

Neil ROSENBERG (ed.), *Transforming Tradition : Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993, pp. xiii+ 340, ISBN 0-252-01982-2)

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Neil ROSENBERG (ed.), *Transforming Tradition : Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993, pp. xiii+ 340, ISBN 0-252-01982-2).

The concept of a "folk revival" is popularly regarded as a twentieth-century North American phenomenon, but in fact it is neither recent nor New World; folksongs were being collected and studied more than 200 years ago in both the British Isles and in continental Europe; the Grimm brothers began gathering and publishing traditional tales in 1812. The assumption behind any "revival" is that something (folksongs, folk music, folk tales, storytelling) is fading away and needs to be rescued. Why has the term "revival," with all of its religious connotations, been so important? Allan Jabbour, in his foreword, suggests that our need for seeking out a music that would

*express simultaneously our quest for cultural roots, our admiration of democratic ideas and values, our solidarity with the culturally neglected, and our compulsion to forge our own culture for ourselves (p. xiii).*

Many of the 15 contributors to this anthology have been directly involved, as performers and scholars, in the folk music revival that reached its peak (or one of its peaks) in the 1960s. The various articles communicate reflective energy that swings, sways, and balances between subjective and objective, passion and dispassion. One of the concerns that arises in every contribution, as a central theme or a faint echo, is the contrast between what is considered to be "authentic" material from oral traditional and "revivalist" reinterpretation by performers and folklorists.

The various contributors have their own unique interests and approaches, and a single review cannot do justice to the wide range of opinions expressed here.

Rosenberg has organized the volume in three sections: Part 1, "The Great Boom", features five articles that consider the historical development of the recent North American folk music revival of the late 1950s through the 1960s. Part 2, "The New Aesthetic", contains three articles that look at specific singers and songs within the broader perspective of the revival as a whole. Section 3, "Named-Systems Revivals", is the heart of the book with seven articles by men who, for the most part, strike a balance between performing music and studying it as folklorists.

In "The Great Boom", detailed overviews by Robert Cantwell and Bruce Jackson are well-presented and challengingly written. Cantwell takes the tradition back to the American minstrel shows of the early 1800s. He suggests that revival musicians have developed a community of sorts, one with its own aesthetic and traditions. Jackson carries this further by suggesting that a folk revival community "was as real and as legitimate as any other based on shared interest and knowledge" (p. 81).

Ellen Stekert's article, originally published in 1966, is a passionate critique of folk music as a commercial business. She describes the "self-involved, self-isolated folk-rock singer" (p. 104) who is more in tune with pop professional entertainment than with any grass-roots connections.

The final articles in this section by Archie Green (on a campus folksong club) and Kenneth Goldstein (on a history of recorded folk music) are useful for historical detail, but are quite narrow in focus.

"The New Aesthetic", with only three contributions, begins with Sheldon Posen, writing as a "revivalist" performer-turned folklorist. He attempts to resolve the struggle between what is "authentic" in terms of actual oral tradition, and concludes that his re-created songs were meaningful not because they were sincere attempts to be a part of an actual oral tradition but because they were part of another context—the folksong revival.

The articles by Pauline Greenhill and Anne Lederman examine a song written and composed by Canadian performer Stan Rogers, picked up and transformed by a Scottish revival band that thought it was a British "folk" song. Greenhill examines the transformations in the text, Lederman considers the music.

In his introductory remarks to Section 3, "Named-Systems Revivals", Rosenberg tries to explain the section title as an attempt to deal with "contextual aggregates" (p. 177) of blues, bluegrass, and old-time fiddling; contemporary supporters of these musical forms have a sense of community, both the original milieu in which the music arises and the transformed context in which it is performed as part of the folk revival.

