

## WHAT IS FOLK MUSIC?

*Throughout the weekend of the Society's 1987 Annual General Meeting in Quebec City, there was considerable discussion among the Directors of major policy concerns within the CFMS. This discussion returned again and again to how (or even, whether) folk music should be defined. Accordingly, a committee was formed to look into the question of defining folk music, particularly with regard to the Society's policies. Due to many exigencies, the committee was unable to meet face-to-face and a whole during the year, but fortunately David Spalding prepared and distributed a discussion paper, to which a number of the committee's members responded in writing. It was decided to publish both Spalding's paper and the responses in the Journal, which because of the length and nature of the submissions seemed the most appropriate vehicle for sharing these concerns. When the committee was originally formed, it was emphasized that issues surrounding the definition of folk music were not temporary but rather ongoing for the Society, and that some clear direction was desirable as a basis for framing the Society's policies. In this spirit, the following discussion paper by David Spalding and the three responses (by Anne Lederman, Ken Persson, and Jay Rahn) are offered to our readership.*

## DAVE SPALDING'S DISCUSSION PAPER

### Introduction

At the Quebec meeting, the board spent a lot of time discussing "what is folk music?" Some members felt that to develop a definition that could be widely accepted by the society would help in dealing with the problems of the society; others felt that development of a definition was not either possible or of practical assistance, but that it was an interesting question and that CFMS should continue to provide a forum in which such questions could be discussed.

During the meeting, as a contribution to the discussion, I developed a list of distinguishable music types that are regarded by at least someone as folk music. I have now had a chance to refine and develop this list, and offer it as a contribution to the debate. This list has benefitted from discussion with President Bill Sarjeant, but the opinions expressed are my own.

It seems that a starting point in any discussion is to define some meaningful categories within the field usually called "folk music," so that those interested can talk about it with some common ground. This is what I am attempting to do here.

### Assumptions and Approaches

- This list of definable categories of music is simplistic; it tries to identify relatively fixed points in a continuum of music.
- I have tried to give working names for the different types I identify, and illustrate definitions by examples.
- I distinguish between *traditional* and *non-traditional* societies, realising again that there is often a continuum between them.

- In this context I define a *traditional* society as one in which much communication is oral, and folk music is largely passed on by traditional means (oral/direct learning of songs and tunes), between people who do not earn more than a small part of their income as performers, and is normally performed on instruments (if any) traditional to that culture.

- By contrast a *non-traditional* society is one in which most music is communicated by non-personal media (publications, radio, TV, recordings), and in which professional performers play a significant role at all social levels, and there may be substantial innovation in the performance of music rather than the continuity of tradition. There may continue to be important direct transmission between non-professionals (e.g. in folk festivals and clubs), but these are also influenced by non-personal media.

- In earlier days, all or the bulk of the population belonged to traditional societies, though gradually a distinct class (sub-culture) emerged that partly distinguished itself by its music. For instance, the music of the troubadours, although having folk roots, developed distinctive characteristics which separated it from the music of the peasantry, since it was intended for the entertainment of the "upper" class, and performed by professional musicians or members of the upper class itself.

- Today, traditional and non-traditional cultures may co-exist in the same country; for instance, parts of the Maritimes and Quebec operate as a traditional society, while parts of those areas and much of the rest of Canada are non-traditional.

- Even in an essentially non-traditional society, the music of certain sub-cultures may remain almost entirely traditional (e.g. girls' skipping rhymes, some aboriginal and ethnic minority communities).

- Unless the definition is restricted to the music of the most basic traditional societies, whatever definition of folk music may be arrived at is likely to be inadequate to cover the music as it develops and changes. For instance, the classic definitions of folk music were formulated over twenty years ago, and are not clearly applicable to some of the new types developing.

- Examples have been drawn from song; however, similar categories can be applied to instrumental music.

- Examples have been defined from style, instrumentation, and social context. Ways in which songs may be changed (change of locale, parody, etc.) have not been considered as distinct categories.

