

## ***Starting Over: A. L. Lloyd and the Search for a New Folk Music, 1945-49***

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**Abstract:** In a previous article in this Journal (1997), the author has outlined Lloyd's early involvement with folk music during the decade 1934-1944 and analyzed the significance of *The Singing Englishman*. Here he continues the story for the next five years, a critical period in the rebirth of English folk song after World War II.

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A. L. (Bert) Lloyd (1908-82) was a leading figure in the post-war folk music revival in England. He is remembered as an influential revival singer who taught a younger generation of folk singers much of their traditional repertoire. He was also a journalist, broadcaster, and folklorist. His booklet, *The Singing Englishman*, stimulated renewed interest in, and controversy about, English folk song in the 1940s and 1950s, and his *Folk Song in England* (1967), was one of two major works of scholarship produced during the earlier decades of the English revival.<sup>1</sup> During the second half of the 1940s Lloyd earned his living as a journalist on the weekly tabloid magazine, *Picture Post*, but he also wrote a variety of articles on folk and other kinds of popular music for left-wing periodicals, and he edited his second important publication, *Corn on the Cob* (1945). He also began his work as a folklorist and song collector, making his first forays into the fields of industrial folk music and ethnomusicology. Perhaps most important of all, he studied and promoted American folk song, and gradually figured out how the lessons and fruits of the American revival might be used to help create the kind of urban, working class, folk song that he passionately desired to see re-emerge as a musical and political force in post-war Britain. These were the years of Lloyd's most intense involvement with the Workers Music Association (WMA), but they were also the years when he became an active member of the English Folk Dance & Song Society (EFDSS) and when he resumed his free-lance work as a researcher and broadcaster with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). In a variety of ways, therefore, Lloyd's activities and writings during the second half of the 1940s prepared the way for the pivotal role he would play in the English folk song revival during the next decade.

### **Challenging Orthodoxy**

The publication of Lloyd's *The Singing Englishman* in 1944 had signified that the conventional wisdom on English folk music, as expressed by the periodicals *English Dance and Song* and *Journal of the EFDSS*, was under challenge. This challenge was reinforced by Max Jones' edited collection, *Folk: Review of a People's Music* (1945), which contained, among other things, an article by George Woodcock on "The English Hymn", an account by Reg Groves of the lyrics composed and sung during the Luddite revolts of the years 1811-13, and an article by Lloyd on "The Revolutionary Origins of English Folk-Song" (1945d). Lloyd began with a blunt attack on the EFDSS and the BBC for perpetuating a middle-class, art song, version of English folk music that was, he claimed, a travesty of the real thing (1945d: 13):

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<sup>1</sup> The other was Peter Kennedy's *Folksongs of Britain and Ireland* (1975).

Englishmen who only know their own folk-songs through cultured arrangements of the more insipid melodies will be surprised to hear that, really, English traditional music is among the very best in Europe. Perhaps only Spain, Hungary, the Balkan countries and Russia have a richer treasury of traditional songs of high musical imagination, great depth of feeling, broad dramatic sweep. It is all the more astonishing - I nearly wrote heartbreaking - to think how completely the scientific investigation of English folk-song has been neglected. Hungary has her Bartok, Spain her Pedrell and Torner. The U.S.S.R. has the collaborators at the folklore institute in Leningrad. But the best we can produce are Cecil Sharp, and the Rev. Baring Gould (who wrote of English agricultural labourers as "the peasantry"). Now, industrial life and industrial ways have invaded the English countryside. The old traditions exist, as a rule, merely as something artificial. Folk-dance means a prancing curate in cricket flannels. Folk-song means the B.B.C. Singers cooing quaintly in the accents of Palmers Green and Ealing.

Lloyd's claim (in fact, an erroneous one) was that in England folk music was no longer a living culture of rural workers: it had been totally appropriated by the urban middle classes. Writing in the Workers' Music Association magazine *Keynote: The Progressive Music Quarterly*, Lloyd drew a sad but forthright conclusion from this scathing assessment. Mincing no words, he declared categorically that traditional music in England was dead (1945e: 18):

There's no two ways about it: in England folk-music has to be looked on as a thing of the past. The words of the folk-songs are often fine; they look well on the printed page of ballad collections. The tunes are fine things too; serious composers will be able to make good use of them for years to come. And arranged as a kind of light music, the songs can still add interest to radio programmes like *Country Magazine*, though by the time they have got to that state they have precious little resemblance to the real thing. Whatever way you look at it, English folk-song as it is now is a museum piece. It is no longer a living thing. The series has long since been discontinued and all we have are the back numbers.

Was there still a chance that English traditional music could be revived and given a new lease of life? Douglas Kennedy, the Director of the EFDSS, thought so, and wrote several articles in *English Dance and Song* proclaiming that folk-song, folk dancing and folk drama were "awake and alive" after the disruption caused by the war (1945a, b). Lloyd disagreed, arguing that it was "too late in the day to do [for England] what Bartok did for Hungary in his monumental work" (1945d: 13). Echoing a viewpoint that had been expressed trenchantly before the War by Frank Howes, in the first issue of *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* (1932), he argued that now was the time for study and analysis. A large body of traditional song had been collected in England in the decades before World War I, but this material had received little in-depth analysis. Nor was English music the only field of investigation that demanded fresh labour. Indeed, despite his pessimism, it was clear that Lloyd was fascinated by the power and variety of traditional music in diverse cultures around the world, and that ethnomusicology was a discipline in which he would welcome the opportunity to work if given the chance. For now, Lloyd saw no viable means of earning a living as a professional folklorist, but he

was nonetheless eager to contribute articles to the left-wing press on folk-song and related aspects of contemporary popular music.

### **The Origins of Folk Music**

Lloyd's first attempt to dig below the surface of folk music had been his social history of the origins and development of English folk-song in *The Singing Englishman* (1944). In that booklet he had argued that English folk-song style had been born of revolutionary struggle during the late Middle Ages. In an article in *Vox Pop: The Progressive Music Monthly* he went even further back, to speculate on the very origins of music itself. He began by casting doubt on a theory that, for ideological reasons, still found support in WMA circles: the thesis that folk music had its origins in communal labour (1945c: 7). He had no real alternative to offer, but he suggested that one fruitful line of research might be to examine the origins of early music instruments, for example African ones such as the zambi of the Kalahari bushmen, the Hottentot flute, the Kaffir ixilongo (an ox horn trumpet), and the mbila found in central and southern Africa. Some of these, he remarked, appeared to have come about "by accident" but others, such as the mbila, were imitations (made with indigenous materials) of foreign instruments or even imports from Asia (1945c: 7-8). Lloyd pursued this line of thought no further in this article on "Prehistoric Music," but it was clear that he was keenly interested in the subject of musical transference from one culture to another. The question that was on his mind was the legitimacy of borrowing from the folk music of another country, and the country he was thinking of was the United States of America.

### **America: A Living Tradition**

If Lloyd despaired of the EFDSS/BBC version of folk-song ever touching the hearts of the lower classes, he believed that things were quite different in America. Unlike Britain, he claimed, the USA was experiencing an authentic folk-song revival. His *Keynote* article, "Sing Out, America!" (1945e), provides a valuable glimpse of his perspective on folk music in 1945. He rejoiced that across the Atlantic traditional music was "alive and flourishing," with the old songs still widely sung and new songs daily created in the folk idiom. In the USA, he claimed, there were many "genuine folksingers" with national reputations as popular entertainers, starring in such Broadway shows as *Sing Out, Sweet Land* or on such radio features as *The Martins and the Coys* and *The Old Chisholm Trail*, and recorded by commercial record companies. Lloyd cited Burl Ives, Josh White and Woody Guthrie as the best-known examples of commercially successful artists who sang "authentic folk-songs" in a "traditional way," a style he contrasted with that of trained-voice singers performing folk-song arrangements by Cecil Sharp, E. J. Moeran or Francis Collinson. He praised a recent album by Ives on the Asch label as an excellent document of the American people and their "fine traditional culture."<sup>2</sup> Ives, he explained, had picked up his singing style and most of his songs from his Kentucky-born mother who knew many traditional songs and ballads and taught them to him as a child, which explained his love for Appalachian variants of traditional English and Scottish folk-lyrics and for melodies based on old pentatonic ballad tunes (1945e: 18-19).