Burt Feintuch examines the effects of transformation in the region of Northumberland. Here an English piping tradition has been revived repeatedly over 250 years *largely in urban tradition*. Feintuch observes that "the current

revival is at least the fourth major revitalization movement" (p. 185) in the area. He concludes with an observation that is relevant to every contribution to this volume:

*As our own view of tradition evolves, we realize that tradition is a social and academic construct standing for and resulting from an ongoing process of interpreting and reinterpreting the past (p. 192).*

Neil Rosenberg's challenging article carries this further by proposing that: "We need to study folklore revivals because they tell us about our own unexamined assumptions concerning the other things we study" (p. 194). Rosenberg examines the intertwined concepts of "revival" and "authenticity" in bluegrass music and its performance by urban "non-traditional" musicians. In contrast Philip Nusbaum's comments on bluegrass and its place in the revival are academic and hard to follow, despite his promising opening that bluegrass is "more than a collection of song texts" (p. 203).

The articles on blues music by Jeff Todd Titon and Peter Narvaez were challengingly and clearly written. Both make the point that the revival is a complex phenomenon worthy of careful attention. Narvaez observes that there is not one integral revival but an ebb and flow that is part of "larger sociopolitical movements, e.g., ethnic, regional, nationalist, neonationalist, subcultural" (p. 246). Richard Blaustein agrees, suggesting that the revival is an "interaction of grass-roots preservationists and folk romantics. . . that focus upon the selective reconstruction of an idealized cultural past" (p. 272). Thus the revival is only one of the many ways of rejecting "urban-industrial-commercial-bureaucratic values" (p. 272).

The concluding article on American music in Japan, by Toru Mitsui, carries the above assumptions to their logical extremes. He describes the historical acceptance of traditional Southern musical styles in Japan, complete with costumes and stage choreography. If revivalism in general is a romanticized response to the alienating social milieu of this century, and if it is in itself a viable form of artistic expression regardless of its "authenticity" in terms of oral traditional cultures, then American traditional music in Japan makes perfect sense. Mitsui's concluding comments neatly summarize the main premise of this anthology, that the revival is a tradition of its own, largely free of narrow cultural roots:

*Because the "revival" itself is significant to them, the Japanese have not worried much about the question of authenticity that is implied in revivalism, and thus are able to nurture their own version of an American tradition without constraint (p. 290).*

“Folk revivals” have been with us for more than 200 years, not only in music and song but in traditional arts and crafts, dance, and storytelling. *Transforming Tradition*, while not a comprehensive record, presents a thoughtful introduction with historical, social, and artistic perspectives. The anthology would have been even stronger with the inclusion of more women, as scholars and as performers. This is not only a matter of equal representation but a long and abiding issue of artistic and academic presence.

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Katharine YOUNG (ed.), *Bodylore* (Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series, Patrick B. Mullen (ed.), Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1993, pp. xiv+261, ISBN 0-87049-799-5).

I was excited when I first heard of *Bodylore*. Frankly, I am frustrated in my teaching on the social construction of gendered and sexual identities, an area where traditional culture has powerful influence, that I am unable to draw on more folkloristic interpretations. I welcomed a collection of papers with the notion of body as invented cultural artifact at its centre and hoped it would begin to fill in some of the gaps. Having read the book, I am even more convinced of the important contribution folklorists can make to the understanding of constructed identities but I’m still looking for materials to use in class.

The underlying premise here is an engaging one: that the body is not a natural object but through its surface structures and accouterments, bodily practices and rituals, and our language about and representations of the body, it is a culturally invented artifact. As editor Katharine Young writes,

*Culture is inscribed on the body. Our beliefs about the body, our perceptions of it and the properties we attribute to it, both symbolic and literal, are socially constructed. The body is being invented. The way we hold our bodies, the way we move them, the way we accouter them, display our membership in a culture (xvii).*

*Bodylore* explores this concept through ten essays on subjects as diverse as Maxine Miska’s study of Hakka Funeral Ritual and Dorothy Noyes’s paper, “Contesting the Body Politic: The Patum of Berga” to Jane Przybysz’s “Quilts and Women’s Bodies: Dis-eased and Desiring” and Phyllis Gorfain’s work on body puns in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Other papers include Elizabeth Wickett’s