

The *Real* Old-Time Religion Towards an Aesthetics of Neo-Pagan Song

Sabina Magliocco et Holly Tannen

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Résumé de l'article

Cette recherche, qui s'appuie sur un travail de terrain dialogique et sur une étroite collaboration entre l'ethnologue et le porteur de tradition, fait l'analyse des performances musicales néopaganes et wicaines. En l'absence de textes ou d'un ensemble de croyances uniques et partagés de tous, la chanson est utilisée pour codifier et diffuser un ensemble de principes de la culture wicaine et néopagane. Cet article décrit différentes catégories de chansons et analyse leur rôle dans les rituels wicains et néopagans, explorant la façon dont les critiques émiques de la musique éclairent les lieux de conflits et de tensions à l'intérieur du mouvement. Ce travail vise à décrire l'émergence d'une esthétique de la musique néopagane qui est syncrétique, participative, antiautoritaire, romantique et centrée sur la femme, reflétant les valeurs de contreculture du mouvement.

THE *REAL* OLD-TIME RELIGION

Towards an Aesthetics of Neo-Pagan Song

Sabina Magliocco

*Department of Anthropology
California State University*

Holly Tannen

*Independent scholar
Mendocino, California*

Ten years ago, I had a dream, a literal dream, in which I was sitting at a table and [a woman came] who was beautiful beyond human; and she picked up a plastic butterfly and stroked it, and it turned into a real one and flew away. And this music was playing, and it was the most beautiful music I'd ever heard.... And then when I began getting involved in festivals and Pagan events, I heard it everywhere. And I realized THAT was the music I heard in that dream. — Steve Rasmussen

American Neo-Paganism¹ is a religious movement in the process of creating itself. It has developed its own extensive body of folklore, including a large number of songs and chants, which play a central role in the diffusion and maintenance of an American Neo-Pagan culture. Pagans value folklore because it involves face-to-face contact, individual creativity and group participation. While these activities contribute to a larger Neo-Pagan moral and political goal of creating a more satisfying alternative to consumer culture, they are also pleasurable in their own right. As Steve's dream symbolically suggests, Neo-Pagans view American mainstream culture as "plastic" and artificial; yet this same culture provides the raw materials with which they can magically create a music that is living, vibrant, and beautiful.

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1. Neo-Paganism includes a number of contemporary mystery religions loosely based on pre-Christian religions. Its largest component is revival Witchcraft. While the term Neo-Pagan is useful in distinguishing ancient from modern practice in bibliographical indices, many Neo-Pagans prefer to refer to themselves as "Pagan," emphasizing the continuity between their practices and those they are attempting to revive or experiment with. "Neo-Pagan" and "Pagan" will be used interchangeably in this paper.

We set out to examine the nature of Pagan songs and how they are understood and used by contemporary Pagans. We were particularly interested in discerning the nature of the relationship between Pagan song aesthetics and politics. While we could not pinpoint a single overarching aesthetic principle uniting the movement, we could discern a number of significant threads that we will explore below. We found that, as many scholars have suggested, politics and aesthetics are closely linked in Neo-Pagan song. Understanding the relationship between the two is important because, as Don Frew first suggested to us, in the absence of a single Neo-Pagan liturgy, songs and chants may act as a unifying factor, establishing a shared set of beliefs and principles which become a part of Neo-Pagan folk culture.

Sabina Magliocco came to her study of Neo-Pagan ritual through her research on European folklore, especially festival, and the cultural politics surrounding its revival.² She brings a theoretical interest in oppositionality, resistance, politics and aesthetics to her research, as well as a background as a performer of traditional ballads in the college coffee-house circuit of the 1970's. Holly Tannen was initiated as a Reclaiming tradition priestess in 1984³, and earned a Master's degree in folklore at the University of California, Berkeley in 1989. She performs traditional English ballads and her own humorous songs, some of which satirize aspects of Neo-Paganism and academic folklore. Through performing and giving workshops with Holly at Pagan festivals, Sabina gained acceptance into the San Francisco Bay Area Pagan community.⁴

Both of us collected data, interviewed respondents, interpreted the findings, and shared the task of writing — and re-writing — until we were both satisfied with the results. Neo-Paganism has historically contested hierarchical relationships, and we felt that this method of collaboration was ultimately more rewarding and more in keeping with Neo-Pagan ideals than a traditional ethnographer-informant relationship.

In this article, we have chosen to focus on music that we have heard performed live at rituals and festivals, music which we know is part of a living oral tradition. There are a growing number of Neo-Pagan rock bands and musical ensembles that perform at festivals. Many respondents also mentioned

2. See Magliocco, 1993.

3. The Reclaiming tradition is an eclectic, feminist form of modern Witchcraft that originated in San Francisco. See Starhawk, 1979, 1982, and 1987.

4. Cf. Loretta Orion (1995:52), who found herself accepted into the Pagan community as a result of her artwork.

well-known groups and performers such as Jethro Tull (especially the albums *Songs From the Wood* and *Heavy Horses*) and Loreena McKennitt in conjunction with questions about their favorite Pagan music. However, we decided to focus on informally-performed, widely diffused Pagan songs and chants for this paper. We conducted research at three large festivals in California, passed out questionnaires to Pagan friends and acquaintances, and invited participation from readers of the usenet group alt.pagan.

Anne Hill, manager of Serpentine Music, a distributor of Pagan tapes and CDs, defines Pagan music as including

....chants and tunes that have deep meaning and power in them, and that can transport us into alternate states of consciousness. Songs sung in praise of a Goddess or God, chants used as invocations, to cast a circle, or for other ritual uses, are all clearly Pagan songs. Many Pagan songwriters have ballads about the Craft, or concerning the lives of Pagans. These, clearly, are also Pagan music. Most songs that are written by Pagans, I consider Pagan music, regardless of the song's content or musical style. By knowing about the musician, I feel a connection to the song by way of relative spirituality that makes me feel like I'm having a conversation with a like-minded soul. [...] Then there's the vast topic of songs written by folks who may not be Pagan at all, yet whose music speaks to us in that central place where our flesh weaves through our flesh and feelings. Music that makes us feel whole, that expresses what it is to be human, and alive, can spark our spirit, regardless of the spirituality of the musician or songwriter. We may not consider all of this to be Pagan music, but if an artist consistently uses Pagan themes, and if enough Pagans speak up for it, the case can be made that this is also Pagan music. [...] The unifying theme, however, is that it is music by Pagans, or Pagan-friendly folks, or that it is music that is found to be inspirational to Pagans.⁵