- The examples are arranged roughly in sequence from the most traditional to the least.

- In selecting examples, the intent is to define a kind of music, and not in any way to express or imply value judgements about individual groups or performers.

- I have used a variety of elements to define recognizable types. These may include words, music, style of performance, and relation of the singer and material to the culture in which it is performed.

## **TYPES OF MUSIC THAT ARE OR HAVE BEEN CALLED FOLK MUSIC**

### **A. Traditional Music**

This fits the narrowest definitions of folk music. It is anonymous, varied, often widespread, and of living importance in the culture, and was originally collected from representatives of traditional societies

often now changed beyond recognition. It is usually impersonal, telling a story that conveys emotions rather than reporting those emotions directly, and keeping descriptions minimal.

**Example:** The Child ballads, many originally collected from illiterate peasants in rural areas.

### **B. Near-Traditional Music**

This is often included in the scholarly definitions of folk music. It has been collected from traditional societies, is anonymous, varied, often widespread, and of living importance in the culture. However, it shows clear evidence of having been at least partly transmitted by non-oral means.

**Example:** The broadside ballads, which were printed and widely circulated by itinerant ballad singers (in some cases fixing tune and words), but still adopted and modified by "the folk," especially when the original did not closely fit the local situation.

### **C. Songs Composed by Known Persons in Traditional Styles within Traditional Societies**

Songs composed in traditional style, within a traditional society but of known origin may include an isolated song attributed to a particular singer, or a recorded body of work from a single source. Such songs (if the origin is lost and they are accepted into the tradition and collected in varied forms) would be regarded as traditional without any hesitation. Such forgotten songwriters may have originated many of the songs we regard as traditional. Modern songwriters of this type exist, but their work is being transmitted largely by modern media.

**Example:** The songs of such singers as Newfoundland's Lem Snow or New Brunswick's Larry Gorman, who lived and wrote in a traditional milieu, and whose songs have in part been adopted into the tradition.

### **D. Authentic Traditional Music Performed by an Authentic Performer in Its Country of Origin, in a Non-traditional Context**

Music performed completely in traditional style (words, tune, vocal style, appropriate accompaniment etc.), by a fully traditional performer, who has his/her material from direct oral tradition, but in a totally non-traditional context such as radio station, film set, recording studio. This may lead the singer to modify performance to suit the new circumstance; it certainly has a very different significance to the listener.

**Example:** LaRena Clark singing at home or in a community performance is a traditional singer, but if taken out of that context is no longer performing in a fully traditional situation.

### **E. Authentic Traditional Music Performed by Revival Performers in Its Country of Origin, in a Non-traditional Context**

Music performed completely in traditional style but performed by a singer who does not come from that traditional society, and has learned the material through the intermediary of other media (books, recordings etc.). This also includes traditional songs with unknown tunes, performed to new tunes, or to old tunes of a different origin.

**Example:** Many revival singers perform in this way, usually in non-traditional contexts, e.g., Muddy York, Barry & Lyn Luft, Jon Bartlett and Rika Ruebsaat.

### **F. Traditional Music Performed by Revival Performers in a Non-traditional Context Totally Divorced from the Origins of the Music**

Music performed completely in traditional style but performed by a singer who does not come from that traditional society, has learned the

material through the intermediary of other media (books, recordings, etc.), and in a country or society that has no historical connection with that music.

**Example:** Music of largely non-Canadian cultures being recreated in Canada by such singers as Paddy Tutty.

### **G. Traditional Music Performed by Revival Performers in a Non-Traditional Way, in Combination with Elements of Other Folk Traditions**

More or less authentic traditional music (words and/or music) played in a more or less traditional style, but varied from the tradition by such devices as accompanying by traditional instruments of other traditions, changes of vocal styles, different use of harmony, etc.

**Example:** Many examples among revival performers; use of even such a basic "folk instrument" as the guitar is not authentic for many traditional songs, e.g. Paddy Tutty using a guitar or an Appalachian dulcimer to accompany an English song which would have been unaccompanied.

