

"FOR SINGING AND DANCING AND ALL SORTS OF FUN": Review

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I. Sheldon Posen. *For Singing and Dancing and All Sorts of Fun*. Toronto: Deneau, 1988. Pp. xiv + 144, map, appendices, bibliography, discography, index, song title index. \$16.95 paper.

Monographs discussing one tale or tale-type are familiar in folklore studies. Book-length examinations of single songs are considerably less common; only Anne B. Cohen's *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl!: The Murdered Girl Stereotype in Ballad and Newspaper* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1973) comes immediately to mind. Most such works are primarily concerned with the origins and variations of individual texts. However, *For Singing and Dancing* ventures into more contemporary folkloristic territory in relating one song to the community in which it was created, and which is to a great extent responsible for its continuation in tradition.

The book's title comes from a line in the song which is its subject, "The Chapeau Boys," which will be most familiar to folklorists as part of the Canadian lumberwoods tradition discussed in Edith Fowke's *Lumbering Songs from the Northern Woods*. The author's debt to another folklorist, who has looked at woods singing traditions, Edward D. Ives, is obvious not only in terms of the kinds of material Posen finds relevant, from the biography of the song's creator, Pat Gregg, to descriptions of cultural context, and in the attention to detail, but also in Posen's informal, conversational style. The study acknowledges "The Chapeau Boys" currently peripheral relationship to the lumberwoods; while the song is part of the memory culture of men who worked there, its primary significance is to the people in and around its eponymous community of Chapeau, in Quebec. Basically a moniker song outlining a trip to the lumberwoods taken by a named group of "boys" from the village, it is "the most popular traditional song in the Ottawa Valley" (p.4).

The Ottawa Valley is often considered a culturally homogeneous region, although one side of the Ottawa river is in the primarily French-speaking province of Quebec and the other in Anglophone Ontario. Many Canadians consider the Valley a rustic and folksy area; it is to the province what Newfoundland is to the rest of Canada. Posen comments on the area's nostalgic image: "The Ottawa Valley has come to terms with seeing itself portrayed in the arts and media as a location to leave, to return to, but especially to remember" (97).

Posen's acquaintance with Chapeau has spanned nearly twenty years, including over a year of fieldwork in the village. This is perhaps not surprising, since he initially intended to research the singing tradition of the Ottawa Valley more generally. But eventually Posen appropriated the community's view of the song's significance, and made it the pivot of his study. This embracing of the insider's perspective informs the entire book.

For example, readers might be struck by the nearly three-and-a-half pages of acknowledgements. They incorporate local people, Posen's informants, including a list of names nearly a page long. This is a strong indication of the degree to which Posen has internalised the community's aesthetic. His acknowledgements are the kind of inventory one expects to encounter at a local event like a shower or anniversary party, where everyone involved is named and thanked. It is important for them to hear or see their names; they are part of the people who

contribute to the community.

Posen's perspective on Chapeau clearly follows its residents' own notion of who and what they are. One might expect that any study of a primarily English community within the mainly French province of Quebec would discuss cultural/linguistic elements, yet this topic gets only brief mention because it is not an issue at the forefront of local concerns, and/or because it is seen as unrelated to folksong traditions. Foregrounding the insider's view once again, Posen opens his study with a look into the summer fair, certainly a quintessential event for community self-presentation and display in this part of rural Canada.

The sources for the history of the area presented in the introductory chapter are local, reflecting the perspective of the insiders who wrote them. Little attention is paid to the large national and international sources that initially shaped the area's relative prosperity and currently shape its marginality. Instead, there is a consideration of the localised chronology of resource-based industries which replace one another in turn: first furs, then logging, and finally a combination of farming, logging, and tourism. The latter becomes interestingly significant; Posen asserts "The Chapeau Boys" contribution to the village's reputation, among people from the cities who have camps or cottages nearby and among Valley residents on the Ontario side of the river, as a place "for singing and dancing and all sorts of fun".