Anne asked visitors to Serpentine's website to answer the question, "What is Pagan music?" Many respondents emphasized the intensely personal and moving nature of Pagan music. "Songs and lyrics that reach inside you and touch the inner depths of your soul, these are 'Pagan music,'" wrote one. Another respondent wrote "When I listen to my favorite Pagan music, I feel as if I have come home," echoing a homecoming theme Margot Adler first identified in *Drawing Down the Moon* (Adler, 1986:14). Yet another emphasized "the ability of the music, in whatever form, to touch that place deep within us where our ancient ancestral memories lie, where we feel the interconnectedness

5. Anne Hill, *Serpentine Notes* 3/1 (1997), p. 1.

of all life....” Many other respondents also valued the way Pagan music made them feel connected to the past: “Pagan music allows us to touch our past, hear some of the beauty heard by our ancestors....” and “Imagine all this wondrous and numinous ancient knowledge surviving the millennia....Music was ever an essential element in ancient worship....” (Serpentine website)

Because the Pagan movement is a recent development, Pagans often use music to construct a link between themselves and a historical past, attempting to give their religion a greater sense of historicity and authenticity. Traditional ballads — especially in the versions popularized by the folk music revival — Scottish, Irish and Celtic-inspired music such as that of Loreena McKennitt, find their way into a number of Pagan musical contexts.

Pagans value independence, individuality and resistance to conservative mainstream attitudes and values. They favor songs that express opposition to dominant religions, especially Christianity. “Pagan music is the expression of the growing dissatisfaction with the pious, holier-than-thou attitude of so many of today’s leaders,” wrote Julie Rosier, a questionnaire respondent on Serpentine website. “It’s a return to free thought, something that is inherent in each of us and... that society tries to obliterate. Fortunately, there are those of us who withstand their efforts....” But oppositionality has its critics; many Pagans are tired of constantly defining themselves in opposition to a dominant culture from which they can never completely separate themselves.

Dissemination of pagan songs

Pagans are inspired by songs from mainstream sources: pop, classical, and traditional and popular folk⁶ music, as well as by Pagan-identified singers and bands. Pagans learn songs from tapes and CDs available at festivals, in alternative bookstores and by mail order. They also learn songs from each other at rituals, song circles and workshops, many of which are held at festivals. Festivals are in fact the most important vector for the diffusion of chants and songs. Humorous songs are often transmitted via Internet usenet groups and Email lists, though tunes, of course, are lost in this context. Since many humorous songs are parodies of well-known songs, the tunes can be indicated in parentheses, as in (“sung to the tune of ‘Give Me That Old-Time Religion’”).

6. In the popular music market, “folk” usually designates singer/songwriters with acoustic accompaniment. In folkloristics, a folk song is any traditional song in oral circulation, regardless of its origins or accompaniment.

The uses of pagan music and song

The most important use of song is in ritual, the predominant Pagan form of worship and the central art-form of the movement (Magliocco 1996: 93). Because Pagans typically do not worship inside a specially designated building, they begin all rituals by “creating sacred space,” separating the ritual from ordinary reality and creating boundaries to keep the everyday world from intruding into the ritual. This is often done by drawing a circle around the participants and “calling the quarters” (invoking the four elements and their corresponding directions). Some covens have songs or chants for opening and closing the circle, for calling the quarters, or for invoking the deities; setting these formulas to music makes them easier to memorize. Musicologist Steve Rasmussen composed a set of tunes for his coven’s invocations using his knowledge of Renaissance magical correspondences between notes in the scale, the four elements, and “modes,” so that the music would enhance the magical power of the invocations.

Musical performance can be a call to ritual — a signal to those present that sacred drama is about to occur. Drumming is commonly used for this purpose.⁷ Steve, who leads a coven in Asheville, North Carolina, explained:

We did this public ritual in Asheville. We were dealing with these people yelling and preaching at us, all the fundies [Christian Fundamentalists]. As soon as we started up on those big African drums it drowned out all their noise, and all you could hear and see and think was this beat which was carrying all over the city.

Dixie, the High Priestess of the coven, added, “It helps people to fall in line and starts setting up those cues: ‘We’re going to ritual,’ you know; ‘We’re about to begin.’”

At Reclaiming’s public ritual at PantheaCon 1996, participants assembled in a hotel ballroom at the given time. First they milled around, conversing and

7. Drumming within the Neo-Pagan movement merits a separate investigation of its own. Like many aspects of the movement, it combines instruments and styles from many different cultures and traditions, and is just beginning to achieve a distinctive style of its own. Neo-Pagans play many different drums, but dumbeks (from the Middle East), djembes (originally from West Africa, but now ubiquitously considered a generic African drum in Europe and America) and bodhrans (from Ireland) predominate. Pagan drumming rhythms are simpler than those of the traditions from which they are derived — perhaps because so many Neo-Pagan drummers are still relatively inexperienced.

waiting for the ritual to begin. Then the lights were dimmed and a woman began to sing the traditional ballad “Tam Lin.” The crowd quieted down immediately and began to prepare for the ritual. The combination of the darkness and the a cappella performance created a sense of separation from the ordinary world; because the song itself concerns enchantments and transformations, it created an expectation of the magical and transformative nature of what was to follow.

One of the central tasks of ritual is to “raise energy”: to consolidate the wills of all of the participants and focus them on the purpose of the ritual. This is often done by joining hands and dancing in a circle, by singing, or both. At the Reclaiming ritual described above, over 300 participants danced the spiral dance while singing a two-part harmonizing chant which the ritual planners had taught at the beginning of the ritual. In small rituals, as well, dancing and singing can be important ways to raise energy. Pagans believe that skillful drumming can be a crucial tool in moving the energy of ritual participants: fast drumming raises energy and participants respond by increasing the speed and intensity of their dancing; slow drumming can signal to participants that it is time for “trancework,” a form of meditation during which participants are guided through an imaginary landscape by a narrator.

In many Pagan traditions, the main purpose of ritual is to grant participants an enhanced understanding of the world around them, to bring them to altered states of consciousness, and through that, into contact with the sacred. Music can move participants towards religious ecstasy. After a small Spring Equinox ritual during which the participants had danced and chanted around the statue of the goddess Hecate, priestess Macha Nightmare observed that this part of the ritual had been particularly important to her. “It’s one of the few things that really gets me out of my head and into a different state of consciousness,” she explained.

