

only there. Even in his scientific works we can find some hardly explainable sarcasm or outright fits of rage at his fellow exiles. This continual distrust and hatred clouded his own life, above all. If we see this *idée fixe* of his, we can understand his scientific work better. And this is our very goal.

Translated by Kai Vassiljeva

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THE FOLK MUSICIAN IN FOCUS: Some Aspects On The Study Of The Individual

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The individual is more or less absent in the older parts of our folk music archives. The pioneers of collecting were seldom interested in those who sang or played, only in the songs and tunes. Therefore, it is not surprising that many folk music studies are dealing with the folk music material, not the folk musicians.

‘It is a paradox’, as Bruno Nettl remarks in his introduction to the study of ethnomusicology, ‘that folk music scholars in their fieldwork have always been meeting individual singers and players, but back home often write about groups. Just compare with the history of classical music, which stubbornly has concentrated on the creative individuals, i.e. the ‘great names’. In those works groups or contexts constantly play a minor role.’¹

The original view upon folk music, from the romantic era, seems to be still alive. Up to the recent days folk music has been regarded as a phenomenon only belonging to groups – and particular circumstances have made it worth studying. This perspective from before is also deeply rooted outside the scientific society. It is, for example, often outspoken by representatives for the folk musicians’ organisations.² Many copyright societies express the same opinion in their way of handling folk music.³

Honestly, one must admit that the individual musician is becoming more and more visible. This development is easily seen in the printed folk music collections, where earlier publications never mention singers' or players' names, only the geographic home of the tunes, and the newer ones always have full names and other information in connection with melodies.

The change could even be easier illustrated, just by reading the entry 'Folk music' in the two different editions of the well-known Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians. The first edition says:

(folk music)... *includes certain types of instrumental music as well as songs – any music, in fact, which has been entered into the heritage of the people, but can be assigned to no composer, school or as a rule even a period.*⁴

Klaus P. Wachsmann, the author of the article 'Folk Music' in *The New Grove's*, quotes the familiar definition from former IFMC's congress in Sao Paulo in 1955.⁵ This act states that folk music among other things is characterised by *variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group.*

Wachsmann discusses the problems with the Sao Paulo-definition, but never denies the sentence cited here. It contains, of course, some kind of consensus when it mentions both the individual and the group. But the individual is anyhow pointed out as a creative force.

Philip Bohlman, who has written an inspiring book about the study of folk music in our days, declares that folk music research has moved from the general level to the specific.⁶ This paper has no place for a recapitulation of research history, but I think his statement could be many scholars. Any way, the individual coming out of the group is part of that pattern, although there are not so many works in this particular field yet.

At least in Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries the specification has resulted in a number of local studies. Nowadays, folk music is found in the village or the district. During the 70's and 80's many local collections have been published, edited by amateurs or educated scholars. Real studies of local folk music traditions are not as many as the printed collections, but still a growing category.⁷ In my opinion this trend could be placed within the broad movement for local history, in Scandinavia characterised by a co-operation between amateur historians and professionals.⁸ Local history is, according to the widespread English Leicester school, *a subject worthy of study in its own right.*⁹ This local history *per se* is 'individualising', as some Nordic historians have remarked.¹⁰ This term does not mean that local history deals with the history of individual persons, but does on the other hand not exclude such works.

Folklore science, another neighbour of folk music research, has also seen a growing interest for the individual. In my opinion that is mainly due to the success of American folk music scholars, which directly or indirectly has influenced many folklorists.¹¹ It's most important contribution is the spotlight on the dynamics of folklore - moving from the written texts, that are only imperfect pictures of oral art. Quite expected, American folk music scholars have been in the front-line of using the performance-tools, which very easily could be transferred to the study of folk music.¹²

Folklore studies of individuals are not only found within the performance school. The Finnish folklorist Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj divides the literature about folklore narrators into two categories.¹³ In the first one the narrator is studied in his cultural context. Sometimes this perspective can end up with a study of culture, she says, not a study of folklore. The other category watches the narrator through his texts, which are often stored in folklore archives. She almost hesitates to recommend this re-use of the already collected material, referring to the vast problems with source criticism and interpretation. But the kind of cleaning the glasses must, of course, also be done by a scholar with his/her own recordings.