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<sup>2</sup> Asch 345. It contained three old ballads of British origin ("Henry Martin," "The Foggy Dew" and "The Bold Soldier," a mountain love song ("Black is the Color of My True Love's Hair"), a play-party song ("Buckeye Jim"), a nonsense song ("The Sow Took the Measles"), a black-face minstrel song ("The Blue Tail Fly"), and a white spiritual ("The Wayfaring Stranger").

This somewhat naive eulogy of Burl Ives as a traditional Appalachian mountain singer led Lloyd to the core of his article, an examination of the origins and development of American folk-song. American history, he argued, provided the clue to why folk-song was still a vital force in that country's popular culture. Contemporary US folk music was the product of a multi-stage process of evolution. Its roots lay in the colonial period when the settlers in the mountains began to make up songs of their own, especially dance-songs or "play-party songs," an amalgam of ballad fragments, nursery rhymes and improvised nonsense stanzas. A second stage came after the War of Independence: the late 18<sup>th</sup> century wave of religious revival enthusiasm found expression in the folk hymns or "spiritual songs" sung by Methodists, Baptists, Shakers and Rollers at revivalist camp meetings. Yet the bulk of "real American" folk-songs came into being during the 19th century: songs of the great trek westward, of the trials and tribulations of the pioneers, and of the life of the cowboy, the lumberjack, the homesteader, and the railroader. Lloyd admitted that both these and the "violent underworld" songs that were created in the cities towards the end of the century initially had less "folk quality" than the earlier mountain ballads and lyrics. Often compositions by individual writers, most of them were adaptations or parodies of pop songs, yet after years of being passed on by word of mouth they gradually absorbed many "genuine folk characteristics" in both words and melody (1945e: 18-19).

Lloyd then turned his attention to the contribution of blacks to American folk music. Although he insisted that "the Negro [had] stood American folk-song in good stead," his analysis was surprisingly controversial, minimizing the African element in black folk music. Yet after stating bluntly that "there is little that is African in American Negro folk music," Lloyd claimed that black Americans had been the saviours of American folk-song: "what the Negro has done...is to keep an authentic folk element flourishing strongly in American popular culture, and so preventing that culture from running to seed." Pursuing further the issue of why American folk music, unlike British, had remained a living tradition, Lloyd argued that this was primarily the work of the poor, not only blacks but also the poor whites of the Kentucky highlands and the sharecroppers of the Kansas plains. More recently, he suggested, the progressive movement in American politics had played an important role in helping Americans rediscover their national heritage, a music that was "well-preserved, still valid, still growing lushly, and more acceptable than ever." It was a great shame, he concluded, that so little of this genuine American folk music was available on record in Britain, and even sadder that "we have no comparable records of a real English folk-singer" (1945e: 19).

### ***Corn on the Cob* and Lloyd's Editorial Practice**

Apart from his articles in WMA publications, Lloyd's main contribution to folk music in 1945 was editing three song collections. They were *Twelve Russian Folk Songs for Children* (1945f), a collaboration with Alan Bush titled *Twenty Songs* (1945g), and *Corn on the Cob: Popular and Traditional Poetry of the USA* (1945b). The most important of these, *Corn on the Cob*, underlined the fascination with American folk-song which Lloyd's *Keynote* article had already demonstrated. It made available in England the lyrics of forty-three folk-songs that had already played a role in the American revival, and it did so at a time when in the U.K. there was strong and widespread interest in the culture of the United States. The songs were organized into seven categories: (i) traditional lyrics and children's songs from the Appalachian mountains; (ii) pioneer,

cowboy and railroad songs under the sub-title "songs of the shifting frontier"; (iii) negro spirituals and other songs of black protest; (iv) prison songs, including chain-gang work-songs; (v) crime ballads and blues under the sub-title "songs of the bad men and the wicked cities"; (vi) hobo songs; and (vii) songs of the Depression and of World War II.<sup>3</sup>

Lloyd's editorial practice in dealing with some of the material included in *Corn on the Cob* was controversial. He occasionally decided to make his own composite version rather than print verbatim a single (incomplete) version of a song as it had been collected from oral tradition. He was quite up-front about this practice, defending it in the following words (1945b: 13):

Most of the poems quoted in this book are given as taken down from the singing of individual singers and unedited, but in one or two cases, where there exists a whole cycle of ballads dealing with a single subject or figure, a composite version has been made, put together from several texts, in order to give the ballad a greater continuity or a higher dramatic interest...Singers of these ballads are always incorporating new or alternative verses into them, and that is all that has been done in this case. I make no apology for doing so.

"One or two cases," however, was an understatement. At least six of the pieces included in the book were composites: "The Old Chisholm Trail" (no. 10), "John Henry" (no. 18), "Stackalee" (no. 31), "John Hardy" (no. 32), "Frankie and Johnny" (no. 33) and "The Blues" (no. 35). On these occasions, in the mental tussle between Lloyd the singer and Lloyd the scholar, the singer won out. From an aesthetic point of view, Lloyd's composite versions were excellent, valuable contributions to a folk process that he regarded, with some justification, as immature and unfinished. But from a scholarly viewpoint, *Corn on the Cob* left something to be desired. It was also marred by the lack of tunes, an omission that Lloyd clearly regretted.

### **The Importance of *Corn on the Cob***

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<sup>3</sup> The first section included three versions of Child ballads: # 68, "Young Hunting," reworked as "Lovin' Henry"; # 79, "The Wife of Usher's Well," in the form of a children's song; and # 155, "Sir Hugh, or, The Jew's Daughter" under the title "A Little Boy Threw"; as well as three American lyrics, "The Top of Old Smoky," "I Dreamed Last Night" and "Black, Black, Black." The second included such pioneer and railroading classics as "The Buffalo Skinners," "The Old Chisholm Trail," "Streets of Laredo," "Young Monroe" (a version of "The Jam on Gerry's Rock"), "Boll Weevil Blues," "John Henry," "Casey Jones" and "The Wreck on the C & O." The rather brief third section on black American folk-song included two spirituals, "Same Train" and "The Boneyard Shout," and three protest songs, "Way Down South," "I Went to Atlanta" and "Out in De Rain," but this was supplemented by two more sections in which the songs were mainly Afro-American in origin. The prison songs included "Chain Gang Blues," "Gwine Back to de Chain Gang," "In de Sweatbox," "Long Gone," "Down in the Valley" and "Twenty-One Years," while section five contained extended versions of "Stackalee," "John Hardy" and "Frankie & Johnnie" as well as the humorous "Willie the Weeper" and a lengthy collection of floating blues stanzas. Lloyd's choice of hobo songs comprised "Wanderin'," "The Great American Bum," "Scissor Bill" and "Big Rock Candy Mountains." The final section, titled "Songs of Modern Times" in allusion to the well-known Charlie Chaplin movie, consisted of two songs from the Depression years, "Hard Times" and "Don't Take Away My PWA," and two anti-Nazi songs, "We're Gonna Move into Germany" and "Round and Round Hitler's Grave."

Despite its faults, *Corn on the Cob* was much more than a collection of popular poetry. It was an ambitious work, as Lloyd recognized in his introduction, commenting that "this is a little book but it has a lot of work to do; and what is asked of it is that, in its sixty odd pages, it should give English readers as complete an idea as it can of the American folk tradition...[R]eaders are reminded that however these poems read, they sing a thousand times better" (1945b: 7). In reality *Corn on the Cob* was an Almanac Singers' lyric book, and much of the material included in it would remain in the repertoire of Pete Seeger and the Weavers throughout the next two decades. It was, in fact, intended to stimulate in England the kind of political folk revival that the Almanacs were leading in the USA. The collection was the first cheap and convenient source-book available to British revival singers, and it would not be superseded until Alan Lomax's *Folk Songs of North America* was published by Cassell in 1960.