### **H. Traditional Music Used in a Non-Traditional Context as a Basis for Music in Less Traditional Styles**

Music using substantial elements of traditional music but in the context of a different tradition or style.

**Example:** Performances of traditional songs by classical singers or choirs with a piano or orchestral accompaniment, such as Richard Johnston's arrangements of Newfoundland songs. Folk Rock, such as some of the work of Figgy Duff and Barde, also falls in this category, when electric instruments come to dominate the performance.

### **I. Traditional Music Used as A Basis for Music in Totally Non-traditional Styles**

Music using elements of traditional music (tunes, words) but in a totally different tradition, such as the classical or jazz traditions, using only some elements and different forms.

**Example:** The many works of English and Hungarian composers (and less well-known Canadian composers) using traditional themes as a basis of symphonies, operas, suites, etc. A number of recordings of such pieces are available (e.g. "Canadian Folk Inspired Compositions" — Dominion S1372), with pieces by Adaskin, Champagne, etc.)

### **J. Non-Traditional Composed Songs using Traditional Styles**

Songs using many of the elements of traditional songs and often performed in traditional styles by revival singers with folk instruments. These still retain a strong storytelling element, and play down emotions and descriptions.

**Example:** Some of the works of Stan Rogers (e.g., "Barrett's Privateers"), and many by less well-known singers fall in this category.

### **K. Non-Traditional Songs Filling the roles of Traditional Songs in Modern Society**

Songs not generally using traditional elements, but filling part of the role in modern society that traditional songs did in their society. Many such songs not particularly close to traditional styles communicate the values of the society (or a significant sub-culture within it), commenting on significant issues in the society, etc. Such songs usually retain the storytelling approach, but are often modified by more direct description of physical appearance and emotions.

**Example:** Many protest songs, and others dealing with broad or extrapolatable experience (e.g., Stan Rogers' "The Field Behind the Plough")

fill this role. Even a few songs of Gordon Lightfoot (e.g., "Railroad Trilogy") fall into this category. If sung by folk singers and in a reasonably traditional style, they tend to be regarded as "folk music"; however, songs of similar character are found in some jazz and popular traditions.

### **L. Original Songs of More Personal Purpose**

Many original songs present a more personal vision of the world, whether poetic, minority, individual, or obscure. These tend to express emotional reactions directly, and to contain detailed physical or environmental descriptions. They may be regarded as "folk songs" if performed in an otherwise traditional style or in a context where traditional material is also performed.

**Example:** Many "singer songwriter" songs fall into this category. Such well-known songwriters as Ferron, Joni Mitchell, and Gordon Lightfoot present many examples.

### **Where Now?**

In general, attempts to glorify one kind of music at the expense of another are futile. Classical music is not "better" than traditional or jazz; it is just different. Equally, the attempt to draw a line around a certain category and say that — for instance — only Traditional or Progressive Jazz is worth attention, is equally futile. Both may be enjoyed, often by the same people.

Traditional music has been the basis of development of a great deal of other music, varying in its relation to the tradition, and in quality. Much of the variation has taken place during the last two or three decades as a result of the interplay of new media and continuing traditions. As a student, collector, listener, performer, and composer of music that relates to the tradition, I am fascinated by the variety of such music, and the ways in which it has evolved, persisted, and changed in response to the variety of our society. I feel it is important to define what we are talking about.

Whether it is possible to get any general acceptance on what "folk music" is, I greatly doubt. The "purest" definition accepts only category A, and perhaps B; I would be willing to consider the claims of most music in categories A to K judging by the content of "folk festivals," the general public probably accepts all the categories listed above, while some would include a lot more popular music.

