

# Saga of a Folksong Hunter

A twenty-year odyssey with cylinder, disc and tape.

by Alan Lomax



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To the musicologists of the 21st century our epoch may not be known by the name of a school of composers or of a musical style. It may well be called the period of the phonograph or the age of the golden ear, when, for a time, a passionate aural curiosity overshadowed the ability to create music. Tape decks and turntables spun out swing and symphony, pop and primitive with equal fidelity; and the hi-fi LP brought the music of the whole world to mankind's pad. It became more important to give all music a hearing than to get on with the somewhat stale tasks of the symphonic tradition. The naked Australian mooing into his djedbangari and Heifetz noodling away at his cat-gut were both brilliantly recorded. The human race listened, ruminating, not sure whether there should be a universal, cosmopolitan musical language, or whether we should go back to the old-fashioned ways of our ancestors, with a different music in every village. This, at least, is what happened to me.

In the summer of 1933, Thomas A. Edison's widow gave my father an old-fashioned Edison cylinder machine so that he might record Negro tunes for a forthcoming book of American ballads. For us, this instrument was a way of taking down tunes quickly and accurately; but to the singers themselves, the squeaky, scratchy voice that emerged from the speaking tube meant that they had made communicative contact with a bigger world than their own. A Tennessee convict did some fancy drumming on the top of a little lard pail. When, he listened to his record, he sighed and said, "When that man in the White House hear how sweet I can drum, he sho' gonna send down here and turn me loose." Leadbelly, then serving life in the Louisiana pen, recorded a pardon-appeal ballad to Governor O. K. Allen, persuaded my father to take the disc to the Governor, and was, in fact, paroled within six months.

I remember one evening on a South Texas sharecropper plantation. The fields were white with cotton, but the Negro families wore rags. In the evening they gathered at a little ramshackle church to sing for our machine. After a few spirituals, the crowd called for Blue- "Come on up and sing-um your song, Blue." Blue, a tall fellow in faded overalls, was pushed into the circle of lamplight and picked up the recording horn. "I won't sing my song but once," he said. "You've got to catch it the first time I sing it." We cranked up the spring motor, dropped the recording needle on the cylinder, and Blue began--

Poor farmer, poor farmer,

Poor farmer, they git all the farmer makes . . .

Somebody in the dark busted out giggling. Scared eyes turned toward the back of the hall where the white farm owner stood listening in the shadows. The sweat popped-out on Blue's forehead as he sang on . . .

His clothes is full of patches, his hat is full of holes,

Stoopin' down, pickin' cotton, from off the bottom bolls,

Poor farmer, poor farmer . . .

The song was a rhymed indictment of the sharecropping system, and poor Blue had feared we would censor it. He had also risked his skin to record it. But he was rewarded. When the ghostly voice of the Edison machine repeated his words, someone shouted, "That thing sho' talks sense. Blue, you done it this time!" Blue stomped on his ragged hat. The crowd burst into applause. When we thought to look around, the white manager had disappeared. But no one seemed concerned. The plantation folk had put their sentiments on record!

As Blue and his friends saw, the recording machine can be a voice for the voiceless, for the millions in the world who have no access to the main channels of communication, and whose cultures are being talked to death by all sorts of well-intentioned people - teachers, missionaries, etc - and who are being shouted into silence by our commercially bought--and-paid for loudspeakers. It took me a long time to realize that the main point of my activity was to redress the balance a bit, to put sound technology at the disposal of the folk, to bring channels of communication to all sorts of artists and areas.

Meanwhile, I continued to work as a folklorist. That is -- out of the ocean of oral tradition I gathered the songs and stories that I thought might be of some use or interest to my own group -- the intellectuals of the middle class. I remember how my father and I used to talk, back in those far off days twenty five years ago, about how a great composer might use our stuff as the basis for an American opera. We were a bit vague about the matter because we were Texans and had never seen a live composer.