The importance of the book lay also in Lloyd's introductory essay and the notes he provided to songs. They revealed many (although not all) of Lloyd's sources, which were mainly printed but included recordings by Kokomo Arnold, Jimmy Gordon, Frank Luther and Carson Robinson, Harry McClintock, Josh White, and the Almanac Singers. Lloyd was familiar with, and drew upon, a fairly large number of American folk-song collections and works of folksong and folklore scholarship.<sup>4</sup> Lloyd's essay performed for American folk-song what *The Singing Englishman* had for English folk-song: it provided a systematic guide and social history of the music in summary form. Moreover, reading between the lines one could also infer quite a lot about Lloyd's views on British folk music at this time. Many of his opinions would change during the 1950s and 1960s, so in order to understand his later intellectual and artistic development it is useful to establish what they were in these immediate post-war years.

### Defining Folksong

Lloyd began his introduction by tackling a generic issue that applied equally to American and English folk song: its relative lack of popularity among the lower classes, and its relationship to other forms of popular music. His book, he acknowledged wryly, was a collection of popular songs that, with a few exceptions, had never gained mass popularity and would commonly be called folk-songs. But using the term "folksong" (his spelling) was also problematic, since much of the material he had collected did not fit a conventional definition of folk-song, such as that proposed by Cecil Sharp, which stressed the role of communal tradition in authorship. Lloyd commented (1945b: 7):

Folksongs are usually reckoned to be songs handed on for generations by word of mouth and not read out of books or off sheet music, songs which are continually changing as each successive singer's taste or memory dictates, songs which are the common property of at least a group of people and not obviously the products of a single author. But the

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<sup>44</sup> They included J. H. Cox's *Folksongs of the South*, L. Gellert's *Negro Songs of Protest*, Robert Gordon's column, "Old Songs That Men Have Sung", in *Adventure Magazine* (1923-1927), R. P. Gray's *Songs and Ballads of the Maine Lumberjacks*, Godfrey Irwin's *American Tramp and Underworld Slang*, Guy Johnson's *John Henry: Tracking Down a Negro Legend*, Odum & Johnson's *The Negro and his Songs and Negro Workaday Songs*, John & Alan Lomax's *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, Carl Sandburg's *American Songbag*, Franz Rickaby's *Ballads and Songs of the Shantyboy*, and Siegmeister & Downes' *Treasury of American Folksong*.

American folksong tradition is a very new one, the newest there is, and many kinds of American 'traditional' songs have only been current for thirty years or less; they have not been rounded and smoothed by the action of generations of singers as folksongs have elsewhere. In some of these songs the folk element predominates and you cannot detect the author's hand at all. But in many, the author is discernable, though it may be only vaguely. Generally, the mountain ballads and the negro songs have the most "folk" about them, and the cowboy songs, the lumberjack songs, the railroad songs and the songs about social conditions have the least. But that is something that need worry only the purist and the scholar...Probably no country has such a great range of folksongs as America has nor such a variety of forms.

Lloyd was thus proposing a wider definition of folk-song than Sharp's, to accommodate the great variety of material that he saw as part of American traditional culture. It was only during the last few years, he argued, that folklorists had come to realize the ubiquity of folk-song in the United States and the richness of folk traditions that were of comparatively recent origin. These discoveries had necessitated a total re-conceptualization of the heritage of popular culture in North America. Previously the focus had been on Appalachian ballads and lyrics, cowboy songs, and spirituals. But now it was evident that there was no corner of the USA lacking in local folk-songs and folk traditions: not only the mountains but "the foothills, the flatlands, the coastal areas, the 'great intellectual desert' of the Mid-West, the Far-West and the Deep South have produced hundreds of ballads, fiddle tunes, play-parties, prison songs, work songs, hobo songs, and blues of a fine, rich and moving kind" (1945b: 8).

Nonetheless, Lloyd believed that within this great variety he could identify some constants. For example, he claimed that the majority of American folk-songs reflected the violent and often chaotic life-experiences of an energetic, pioneering people whose lives lacked stability and who were "no strangers to the idea of quick-fire success and crashing failure". The new circumstances and environments in which the old songs were sung often resulted in their re-creation as something different but equally legitimate and still worthy of the term "folksong" (1945b: 8). Lloyd then discussed in turn various types of American popular song. His comments reveal many of the conceptual categories and value judgements that underlay his interpretation of British as well as North American folk music.

### **American Folksong Traditions**

Ignoring the music of the native peoples of North America, Lloyd contended that the oldest type of American folk-song was the traditional ballad and lyric collected by Cecil Sharp and others in the Appalachian mountains. Many of these songs were virtually identical to their transatlantic parents, while others were unknown in the English countryside although cast in the same mould. Significantly, however, these mountain ballads and love lyrics had now ceased to change and develop. The life had gone out of them: they "belong to the past, like the way of life that gave rise to them, and they are on their last gasp" (1945b: 8-9). To judge from these remarks, Lloyd, although he loved Child ballads and traditional lyrics of rural origin, regarded them as part of a dying tradition, essentially irrelevant to the issues of the post-war world. As noted earlier, he did not find in the Britain of 1945 any folk-songs that had contemporary relevance. Nor did he detect such a music in the Appalachians. But he did perceive many elements of a

living folk culture in other parts of the United States. What he called “real American folksong” (as opposed to the “foreign” mountain ballads) was in fact a more recent phenomenon, an indigenous culture that had developed only after the American Civil War (1945b: 9).

Lloyd saw the opening of the western frontier as the first main source of truly American folk-song, and argued that such songs as “The Old Chisholm Trail” expressed the true spirit of the cowboy (1945b: 9-10). His love of cowboy songs was equally evident in an article that he wrote for *Transatlantic Quarterly*, titled “The Days of the West” (1946f), in which he argued that the cowboy was “just a common working man in a hard and poorly-paid job” and quoted Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling to the effect that this “mythological figure” was in fact “as much at the mercy of the capitalist as the cotton operative” (1888). Cowboy songs - at least the authentic ones - were thus workers’ songs, and hence admissible as folk-songs.

The second great wellspring of indigenous American folk-song was the rape of northern forests that occurred in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The lifestyle of the men logging the woodlands of Maine, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota gave rise to a new form of shanty which, in Lloyd’s opinion, had little in common with the older tradition of sea-shanties. For this reason he felt the need to defend the inclusion of lumberjack songs in his collection. Recognizing that they were not true folk-songs in the Sharpean sense, he argued that some of the lumber-camp songs came “very near to the real thing,” a good example being “Young Monroe.” He rejected the judgement of Sharp’s disciple, Maud Karpeles, and of American folklorist Louise Pound, that the quality of such material was substantially inferior to older songs honed by oral tradition (1945b: 11).

By implication, Lloyd was arguing that there was nothing wrong with modern or even contemporary folk-songs composed by identifiable members of the labouring classes. As a communist, he was particularly interested for ideological as well as artistic reasons in the music of manual workers. The cowboys, wagon-drivers, lumberjacks, track-layers and railroaders who had contributed in their different ways to opening up the American West were all labourers of one kind or another, and Lloyd’s primary purpose in *Corn on the Cob* was to champion these workers’ songs. Indeed, the book was designed as a celebration of proletarian art and published by a left-wing press.

### **Workers’ Songs**

The basic thesis of *Corn on the Cob* is to be found in the following sentiment, and helps explain why Lloyd was so enthusiastic about this non-British material (1945b: 11-12):

It is the preponderance of work songs, of songs sung at work or about work, which gives the American folk tradition its special character, and makes it different from the tradition of most other countries...In America, the work songs, especially the songs about work, are of a shifting, syncopated, footloose and fancy-free type, and words and tune seem surely to be made up not by serfs or men bound to one place of work, but by men who could come and go as they chose and move from job to job and state to state as the fancy took them...Besides songs about what is commonly called “conditions”... there are also many which just take a job



as an excuse for poetry ... And there are many more still which are not sung for an audience nor yet for fun, but to help in the timing of pulls or lifts, or blows of hammer or pick ... These last are the true work songs.

