom" includes songs on a variety of topics, including families, mittens, horses, the death of a pet dog, and the fact that love can't be bought in a supermarket. One song, "Blacktop Meadows," comments on the increasing number of fast-food restaurants, describing their parking lots as places "where the Chevy's graze."

Another song, "Caring," describes how a baby chicken will be taken care of by its



Mary Lu Walker

mother, and the hen by the farmer. It includes the question "who cares for every chick and child?" and answers it: "The Father who loves us all."

One song on the album might reflect Ms. Walker's own view of the relationship between religion and the arts. In "David Dances," King David defends his dancing to his wife, telling her that "he would dance in praise of God whenever and wherever he chose to do so," as is noted on the album jacket.

Ms. Walker said that music is for the "glory of God," and "is part of religion and should be supported as such."

She noted her own growth,

While writing songs intended for children, Ms. Walker notes that she does not write down to them. A composer of children's songs needs to "write it just the way you feel it," she explained, and if you do a good job, the song will work with children.

Her own experiences are the primary sources for song ideas, she noted. Currently she is working on a collection titled "Middle Age, Middle Class Mama Songs," she said. She had just completed one on zucchini, she added, noting that her family has been eating quite a bit of zucchini lately.

For her musical training, Ms. Walker progressed from learning to play a used guitar in night school to her present status.

"It's taken me three records to call myself a singer-songwriter," she commented.

As for her singing and guitar-playing ability, she said that she feels comfortable accompanying herself when she sings her songs, but that she doesn't expect to be asked to play for someone else's recording sessions.

"My voice seems to be just right for kids," she said, observing that highly trained voices are difficult for children to follow because "children can't sing like that."

As for her guitar playing, she held up her first guitar, commenting that she learned on "this crummy thing that I got out of a pawn shop."

She also displayed her concert guitar, which she uses in her frequent appearances both in the Elmira-Corning area and at national conferences and festivals. She recently attended the Fox Hollow Folk Festival in Petersburg, N.Y.

She also is scheduled to perform at the Canadian convention of the Christian Family Movement, and at a Canadian liturgy conference.

She unveiled "Peaceable Kingdom" in two such appearances. Accompanied by Ray Repp, she performed at the National Catholic Educators Association conference in St. Louis, and at the Music and Liturgy Conference in Scranton, Pa. Repp, composer of such songs as "Sing from the Highest Mountain" and "Sons of God," and an Ithaca resident, was the producer for "Peaceable Kingdom," Ms. Walker said.

For the future, her "Middle Age, Middle Class Mama Songs" collection, and a wide variety of appearances at festivals, conferences, and in local schools and before local groups will continue to occupy her time, Ms. Walker said.

### Archbishop Sheen to Join Bimillennial Celebration

Corning—Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, former bishop of Rochester, will be the principal celebrant and homilist at a Mass Sept. 8 commemorating the bimillennial of the birth of Mary, sponsored by the Legion of Mary.

The event will be the annual reunion of the Southern Tier Curia, Legion of Mary. Florence Hughes, curia president, has announced.

### School Superintendents Elect New Officers

Albany, N.Y.—Father Vincent D. Breen, superintendent of schools for the Brooklyn diocese, has been elected president of the New York State Council of Catholic School Superintendents. Father James T. O'Brien, Syracuse diocesan superintendent, is the new vice president. Each will serve a two-year term.

The council advises the state's bishops on school matters and involves itself in public and general education issues. Father Breen has been a member since 1966, and is a member also of the State Catholic Committee, which advises the bishops' conference on public policy issues.

Some historians have suggested that 1978 is a logical year to celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of Mary's birth, and the Southern Tier Curia has responded by organizing a special celebration.

The Mass will be in St. Mary's Church, Friday, Sept. 8 at 6:15 p.m., and is open to the public. A dinner will follow in Corning Catholic School South, with admission

by ticket only. All local priests have been invited to concelebrate with Archbishop Sheen, and many have notified the organizers of their intention to participate.

### Charismatic Mass

Elmira—The monthly Mass sponsored by the Southern Tier Charismatic Prayer Groups will be Monday, Aug. 28 at 7:30 p.m. at St. Patrick's Church. Principal concelebrants are scheduled to be Father Francis Marino, SM, of St. Mary's House of Prayer, Corning, and Father David Callan, St. Patrick's co-pastor.

by ticket only.

All local priests have been invited to concelebrate with Archbishop Sheen, and many have notified the organizers of their intention to participate.

Father Bartholomew O'Brien, pastor of St. Mary Our Mother, Horseheads, will be master of ceremonies for the dinner.

The Southern Tier Curia includes 111 members of 10 adult praesidia and three junior praesidia. Miss Hughes noted that the curia is planning other events for the future, hoping to attract new members.

More information regarding the celebration may be obtained from legion members, or from Miss Hughes (607) 732-7150.



Photo by Mary Ann Ginnerty

### Family Picnic

St. Alphonsus, Auburn, held its first Family Picnic recently, judged a success by newly appointed pastor Father Clarence Gardner. Shown above with Father Gardner are Robert Bushman (left) picnic chairman, and Daniel McCarthy, president of the Holy Name Society.

### Gerould's Pharmacies

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