I kept on talking about that American-opera-based-on-folk-themes, until one year the Columbia Broadcasting System commissioned a group of America's leading serious composers to write settings for the folk songs presented on my series for CBS's School of the Air. The formula was simple. First you had the charming folk tune, simply and crudely performed by myself or one of my friends. Then it was to be transmuted by the magic of symphonic technique into big music, just as it was supposed to have happened with Bach and Haydn and the boys. This was music education.

I recall the day I took all our best field recordings of John Henry to one of our top-ranking composers, a very bright and busy man who genuinely thought he liked folk songs. I played him all sorts of variants of John Henry, exciting enough to make a modern folk fan climb the walls. But as soon as my singer would finish a stanza or so, the composer would say, "Fine- Now let's hear the next tune." It took him about a half-hour to learn all that John Henry, our finest ballad, had to say to him, and I departed with my treasured records, not sure whether I was more impressed by his facility, or angry because he had never really listened to John Henry.

When his piece was played on the air, I was unsure no longer. My composer friend had written the tunes down accurately, but his composition spoke for the Paris of Nadia Boulanger,

and not for the wild land and the heart-torn people who had made the song. The spirit and the emotion of John Henry shone nowhere in this score because he had never heard, much less experienced them. And this same pattern held true for all the folk-symphonic suites for twenty boring weeks. The experiment, which must have cost CBS a small fortune, was a colossal failure, and had failed to produce a single bar of music worthy of association with the folk tradition. As the years have gone by, I have found less and less value in the symphonizing of folk song. Each tradition has its own place in the scheme of mankind's needs, but their forced marriage produces puny offspring. Perhaps our American folk operas will come from the sources we least expect, maybe from some college kid who has learned to play the five-string banjo and guitar, folk-style, or from some yet unknown hillbilly genius who develops a genuine American folk-style orchestra.

In the early days, when we were taking notes with our recording machine for that imaginary American opera or for our own books, we normally recorded only a stanza or two of a song. The Edison recorder of that first summer was succeeded by a portable disc machine that embossed a sound track on a well-greased aluminum platter; but the surface scratch was thunderous, and besides, we were too hardpressed for money to be prodigal with discs. Now, the recollection of all the full-bodied performances we cut short still gives me twinges of conscience. Even more painful is the thought that many of the finest things we gathered for the Library of Congress are on those cursed aluminum records; they will probably outlast the century, complete with acoustic properties that render them unendurable to all but the hardest ears.

This barbaric practice of recording sample tunes did not continue for long, for our work had found a home in the Archive of American Folk Song, established in the Library of Congress by the late Herbert Putnam, then Librarian, and there were funds for plenty of discs. By then, we had also come to realize that the practice among the folk of varying the tune from stanza to stanza of a long song was an art both ancient in tradition and subtle in execution- one which deserved to be documented in full. So it was that we began to record the songs in their entirety.

Learning that the Russians were writing full-scale life histories of their major ballad singers, I then began to take down lengthy musical biographies of the most interesting people who came my way. Thus, Leadbelly's life and repertoire became a book-the first folksinger biography in English, and unhappily out of print a year after it was published. Jelly Roll Morton, Woody Guthrie, Aunt Molly Jackson, Big Bill Broonzy and a dozen lesser-known singers all set down their lives and philosophies for the Congressional Library microphones. In that way I learned that folk song in a context of folk talk made a lot more sense than in a concert hall.

By 1942 the Archive of American Folk Music had become the leading institution of its kind in the world, with several thousand songs on record from all over the United States and parts of Latin America. With Harold Spivacke, Chief of the Music Division, I planned a systematic regional survey of American folk music. We were lending equipment and some financial aid to the best regional collectors. We had our own sound laboratory, had published a series of discs with full notes and texts which was greeted with respect and admiration by museums and played on radio networks the world over- though little in the United States. By teaching our best discoveries to talented balladeers like Burl Ives, Josh White and Pete Seeger, many hitherto forgotten songs began to achieve national circulation. Even music educators began to give serious thought to the idea of using American folk songs as an aid toward the musical development of American children- properly arranged with piano accompaniment and censored, of course.