The problem was that Lloyd had found few "true work songs" of this kind in the British tradition, apart from sea-shanties. But in America they existed, and what was more, they were of quite recent origin and still part of a living tradition of working-class music. Such songs excited Lloyd because they combined two of the most dominant emotional elements in his life: his love of traditional song and his political commitment to the cause of the working class. And he liked them all the better when they had obviously struck a chord with the mass of common people, as was the case with American railroad songs such as those about the folk hero Casey Jones. He waxed eloquent about the railroad songs of the turn of the century, songs about "mythical and romantic figures of engines and engineers, breathing speed, energy and power." He also claimed that most "true work songs" of this type were borrowed or derived from the traditional music of black Americans: they were "always full of echoes of the old rowing songs of the slave days, and of cornfield hollers, spirituals and religious shouts, dance songs, underworld songs, and blues" (1945b: 11-12). Moreover, such black work songs, he observed, were stylistically akin to the sea shanties of English tradition. In short, a case could be made that America, unlike Britain, possessed a wide range of vibrant working-class music that was nonetheless authentic folk-song with evident roots in older work-song traditions.

### **Protest Songs, Crime Ballads and a New Urban Folk Music**

Lloyd's political sympathies were clearly with the black worker who preferred protest to religion, resented poverty and segregation, and used song to express hatred of the white exploiters. He recognized that such resentment often found indirect expression in underworld songs and crime ballads. There was a parallel here with English folk-song, but it was clear that in this instance too Lloyd preferred the American tradition to the English one. Broadside ballads were not much to his taste, and he rejoiced in the way in which in the late nineteenth century American crime songs had evolved away from the conventions of the broadside, a development that he attributed - without providing any evidence - to "negro influence." The crime ballads that Lloyd claimed exhibited this "genuine folk style" were the song cycles dealing with "Stackalee," "John Hardy" and "Frankie and Johnny," as well as such New Orleans jazz standards as "Willie the Weeper" and "St. James Infirmary" (1945b: 13).

For Lloyd these crime ballads were among the finest achievements of American folk culture, and they demonstrated beyond question the viability of *urban* folk music. This he saw as a "different kind of music" from the older forms of traditional song, one that drew upon black musical styles and traditions but spoke in a universal way to both blacks and whites, to both country and city dwellers. The new music, he argued, was the product of a new century, and it signified the end of the romance of the frontier in American life and the beginning of a new fascination with the "big wicked city." But Lloyd's new kind of urban folk song was not restricted by any means to these "bad man" ballads. Another example of the new genre was prison songs. Prison, he remarked, was still a big feature of American life, and there were numerous American folk songs that reflected life in jail, such as "Twenty-one Years," "Long Gone" and "The Chain Gang Blues," all of which he included in *Corn on the Cob*.

With the coming of the great depression, Lloyd argued, another kind of urban folk-song re-emerged, although it had been born in the 1890s and first flourished in the decades before the First World War. This was the hobo song, a “product of hard times” which often had a “highly subversive and even directly political character.” Lloyd clearly admired greatly the poet laureate of the hobo song, IWW organiser and minstrel Joe Hill, a man who expressed in hundreds of songs the mentality of the itinerant, semi-organized worker with a “deep grudge against society and a strong desire to get the upper hand and overthrow the wealthy.” Hill, indeed, combined folk music and labour politics in a way that was dear to Lloyd’s heart (1945b: 15-16). Here, for sure, was a model to be followed, and a further demonstration that American folk-song was a living expression of the lower-classes quite unlike the artificial, middle-class recreations of a dead rural past promoted by the EFDSS. In short, it was the kind of “new and strong” urban folk-song that Britain lacked, a popular music that would speak to the masses of working class people in the industrial cities and encourage them in the struggle against capitalism.

### **W.C. Handy and the Blues**

As for the blues, Lloyd unequivocally accepted the genre as a form of rural Afro-American folk-song that had found a wider echo among both blacks and whites in the northern cities. Another of his *Keynote* articles (1945h), written under a thinly disguised pseudonym, Albert Lancaster, underlined that he considered the blues folk music. Lloyd began by attacking the widely-held notion that jazz was the folk music of the industrial age. He pointed out that while the field of jazz was a wide one and the “hot” end of the jazz spectrum was “within earshot” of the music made by “down-and out negro sharecroppers and migratory labourers,” most jazz belonged to the domain of light music rather than folk music, and there were fundamental differences between the two genres: whereas folk-song was “made up by humble and anonymous workers and altered around by the mass of the common people in the process of being passed on by word of mouth,” jazz was essentially a form of commercial music created by professionals (1945h: 20).

Lloyd then argued that W.C. Handy, the first trained musician to exploit black street music commercially and to “put blues on the map,” was a highly important figure who had been wrongly neglected by “hot jazz devotees.” The blues antedated Handy, Lloyd pointed out, and were “the sorrow music of the lower strata of negro society - gamblers, convicts, prostitutes, beggars, migratory labourers.” Handy, by publishing examples in printed form, stylized the music but at the same time helped give it world-wide recognition. “Memphis Blues,” his first big hit in 1909, single-handedly started a vogue for “a new kind of popular music, more down-to-earth, more direct, more uncompromising than the current ragtime or sentimental hits.” Lloyd claimed that of the more than sixty blues published by Handy, most were “made-over folk tunes with worked out accompaniments and with lyrics that consisted largely of direct quotations from existing traditional blues.”<sup>5</sup> Handy himself was no folk musician, concluded Lloyd, but his art was firmly rooted in folk music and he altered the course of American musical history by introducing the blues into jazz (1945h: 21).

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<sup>5</sup> They included “St. Louis Blues”, “Beale Street Blues”, “Yellow Dog Blues”, “Friendless Blues” and “Joe Turner Blues”.

## Spirituals

For a communist in 1945 it was politically correct to admire Afro-American music as popularized by Paul Robeson and Josh White, but Lloyd's motivation was not primarily political. He clearly loved the sounds and rhythms of black American folk-song. He also loved negro spirituals and was fascinated by their relationship to white religious music and to older folk song traditions. His first scholarly essay on the subject, "Black Spirituals and White", was published in a new Marxist journal, *Modern Quarterly*, and analyzed the relationship between negro spirituals and their white counterparts (1945a). An article in *Keynote*, "The Origin of Spirituals," continued his exploration of their roots (1946a). It was intended as a partial answer to the broader question: how African was the folk music of American blacks?

Lloyd sided with the "white derivation" theorists, relying on the books of George Pullen Jackson, especially *White and Negro Spirituals* (1943), which he characterized as "the best work as yet published on the problems of spiritual origins" (1946a: 6). Much of Lloyd's article was in fact a summary of Jackson's work, and, as something of a social historian himself, he agreed heartily with Jackson's contention that to explain the emergence of the spirituals one had to examine not just the melodic and structural nature of the tunes but also the historical social conditions in which they were created. Lloyd was here continuing his polemic against the a-historical schools of musicology and folklore scholarship that he had challenged in *The Singing Englishman*. Part of the problem, he suggested, was the narrowness of the academics involved. Few of the "experts" writing about the spirituals had been well-informed about all three types of music involved, namely African music, the white religious music of slavery times, and the spirituals themselves. By and large, the academics had focused on the pentatonic scales and the solo and response patterns exhibited by some African songs and some spirituals, and had then assumed a causal relationship between the two. But this was to beg the question, since African music was not the only folk music with these characteristics. Such features were also to be found in the Anglo-Celtic tradition and were thus the musical heritage of the religious and anti-institutional pioneer settlers in 18th century colonial America.