Many of those who have studied folk musicians on the individual level are obviously fascinated by the creating process. With Kaivola-Bregenhøj's categorisation in mind, we can see that several of them are more oriented towards the musical material than the context or culture. Some examples may illustrate this trend: the already mentioned Ives has made a broad study about the woodsman and ballad singer Joe Scott, where an analysis of Scott's songs is an important part.¹⁴ Albert Lord says explicitly in his classic book about epic tradition in the Balkan: *It is a study in the process of composition of oral narrative poetry*.¹⁵ In his thesis about a Lappish singer of yoiks as a 'tradition mediator', Ola Graff deals with 'the problem of meanings in the music itself'.¹⁶ In spite of that Graff analyses how his singer makes variations, when he repeats his yoiks. The Danish musicologist Svend Nielsen, who has studied an Icelandic *rímur*-singer, is concerned with the question how the individual can express himself in improvisation, but still preserve the frameworks of tradition.¹⁷

Variation has always been regarded as typical for folk music – just remember the statement from the former IFMC's definition. Many of the studies mentioned here share an interest for variation as a process that the individual can influence, not as an unconscious and accidental change. *Umsingen* was a term from yesterday, used by Wiora¹⁸ and others. Today one would rather start to speak about creating.

The Norwegian Ola Graff writes, when investigating different versions of a yoik:

The differences can be related to the object (of the yoik). Variations in the melody then have a relation to the object, i.e. they describe the object.

Differences can be related to the subject (= the yoiker). Variations can be expressions of personal conditions and tell about friendship or hostility between the yoiker and the object of the yoik. But the variations can be just an expression for the subject, independent from the object, from feelings and aesthetic preferences.¹⁹

In his conclusion Svend Nielsen puts some questions about his singer's way of making variations:

Are there forces outside the musical structure as such that have a decisive influence on the 'kvedskapur'? Is it such forces that direct the form of the individual verses within the boundaries of the 'kveda'-style described here? the answer must be yes. There are doubtless such forces, first of all in the 'kvedamadur' himself.²⁰

The tension between tradition and innovation has – as we can see – attracted some of those who have studied individuals. But nearly every study has turned its focus on exceptional persons, not typical – if the latter can be found. Is the creating process more interesting to examine in its developed forms? Or, are there influences from studies in art music, where the 'great' creators always stand in the foreground?²¹ Bruno Nettl can anyhow calm down those who ask for the representative selection.²² The mediocrity is not worth studying for the sake of the representativity, but the ordinary musical man is the foundation of musical universe and must therefore be understood. In other words, examining explicitly innovative persons' creativity is legitimate – according to Nettl and the mentioned authors.

Some attempts have been made to describe the creating process in folk music. Eleanor Long divides creativity in ballad singing into five categories,²³ with different relations to the tradition.²⁴ Edward D. Ives makes another kind of categorisation.²⁵ He sees four levels of creating – from the lowest, hardly observable to a real change. The difference between Long and Ives could be described as follows: Long's categorisation points out various kinds of creativity, with no mutual connections than just the relation to the tradition. Ballad-singing can possibly be regarded with these eyes; on the other hand, breaking the limits, such as those that separate Long's categories, characterises creative persons. Ives' chain shows a logical succession and makes it easy to understand the importance of the creative individual for the renewal of the tradition.

My own model adheres to Ives', as it has the same structure. Thus, I will divide the creating process – and the continuation of the tradition as well – into three steps or levels:

personal expressions – innovation – change

Personal expressions could be found in all music. Some people put their personality in the music without reflecting about it. Others interpret their music in a very conscious manner. Every musical genre offers tools for this personal exposition; in many folk music traditions ornamentation is a common one.²⁶

Improvisation also belongs to this level. Where improvisation is used, improvisation is the music. European art music with its literacy has made improvisation to a higher form of music in many peoples' eyes. In fact all music is built upon inspiration of the moment.