## **RESPONSES TO D. SPALDING'S "WHAT IS FOLK MUSIC"**

### **1. ANNE LEDERMAN**

Spalding's paper is a personal and honest attempt to wrestle with a question that has been characterized by confusion and changing perspectives since the term "folk music" and its German counterpart "Volkslied" (the origin of our English term) came into use in the 1700s. It will work as a stimulus for abstract discussion and certainly gives us distinctions of detail whose worth should be considered. However, on reflection, I am forced to conclude that it does little to clarify the issues at hand. I will attempt to delineate some of the problems I see with Spalding's presentation, and apply them to the present situation of the Society.

First of all, I can hardly believe that there are any members in the Society who would say the "development of a definition was not ... of practical assistance in dealing with the problems of the Society," as Spalding states in his first paragraph. Such a definition, for any group that goes under the name of a "folk music society" would obviously make the entire work of the organization vastly easier by clarifying exactly what was and wasn't the Society's job. It would spare us from spending enormous amounts of time and energy on discussions such as this one and on the attempts to resolve conflicts between members who hold opposing views. The question is merely whether or not such a definition is possible, for, if possible, it would certainly be practical.

However, I would be the first to accede that an absolute universally-approved definition of "folk music" is not, in fact, possible. As Spalding's paper makes abundantly clear, the use of the term "folk music" for many different kinds of music and musical situations makes the phrase totally impractical at any time without qualification and explanation. This is even more important for a group such as the CFMS that must base an entire course of action on its understanding of the term. For a folk-music society not to explain its use of the term is for it to have no direction or mandate. That leaves us in our present impossible position of trying to represent everything that "at least someone considers folk music" (Spalding, paragraph two).

Obviously, the only solution, within the entire realm of what is considered folk music by someone, is for any given organization, at a given time and place, to decide what its interests are. I doubt that anyone can question the practical value of that. Hopefully, the organization's ability to do an adequate job, given its resources, would also be a consideration. Whether or not we call the subject "folk music" or the organization a "folk society," rather than some other more specific term, is a question we can answer after we are clear on what we want to do. If Spalding's paper can help the Canadian Folk Music Society decide what it wants to do, then the paper will have made a useful contribution. Anything else is completely academic at this point, in the worst sense of the word.

So, how useful are Spalding's categories? First, let me give some background on the state of the debate in other quarters, where the question has been of concern for some time. A very helpful article from the 1975 *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* is R.P. Elbourne's, "The Question of Definition," in which he introduces and quotes a statement of Bruno Nettl's:

There are two main approaches to the definition of folk music, one concerned with internal properties and the other with cultural background. For some people, folk music must sound a certain way, it must be composed in a particular style and any music which conforms to this style is folk music. If one follows the other approach, one accepts as folk music all music produced by a particular group in society, which one calls and defines as the "folk."

These two approaches, that of the form of the music itself and of the context in which the music originated, are woven throughout Spalding's categories. For the former, the form of the music itself, he gives us "traditional music", "authentic traditional music" (which seems to be the same as "traditional music"), music which is "composed in a traditional style," "more or less authentic traditional music" (one of the least helpful phrases he has adopted), "music using elements of tradi-

tional music," "non-traditional music" and "composed music" (which seems to be the same as "non-traditional music"). However, even these sub-categories are distinguished more by origin than by the actual sound of the music, and many of them might, in fact, sound the same. For the second of Nettl's two approaches, the kind of group from which the music comes, Spalding gives us "traditional" versus "non-traditional" societies. As well as these two variables, he gives us three other elements to consider: firstly, performance style — "traditional," "more or less traditional," and "non-traditional"; secondly, performance context — "traditional" and "non-traditional" (with the added distinction of whether or not the context is "in its country of origin," the relevance of which I seriously doubt); and thirdly, performer — "authentic" and "revival." The attempt to account for all existing combinations of these five elements has led to Spalding's total of twelve categories of folk music.