Lloyd concluded that spirituals were mainly songs with melodies characteristic of British rather than African tradition and verse-patterns and imagery forged in the white-heat of camp-meeting religious enthusiasm. But in taking the songs over, he admitted, "the negroes re-created them considerably," above all by infusing them with a direct political meaning: they became freedom songs. This emphasis on the political content of the spirituals marked a change in Lloyd's interpretation of the history of black American folk music. Previously, in *Corn on the Cob*, he had shown a preference for black protest songs and blues. Now, however, Jackson had shown that spirituals were the combined fruit of three elements dear to Lloyd's heart: the melodies of Anglo-Celtic folk tradition, the vocal style and rhythms of Afro-American folk music, and liberation politics. What more could one want?

Lloyd's fundamental purpose in writing this *Keynote* article was thus to suggest that labour activists in Britain could learn from the spirituals and perhaps use them as a model. If other oppressed people on a different continent in a different era had found in traditional British folk song a source for a new music of struggle and freedom, why should not the left in post-war England do the same?

## Radio and the Future of Folk Music

All in all, in 1945 Lloyd was highly optimistic about the future of American folk music. Unlike British folk song, he asserted, it was forward-looking, and the tradition was alive and growing. He saw the Almanac Singers as the best representatives of this healthy movement that combined good music and progressive politics. Lloyd dated the American folk music revival from the early thirties, and he noted the role of folk festivals in promoting this revival. National Folk Festivals, started in 1934, had attracted more and more folksingers and larger audiences each year. Another aspect that particularly interested him was the role of broadcasting in promoting folk music. The jury was not yet in on this question, he conceded, but it was beginning to look as though the positive benefits of radio outweighed the negative ones. Although there was a danger that radio might kill folk-singing by bringing ready-made commercial music to previously isolated communities and destroying their home-grown musical traditions, it appeared that, on the contrary, radio was stimulating interest in traditional music (1945b: 16-17):

If, thanks to the modern way of life, city culture has penetrated to rural areas, folk culture by the same token has come to the towns. Radio programmes of traditional music are a regular feature - not merely programmes made up of commercial cowboy or hillbilly troupes, but of the real thing, too, such as is found among the thousands of records and manuscripts collected in the Library of Congress's Archive of American Folksong. And the young American who learns traditional songs by radio or record is learning them in the traditional way, by word of mouth, as it were.

In saying this Lloyd was proposing a radical reinterpretation of the Sharpean conception of a folk tradition. If radio broadcasts and 78rpm records were legitimate vehicles by which traditional song might be passed from generation to generation, then English folk music too might be re-invigorated in a way similar to the American revival.

By implication Lloyd was suggesting that three things were needed in Britain: record companies that would issue folk music on disc, a national museum that would create an equivalent to the Archive of American Folksong, and a new-look BBC that would broadcast programs of traditional folk music on a regular basis. In the USA, Lloyd argued, folk culture had been accepted as valuable, as an important part of the national culture. That had never really happened in the UK where a chasm still existed between popular culture on the one hand and middle-class culture on the other. The BBC and other British cultural institutions supported high-brow culture to the almost complete exclusion of traditional folk culture, one of the reasons for the latter's decline. But the American example demonstrated that this did not have to be the case. Perhaps the post-war era might be the time when the great cultural divide in British life would also be overcome. If so, then the decline of traditional culture was not inevitable and folk-song was not doomed, although it would certainly have to undergo a metamorphosis to find its new role in the modern world (1945b: 17).

### Lloyd's Personal Situation: Journalism and Travel

Reading between the lines of *Corn on the Cob* and Lloyd's other publications in 1945 one can deduce that he had a number of personal goals connected with folk music and the labour movement in the years immediately following World War II. He was

committed to being an active member of the Workers Music Association and to persuading this organization that it should broaden its activities beyond classical music and jazz to include folk-song. He intended to develop his knowledge and skills as a musicologist specializing in American and East European folk music. He hoped to resume his pre-war career in broadcasting, at least on a free-lance basis, and to encourage the BBC to take notice of folk music, foreign and British, in its programming. He hoped also to persuade the EFDSS to take a more eclectic and flexible view of the English folk music tradition and to abandon its "drawing room" approach to the presentation of folk-song. And he intended to continue singing and to expand his repertoire of English, Australian and American folk-songs.

In 1945 Lloyd felt rather isolated intellectually: nobody else seemed to have the same enthusiasms and goals. He had good friends in the Workers Music Association, including Will Sahnou and the composer Alan Bush, but there was no one in the WMA with quite the same passionate love of folk song. And Lloyd had yet to overcome the political void that separated him from the English Folk Dance & Song Society. *The Singing Englishman* had been a manifesto aimed against the EFDSS, and Maud Karpeles' stinging review of it in the *Journal of the EFDSS* (1944) had indicated that the broadside had not gone unnoticed.

Early in 1946 Lloyd resumed his career in journalism, earning his daily bread as a reporter for *The Picture Post*. His first article appeared in March 1946 and was titled "The Disney Team at Work" (1946b). It was followed the next month by "Can German Prisoners Learn Democracy?" (1946c) and "Argentina Votes Itself a Dictator" (1946d). An article in September, "Czechoslovakia: A Peasant's Life" (1946e) probably explains how Lloyd got the opportunity (and the money) to attend a Czech folk festival that year. For the remainder of the 1940s he continued to work as a staff member of *Picture Post*, operating in tandem with a variety of photographers but most often with Bert Hardy.

As the Cold War climate worsened Lloyd nearly lost his job because of his known Communist affiliation, but *Picture Post* editor, Tom Hopkinson, resisted pressure from the weekly magazine's owner, Edward Hulton, to sack him. Lloyd had to take care that his articles in the magazine between 1947 and 1950 were strictly "human interest" in focus and showed no ideological leanings towards the left, although he did get the opportunity to write about several topics that greatly interested him: fisheries, the mining industry, gypsies, the theatre, and UNICEF (1947c, 1947g, 1948c, 1948d, 1948e). Other articles in *Picture Post* and in the monthly magazine *Lilliput* reveal that Lloyd's job afforded him many opportunities to travel abroad, to Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, Norway, Czechoslovakia, Brazil and Argentina (1946e, 1947b, 1947d, 1947e, 1947f, 1948a, 1948b, 1948f, 1949a, 1950b, 1950a). He used these trips to learn more about the folk music of Celtic Britain and of various countries of Europe and South America. During these years he continued his research into the traditional music of Central Europe and the Balkans, publishing articles on Moravian folk dancing and on the tradition of guerilla songs in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria (1946g, 1946h). He also began to develop a parallel expertise in the folklore and folk music of Latin America. Lloyd, a talented multi-linguist, spoke Spanish and he felt a strong attraction to traditional Latin American culture, so he was excited to visit Brazil and Argentina in 1949. He was disappointed in Brazil, describing the situation there as "horrible" but he was fascinated by Argentina and was delighted with the chance to expand his knowledge of Argentine music and folklore, about which he would publish a booklet, *Dances of Argentina* (1954).

## The WMA and *Keynote*

Apart from his journalism and a few pieces in *English Dance & Song*, *Modern Quarterly* and *Transatlantic Quarterly*, Lloyd's main vehicle for expressing his views in the post-war years remained the WMA magazines *Vox Pop* and *Keynote*. Indeed, along with *Corn on the Cob*, his articles in these left-wing periodicals constituted a significant contribution to the rebirth of folk music in Britain in the post-war years. With the help of a few comrades in the WMA Lloyd now began to articulate an alternative vision of English folk-song to the orthodoxy created by the *de facto* alliance between the EFDSS and the BBC. An article in *Keynote*, written by Lloyd's friend and mentor Will Sahnou, expressed succinctly what he and Lloyd celebrated in American folk-song and found so lacking in the EFDSS version of English folk music. Reviewing B.A. Botkin's *The American People*, Sahnou commented (1946: 22):

If you think that folklore passes away in the face of industrialization, then this book will give you ample proof that it is not necessarily so! Much of the myth, saga and song of the American pioneers is concerned with the early mill, mine, railway and city life... folksong in America (as in other lands) is an expression of its democratic, inter-racial, international character...people not only sing songs in their own way but *make them*, as they begin to examine their problems self-consciously and comment on them with an objective vigour and irony.