Ives makes two levels out of my 'personal expressions'. His first one describes the creativity that every performance demands, the other the condition when a musician 'improves' a tune. In my opinion it is pointless to divide this lowest level of creating. How to look upon an interpretation? And what is, in this connection, an improvisation? My conclusive expression covers Ives' first two categories – and he also admits that they are hard to separate.

With **innovations** a folk musician expands his or her repertoire and means of expression. Ives reserves this level for the creation of new songs (or instrumental tunes), and only for that. Innovations can – of course – be held both outside and inside the framework of tradition. They are always consciously made, while personal expressions are not. New melodies, for example, can now and then more or less fall out of the instrument or the mouth, but in order to catch them and bring them into the repertoire a musician has to work in a reflected manner. It is worth adding that creating on this level presumes both heat and interest for music – ordinary musicians are therefore seldom innovative.

Both traditional expressions and new-born ones are usually examined by putting a repertoire or part of the repertoire in a microscope. John Quincy Wolf reminds us of another way, when he studies the musicians' own attitudes towards creating.²⁷ A very high consciousness in the framework of the tradition is needed to verbalise the limits of creating. Normally very few folk musicians have such insights, but the performers' own view is indeed important to catch.

To achieve *change* innovations must be spread and accepted. This last level is a social process, where the musician himself can play a certain role. The acceptance depends on the originality of the innovation and its relations to the framework. An original creation must not be too far away from the boundaries, if it shall be played by other musicians than the innovator himself. On the other hand, the innovation should contain something really new to reach attention.

The first level of creating, with personal expressions, is not a very investigated one in folk music research. This situation can, as the Norwegian musicologist Tellef Kvifte points out, be explained by the fact that archive material never tells about variation and improvisation, two essential factors in folk music.²⁸ You could also add the difficulties in measuring, noting and describing verbally the smallest sound events.

The methods of the performance-school offers an other way of studing the individual and his music.²⁹ Analyses of situation with sayings, gestures, body language and other observable components to an examination of the registrered music.

Studies of personal styles do not automatically lead to a search for originality, which must be stressed. Many musicians have no intentions what-so-ever to make new music. The American Henry Glassie has his own opinion: 'The commonplace folk performer, his audience and fellow performers do not strive for change: they interact in a system of frequent repetition, enforcement and reinforcement to prevent it.'³⁰

Glassie's opinion could even be called sarcastic. In folk music there should be not found a struggle for renewal, but a system that works against changes. His statement can certainly be discussed, but not here. It is at least not valid for all folk music cultures. It remains us that personal expression can contain not only unique elements, but elements shared by several musicians.

As already has been said, studies in this field mostly deals with exceptional personalities, not representative ones. The authors are, as it seems, occupied with the innovative level - in some cases also with the level of personal expressions. The starting point for the understanding of a creative individual must be an insight in his musical personality, his own interpretation of the tradition. Every one that wants to follow a creative individual should study *both* personal expressions and innovations, oscillating between these levels.

A change can only be stated by moving focus from the individual to the group. The individual perspective must be abandoned - or occasionally left, if the purpose is to trace one single person's influence on the tradition. Hannu Saha, writing about an Ingrian flute-player,³¹ first analyses the repertoire, then examines the player as a national personage in the music life of Finland. The impact of a single musician is seldom that big, more often influences have to be traced within in a smaller society. But, in the choice of an exceptional person, is there a wish to overestimate the importance of folk music in the music life as a whole?

The actual circumstances must evidently, decide how big or small the group in question will be. Studies in history have reasonably a narrow geographic range, where the importance of the individual should be measured. Works of that kind could often be associated with local history in the already mentioned sense. Anyone following a musical personality in our days must be prepared to widen his horizons. Today folk music can fly away with the help of mass media and take roots on unexpected spots.

The increasing interest for the unique folk musicians could be explained in many ways. First of all, the focus on the individual is a reaction upon the

romantique view, where supposed to be collectively owned. This discovery of the musician is also inspired by folkloristic studies, showing a parallel development. Moreover, today's popular music, with its concentration on 'the star', is perhaps another important influence to discuss. Studies of individuals have, anyhow, contributed to the understanding of folk music, its inner life and continuation.

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