Priestess Farida Fox described her own ecstatic experience:

I’ve been to circles or rituals where at three or four in the morning the truth is being told, and it’s being told in song, and people are weeping, reaching out to one another and holding one another.... It’s a transcendent experience, and it’s being facilitated through music. [...] First of all, the heart opens, so that feelings are really flowing freely, and you’re totally feeling them deeply. Then there’s a transcendent moment in which you suddenly realize that you’re in this state with all these other people who are also in this state. And there’s a sudden sense of — it’s more than kinship, you’re truly connected. Deeply connected. And that’s an amazing experience.

Pagans also use songs as raw materials for spells and rituals. They often assume that songs, especially traditional ballads, preserve fragments of folk knowledge which, in turn, reflect the survival of ancient practices. John Yohalem described an instance in which material from “Willie’s Lady” (Child number 6) was used to design a spell to prevent miscarriage:

The priestess who taught me subscribed to a whole bunch of folklore journals and had bought the complete publication in four volumes of [Francis James Child’s *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. And I found a number of interesting magical techniques from looking through this. The one where he brings his bride home to his mother, and his mother’s a witch, and she can’t have a child because it turns out the mother’s been tying knots and throwing them under the bed. Anyway the way it was used was this. When Julie was pregnant and had a false labor early on, they put her to bed and so forth and were very worried. Judy sent them the ballad, and every night they would tie another knot and put it under the bed; and then when the ninth month was up, they untied all the knots, and a couple of weeks later she had Ned, who’s sitting over there having lunch! So it was a great success.

John’s narrative highlights the uses Neo-Pagans may make of materials from academic folklore publications in ways which are quite different from the intentions of their authors — a practice which characterizes the post-modern consumer and which Michel deCerteau has called “textual poaching” (deCerteau, 1984; Jenkins, 1993). Many Pagan readers have taken issue with Sabina’s use of deCerteau’s term “poaching” because of connotations which suggest illegal hunting, particularly of endangered animals. While I [Sabina] am sympathetic to their reactions, deCerteau’s concept of imaginative consumers who do not simply swallow what is imposed upon them by the dominant culture, but reshape it to suit their own purposes, is actually in harmony with the ways most Neo-Pagans see themselves. Later, we will examine in detail Reclaiming’s use of the ballad “Tam Lin” in the creation of a ritual.

Pagans also sing together in small groups outside the framework of ritual. Many of their songs are humorous critiques of Christianity, but a remarkable number comment reflexively on issues within the movement.

Types of pagan song: an overview

Chants

Chants are central to Neo-Pagan ritual, from intimate coven gatherings to public rituals at which hundreds of people gather. Because of their simple two

or four-line structure, they are easily learned and transmitted; they could be called the constituent elements of the primary Neo-Pagan oral tradition.

Chants are typically sung in unison by the entire ritual group, often with improvised harmonies, to accompany circle, spiral or individual dancing. Some are designed to be sung as rounds; others have several verses with interlocking melodies and rhythms. A skilled priestess or priest generally knows a large number of chants, and can select and teach the ones that best fit the season, the purpose of the ritual, and the participants' singing abilities.

While chants to accompany a ritual are usually chosen ahead of time, a good ritualist may keep the ritual structure fluid enough to allow for participants to break into chant spontaneously. Often, as Anna Korn noted, "a chant... spontaneously used at just the right point... will communicate a deeply needed message." Ostensibly anyone present can begin a chant, but only if it is in alignment with the purpose of the ritual, that is, appropriate, comprehensible and singable, will it be taken up by the group. Thus the group exerts its aesthetic discretion on material which arises spontaneously during the course of ritual.

Most Neo-Pagan chants have been composed within the last fifteen to twenty years; but because of the way they are learned and spread, few people know or care who the authors are. This situation applies even in the case of well-known writers; for example, few Neo-Pagans realize that the popular chant "She changes everything she touches/ And everything she touches changes" was written by Starhawk. It has become part of the register of Neo-Pagan folklore.

Anne Hill notes that in a religion without a written text, the simple lines of a chant can function as liturgy. She emphasizes the importance of chants in raising energy: "In ritual,... chanting words is simply a doorway to wordless chant.... Once you've sung the words enough, the energy is still building, and it's actually more powerful to open it up and not even use the vowel or the syllables... just... the same harmonies, the same intervals." This style of chanting, in which words gradually build up to wordless chanting, is a hallmark of the Reclaiming tradition, in which Anne was trained.

According to Steve Rasmussen, most Neo-Pagan tunes are in what could be called the "Dorian/Aeolian hexatonic" mode, based on the notes D-E-F-G-A-C-D. Steve points out that this scale skips the note between A and C. When Pagans do fill the gap, it is usually with B, rather than B flat, which makes the scale Dorian (D-E-F-G-A-B-C-D) rather than Aeolian (D-E-F-G-

A-Bb-C-D). He thinks this is because “Dorian has an epic, ancient flavor, whereas Aeolian has more of an introspective, mourning quality to it. The commercial musicians that are most popular with Wiccans I know, like Loreena McKennitt or Enya, cast many of their melodies — especially the ones Wiccans like best — in the Dorian mode, as well as the Dorian/Aeolian hexatonic.” Celtic music also characteristically builds songs upon the chords D-F-A, and C-E-G, and Celtic melodies lean towards the Dorian pentatonic (D-E-G-A-C-D), known in Appalachian music as the “mountain minor,” or “mountain modal.” “In its pure form,” says Steve, “this pentatonic is actually quite rare in Wiccan chants, perhaps because it’s ambiguous — we don’t like leaving out that minor third, D-F, which identifies the melody decisively as being in a minor mode.... Major is too bright and patriarchal!” He continues:

We harmonize our chants with the two chords D-F-A and C-E-G, alternating back and forth. In fact, it is really these two alternating chords — these two dancing, embracing, dark-and-light, Lady-and-Lord, minor-and-major chords — that seem to generate our chants. Our melodies arise from this harmony, rather than the other way around — hence, the six-note scale that arises from combining the two chords together.

Chant is an important vehicle for invoking the emotions of ritual participants and stimulating an affective response. Steve’s partner Dixie Deerwood explained: “You have the dizzying highs and the terrifying lows. When they’re talking about death, it’s low, somber, it’s even slower sometimes, when they’re talking about life, it goes back up again.... It’s almost like a... morality play.... It almost seems designed to evoke emotional response in people.”

Chants are songs that everyone can sing at once, songs which do not privilege the single voice over those of the many. “[T]he best place to hear it is at night, dancing around a bonfire, when everyone’s chanting... in harmonies that resonate...,” continues Steve. “[I]t comes from deep within, and people really feel the perfect fifths; they feel the minor thirds. That’s my favorite Pagan music.” Chants express the Neo-Pagan aesthetic of egalitarianism and communitarianism; in this sung liturgy, the aesthetic and the political converge.

