

Reviews

Neil V. Rosenberg, ed. *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. (Contributions by Neil Rosenberg, Robert Cantwell, Archie Green, Bruce Jackson, Ellen Steckert, Kenneth Goldstein, Sheldon Posen, Pauline Greenhill, Anne Lederman, Bert Feintuch, Neil Rosenberg, Philip Nusbaum, Jeff Todd Titon, Peter Narvaez, Richard Blaustein, Toru Mitsui). Urbana/Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1993. xiii+340 pp.

Oddly enough, while reading this admirable volume, I had been going through old files and had just come across my old Jewish "Y" teen newspapers from the 1960's. It seems relevant to the re-examined memory aspect of *Transforming Tradition* to quote here from something I wrote as a teen-aged folk-revivalist over 30 years ago. In a heated dialogue with our high-school folk-song club, our adviser, (also our French teacher), Donald Peacock, had said:

... instead of feeling smugly that you are spreading freedom, you are merely being disrespectful and hypocritical. If you must sing what you call folk-songs, keep to the songs of your society, the middle-class NDG teenagers who are as bourgeois as the people in "The Bourgeois Blues." These other songs are empty when you sing them; their only truth is the line 'We shall not be moved.' And you shall not be moved--from your self-righteousness and your easy living. Don't just sing there--do something. You say you enjoy singing these songs? Why? Because of their melodies? Why don't you sing the Nazi song? You don't believe in that either but the melody is exciting and full of rhythm.

For a group of Grade 10 kids, this was heavy going. We hadn't yet heard Shel Silverstein's "But what do you do if you're young and white and Jewish ... and the only levee you know is the Levy who lives down the block?"--and, in any case, most of us didn't know what a levee was and would have been too embarrassed to ask. My teen-aged self wrote (at some length) about broadening one's cultural horizons, and how even if it was only symbolic, symbolic was better than nothing, and finally deli-

vered the folksong club's *coup de grâce*: "We are not being disrespectful. Marie-Antoinette was being disrespectful when she and her friends dressed up as peasants and shepherds." (We had "done" the French Revolution that year in history.)

With this personal relation to the folk revival, which I never really left (the folk revival may have ended, but it took me so long to notice that I just kind of kept on going), and as one of the revivalist/folklorist/scholar types under the reflexive ethnographic lens, I react to these essays in various ways. In some ways, my own conflicting reactions may in fact illustrate some of the issues discussed in the anthology.

Since the volume revolves to a large extent around that late 1990s favourite, reflexivity, it is hard to review it from a standpoint other than reflexive. First, as an academic ethnomusicologist, I read each essay with keen interest, more than once accompanied by that admiring stab of "now, why didn't I write that?" Simultaneously, as a "folkie," my reactions also included "must we really go on about it? Can't we call for a moratorium on these reams and reams of words?" Finally, as an Occasional Curmudgeon, I found myself muttering, "OK, all aboard! Get your tickets right here for an unforgettable ride on the Great White Scholar Reflexivity Bandwagon!" or darkly mulling over such alternative subtitles as: "How to present schmoozing with your old friends in mid-life as serious reflexivity and get academic Brownie points for it."

Still, when all is said and done, my bottom line reaction is admiration for this collection of perceptive, honest and intelligently organized and presented essays.

Rosenberg's introduction sums up the collection's main themes as including reflexivity, public sector folklore and revival musicians, the politics of culture, the role of the reporter in creating texts, invented traditions, concepts of authenticity, and new ways to review a familiar past. It presents central issues of the folk revival, including the elite versus consensus perception, and the concept of folklorism/folklorismus, with cogent discussions of such notions as "folk" and "folksinger," "folknik," "tradition," "revival," "citybilly" and the overlapping of concepts of "folk," "pop" and "elite." He manages to discuss politics and academic trends, the construct of authenticity, the notion of phoniness, and the interventionist versus individualist stance - and much more, all in twenty-one dense but very

readable pages: I found myself referring back to this essay frequently, while reading the others. Rosenberg also explains rather wistfully that it seemed necessary to cut down the original scope of the volume from folk revivalism in general to folk music revivalism to folk music revivalism in North America (with a brief excursion to Japan). On the whole, while this choice does result in coherence, I still found the lack of references to non-English language traditions dissatisfying, and missed opportunities for comparison, or at least a basic bibliography of comparable work in other traditions and languages.

