

Bouët et Solomos, ont le mérite d'avoir fait le pari d'une véritable rencontre par-delà ces failles. Que les auteurs aient réussi ou non n'enlève rien à la valeur de leurs contributions au débat. 🍀

RÉFÉRENCES

Comaroff, Jean et John. 2012. *Theory from the South. Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*. Boulder: Paradigm.

Fabian, Johannes. 2002 [1983]. *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. Columbia University Press.

**“To Everything There Is a Season”:
Pete Seeger and the Power of Song.**
2011. Allan M. Winkler. New York:
Oxford University Press. 256pp, black
and white photographs, bibliography,
index. Accompanying online audio
recordings. Cloth, \$23.95; paper,
\$12.95.

**Gone to the Country: The New Lost
City Ramblers and the Folk Music
Revival.** 2010. Ray Allen. Champaign,
IL: University of Illinois Press.
328pp, black and white photographs,
discography, bibliography, index. Cloth,
\$80.00; paper, \$25.00.

MICHAEL B. MACDONALD
University of Alberta

Two new books, *“To Everything There Is a Season”*: Pete Seeger and the Power of Song by Allan M. Winkler, and *Gone to the Country*:

The New Lost City Ramblers and the Folk Music Revival by Ray Allen, explore the uneven development of folk music in the twentieth century. These excellent texts balance synchronic and diachronic analysis, using the songs as a starting point. This perspective is useful and even essential for scholars interested in cultural capitalism and how the hegemony of the recording industry is experienced by creative people. These two books, together with Michael Scully's *The Never-Ending Revival: Rounder Records and Folk Alliance* (see my review in *MUSICultures* 37, 2010), provide the beginning of an approach to these issues.

“To Everything There Is a Season” proposes that Pete Seeger's songs and significance arise dialectically from his political conflict as a creative person with the times in which he lived. The chapters are organized chronologically and each centres on a song representing Seeger's response to the issues of the day. Chapter One, “Talking Union,” explains Seeger's musical background and the steps that led him to Woody Guthrie and a now mythical voyage across America that laid the foundation for Seeger's enduring political significance.

Chapter Two, “If I Had a Hammer,” starts with Seeger's return from service in World War II and concludes with the founding of *Sing Out!* magazine and the success of the Weavers. Chapter Three, “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” follows the personal and professional impact of Seeger's appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee, his years as a “blacklisted” artist, and his reemergence as a Top 40 recording artist. Chapter Four, “We Shall Overcome,” follows Seeger through the

folk revival and the civil rights movement.

Chapter Five, "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," opens in the middle of the (in) famous 1965 Newport Folk Festival where Bob Dylan, a Seeger acolyte, symbolically and historically distanced himself from the folk revival. In most music history textbooks this is the moment when the folk revival ends. But as this book shows, Seeger's career, and the development of the folk revival, were far from over.

Chapter Six, "Sailing Down My Golden River," follows Seeger's move from global social politics to local environmental politics. During the time covered in the first five chapters, Seeger tried to live the fantasy of "Daddy goes away to work and comes home to family." Toshi and the children were left to deal with the realities of living in Pete's Thoreauvian ideology, and sadly, even in this text, their voices are rarely heard. It was not until the years examined in Chapter Six that Seeger remained close to home, inspired to lead an effort to clean up the Hudson River, which ran near his home and was declared "dead" in the mid-60s. Winkler concludes that Seeger "fought for justice, in one form or another...or when the ground shifted under him, he found another cause" (190).

As the glow of hero worship inspired by this book diminished, I was left with a nagging discomfort heightened by repeated viewings of Seeger's performance at President Obama's inauguration. At that event, Seeger sang two verses of Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" that are not often reproduced. These verses pose the question: Is this land for you and me? Accompanied by Bruce Springsteen, Seeger performed an anti-anthem against private property at a celebration of a state

figure – the highest in the land, and who is symbolic of the legal system that secures private ownership. Was the performance an empty gesture with troubling resonances for Seeger's own career? Was it meant to be irony? Did Seeger do it intentionally? If one takes a moment to consider Seeger as a cultural entrepreneur instead of an activist, he appears to be a very astute business person able to channel the energy of social unrest into products. Seeger might have performed blue collar music, but he certainly never was blue collar himself. As with Whitman and Thoreau, and contemporary popular musicians such as Springsteen, the performance of working-class alienation has become a commodified *gesture*, just as the banjo has become an emblem of Pete Seeger, the folk product. Is the celebration of Seeger part of an elaborate American ritual that obscures the deepening penetration of cultural capitalism? Is Pete Seeger a living analogy to the Che Guevara t-shirts produced in factories that Guevara would have wanted to liberate? Is he a symbol that performs the opposite of what it appears to perform, a revolution that in fact participates in economic colonialism?