Seasonal songs with “pagan” themes

The idea that traditional folksongs contain pre-Christian imagery has been propounded in A.L. Lloyd’s *Folk Song in England* (1967), in Bob Stewart’s *Where is Saint George? Pagan Imagery in English Folksong* (1988), and in liner

notes to such albums as *The Christmas Revels in Celebration of the Winter Solstice* (1978), Jean Ritchie's *Carols for All Seasons* (1959) and the Watsons' *Frost and Fire* (1965) and *For Pence and Spicy Ale* (1975). Singers within the Neo-Pagan community have learned May songs, harvest songs and wassail songs from these albums and spread them throughout the community, often embedding them within a theoretical framework of folklore as survivals, a perspective which has long since been discarded by academic folklorists.⁸ "The Cutty Wren" and "The Herring's Head," for example, are believed to be survivals of the ritual sacrifice of a divine king, following James G. Frazer's hypothesis in *The Golden Bough*.⁹ Traditional English seasonal songs are popular among Pagans. Maying songs, harvest songs and wassail songs are often sung at Pagan rituals at the appropriate seasons. The use of these songs in ritual reinforces the belief that the quarter days (solstices and equinoxes) and the cross-quarter days (Beltaine, Lammas, Samhain and Brigid) were widely and consistently celebrated before Christian times and well into the early modern period.¹⁰

Pagan singers often change the lyrics of traditional songs to "re-paganize" them. In the Cambridgeshire May song, "It's nothing but a sprout, but it's well budded out, the work of the Lord's hand" becomes "our Lady's hand" in reference to the mother goddess. In the Lyke Wake Dirge, "and Christ receive thy soul" becomes "and earth receive thy soul."¹¹ The singers generally do not

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8. The survivalist paradigm has long since been discarded by folklorists, in part because its evolutionist assumptions were not supported by field data, and in part because folklorists turned their attention to the role of folklore in contemporary life and the many contextual factors which influence that.
 9. The attribution of ritual human sacrifice to Neo-Pagans is unfortunately a common negative stereotype. While Neo-Pagans may revive, re-create and experiment with certain elements of ancient religions, sacrifice — human or animal — is emphatically *not* one of them. Reports of Neo-Pagan groups engaging in such practices should be understood as versions of the "blood libel" (Dundes, 1992), a defamatory legend in which the targeted minority is accused of human sacrifice. It is best known for its use in the persecution of Jews.
 10. While there is some evidence that at least in Ireland the cross-quarter days marked (and still mark) the turning of the seasons (Glassie, 1975, 1982), the Neo-Pagan year cycle of quarter days and cross-quarter days (8 holy days in all) can be dated to Gerald B. Gardner's *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (1959:19). On p. 82, Gardner states that the four sabbats (the cross-quarter days) and the full moons nearest the solstices and equinoxes are celebrated (1959:82).
 11. Cambridgeshire May song, from various concerts by Holly Tannen; Lyke Wake Dirge, from Ruth Barrett at the 1987 Spiral Dance, San Francisco, California.

represent these songs as genuine pre-Christian songs, but neither do they elucidate all the changes they've made every time they sing them. This has led to many people within the community believing in the existence of an extant body of songs in honor of pagan goddesses (or The Goddess) and gods. Donna Read's film *The Goddess Remembered* (1989) has been shown repeatedly on public television, and its assertion that folk customs such as Morris dancing are survivals of goddess worship have reinforced these beliefs.

Popular songs re-interpreted

Another category of Pagan songs consists of popular compositions which, while not Pagan in origin or even intent, nevertheless could be understood from a Pagan perspective. Here, as in the case of songs used as source material for rituals, Pagans are engaged in textual poaching, making creative use of materials in the cultural register in ways that reflect their own aesthetics. John Yohalem likes to use Broadway tunes and operatic arias in rituals. He explains:

"You Do Something To Me," a Cole Porter song — I realized that every word of this could be sung as a hymn to the Moon Goddess; I wouldn't have to change a syllable of it. This is the one with the bridge that goes:

Do do that Voodoo that you do so well...

Which is perfect for the Moon and it's about "hypnotize," and "you mystify me," and so forth; and it's a loving tune. I've used it in lots of rituals and everybody cracks up, but I do it quite seriously in rituals by myself. [...] When I learned the verse to "You Do Something To Me," and it goes:

Feelin' mighty blue, thought my life was through,
Then the heavens opened and I gazed at you

— of course, Cole Porter was taking a spiritual experience and sentimentalizing it as an experience you have with a loved one — you can go right back to the original spiritual experience. It's precisely what happens when you're walking along on a dark night and suddenly the clouds open and the moon comes through; it can be a stunning experience, and make you really feel in touch with macro-powers. [...] Sometimes I've done rituals to Venus sort of by making up my own words on the spot to the song "To the Evening Star," which is of course famous from Wagner's *Tannhauser*.

John's preference for operatic arias and Broadway tunes is unusual within the Pagan community, but his adaptation of non-Pagan materials to Paganism

is not. Loretta Orion, for example, describes a ritual in which three women sang the Supremes' "Ain't No Mountain High Enough." The women impersonated Diana Ross and the Supremes, by implication embodying the goddess Diana and her entourage (Orion, 1995: 138-39). The power of this adaptation, she argues, lies precisely in its modernity and familiarity, and in the juxtaposition, in the participants' minds, of sacred and secular (Orion, 1995: 154). The adaptation of popular songs for use in ritual creates an intertextuality which may move participants towards a new understanding: that gods and goddesses are immanent among us; they are beings we learn to embody.

Pagan songs of opposition and resistance

American Neo-Paganism spread in part as an outgrowth of youth movements of the late 1960's and their search for alternatives to consumer capitalism, the dominant religions' emphasis on guilt and sin, and an empiricist denial of the existence of a spiritual realm. Any emergent movement necessarily constructs its identity by contrasting itself with what it wishes to oppose; thus it is not surprising to find themes of opposition and resistance in many Neo-Pagan songs.

Charlie Murphy's "The Burning Times" is probably the most widely known Pagan song. It is also among the most controversial. It expresses core elements of Pagan, and specifically Wiccan, ideology: that European witches met at night according to seasonal and lunar cycles; that these groups were democratic, led by a woman whose position was assigned by merit; that witches were healers, teachers and herbalists who worked for the good of the people; that they worshipped a mother goddess; that the Inquisition was specifically a "war against the women" and an attempt by the Catholic church to control "the common people." This song explicitly compares the witch burnings of medieval Europe and the German genocide of Jews during World War II by using the word "holocaust," and presents the idea that nine million women were killed by the Inquisition. This song is probably one of the vectors for the spread of this misleading statistic throughout the Pagan and womanspirit communities.