Sahnou identified this view of folk-song as that championed by John and Alan Lomax, whom he quoted as emphasizing that "the American singer has been concerned with themes close to his everyday experience, with emotions of ordinary men and women who are fighting for freedom and for a living in a violent new world". He contrasted this Botkin/Lomax approach with that of the "fundamentalist" school of Cecil Sharp, which he accused of stressing "the 'heritage' rather than the 'participation' aspects of folk song and the passive rather than the active role of the folk-singer, making him out to be a carrier of national culture, who sings to forget himself and everything that reminds him of his everyday life" (1946: 22). This contrast between treating traditional folk song as the passive preservation of a heritage from the past and as an activist vehicle for social and political change was at the heart of the ideological difference between the WMA and the EFDSS.

### Lloyd on Gershwin

Lloyd's fascination with American popular music extended beyond traditional and contemporary folk music. He recognized that during the interwar period a handful of talented Broadway songwriters had created a wealth of songs with widespread popular appeal on both sides of the Atlantic. Back in 1945 he had suggested to Sahnou that *Keynote* might print a series of articles exploring the pros and cons of such popular songsters as W. C. Handy, George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Richard Rogers, Harold Arlen, and Kurt Weill, and he had written the first in the series, on Handy. In the event, he contributed only two more of these biographical sketches before *Keynote* disappeared through lack of funds: one on Jerome Kern and one on George Gershwin. Lloyd's article on Gershwin revealed quite a lot about his own musical tastes and also his opinions on the musical press of the day. Writing as Albert Lancaster, his tone echoed that often employed in his *Picture Post* articles: amused skepticism and confidential, down-to earth, frankness.

Gershwin, Lloyd suggested, had been over-hyped by his fans and underestimated by his critics. He was neither a major classical composer, nor an important jazz musician. But he was a talented light music composer, with a gift for writing catchy melodies. So why did those bright little numbers of Gershwin's seduce so many listeners? That was the question which really interested Lloyd. His answer was that Gershwin was in tune with the spirit of his age and that he had an uncanny knack for capturing in song the preoccupations and emotions of the times. For all his faults, Gershwin could communicate with the masses, and he was at his best when he kept things simple. From this Lloyd concluded that the secret of the best commercial pop music was its simplicity and directness. By emulating those qualities, he inferred, a new urban folk music might similarly express the spirit of the times and reach a mass audience (1946i: 21-22). That was what Burl Ives and the Almanacs were doing successfully in the USA. But on what foundation could this new folk revival be built in Britain? Must it be purely derivative from the American revival? In the mid-late 1940s Lloyd wasn't entirely sure of the answer to this question, but he was beginning to find some clues to solving the puzzle. Four more clues would appear in 1947-48.

### Tracing a Ballad

Lloyd's interest in the relationship between the English and American popular music traditions found expression in another article he wrote for *Keynote*, his first attempt at ballad scholarship. Titled "Background to *St. James' Infirmary Blues*," it was an historical analysis of a tune popular with jazz musicians in London at the time (1947a). He began by pointing out that although "St. James Infirmary" was a jazz tune it was also a song that had long been popular among American blacks. The current version, however, was almost certainly a corruption of an older folk ballad of non-negro origin. He also noted the similarity of both words and tune to an old Western song, "The Dying Cowboy," otherwise known as "The Streets of Laredo." One of the curious things about "Streets of Laredo," he remarked, was why a cowboy should request a military funeral, and this incongruity suggested that the original protagonist had been a soldier. So what light might a little historical research throw upon on these cowboy and jazz songs?

Both the Western song and the negro song, Lloyd suggested, were derived from an older hillbilly version collected by Cecil Sharp on the 8th of June 1918 from Mrs. Laura V. Donald of Dewey, Virginia, called "St. James' Hospital" or "The Sailor Cut Down in His Prime," in which the dying anti-hero was a mariner. He then discussed other variants of this mountain ballad, including "One Morning in May" from Virginia and "The Bad Girl's Lament" from Nova Scotia, both of which were derived from British sources.<sup>5</sup> Indeed the ballad had remained in oral tradition in various counties of southern England. Between 1909 and 1915 the *Journal of the Folk Song Society* had printed several versions, including one collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams in Hampshire and one by Lucy Broadwood in Sussex, while Cecil Sharp had reported six variants from Somerset and elsewhere. Earlier still Frank Kidson had collected in Knaresborough a version called "The Unfortunate Lad" which was printed in the Folk Song Society's *Journal* in

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<sup>5</sup> "One Morning in May" was collected for the Library of Congress in 1941 from Mrs. Texas Gladden of Salem, Va., and "The Bad Girl's Lament" was collected from Ellen Bigney of Pictu, Nova Scotia, by Roy Mackenzie and published in *Ballads and Sea Songs from Nova Scotia* (1928).

1904. That in turn was related to a mid 19<sup>th</sup>-century broadside ballad, "The Unfortunate Rake," in which the protagonist was a soldier in a military hospital dying from alcoholism and venereal disease. However, this broadsheet was probably a folk-song written down by the ballad-monger, and it was most likely during the 18th century that it travelled across the Atlantic.

Although Lloyd's detective work in tracing the evolution of "The Soldier Cut Down in His Prime" was based on textual comparison, he was also interested in what had happened to the tune. Tunes, he argued, were usually more fragile than words, and that was evident in this case. Nonetheless, although most of the airs associated with variants of this song bore little resemblance to each other, there was enough similarity between the tune of "St. James Infirmary" and that of several of Cecil Sharp's versions which used the melody of another ancient ballad, "Henry Martin, the Bold Scottish Pirate," to indicate that the original tune had also crossed the Atlantic. Lloyd's general conclusion was that the English ballad had proven remarkably durable in its lengthy travels (1947a: 14):

So through all the changing scenes of character, *St. James Infirmary* is not very different, after all, from its 18th century original...A folk song is indeed a tough thing to kill, and though the captains of industry did their damndest, many songs have survived and adapted themselves to new characters and new conditions...*Infirmary's* origin is sturdily Anglo-Irish; and in that it resembles many - perhaps even most - well known American negro songs.

The results of Lloyd's investigation had again underlined the close link between British and Afro-American folk music. He refrained from explicitly drawing the further conclusion that the moribund English folk-song tradition might be reinvigorated by a blood transfusion from its healthier American offspring, but the lesson could be easily inferred from his article.

### **Rapprochement with the EFDSS**

Despite the highly critical character of her review of *The Singing Englishman*, Maud Karpeles, the guardian of Sharpean orthodoxy in EFDSS circles, had recognized Lloyd's obvious affection for the music that they interpreted so differently. Moreover, her brother-in-law, Douglas Kennedy, the Director of the EFDSS, was eager to put the organization on a new footing in the post-war era and to have it play a central role in stimulating a new folk music revival. The EFDSS needed talented new members, and by the fall of 1946 overtures were being made to Lloyd. The first sign of a possible reconciliation with the organization that he had attacked so bitterly was his contribution to the EFDSS magazine, *English Dance and Song*, "A Folk Festival in Czecho-Slovakia," in which he reported on a competitive folk-dance festival that he attended at the village of Straznice in Moravia in July of that year (1946g).

Early in 1947 Lloyd gave a talk, illustrated by gramophone records, in the library at Cecil Sharp House on "The History of American Folk Song." It received a favourable, if brief and anonymous, report in *English Dance and Song* (1947: 2). This represented a second step towards rapprochement with the Kennedy clan. Lloyd had little interest in Morris dancing, which he regarded as decidedly twee, and he initially joined the Society only because doing so was the cheapest way of accessing its library. But he now began



to realize that the EFDSS was not as monolithic as he had previously assumed. A regular user of the library, he became better acquainted with the librarian, Margaret Dean-Smith, and found that she agreed with him about the lack of genuine folk-song recordings in post-war Britain and also sympathized with his complaint that the EFDSS placed too much emphasis on folk dancing and not enough on folk-song (1947: iv-v).