Unfortunately there are severe problems with this approach. First, there is no such thing as either a traditional society or a non-traditional society in Canada as Spalding has defined them. It is not accurate to say that "significant parts of the Maritimes and Quebec operate as a traditional society" while other parts are non-traditional. In fact, *all* societies, and all individuals within any society, operate in traditional ways at certain times. We are all part of many groups by virtue of our age, sex, religion, geographical location, ethnic background, interests, and beliefs. All of the groups to which we belong or have belonged in the past, have their own folklore, usually (but not always) passed on by oral means. Many of these groups have their own music. For example, we were all children, and as such were part of as traditional a group as could be imagined by any definition — one in which great amounts of information were passed on orally. Much of this information, from games to songs, stories, rhymes, ways of tying your shoes, etc., is hundreds of years old and has been passed on orally since time immemorial. Likewise, as adults we have songs for certain occasions known to everyone in Canada, others which are known to smaller groups defined by any number of the above criteria.

Similarly, there is no society in Canada, including those who have maintained oral-music traditions for several generations, that is not extremely influenced at present by the "non-personal media" of "publications, radio, TV and recordings." One need not be literate to be influenced by printed matter, nor must one own a TV, radio, or record player to be influenced by them, as their effects quickly extend through any group from contact with whomever does own them.

Spalding's sub-categories of the other four elements — music, performance style, performance context, and performer — all depend on his use of the word "traditional" which always relates back to the problematic "traditional society." Spalding's concept of "traditional" in all categories is based on oral transmission, which gets him into trouble. Oral and written transmission have been so inextricably bound together since print was invented that Spalding's attempt to separate kinds of music on the basis of whether or not non-oral sources may have been involved is doomed to failure. It also undermines many of his examples. The Child collection, for example, was amalgamated from written

sources, not oral. The ultimate origins of the ballads are largely unknown, but may just as easily have come from the pens of scholars as the tongues of peasants. Also, many revival performers learn their material directly from "fully traditional performers" such as LaRena Clarke, not from "other media" as stated in Type E. In spite of that, I would seriously question whether any revival musician plays "completely in traditional style," a further criterion of Type E. Certainly, Muddy York, one of the main examples given in this category, does not.

Difficulties also arise from Spalding's unexplained use of subjective phrases such as "appropriate accompaniment" in Types E and F, or songs which "fill the same role as traditional songs did in traditional societies," Type K. This category is especially problematic, for Spalding goes on to explain the latter phrase as music which "communicates the values of the society." What music does not?

I do not mean to be overly harsh, but do feel that Spalding's categories raise more problems than they solve. He is attempting to distinguish musics into "meaningful" categories based on shadings of meaning of one word — "traditional" — applied to five different variables in many possible combinations. In my view, "tradition" can really only be understood as a process, one in which we all take part in many aspects of our lives. This is also Elbourne's conclusion after a long and detailed discussion of the limitations of past approaches to defining folk music. He states that, "existing definitions of folk music founder in making classifications that are too narrowly based on content and form" and argues instead for a social process, that of the "active transmission" of music. This is an extremely important difference. It allows us to circumvent the whole messy debate about entire societies being "folk groups" or "traditional societies," and allows us to recognize a universal human process at work. Acceptance of this approach would also make redundant such attempts as Spalding's to distinguish kinds of folk or traditional music based on who is performing what, where, to whom. Important as these observations are they do not help us to define different kinds of music. In a final statement by Elbourne, "Any kind of music, no matter what its origin or content, can become part of a tradition and be transmitted traditionally."

My problem with much of the CFMS's activities at present is their overriding concern with the subjective evaluation of songs, concert events, festivals, etc., largely expressed in *Bulletin* articles. These are in lieu of an interest in the process of face-to-face musical interaction by which music may be communicated in any context, by any group of people. This interaction, in my view, is what gives the music its "folk" or "traditional" character.

I have argued in the past that music that has been maintained in this face-to-face way for longer periods of time is more deserving of our energy than newer music or music learned by other means, but not because it is necessarily better or of greater value. I have argued merely that it is in severe danger of extinction at present and needs our attention if we want the world to know it ever existed. In Canada we are not in the comfortable position of having fully documented our musical past so that this material is preserved for all time. Much of what has gone on for the past two hundred years in this country is still largely unknown and will remain that way if we don't make some efforts to document it within the next ten years.