The final verse compares the destruction of the environment to the burning of witches: "The earth is a witch, and men still burn her" — and describes the earth as a nurturing mother, "weaver of the web of life that keeps us all alive." The use of the words "we" and "us" in the final verse suggest a historical continuity between the witches of old and contemporary Pagans. The refrain,

a chain of goddess names — “Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inanna” — collapses the distinctions between widely different cultures and time periods, implying that these deities are aspects of one Mother Goddess. These tenets are central to the sacred core of Pagan, and especially Wiccan, religious identity. Political scientist Gus Di Zerega describes the first time he heard the song:

I had just barely begun involvement [with Neo-Paganism].... I was by myself in my apartment and I put the music on... I was in a pretty good mood, sort of a quiet mood, and by the end of the first verse I was sobbing uncontrollably.... It took playing that song probably twenty to thirty times before I wouldn't sob uncontrollably when I heard it.

The late Gwydion Pendderwen's “We Won't Wait Any Longer” is another important oppositional song. Like “The Burning Times,” it creates a contrast between “you,” variously identified as intellectuals, Christians, colonizers, and degraders of the environment, and “we,” who “linger on” even though we have been “dispersed among the nations of the earth,” and continue to worship according to the “ancient ways.” It implies continuity between early earth-worshippers and present-day Pagans and hints at kinship between polytheistic nature-worshippers of all “nations of the earth.”

Like “The Burning Times,” it paints Neo-Pagans as survivors of a series of oppressions, survivors who will rise again and reclaim what was theirs. It specifically calls for political action — “we won't wait any longer; we are stronger than before.... Now the time has come to... redeem our ancient promise to the earth.”

Judging from our questionnaire responses and interviews, many people find such songs stirring. A Sacramento political analyst writes:

I am most moved by [songs] that express connection with nature and...resistance to... oppression and to attacks on nature, songs that... express sadness about what is happening to the earth.... I think it is because there is so little public expression of this grief that the songs offer an outlet for my grief plus an affirmation of its legitimacy. Through our songs, we claim our (Pagan) history. We declare our common culture... When I hear such a song... I feel strengthened, heartened, renewed (Darien Delu, questionnaire response).

Another favorite song, especially among women, is Catherine Madsen's song “Heretic Heart.” Margot Adler used it as the theme song of her WBAI radio show “Hour of the Wolf,” and has entitled her autobiography *Heretic's*

Heart: a Journey through Spirit and Revolution (Beacon, 1997) after the song. Set to the tune of an Episcopal hymn, the song juxtaposes Christian symbols with Pagan ideals. The singer describes herself as bold and reckless, responsible for her own judgments and her own sexual satisfaction. "I once was found but now I'm gone" inverts the line "once was lost but now I'm found," from the hymn "Amazing Grace." "Out of the faithful fold" alludes to Christians' self-definition as sheep whom Jesus shepherds. They are instructed by "those who teach that holiness is to do what you are told."

"They tell me Jesus loves me, but I fear he must love in vain" juxtaposes two strikingly different songs. "Jesus loves me, this I know/ 'Cause the Bible tells me so" locates authority in the Book. "But I fear he must love in vain" can be heard as an allusion to Robert Johnson's "Love in Vain," popularized by Mick Jagger. Whether or not all listeners recognize this reference, the line eroticizes the love of Jesus and then rejects it. It suggests a parallel between the sexual domination of women by men and the religious domination of women by male deities.

Jesus' love is scorned because he cannot understand woman's experience: "What can any man-god know of woman's secret pain?" Authority is located in the body: "My skin, my bones, my heretic heart are my authority," and explicitly in woman's embodied experience, which is lined with natural and cosmic cycles: "My healer is the Lady Moon, whose tides run deep in me." This personal, embodied authority is contrasted to the religious and secular teachings of "priest or scripture, man and law" which attempt to subdue not only the female ("my mother lives her life in fear"), but also, apparently, the male ("my father's a broken man").

In the last verse, the singer identifies herself as an "outlaw" who rejects external authority: "my body shall not be subdued, my soul shall not be saved." These two phrases, balanced like two halves of a proverb, imply an equivalence between body (subdued) and soul (saved). For the soul to be saved, the body must be subdued, and this the singer will not accept.

The song underscores the importance of the personal, the experiential and the individual in Neo-Pagan thought; it sacralizes the body and the cycles of nature, and rejects any form of authority imposed from without or perceived as coming from a locus of power within the hegemony. Reclaiming tradition priestess Macha Nightmare has asserted: "Heretic Heart perfectly expresses my worldview and philosophy of life."

Reclaiming's "Tam Lin" ritual

Traditional ballads have long been a favorite source of narrative and ritual materials because they are thought to preserve vestiges of a pre-Christian magical worldview. The Child collection is the most commonly cited source for the ballads Neo-Pagans like to use as the narrative bases for rituals. Among British traditionalists, the Child corpus is thought to be more likely than other collections to preserve archaic English material. But the Child ballads have also been recorded in disproportionate numbers over ballads from other collections, such as Bronson and Sharp; and it is often through those recordings, and not from the texts themselves, that Pagans become exposed to them. Looking at how ballads are used in creating rituals can illuminate how Pagans borrow texts from literary sources and creatively adapt them for their own purposes. A case in point is the ballad "Tam Lin" as it was adapted for use by Reclaiming in its public ritual at Pantheacon 1996. Sabina was present at this ritual, and what follows is based on her field observations.

Pagans appreciate ballads such as "Tam Lin" because of their incorporation of magical elements. "Tam Lin" tells the tale of a young woman ("fair Janet" or "Lady Margaret") who trysts with a mysterious young man in an enchanted glade. She becomes pregnant, and returns to the glade to learn more about her lover's identity (or to gather herbs for an abortion, in some versions). He explains that he was kidnapped by the fairies, and is under a magic spell; but he can be disenchanting and returned to an earthly existence by following specific instructions. The heroine agrees to do this, and there is a famous scene in which Tam Lin undergoes a series of transformations into dangerous beasts and objects while she holds him tightly in her arms. At last, he is transformed into "a naked knight" and is freed from the enchantment. Then the Fairy Queen who has been holding him prisoner appears and expresses her anger at the loss of Tam Lin to the world of mortals. The themes of transformation and enchantment in this ballad are important to contemporary Pagans, both for their portrayal of a magical worldview and for their metaphorical application to the transformation of the self and the re-enchantment of the world.