Lloyd's new approach to this rather stuffy and conservative organization was one of internal subversion rather than confrontation from the outside. He simply suggested that the Society might broaden its horizons a little, by taking a greater interest in the folk song traditions of other lands and by promoting a little more vigorously the performance of traditional songs collected by Sharp, Vaughan Williams and others. Maud Karpeles agreed wholeheartedly with his first suggestion and Douglas Kennedy with his second. And Douglas, it turned out, was an enthusiastic fan of Burl Ives, as was another younger, rather more open-minded, folk-singer often to be found at Cecil Sharp House, Patrick Shuldham-Shaw. On the other hand, industrial and other workers' songs were not something that the EFDSS could be persuaded easily to regard as within its purview. Nevertheless, half a loaf was better than none, and by 1948 Lloyd had become an active member of the Society. That year he took part in the EFDSS Folk Music Festival held at Cecil Sharp House one weekend in March. This festival was a competitive affair, with eminent judges, including composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, adjudicating, and Lloyd won in the category he entered, that of unaccompanied solo singer. This achievement was duly reported in *English Dance and Song* (1948: 23).

### **East Anglia Sings**

A significant event in the early history of the post-war English folk-song revival occurred in 1947: BBC producer Maurice Brown persuaded the composer E.J. Moeran to return to East Anglia with a tape recorder to investigate the state of traditional singing in the pubs of Norfolk and Suffolk where he had collected folk songs on several occasions between the wars. Brown and Moeran visited three pubs: the Windmill at Sutton, the Fishermen's Return at Winterton (both in Norfolk) and the Eel's Foot at Eastbridge (Suffolk). A program based on their recordings, *East Anglia Sings*, was broadcast on the Third Programme on November 19th, 1947.<sup>7</sup> For Lloyd, this was *deja vu*. Before the war, in 1939, when he was employed by the BBC, he and producer Jack Dillon had recorded an evening of singing at the same Suffolk pub for a program titled *Saturday Night at the Eel's Foot*. But his tenure as an employee of the BBC had been brief, and he had had no opportunity to make more programs of this type himself. He had hoped to work for the BBC again in 1945, at least as a freelance researcher, but when producer Harry Ross of the BBC Services Educational Unit proposed to employ him on schools programs about early nineteenth century social history they discovered that a blacklist was in operation. Ross was informed by the BBC top brass that there were "policy objections against the use of Lloyd" and that he had better find himself

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<sup>7</sup> It included performances by Charger Salmons ("The Rigs of Time"), Charlie Chettleborough ("The Lost Lady Found"), Billy Miller ("Happy and Delightful"), Walter Gales ("As I Walked Out", a version of "The Banks of Sweet Primroses"), Elijah Bell ("The Wrecking of *The Rambler*"), Harry Cox ("The Bonny Bunch of Roses-O", "Barton Broad" & "The Barley Straw"), Jumbo Brightwell ("The False Knight", a variant of "The Outlandish Knight"), a comic singer identified only by his first name, Fred ("The Sow and the Little Old Man") and another man called Jack (no surname recorded) who led the patrons of the Eel's Foot in singing a Child ballad, "The Dark-Eyed Sailor". BBC Written Archives, Caversham, Reading, England. File # R 19/293.

another scriptwriter.<sup>8</sup> Lloyd nonetheless remained keenly interested in the idea of using radio to promote folk music, and whenever a suitable opportunity arose he would offer his services to the BBC as a subject matter expert and/or scriptwriter. To the BBC's shame it rarely took advantage of Lloyd's availability during the post-war decade.

*East Anglia Sings* nonetheless had a significant impact on Lloyd. It reminded him that traditional ballad singing was still alive and well in locations within fifty miles of London, let alone in more remote rural areas of the north and west. In particular the program reintroduced him to the singing of Harry Cox, one of the two traditional folk-singers he had cited in *The Singing Englishman*. Lloyd's own singing style was derived, at least in part, from that of Cox and the other singer he mentioned in the booklet, Phil Tanner (1944: 26 & 69). In building up his own repertoire of traditional English ballads and lyrics Lloyd undoubtedly learned material from these two much-admired source singers. *East Anglia Sings* thus served as a warning not to abandon entirely English traditions for things American. It also helped rekindle Lloyd's love for Child ballads and other traditional lyrics. Yet it did not solve the problem of how to make them relevant and attractive to city-dwellers who had lost all contact with Olde England.

### Johnny Miner

Despite the blacklist, Lloyd did get one opportunity to work for the BBC in 1947. Nationalization by the Labour government of the British coal industry had suggested to radio producer Geoffrey Bridson the idea of a docudrama about the everyday life of a coal mining family. To make the subject more entertaining he cast the program in the form of a ballad opera, and he recruited Lloyd to research the music. Lloyd's job was to find usable songs, and find them he did: "The Collier's Rant," "Down in the Coal Mine," "Bonny at Morn," "Must I Go Bound," "Stand Out, Ye Miners," "Air Feailed, Hinnny," "I Love My Miner Lad," "Bladon Races," "Jesu, Lover of My Soul," "The Miners' Dirge," "Ma Bonny Lad," "We Shall Not Be Moved," "The Durham Reel," "Johnny Miner" and "Geordie is Gone for a Soldier" (Bridson, 1947).

Bridson was a talented script-writer and one of the BBC's star producers. *Johnny Miner: A Ballad Opera for Coal* was a milestone in English radio history, a highly original production in both style and content. This was the first English radio ballad to use folk music, and, moreover, it employed dialect speech throughout, another controversial innovation. The program was unusually *engage*, presenting the struggle between miners and mine-owners entirely from the workers' perspective. Nonetheless, in Lloyd's opinion Bridson was not innovative enough. The singers chosen were Owen Brannigan, Alex Gillis, Catherine Swann and Marjorie Westbury, not artists whom Lloyd would have described as "real folksingers." Although middle-class in origin and with trained voices, they did avoid the *bel canto* style so often inflicted on folk songs by the BBC Music Department; yet they were hardly source singers, nor had they much experience with the musical traditions of miners from the Yorkshire or Durham coal-fields. The result was a commendable attempt to make the music sound authentic, but not a complete success.

The importance of the project for Lloyd was that it put him in touch with a tradition of industrial folk music that he had known existed but had never really explored before.

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<sup>8</sup> BBC Written Archives, Caversham, Reading, England. A. L. Lloyd: Artists File 1 (1938-59). Letter from Harry Ross, 18th August 1945. Confidential memo from R. A. R. to Captain Royston Morley, 30th October 1945.

In the time he had available to do the research for *Johnny Miner* Lloyd felt he had only scratched the surface. But he now knew what he wanted to do with much of his spare time: investigate the heritage of British industrial folk-song, and especially the music of the coal miners.

### Breaking the Blacklist

Lloyd hoped that *Johnny Miner* might result in further freelance contracts from the BBC, and one of his friends in the Corporation, producer Douglas Cleverdon, was anxious to work with him. Cleverdon proposed to the program planners a forty-five or sixty minute radio feature based on *The Singing Englishman* that would place folk songs in the context of English social history, using them to illustrate the human side of the Peasants' Revolt, the Press Gang and the Industrial Revolution. Such an approach, he argued, would "afford a useful corrective to the attitude of the E.F.D.S. which (valuable though its work has been) suffers from emasculation."<sup>9</sup> This excellent idea went nowhere. Because of his political views Lloyd was still blacklisted at the BBC and he could now be employed only when special permission was given by the Controller of Entertainment (Arthur, 1994). It was not given in 1948, but the ban was eased the next year.