Rosenberg organizes the contributions in three sections: foundations, or "The Great Boom"; roots/revival or "The New Aesthetic" and "Named-System Revivals." While the last section was possibly the most stimulating from a theoretical perspective, the first two sections were those I found most engaging, again quite possibly because of my own connections to the issues they present. Of particular interest were the fascinatingly ambivalent reflections of Posen, Steckert and Jackson on their own earlier work, providing the opportunity to examine it on several levels--reflexivity at its most reflective. Goldstein's contribution is in the form of an interview with Rosenberg, and presents a fascinating mix of pragmatism and philosophy. Jackson, Cantwell and Green provide thought-provoking histories of the revival (though Cantwell's perceptive study of the catalyst "Tom Dula/Dooley" ballad would have been more complete with at least one full text-melody transcription). Lederman and Greenhill's paired articles (with detailed transcriptions) examine Stan Rogers' "Barrett's Privateers" and its transformation by a British group who had been unaware of its authorship. Here and in other essays, the notion of the folk revival (if one accepts the term, which is also discussed and debated in several pieces) as a folk process of its own is examined seriously.

Steckert's categories of "traditionalist," "emulators," "utilizers," and "new aesthetic" are still useful ("Cents and Nonsense"), and her own comments, many years later, about this 1966 paper, underscore the effect of the earlier piece's uncompromising remarks about Woody Guthrie's "reams of abominable prose and ditties" (101), or Bob Dylan's poems being mostly "weak as poetry" (103) and he himself a "nihilist without a sense of humour" (104). Titon, Narváez and Blaustein, in different ways, contribute thought-provoking discussions related to power structures and their use and abuse, while Rosenberg's relatively brief

reflection on changes in bluegrass prompts reflection about personal choices. Jackson opens by characterizing the folk revival as "romantic, naïve, nostalgic, idealistic," as well as "in small part, venal, opportunistic and colonialistic" (73); he concludes, "folklorists can examine the revival as an historical event but not, alas, as the vital season it once was" (81).

Seen through the prism of several more years of reflexivity, postmodernism and their friends, these essays seem either on the verge of redundancy, or, viewed differently, a little ahead of their time. While distancing oneself to examine one's own cultural past is without doubt valuable, perhaps even essential, it sometimes seems to veer towards either over-indulgence or a sort of compensatory self-deprecation, as in Rosenberg's memories of young "revivalists" as having "highbrow pretensions" (5). My reaction here was that my friends and I listened and sang because we liked the songs, and didn't feel this made us more intellectual or highbrow or anything else: now that we have over-analyzed the "Other," is it time to over-analyze ourselves?

This question leads me to the only essay which aroused a negative reaction in me: Nusbaum's, ostensibly comparing participants in Bluegrass [BG from here on] and those in Revival (his capitals, to distinguish the overall involvement from the music itself). While Rosenberg's shorter and denser reflections on Bluegrass involvement, in the same section of the volume, offer serious dilemmas related to one's position and stance inside and outside a tradition, Nusbaum's essay, unless it is meant as a parody, annoyed me from its opening sentence: "those of us who take part in Bluegrass know that it is more than a collection of song texts." My reaction was "and why is this different from any other tradition? Do those involved in other traditions think they're just a collection of song texts?" Again, people remain in BG for various reasons relating to sociability, etc. (204-05), and BG festival participants "decide to have a bite to eat," "engage in conversation with many other participants" and "spontaneously move from location to location" (205). Furthermore, those taking part in BG assume other participants share their love for it (208) and "at a BG event, bg music performance always predominates." Why is any of this (a) worth noting about any festival and (b) of particular significance for BG? "The assumptions concerning everyday living shared by most Americans" seemed rather presumptuous, even with the footnote: "A Bluegrass event is just that" (213). Just what? The significance of Nusbaum's comparison/contrast with "Revival" escaped me