The Reclaiming tradition, based in San Francisco, often uses traditional narrative material as a basis for rituals. Reclaiming's magic classes and Witch Camps are sometimes organized around the theme of a single folk narrative and the various interpretations which can be built around it. Starhawk, Reclaiming's best-known and most widely published member and a trained psychotherapist, has a special talent for isolating narrative motifs which resonate

within people's psyches, and the narrative-based rituals are built around this principle. This ritual technique is based on two schools of thought: the myth-ritualist school, which theorizes that rituals originated as enactments of sacred narratives (myths); and Carl Jung's theories linking myths to universal processes of psychological development.¹²

During this ritual, three actors took the parts of Janet, Tam Lin and the Faery Queen and dramatically enacted portions of the story. A narrator recounted the other episodes, and Starhawk led the guided meditation in which participants were invited to apply the principles of the story to their own lives.

For this ritual, Reclaiming used a composite version made up of at least two variants: Fairport Convention's 1974 recording, from which Reclaiming borrowed the tune, and Holly Tannen's 1980 recording based on a version she heard from Frankie Armstrong. In Holly's version, when the protagonist discovers she is pregnant after her tryst with Tam Lin, she returns to the forest at the advice of a serving maid to "pluck the bitter herb... that will twine thy babe from thee." But there Tam Lin appears again and begs her not to "lose the babe... that we got in our play." Reclaiming members added new verses they composed based on W.B. Yeats' poem "The Stolen Child" (1886), which, like the ballad, deals with the theme of fairy abduction:

Come away o human child
To find a world unseen;
Know the wonder and the wild,
And be a bridge between.

Come away o human child
Back to the earth so green;
Know the hearth and know the wild
And be a bridge between.

Reclaiming members also composed new chants to add to the ballad. The first two were performed by the characters of Janet and Tam Lin; the third by the audience during the spiral dance.

12. On the myth-ritual school, see *Sacred Narrative*, ed. Alan Dundes (1984) and Catherine Bell's *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (1997:3-22). For Jung's theories on dreams, myths and human development, see his *Psychology and Religion* (1938). Jung's theories have once again become popular today through authors such as Robert Bly and Clarissa Pinkola Estes

Tam Lin:

My eyes are jewels, my heart is fire;
Come hold me close to you; you will have all that you desire.

Janet:

I hear a voice, it calls from far away;
I walk between the worlds, I go in spite of what they say.

Participants in the spiral dance:

We are alive, as the earth is alive.
We have the power to fight for our freedom.
If we have courage we can be healers;
Like the sun we shall rise.

The ballad and its meaning have been considerably transformed from both the Child text and its recording by Fairport Convention. Not only has the ballad gone from song to participatory drama, it has also acquired new text and new implications. According to Reclaiming's interpretation, Janet becomes one who "goes between the worlds," who mediates between the human world and the world of faery, and who violates interdictions to do so. Tam Lin, whose "eyes are jewels" and whose "heart is fire," embodies all the glamour and allure of the enchanted but forbidden Faery realm, while promising "you will have all that you desire." The new verses expand on themes within the ballad, making it consonant with Neo-Pagan ideology. Participants were told they could be "the bridge between" the hearth and the wild, culture and nature, the ecstatic world of faery and the everyday world, in a sequence which suggests structuralist anthropologists' view of shamans as mediators. The last chant embodies many aspects of the Pagan worldview: that we are alive just as is the earth; that Pagans can heal the earth, and that there will be a rebirth of ancient wisdom and practice — "like the sun we shall rise." The message of the ritual seems to be that by embracing the enchanted, the forbidden, the thing which draws us to it despite the obstacles and interdictions, we will achieve what we desire. Having one's heart's desire means being willing to hold fast to it as it undergoes a number of frightening transformations, just as Janet had to hold onto Tam Lin before he was transformed at last into a human being.

The ritual's meaning is most in syntony with Reclaiming's politics when the desired goals are fairly abstract: political consciousness or personal development, for example. Some ritual participants interpreted this message as pertaining to a desire to heal the earth, to bring about a more whole and authentic moral order, or to bring more creativity into the world. By persevering

in their political and ritual work, they could become like Janet, moving between the worlds (the expression “between the worlds” refers specifically to the liminality of ritual in Pagan parlance) and eventually attaining their goals. Magic, in other words, is a central part of politics. Others related the ritual directly to their own personal goals for spiritual growth, fulfillment or creativity.

But when I [Sabina] participated in this ritual, I identified my heart’s desire as the academic career I had been struggling to hold on to through years of temporary employment, and a failed relationship with a person who was clearly unavailable to me. Neither of those objectives seemed remotely attainable at the time. I found myself angry at the ritual’s seemingly too simplistic message, at its failure to elucidate a more revolutionary social critique, i.e. that we cannot all have what we desire because we live in a system which privileges some people over others. While I found the ritual deeply moving, I also felt upset by it. In subsequent Email discussions with Starhawk and other ritual organizers and participants, it was suggested to me that magic is most successful when it focuses on essences — affective states — rather than forms (a particular job, relationship, or consumer good). When “desires” are interpreted as forms, the ritual could suggest that it is possible to attain all of one’s materialistic goals in an individualistic way, an argument completely contrary to Reclaiming’s ideals. The ballad has become raw material which the members of the Reclaiming Collective have creatively re-shaped to reflect their own worldview and ideology, but which can also be given a broad interpretation, depending on the worldview of the participant.

Humorous songs, self-parody and reflexivity

Few religions tolerate, much less appreciate, humorous parodies of their ideology and practice as much as contemporary Paganism. Pagans do not see a contradiction between deep spiritual experience and playfulness; laughter is often portrayed as sacred because of its ability to change consciousness and perception. Humorous material contains some of the most important reflexive critiques of the movement; it is one way Neo-Pagans comment upon its salient contradictions. This ironic stance can be interpreted as partly due to a rejection of the solemnity associated with most mainstream forms of religion in the United States; but it also typifies a post-modern consciousness, an attitude that blends earnest participation with amused detachment and the ability to appreciate the humor in a situation.

