
Commentary:

The Truth About Folk Festivals

There are people who tend to treat folk music as something historically interesting, that is, kind of cute or even worse, as something without much value. There are two kinds of people that I have in mind; first are the ethnomusicologists: "Listen to this, it's the two hundred and tenth known version of "My Dog Has Fleas" and I can use it to write a paper for the Canadian Folk Music Journal. Perhaps I could even use it for my Ph.D. thesis on the relationship between Anglo-Saxon folk song and animal life. I was thinking about sheep shearing-songs but this way nobody will think I'm kinky".

Second are the commercial radio programmers: "Folk music eh, ya mean Joan Baez sitting barefoot on the stage singing those songs about peace and freelove and drugs. We don't want any of that dirty commie crap on our good station! What will the sponsors think? Besides who listens to folk music anyway? All those kinky songs about sheep".

The "ethnoists" tend to treat folk music as a dead art form and therefore consign it to the trash bin of history. "A song is not a folksong unless it has been passed down from one generation to another without being written down. Folk music is something that must be placed under glass and protected and studied and written about before it has any relevance. Publish or Perish".

The "radioites" reach the same conclusion as the ethnomusicologists coming from the other direction. "Who wants to hear songs about the trouble people are having. Music is something that has to take away the problems of life. It needs a big beat and for godsakes turn up the volume".

They both miss the point, which simply put is, that since the dawn of time when early man danced around the campfire, banging out rhythms on the bones of dead animals, until the time when pollution or war wipes us out, people are going to create folk music.

The forms will change with the advancement of technology. It probably will not remain acoustic, but so long as people make music for their own enjoyment, to express their own feelings and reflect their experience, without the purpose of creating a hit for the parade, then folk music will remain a living, breathing and vibrant part of human existence. And who cares about whether or not you can hear it on radio or whether some jerk gets to write his thesis.

And that folks is the truth about folk festivals.

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