

Singing Social Friction: Quotations (lecture 1)

Herder

“Wissen Sie also, daß je wilder, d.i. je lebendiger, je freywirkender ein Volk ist, (denn mehr heißt dies Wort doch nicht!) desto wilder, d.i. desto lebendiger, freyer, sinnlicher, lyrisch handelnder müssen auch, wenn es Lieder hat, seine Lieder seyn! Je entfernter von künstlicher, wissenschaftlicher Denkart, Sprache und Letternart das Volk ist: desto weniger müssen auch seine Lieder fürs Papier gemacht, und todte Lettern Verse sein.”

(Letter excerpt about “Ossian und die Lieder der alten Völker”)

Child

“...nearly all those ballads which, in either country, have been gathered from oral tradition,-- whether ancient or not. Widely different from the true popular ballads, the spontaneous products of nature, are the works of the professional ballad-maker, which make up the bulk of Garlands and Broad-sides.”

“...For the Texts, the rule has been to select the most authentic copies, and to reprint them as they stand in the collections...” (Preface to *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*)

Funk and Wagnall’s Standard Dictionary:

Folk song: “a song or ballad originating and current among the common people, and illustrating the common life with its interests and enthusiasms as derived from legend or story; also a lyric poem on a popular theme in the style of such a ballad” (Sharp 1907:3)

“the song which has been created by the common people in contradistinction to the songs, popular or otherwise, which have been composed by the educated.” (ibid.)

Sharp and Marson

“Folk-song, unknown in the drawing room, hunted out of the school, chased by the chapel deacons, derided by the middle classes, and despised by those who have been uneducated..., taking refuge in the fastness of tap-rooms, poor-cottages and outlying hamlets. It harbours in the heathen kingdoms and the wilder parts... It comes out very shyly, late at night, and is heard when the gentry have gone home to bed, when the barrack room has exhausted its music hall menu. It is to be found when men have well drunk.” (Sharp and Marson 1904-9: xi-xii).

International Folk Music Council 1955

“Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are:

- I. continuity which links the present with the past;
- II. variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group;
- III. selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.

The term can be applied to music that has been evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular and art music. (...)

The term does not cover composed popular music that has been taken over ready-made by a community and remains unchanged, for it is the re-fashioning and re-creating of the music by the community that gives it its folk character”

Albert L. Lloyd

Folk song “is something that came out of social upheaval”
“songs made by working people out of their own traditions and for their own use.”

John Blacking

Many, if not all, of music’s essential processes may be found in the constitution of the human body and in patterns of interaction of human bodies in society. Thus all music is structurally, as well as functionally, folk music. (1973: xi)

Big Bill Broonzy

“All music is *folk music*, I ain’t never heard no *horse* sing a song.”

Ruth Finnegan

(on music practices in Milton Keynes)

“It may be questionable whether there really ever was a distinctive corpus of music produced by a definable “folk” in the rural setting envisaged by the purists, but this belief, conjoined with socially recognised definitions and practices, provided an implicit authorisation for ‘folk music’ as it was being performed and enjoyed in urban settings in the 1980s” (Finnegan 2007: 67).

“When one looks at how ‘folk music’ was actually organised in Milton Keynes ... it is striking how far it was at variance with many of the tenets of this implicit ideology.

“First, the social background of the local folk music participants was far from the rural unlettered ‘folk’ of the ideal model. ... Members of the folk music world liked to think of themselves as in some sense ‘the folk’ or at any rate as ‘classless’. In a way they were justified: once within a folk club or band their jobs or education became irrelevant. They were thus themselves startled if made to notice the typical educational profile of folk enthusiasts. If any of the local music worlds could be regarded as ‘middle class’ it was that of folk music, for all that this ran so counter to the image its practitioners wished to hold of themselves.” (Finnegan 2007: 68)

Niall MacKinnon

(From *The British Folk Scene: Musical Performance and Social Identity*)

‘My view is that the folk scene attracts those who have benefited materially from upward social mobility, but who have not chosen to identify with and refuse to aspire to the dominant competitive individualistic ethic. A pointer to this is to note that it is a specific sub-section of the middle class which is heavily over-represented in folk music, those in service occupations which are largely in the public sector, jobs such as teaching and social work. (MacKinnon 1993: 130)

Jon Craven

(On authorship of social critical songs of the Victorian Age in *Victoria’s Inferno* (1978))

Five categories of authorship:

- “‘direct, forceful’, ‘simple’ songs written by and for working classes

- Pseudo-literary pieces by working class writers for outside audiences
- Songs by ‘educated supporters of working class movements’, ‘ap[ing] 1’
- Songs by ‘educated supporters of working class movements’, to influence ‘their peers’
- music hall songs with underlying social or economic comment”