Seeger is not the only one caught in the bind of capital. From an economic perspective, marketing to both sides of American hegemony – the conservative as well as the radical – makes sense. While the author does not explore this side of Seeger's legacy, the publisher (Oxford University Press) is not afraid to support Apple iTunes, providing a link to songs from Apple's service on the first page of the book, instead of sending the reader to *Smithsonian Folkways* or a local retailer to purchase a list of key albums. Are the

editors of this book in the same position that Seeger found himself, and have they chosen not to notice? So perhaps there is poetry in the fact that the iTunes link is broken. Songs hold this book together, used as chapter titles, and are essential listening to enter the emotional territory: they help to navigate the material, since Seeger's political history took some rather abrupt changes of direction. But unfortunately there is no album list or reference list for the included songs, nor clues to navigate Seeger's extensive bibliography. This omission, and the lack of a substantial bibliography, unintentionally poses a meta-question: Is part of Seeger's journey to *find* folk music, and do we readers also have to journey?

I do not wish to suggest that the *folk gesture* is simply a marketing ploy designed by clever marketing agents and distributed by a media savvy industry; that would mistake the sophisticated power of hegemony. I worked in the folk music industry long enough to know that everyone believes in the democratizing mission of folk music, but that this mission is synonymous with expanding markets for cultural commodities. This creates conceptual problems. I encountered the New Lost City Ramblers (NLCR) at exactly such a paradoxical moment. We were backstage at the Vancouver Folk Music festival in 2006, sitting close to each other in the shade of blue porta-potties. I didn't say much. I had been a fan for quite a few years and was astounded that I was actually getting a chance to speak with them. But they weren't happy: Mike Seeger said that the noise of the festival was alienating, and the competing sound-wash from other stages made on-stage acoustic intimacy (essential for non-amplified

musicians) impossible. If this is folk music, they said, it has left us behind.

I approached Ray Allen's *Gone to the Country* with this in mind. Allen picks up at the very end of the folk revival narrative, the pop period ushered in by the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, with Dylan and the Paul Butterfield blues band thundering, Pete Seeger in a rage, and the New Lost City Ramblers playing as a backup band to old-time Texas fiddling legend Eck Robertson (whose first recording was made in 1922). Allen intends to shed light on the "purists, traditional and neo-ethnic camp of the movement" which was made up of "city players who were simply mesmerized by the sounds of traditional music and the exotic cultures and bygone eras those sounds evoked" (5). Allen is interested in a frank conversation, often drawing from discussions with the NLCR themselves, about the power of cultural and artistic authenticity.

The first four chapters provide the back-story of the original three members of the Ramblers, situating them relative to more familiar names in the folk revival movement. Mike Seeger, Pete's younger brother, was central to the development of the NLCR and we are given another version of their family background. For those interested in Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger, this section is especially interesting.

New York City, an important but undocumented character in the folk revival, also takes centre stage in Allen's account. The title *Gone to the Country* prepares the reader for a story of ruralization (opposite of urbanization?) that highlights the romantic allure of the American countryside for naïve urban youth. Performance problems constantly

get in the way as the NLCR try to tell history, entertain, and *perform* authentic American rural music styles. These irreconcilable goals, exacerbated by the personalities in the group, risk running “authenticity” into the folk-mire of what might be called an American primitive surrealism. These problems are highlighted in Allen’s account of Tom Paley’s exit from the band and his replacement by Tracey Schwarz, which created a drama over the NLCR name/brand.

Ray Allen weaves a rich tapestry of personal and sometimes competing narratives held together by two things: great writing and album analysis. Allen’s prose is exceptional, fast paced and quick-witted, which helps to communicate the sharp, often acid, NLCR repartee. I must admit that after spending a little time with them in 2006, I’m not certain that I liked them very much, but this made them even more interesting. To his credit, Allen fights the urge to editorialize and allows the voices of the NLCR to emerge from his prose. I often feel that artist biography tends to be sweetened to make the artists more likeable, or unlikable, depending on the needs of the author. In Allen’s skillful prose, the band emerges as a complexity held together as much by contradiction as by consistency.

However, readers seeking cultural studies or musicological analysis will be disappointed. Allen introduces some close reading of the albums and documents how they were put together with attention to salient musical aspects, but this does not go far. Having spoken with Allen, I know that musicological analysis was reduced in response to an editorial suggestion to keep the focus on the story; but I think this was bad advice. The story might have been

richer and the analysis more penetrating with prolonged discussion of the musical development of the group. After all, it is the music that seems to have held this fractious group together, not interpersonal relationships. Although Allen discusses the albums in the text, there is no discography; the reader is directed to the internet and a list of websites.

Ultimately, the cultural studies perspectives promised in the introduction do not fully mature. In the closing chapter, which is the most analytical, Allen focuses on familiar revival literature and does not draw upon writers who might be recognized as cultural studies thinkers. This is unfortunate as folk revival scholarship still gets tied in knots over the seeming paradox of performing authenticity, which Allen describes as the central paradox of the NLCR. Methodological and theoretical developments from the Frankfurt School, British cultural studies in the style of Stewart Hall, and French structural and poststructural analysis developed by Roland Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze, and Baudrillard, would have added interesting perspectives to his analysis. Nevertheless, *Gone to the Country* is a long overdue historical discussion of the NLCR that provides essential new insights into what was happening in the shadows of Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan, and makes a substantial addition to critical analysis of the sweet noise we call folk music. 🍷

REFERENCE

- Scully, Michael. 2008. *The Never-Ending Revival: Rounder Records and Folk Alliance*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.