This is my personal basis for an appeal to the CFMS to establish its priorities. We are not doing a good job attempting to be all things to all people. I would like us to do a good job in a smaller arena where we have some chance for consistency, the maintenance of a high standard, and where our efforts may be of some interest to posterity. Of course, the problem is, who gets to decide? Because of the CFMS's failure from the very start to clarify what it was all about, we are now in a position of having a large and varied membership who hold completely opposing views on what the Society should be doing. The revival movement of concerts, folk clubs, festivals, and professional performers in Canada certainly deserves a voice. So does the field of ethnomusicology, whose present concerns with process I have tried, briefly, to present.

At present, it is impossible for the Society to avoid alienating part of its membership. If it continues to do nothing to solve its definitional and organizational problems, it will lose most of the people who have an academic background in folklore and musicology, those who have not left already. If it decides to be a revival organization, it can continue much as it has. It may lose some of its scholars who have no interest in the revival and it would lose all hope of appealing to people who are an active part of older traditions, but at least it would present itself honestly. If it decides to become more ethnomusicological in outlook, concerning itself with music that partakes of a certain process rather than music which fits any definition based on content, style, or origin (which are inevitably inconsistent), it may lose many members whose main interest in music revolves around the "non-personal media" of books, record, TV, radio, and, I would include, concerts of professional performers.

A decision must be made.

## 2. KEN PERSSON

A recent survey of a selected group of CFMS members has revealed that nobody really *cares* what is and isn't called folk music. The predominant sentiment is "I know what I like and you can call it whatever you want." On that basis, it would appear that anything more than a very *brief* definition of folk music, perhaps for the purpose of clarifying to potential members what the Society is about, is unwarranted.

Such a definition has been provided by Tim Rogers (*Canadian Folk Music Bulletin* 20: 3-4; p. 6) who said that "Folk music ... strives to reflect the essence of belonging to a specific cultural group, ... celebrates membership in this group, and ... tells others what it is like to belong."

Another approach might grow out of the somewhat cynical performer's observation (quoted by Uncle Bonsai in a CBC interview at the 1988 Edmonton Folk Music Festival) that "folk music is anything that doesn't make money for you." On the surface, a flippant remark, but perhaps with an underlying truth. Whereas the main motivation for the creation and performance of commercial music, including "art" music, has always been money; the motivation for the learning and performing of music by ordinary people is simply *a love of the music itself*. Using this approach, it could be argued that, to the extent that commercially-produced music is learned and performed by ordinary

folks, it *becomes* folk music. It could further be argued that, in cases where motivation includes several factors — money, love of the music, and perhaps a need for self-expression — the *distinction* between folk and non-folk becomes quite meaningless.

### 3. JAY RAHN

In his discussion paper, Dave Spalding illustrates his continuum of “traditionality” — my word — by means of certain examples. On the one hand, Spalding’s illustrations are very valuable in that they clarify his categories greatly. Further, I believe that Spalding’s examples are well-chosen for members of the Society in general because they comprise many of the kinds of music with which the Society has been most concerned of late, at least as these kinds have been reflected in the *Journal*, the *Bulletin*, and the mail-order catalogue. On the other hand, I feel that Spalding’s illustrations do not adequately reflect the several sorts of music that I would consider central to a reasonable conception of “Canadian folk music.”

Virtually all of Spalding’s examples are restricted to English-language genres deriving from a certain British-American tradition. Further, if one viewed Spalding’s list as an accurate picture of Canadian folk music, one might be led to conclude that it served only two functions: as secular entertainment and as a pastime for amateurs or hobbyists.