As Posen points out, the song is both typical and atypical as a representative of local singing tradition. For at least a couple of generations, "The Chapeau Boys" has been central to both oral and written traditions. It is used as an icon, it is a familiar reference standing for the community, and it is the song against which others are compared. Its popularity is confirmed by the fact that it is not only sung--if not in its entirety--copied, and referred to with great regularity, it is also used as a model for songs about nearby communities, like "The Wilno Boys," and is even parodied in "The Chapeau Girls."

The chapter entitled "History" is a detailed account of the search through different sources, and for corroboration in the song, for its creator. While "The Chapeau Boys" first verse identifies the composer as Pat Gregg, Posen's problem is to outline various arguments for similarly named community members, and decide between them. Like any good mystery story, this section has its red herrings, but ultimately Posen supports the choice of oral tradition.

In "Craft," the author attempts to explain why "The Chapeau Boys" is such a popular song. He raises various issues: its personal experience format, the fact that it "has more of a story line than most woods songs, especially the ones that rely on the moniker format" (p.71), and the representation of community values by its main protagonists--"it's not who they are but what they do that counts, and the fact that they do it together" (73). In discussing the song's popularity, Posen comments that the alternation of here/now and there/then frames between the text and its performance form part of its interest. Implicitly, he is suggesting that the popularity of a traditional song is linked to its complexity. Such a hypothesis is worth testing elsewhere and with other song texts.

In the chapter on "Performances" Posen talks about the people who sing "The Chapeau Boys," but it is interesting, as he points out, that the "best" singers in Chapeau, the ones identified by local people as singers, aren't the ones who keep the song popular. As Posen originally was, they are looking for more exotic material. It has greater value for others; the author discusses a younger, professional, ex-resident of Chapeau who now lives across the river in Pembroke,

Ontario, for whom "The Chapeau Boys" is again iconic. This is part of his personal conflict between an outsider's nostalgic view of the community and the perspective of his insider contemporaries who "are glad to see [the older way of life] gone" (p.79). The ability of the song to appeal to insiders and outsiders alike is part of its attraction; singing is a way of bringing outsiders into the community and inculcating them with its culture. "Like tourist art, it stands for the tradition, it's accessible to the public, and it's deflective--it absorbs the newcomer and keeps him from wanting to delve further" (95). One person who has the entire song in her repertoire is not identified in Chapeau as a singer and does not so consider herself, in keeping with the male domination of the singing tradition, despite the fact that "she has a better repertoire than some village singers with larger reputations" (p.78). Posen also has some valuable comments about the effect of revival interest in traditional singers upon their aesthetics with reference to Lennox Gavan, who has become a representative Valley singer.

The book finally returns to the community, and Posen reflexively considers his work's possible effect and place in it. Like the insiders he discusses, Posen remains in the end nostalgic about the singing tradition and its current--and ultimate--place in Chapeau.

This book includes many small illustrations; some are impressive enough that one wishes they had been reproduced in a larger format. While folklorists might object to the editing of quotations from informants, the lack of footnotes or references, and the highly selective bibliography--in fact the minimal use of scholarly apparatus in general--this book's readability and topic make it ideal for undergraduate classroom use in courses on folklore, folksong, and/or Canadian culture.

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"SITAR MUSIC IN CALCUTTA": Review

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James Sadler Hamilton. *Sitar Music in Calcutta: An Ethnomusicological Study*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1989.

Upon opening James Hamilton's book, one is struck by a feeling of reassurance that obtaining new information about sitar music and "gharanas" in Calcutta will not, perhaps, prove as difficult as trying to locate a person in this city by just an address. The table of contents flashes its street signs for the reader who has often strayed in his search for the "abode" of such terms as "gharana," "rag," "baj," etc. This book is replete with figures, maps, charts, tables, and transliterations to aid the wayfarer on what promises to be a sure path to the sitar music in Calcutta.

The introductory chapter presents an ethnographical study of the Indian mode of perception regarding the human body, social structure, material objects, and time and space. It aims to show that "nothing in India exists in a vacuum". The relevance of this mode to the organization of musical material is merely suggested, not expanded upon.

Then there are six chapters which treat such topics as gharana and