altogether, other than the discomfort it appears to cause BC people, presenting them with--horrors! -- "music not completely to their liking" and, worse, confusing them with "... a seemingly unconnected array of musical styles": all of which presumably forces them to wonder whether there is any other kind of music in the world. Nusbaum observes sagely that "lack of familiarity with Revival music ... dulls the ring of familiarity with Revival events" (214). Yes, lack of familiarity will dull that old ring of familiarity every time! Profundity returns with "the seriousness of self-doubt" (215) and the "caveat" [sic] that BC participants also have "broken hearts, disenchanted band members..."(216). The observation "they participate in what seems like a vast variety of experience" (218) may be the clue: it only "seems like" a "vast variety"--really, from Nusbaum's description, it isn't one at all.

While I found things to disagree with personally in several essays, this was the only one which I did not find intellectually stimulating and worth returning to for further thought. Still, while my ethnomusicologist self applauds the volume and wants more, my "folkie" persona can't help wondering whether this is yet another example of the GWSS (Great White Scholar Syndrome): the GWSS examines him/herself, affecting mildly ingenuous--but at the same time ripely mature--hail-fellow-well-met rationalizations and justifications. After all, we can now obtain grants to be reflective, having run low on unspoiled indigenous cultures and also the moral right to investigate them. But once we are all safely and neatly packaged up and disposed of, then what?

Altogether, as much for its ability to stimulate thought and self-questioning as for its overall high quality, I highly recommend this volume for one's own reading and thought, and for use with students. An affordable paperback edition, if not already available, would be timely and welcome.

Judith Cohen

Mark Jaroslav Bandera. *The Tsybaly Maker and His Craft: The Ukrainian Hammered Dulcimer in Alberta*. Edmonton: Huculak Chair of Ukrainian Culture and Ethnography, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, University of Alberta, Publication No. 1, 1991. 62 pp.

For those wishing to learn more of Ukrainian tradition and its evolution in Canada, this is a useful study. In a book of only 62 pages, the author briefly outlines the origins of the hammered dulcimer in North America; he then deals specifically with the tsymbaly, or Ukrainian hammered dulcimer in east central Alberta--its place in the musical scheme of things, its lore and its builders.

The typical Old World tsymbaly consists of a trapezoidal frame, 95-130 cm. long and 35-55 cm. wide, a sounding board with one to four holes, and two bridges. Strings in groups of one to six each pass alternately over one bridge and under the other. The player produces sound with two sticks.

Bandera writes: "The tsymbaly phenomenon reflects the processes of continuity and change in the immigrant complex."(5) The book, while concentrating on the tsymbaly in a defined geographical area, is a jumping off point for extensive further reading on a number of aspects of Ukrainian-Canadian folklore and ethnomusicology and includes a map of east central Alberta; footnotes; glossary (Appendix I); and bibliography, including the titles of seventy-eight books and articles in English, Ukrainian or Russian, twelve disks and a list of twenty-two interviews. Appendix II gives the names and ages (the oldest was 83 years old) of twenty-three tsymbaly makers living in east central Alberta who were responsible for the construction of 476 tsymbaly between 1917 and 1984. (Tsybaly is a plural noun in Ukrainian). Also included are photographs of a 1933 Ukrainian wedding in Alberta, and of Tom Chychul and his dulcimers; as well three tuning systems are diagrammed.

The "Introduction" includes a review of research in the field. Bandera then explains that he will be looking at the tsymbaly as "objects of material culture in their cultural context."(5) Following the introduction is the chapter "Tom Chychul: Case Study of a Tsybaly Maker." The chapter gives the background of his interest in tsymbaly--the fact that his family's involvement