There is a large body of humorous Pagan song, mostly parodic in nature. Parodic songs are by definition intertextual. In *Morning Dew and Roses*, Barre Toelken comments, “When a musical style or tune becomes so well-known that it carries an automatic load of assumptions and responses, it is ripe for parody... the parodic element... does not exist unless the listener can register the disjuncture between the pious tune and the sarcastic words” (Toelken, 1995:24). Their humor depends on the listener’s familiarity both with Neo-Pagan practice and the content of the parodied song. The most widespread Pagan parody is “Old Time Religion,” or as it is sometimes referred to, “The *Real* Old Time Religion.” Set to the tune of the gospel song, it retains the original chorus, but the concept of “old-time religion” is expanded to refer to present-day polytheistic religions and to religions pre-dating the emergence of Christianity — as is the case in “The Burning Times” and “We Won’t Wait Any Longer,” implying a historical link between contemporary Pagans and practitioners of pre-Christian religions.

Eight verses of “Old Time Religion” were popularized by Pete Seeger and printed in the widely used songbook *Rise Up Singing*. Since then, the song has accumulated over 500 (some say 666) verses that are spread via broadsheets and Internet newsgroups — so many, in fact, that the Digital Tradition, a computerized folksong database, has declared a moratorium on new verses. However, no more than about 20 or 30 are commonly sung. Often one person starts off singing several verses and others join in with their favorites.

Some verses contrast attitudes within the Neo-Pagan movement:

Those who worship Dionysus
Say he’s twice as nice as Isis
But she’s more help in a crisis
And that’s good enough for me!

While wine-drinking party Pagans laud the Greek god over the Egyptian goddess, her followers caution that in hard times, sober wisdom may be of more value.

Other verses create humor by juxtaposing sacred and secular:

With the aid of my athame (sacred ritual knife)
I can throw a double whammy
And can slice and dice salami,
And that’s good enough for me!

and

Let us follow dear old Buddha,
As a god there's no one cute-ah;
Comes in plaster, wood or pewtah,
And that's good enough for me!

Both verses use images drawn from popular advertising: “it slices, it dices....,” usually said about chopping appliances, not ritual knives; and “comes in plaster, wood, or pewter,” recognizable as the cant of an over-eager salesman. These verses address the tensions inherent in the practice of religion in a society driven by consumer capitalism which commodifies just about any practice. The first verse can also be interpreted as a comment on two schools of thought regarding ritual tools: ceremonial magicians, and what Pagan author Starhawk has called the “kitchen magic school” (Starhawk 1979, 1989:75).

Ceremonialists are purists, who feel that magical tools should never be handled by others or used for any but ritual purposes. Objects can become reservoirs of psychic power, which may be dissipated by, for example, slicing fruit with your *athame*. Kitchen magic witches, on the other hand, feel that the Goddess is manifest in ordinary tasks as well as magic circles. When you slice fruit with your *athame*, you consecrate the fruit, and a kitchen chore becomes a sacred task (Starhawk 1979/1989:75-76).

Other verses allude to sensitive issues within the Pagan movement, such as sexual expression and the appropriation of indigenous religious traditions.

Oh the Christians all are humming,
'Cause they say their god is coming.
Our god came two times this evening
And the goddess at least three!¹³

Fundamentalist Christians are happy that their god is going to arrive anytime now. For Pagans, it's “good enough” that their god has had two orgasms tonight. This refers to the Great Rite, a ritualized union of god and goddess, embodied in priest and priestess, which is enacted more often symbolically than in the flesh. Another verse implies that Pagans are not as sexually emancipated as they would like to be:

13. Another version of this verse simply repeats the refrain as the last line:

Our god came two times this evening
And it's good enough for me

Oh we tried to worship Venus,
I wish you could have seen us!
Now the clinic has to screen us,
But she's good enough for me!

Pagans sacralize sexuality; yet they acknowledge the tension between their desire to express their sexuality, their internalized inhibitions and their awareness of the possible consequences.

Another popular verse presents a series of images that verges on the surreal:

If your rising sign is Aries,
You'll be taken by the fairies,
Meet the Buddha in Benares,
Where he'll hit you with a pie.

The juxtaposition of astrology, fairy belief, Eastern mysticism, a Hindu holy site and a comic act popularized by Hollywood movies ridicules the extremes of cultural appropriation to which some Pagans may go. "Old Time Religion" includes deities from a wide range of pantheons, cultures and historical periods and portrays this mish-mash as humorous, indicating a reflexive awareness of the processes of cultural bricolage. "I like songs that make fun of what we're doing," said priestess Farida Fox, "so we don't get too bogged down."

Towards a pagan aesthetic: pagans critique pagan music

As Richard Bauman has pointed out in *Verbal Art as Performance* (1978), the act of performance gives license to its audience to critique the act of expression. We asked our informants to tell us not only what kinds of Pagan music they most enjoyed, but also what they most disliked. We hoped their answers would help us define the shape of a developing Pagan musical aesthetic.

John Yohalem perceived "a certain weariness, a lot of references to 'Pagan top 40,' a few songs that are so serviceable that they come up perhaps a bit too often in too many rituals...." John sang us Zipporah Klein's parody: "A minor, A minor, D minor, A minor; this is a generic Pagan chant!" A woman present at the interview laughed and chimed in: "A minor, D minor, E minor, D minor, this is another Pagan chant.... You can tell it's real 'cause it sounds like all the rest." The existence of multiple parodies indicates that dissatisfaction with the monotonous nature of certain chants is widespread. Coordinating any large group of people singing is difficult; when they are standing around a fire in the dark, the problems are compounded. Farida Fox complained of

...the pedestrianism of... going to a... huge circle and a very dispirited [sings in a monotone] "We all come from the goddess" and one side of the circle is lagging about a quarter of a line from the other side of the circle.

Ideally, ritual coordinators should have at their disposal a large body of chants from which they can choose the ones most appropriate for the season, the purpose of the ritual, and the participants' level of ability. However, reality seldom reflects this ideal. At large gatherings, however, Pagans must balance their strong participatory ethic against the difficulty of teaching new chants and songs to large groups of people who have grown up in a culture which discourages public singing by non-professionals. This results in the overuse of certain tried and true favorites and the reliance on simple, formulaic chants.

Another issue Pagans criticized was the fetishization of "Celtic" music within the movement. The music industry markets as "Celtic" many European folk musics which feature fiddles or other stringed instruments, chord changes from major to minor or the use of a melody against a drone. The more sophisticated among our respondents bemoaned the tendency of some Neo-Pagans to acritically accept this mass-marketed genre as genuinely representative of the musics of Celtic countries. John explained:

It sounds Celtic, it sounds pentatonic; this is also the background to rock-and-roll, so everybody's sort of used to it by now.... Not too many people are familiar with real Celtic music; what we have are impressions of Celtic music from movies and TV commercials and so forth. And so much of Wicca is based on Celtic legends and Celtic pantheon that people think "well, that sounds more authentic."