Lloyd's return to the airwaves took place on the 22nd September, 1949, when he gave a talk on "White Spirituals" for the BBC Third Programme. The Third Programme controller, Herman Grisewood, had hoped that Alan Lomax could be persuaded to do a program on this subject, but Lomax postponed his arrival in Britain for a year. Moreover, Grisewood admitted in a confidential memo, Lomax would have to be paid in American dollars and there were none left in the Third Programme budget. Lloyd was his second choice, and got the job.<sup>10</sup> He centred his talk around *The Sacred Harp* hymn-book and the "shape-note" system of musical notation employed in it, illustrating his remarks with nearly a dozen recordings made at a Sacred Harp Singing Convention in Birmingham, Alabama (1949b: 2-7).

This broadcast did not lead immediately to more work with the BBC, but it was an important step in the door. Lloyd had acquitted himself well, and he was now considered by some BBC staffers as "an authority on American folk music". Third Programme manager Christopher Holme now found in his budget the means to pay Lloyd to "investigate the programme possibilities of some seventy double-sided records of American folk music" which the BBC had recently acquired from the Library of Congress, and obtained the necessary special permission.<sup>11</sup> Lloyd did the work, and no doubt greatly enjoyed being paid to listen to Archive of Folk Song recordings that were otherwise unobtainable at the time in the U.K. But the project did not turn into another opportunity to broadcast, mainly because Alan Lomax arrived in London and the BBC began employing him immediately to make programs on American music. Another proposal of Lloyd's, that he do a talk on "The Folk Music of Argentina," was also turned

<sup>9</sup> Cleverdon, Douglas. "Memo to H.F, 20th September 1948". Albert Lancaster Lloyd: Scriptwriter File 1, 1939-1956. BBC Written Archives, Caversham, Reading, England, U.K.

<sup>10</sup> Grisewood, Herman. "Confidential Memo, 21st July 1949". BBC Written Archives, Caversham, Reading England. A.L. Lloyd: Artists File 1 (1938-59).

<sup>11</sup> Gordon, Diana. "Memo to Talks Booking Manager, 14th April, 1950". Boswell, Robert (Talks Booking Manger). "Memo to H.P.C., 14th April, 1950" and reply, dated 17th April 1950. A. L. Lloyd: Artists File 1 (1938-59), BBC Written Records Archive, Caversham, Reading, England.

down, despite support for the idea from producer Alec Robertson. Holme had the last word, and rejected it on the grounds that Lloyd was too “superficial and slapdash” and employed a “told to the children” journalistic style inappropriate for the Third Programme.<sup>12</sup> This time Lloyd was a victim not of political blacklisting but of snobbery about his lack of formal education and his profession as a journalist.

### **John Hasted and the Quest for a Workers Music**

If the BBC was proving less responsive than he had hoped and the EFDSS was resistant to real change, Lloyd still had the WMA. In 1949 he met a new member of the Association, a protege of Alan Bush, who assisted Bush with his choir, the Workers Music Association Singers. This was John Hasted, a researcher in the Physics Department at University College, London, and an active member of the Labour Movement Theatre Group linked to the Unity Theatre. By 1949 he was getting interested in street theatre and in street singing, and he formed the Topic Singers to do a political musical review. Lloyd applauded his efforts, and the two men became friends. Musically Hasted’s interests at the time were mainly in jazz and choral music, but in 1946 (when Hasted was a student at Oxford) he had got wind of the American folk revival and had become a devotee of the Almanac Singers. Lloyd was also a fan, and this was an immediate bond between them. Hasted recalled in his autobiography how their friendship came about (1992: 121):

Bob Hinds, a merchant seaman, had brought the Almanacs 78 rpm record “Talking Union” for me to hear in 1946. I at once wanted to make music like this. But it was years before I could even get hold of a folk guitar, let alone find other people with similar aspirations. Eventually I found folklorist Bert Lloyd, and asked him if he wanted to start an Almanac group in England. To my astonishment his voice dropped about an octave, and he said very quietly “Passionately.”

Hasted then set out to learn guitar and banjo, writing letters to Pete Seeger in the USA and receiving back cyclo-styled banjo and guitar instructions and tablature. Meanwhile the Topic Singers evolved into the London Youth Choir which specialised in performing folk song arrangements, mainly those by Vaughan Williams whom Hasted greatly admired. Lloyd took a keen interest in the Topic Singers and in the London Youth Choir, becoming the latter’s unofficial adviser on folk music. The Choir sang in street markets, cheered-up striking workers freezing on picket lines, and performed folk-songs at left-wing political meetings, so Hasted and Lloyd were now succeeding to some degree in their shared goal of restoring to the labour movement a form of people’s music. But Hasted soon became frustrated with the stylistic limits of his choral arrangements, and Lloyd had never believed that choral singing spoke to the average member of the urban working class. The Topic Singers and the London Youth Choir were a step in the right direction but they were not the Almanacs and they were not the answer to Lloyd’s quest.

As the decade of the 1940s closed, Hasted and Lloyd were looking for something else. Hasted found what he was looking for in the music of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger, and became one of the pioneers of skiffle in England. Lloyd enjoyed these

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<sup>12</sup> Holme, Christopher. Memo to Alec Robertson, 17th November, 1950. A. L. Lloyd: Artists File 1 (1938-59), BBC Written Records Archive, Caversham, Reading, England.

singers too, but he was now searching for something indigenous on which to graft the fruits of the American revival. His thoughts went back to the small collection of mining songs he had assembled for *Johnny Miner*. They were industrial poems that truly reflected the realities of English working class life, a vein of gold that might be mined more deeply. Perhaps there were more of them, perhaps this vein might lead to a seam of workers' music. At any rate, Lloyd decided, industrial song was a topic worth investigating further, and mining songs were worth collecting. From ex-collier J. White of Houghton-le-Spring he obtained "The Banks of the Dee," and in 1950 he contacted the National Coal Board to see if it would give any assistance in collecting songs from its employees. The Board responded positively, and *Come All Ye Bold Miners* (1952) would be the eventual result. Along with Ewan MacColl's *The Shuttle and Cage: Industrial Folk-Ballads* (1954), *Come All Ye Bold Miners* signified that the WMA had finally succeeded in reorienting the post-war folk-song revival in England towards the rich heritage of urban and occupational song that had been neglected for so long. This new development in the English revival belongs to the 1950s, but from 1947 onwards Lloyd laid the groundwork for it. The songs of workers other than farm labourers were finally becoming recognized as folk-songs.

## Conclusion

The story of A. L. Lloyd and folk music in the critical half-decade, 1945-1949, is that of a man who began the postwar era thoroughly dissatisfied with the musical status quo in his own country. Scathing about the genteel apology for folk music perpetrated by the EFDSS, he saw - or believed he saw - something approaching his vision of "genuine folk-song" on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. In the U.S.A., he claimed, folk-song had been the popular music of the working man, white and black. And it was still a living tradition, vibrant and evolving daily in response to the changing times.

Initially pessimistic about the feasibility of breathing fresh life into the corpse of English traditional song, Lloyd gradually came to hope that it might, after all, be possible to borrow some of the ingredients of the American revival. His travels as a journalist for *Picture Post* stimulated his interest in the folk music of other countries, especially Central Europe and South America, and he also came to recognize that some of the leading lights of the EFDSS were not as conservative as he had once thought. The radio program *East Anglia Sings* reminded him that traditional music was still a living culture in some regions of the British Isles, and his work as a song-researcher for Geoffrey Bridson led him to explore the almost lost heritage of mining songs from the coal-fields of north-eastern England.

By the end of the decade Lloyd had changed his views quite fundamentally. Contrary to his assertions in 1945, he now believed that English folk music could be reinvigorated, if one could find (or write) folk-songs that spoke to Britain's urban workforce. The key to the future, he believed, lay in reviving the 19th century tradition of industrial, occupational and political songs, and in developing this tradition further. In doing so one should learn from W. C. Handy and George Gershwin: keep it simple, make it catchy, and, above all, stay in tune with the times. The result would be the creation of a new kind of urban folk-song akin to that already existing in North America.

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