Despite fleeting references to “girls’ jump-rope rhymes,” French and Native traditions, and “ethnic minority communities,” Spalding’s account does not provide a clear sense of the great mix of traditions and functions that I immediately associate with Canadian folk music. Instead, one gains much the same impression of Canadian folk music as one would on going through the bins of “folk music” in one of the larger commercial record stores or listening to a “folk music” program on English-language radio. But this impression is very different from that conveyed by the programming on both “ethnic” radio stations and “multi-cultural” television outlets, and by the private, semi-private and public concerts, celebrations and other events of “non-Anglo” groups throughout the country, and by the research on “grass-roots” music-making that has been carried out among folklorists, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, sociologists and so forth. Moreover, even within the “Anglo” tradition, Spalding’s account seems to ignore such phenomena as football songs, college songs, “filk” songs, the songs sung on picket lines and in protest marches, the songs of political and service organizations (what German scholars refer to as “*Gruppenlieder*”), the music of religious cults and sects, diverse material from commercial popular culture that has become “traditional,” and so on.

The Constitution of the Canadian Folk Music Society specifies as its first objective “to encourage the study, appreciation, and enjoyment of the folk music of Canada in all its aspects.” I would submit that Spalding’s account represents a very narrow and unbalanced conception of what is entailed in “the folk music of Canada.” Additionally, I believe that the Society must try to live up to the commitment that is embodied in the word “all.” With regard to the Society’s second aim, namely, “to promote publication and performance of Canadian folk music,” I feel that, as a non-profit organization, its first responsibility here is to kinds of

music that need help because, to put it frankly, they are not financially or even culturally self-sufficient.

In Spalding's list, the kinds of music that most need fostering would seem to correspond approximately to the first items. But I would maintain as well that outside the Anglo repertory which Spalding classifies, various continua would be discerned and that the Society should endeavour to "encourage" and "promote" those sorts of non-Anglo folk music where the need is greatest.

I would argue further that the Society's third objective, "to stimulate international understanding through a common interest in folk music," can only begin to be realized if the organization stimulates inter-cultural understanding within Canada itself. The Society must recognize, in both its policy and its activities, that there are various folk music sub-cultures within each linguistic community, not merely within the currently dominant Anglo culture. And I would hope that all members of the Society might endeavour to live up to the noble assumption that we share "a common interest in folk music."

Finally, I would like to place the aims of the Society into a broader, albeit personally held, framework. It seems to me that relatively "traditional" forms of music, corresponding roughly to Spalding's first categories, are to be especially valued because they have "stood the test of time." One need not apologize for an interest in extremely traditional music, because such music ranks among the most successful products of human culture. In addition, that such music might encounter difficulties in the face of modern developments need not be taken merely as an indicator of its supposed weakness or fragility. Rather, the difficulties encountered by more traditional forms can be considered, in conjunction with their past vitality, as a strong argument for nurturing and sustaining them. Further, it seems to me that the Canadian experiment consists in protecting diversity as much as is feasible in the hope that the cultural "gene pool," as it were, might give rise to a highly adaptable culture. And to stretch this admittedly somewhat simplistic biological metaphor a little further, whereas it seems reasonable to me that, at this point in history, a non-profit organization might well concern itself with such threatened species as whales, it seems somewhat unreasonable — to me, again — to advance a non-profit organization on behalf of whalers, the consumers of whale products, or those who spill oil on the sea. Although I acknowledge that the latter extension of the metaphor is potentially inflammatory, it conveys a need which I feel, namely, that the Society clarify its priorities in favour of those portions of the country's folk-music traditions where help and encouragement are needed most. The Society might consider striking a committee on vital concerns; such a committee could be charged with the task of determining and, more importantly, officially recognizing, as a third party, areas of Canadian folk music where it is particularly desirable to encourage study, appreciation, or enjoyment, and to promote publication or performance.

*Resumé: «Qu'est-ce que le folklore?» présente une discussion de la nature des chansons traditionnelles entretenues par David Spalding, Ann Lederman, Ken Persson, et Jay Rahn — quatre directeurs de la Société canadienne de musique folklorique — pendant la réunion du bureau de direction en 1987.*