The prevalence of Celtic music is just one part of the predominance of Celtic cultural elements such as gods and goddesses, names for year-cycle customs, and artwork motifs in Neo-Paganism. Why this is so is a complicated question. Wicca is widely believed to have been a Celtic religion, but there is little evidence that Wiccan practices are of Celtic origin. Instead, it is likely that early Witchcraft revivalists, among them Gerald B. Gardner, grafted the names of Celtic deities onto an existing practice during the 1930's, perhaps, as D.H. Frew (this volume) suggests, in order to bring it into syntony with Margaret Murray's interpretation of medieval Scottish witchcraft as based on a pre-Christian religion. The Celts are appealing because they were the first victims of British colonial expansion. They were romanticized by early folklorists as the "noble savages" of Europe, and in fact were often compared with Native Americans by 19th century ethnologists. Turn-of-the-century writers such as

William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory drew inspiration from Irish folklore as part of a resistance to English cultural domination. Marion Bowman has commented on the identification of many non-Celtic people with Celtic cultures, a phenomenon which she has called “Cardiac Celts” (Bowman, 1996), and on the related commodification of things Celtic at British tourist sites to appeal to this broad market (Bowman, 1994). The appropriation of “Celticity” by contemporary American Witches and Pagans may indicate a desire to claim authenticity for white ethnics in a cultural and political climate which locates authenticity only in the cultures of the marginalized and oppressed. Yet as Malcolm Chapman has argued, the Celts were the invention of 19th century philologists and did not correspond to any kind of self-identified political or ethnic group (Chapman, 1992). As more Neo-Pagans have become aware of this scholarship, a new wave of analysis critical of Celticization has begun to emerge in the movement’s literature (Fairgrove, 1997; Nautin-Mayer, 1998).

A related set of concerns centers around historical accuracy. Many respondents felt that songs should be accurate both historically and in their presentation of beliefs and practices of other religions. Gus Di Zerega, while deeply moved by “The Burning Times,” also had reservations about the lyrics:

[T]he part that really bothered me,... the 9 million European women, which is bad history, both because some of them were men,... and there was nowhere near 9 million, as far as I’ve been able to tell.

Another respondent, Kate Slater, had similar concerns:

I love the music/rhythm/passion of this song. However, it contains the Pagan myth about the “Pope declared the Inquisition....9 million European women died.” This has become perniciously widespread.... The problem is that it is so wrong...whether it represents a lack of realistic scholarship, innumeracy or a desire to identify with victimhood.....[It] is propaganda....

Several of our informants felt that while opposition to Christianity may have been important in the early stages of defining a Neo-Pagan identity, it is something that Pagans, both individually and as a movement, need to outgrow. Gus Di Zerega said, “We too often define ourselves against the Christian religion. And I think we have enough going for us spiritually that we don’t need to do that.... Because so long as you define yourself by what you’re against, what you’re against is still defining you.”

Pagans are also concerned about the authenticity of the emotions that songs express. Ruth Barrett stated her preference for songs that are “mythic

and mysterious in their imagery, that come out of authentic revelation and authentic experience. Because I get a sense of the person's energy behind the creative act when it's real." Pagan songs that are too simple or too contrived do not evoke her own participation in the message. Others felt that too often, Pagans lack the musical and poetic skills to write songs and chants that are moving and evocative. Anne Hill commented: "If you can't say it well, why say it?... Then we're all cursed with having to repeat bad poetry to the end of time. In Paganism... the poetry... is what we have. We don't have a text, we don't have anything else. That's the liturgy: those simple lines of a chant."

Gaelic scholar and Indo-European linguist Jim Duran believes that contemporary Pagans, like most Americans, do not fully inhabit their bodies, and that this inhibits their self-expression. As an example, he offered his attempt to teach Scottish Gaelic waulking songs to a group of American Neo-Pagans.

One of my most disappointing experiments was my attempt to form women's singing groups using hand-milling songs [waulking songs] in Scottish Gaelic. Even though I entitled my workshop "Women's Singing for Power and Solidarity...", the content was quite pagan, but the singing groups never caught on. I found women would not let themselves go, would not let loose. Instead of using their bodies as a soundboard, to magnify the sound, they tended to muffle the sound within themselves. [They have a]... fear of really letting loose. A fear that elderly Christian women in traditional communities, for whom it was an important emotional outlet, might not have; as Alan Lomax pointed out in *Folk Song Style and Culture*, even in the most repressed cultural situations, you can hear the tortured screams of women really letting things out, manifesting their oppression, or else you can hear their joy and power.

So while Pagans may lay claim to having embodied an inner authority — "my skin, my bones, my heretic heart are my authority" — Duran's critique suggests that this may be more of an ideal than a current reality. As some verses of "The *Real* Old-Time Religion" suggests, certain attitudes towards sexuality and the body are so deeply embedded in American culture that it will take Neo-Pagans many decades to be able to overcome them.

Duran further criticizes American Paganism's lack of continuity with the past, and suggests that Neo-Pagans claim and adapt only those parts of their ancestral pasts which conform to their romanticized ideals.

Your new world [Neo-]Pagan religions reflect strongly the conditions of the modern United States, rather than the physical and cultural environment of the Northern European pagan homelands..... Artistic creativity is very

strong in the Pagan community, both in the plastic and performing arts. The desire for liturgy is very strong — liturgy which is at the same time good theater. But in terms of interest in genuine traditional beliefs and practices of Northern European traditional religion, there's very little tendency to take over beliefs and practices from these areas. Because Pagans do not fundamentally relate to experiences of people such as Lapps, Balts, Finns, Slavs, Hungarians, or Gaelic speakers on the coasts of Scotland and Ireland.... In the United States the tradition here is "Paganism *à la mode*." People like to claim authenticity for beliefs and practices they hold, but at the same time want to be free to innovate, which results in some strange products at times.

Like the plastic butterfly in Steve's dream, Pagan music is still in the process of metamorphosis. Emerging from a countercultural tradition, it has not yet found its own completely distinct identity. Yet even in this emergent stage, we can already discern the beginnings of a Pagan musical aesthetic. Pagan music is highly syncretic, integrating the folk musics of Europe, rock, and living Pagan traditions. It is accessible and participatory. Musically, it integrates modal and chordal structures. Women play a central role in both songwriting and vocal and instrumental performance. It re-visions the historical figure of the witch, expresses connection with seasonal cycles, and comments humorously on authoritarian religious structures and on Neo-Paganism itself. In this sense, Neo-Pagan musical aesthetics closely mirror its countercultural political stance.

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