Then came the day when a grass-roots Congressman, casually inspecting the Congressional Library's Appropriation Bill, noted an item of \$15,000 for further building up the collection for the Archive of American Folk Music. This gentleman thereupon built up a head of steam and proceeded to deliver an impassioned speech, demanding to know by what right his constituents' money was being spent "by that long-haired radical poet, Archibald MacLeish, running up and down our country, collecting itinerant songs."

A shocked House committee rose to this national emergency. It not only cut the appropriation for the Archive out of the bill, but along with it a million dollars earmarked for the increase of the entire Library. Our national Library would have to get along without the purchase of books, technical journals and manuscripts for a year- but at least that poet would also have to stop doing whatever he was doing with those "itinerant songs."

I was hardly the most popular man in the Library of Congress during the ensuing week. My name had not been mentioned in Committee, but the blame for what happened fell on me- for my noisy round objects had never fitted into the quiet rectangular world of my librarian colleagues. For a few days I walked down those marble corridors in a pool of silence. Then logs were rolled and the million dollars for the Library were restored, apparently, though, with the understanding that the folk song Archive should get none of it ever. To the best of my knowledge, no further government funds since that day have been appropriated for the pursuit of "itinerant" songs. Although the Archive has continued to grow, thanks to gifts and exchanges, it has ceased to be the active center for systematic collecting that we so desperately need in this unknown folksy nation of ours.

To the best of my knowledge, I say, because when it became plain that the Archive was no longer to be a center for field trips, I sadly shook the marble dust of the Library off my shoes, and have paid only occasional visits there since. However, once the field recording habit takes hold of you, it is hard to break. One remembers those times when the moment in a field recording situation is just right. There arises an intimacy close to love. The performer gives you his strongest and deepest feeling, and, if he is a folk singer, this emotion can reveal the character of his whole community. A practiced folk song collector can bring about communication on this level wherever he chooses to set up his machine. Ask him how he does this, and he can no more tell you than a minister can tell you how to preach a great sermon. It takes practice and it takes a deep need on the part of the field collector- which the singer can sense and want to fulfill.

I swore I would never touch another recording machine after I left the Library of Congress; but then, somehow, I found myself the owner of the first good portable tape machine to become available after World War Two. Gone the needle rasp of the aluminum disc; gone the worry with the chip and delicate surface of the acetates. Here was a quiet sound track with better fidelity than I had imagined ever possible; and a machine that virtually ran itself, so that I could give my full attention to the musicians.

I rushed the machine and myself back to the Parchman (Mississippi) Penitentiary where my father and I had found the finest, wildest and most complex folk singing in the South. The great blizzard of 1947 struck during the recording sessions, and the convicts stood in the wood yard in six inches of snow, while their axe blades glittered blue in the wintry light and they bawled out their ironic complaint to Rosie, the feminine deity of the Mississippi Pen--

Ain't but the one thing I done wrong,

I stayed in Mississippi just a day too long.

Come and get me, Rosie, an' take me home,

These life-time devils, they won't leave me alone.

Although my primitive tape recorder disintegrated after that first trip, it sang the songs of my convict friends so faithfully that it married me to tape recording. I was then innocent of the nervous torments of tape splicing and of the years I was to spend in airless dubbing studios in the endless pursuit of higher and higher "fi" for my folk musicians. The development of the long-playing record- a near perfect means for publishing a folk song collection- provided a further

incentive; for one LP encompasses as much folk music as a normal printed monograph and presents the vital reality of an exotic song style as written musical notation never can. At a summer conference dealing with the problems of international folk lore, held in 1949, I proposed to my technically innocent colleagues that we set up a committee to publish the best of all our folk song findings as a series of LPs that would map the whole world of folk music. Exactly one person- and he was a close friend of mine- voted in favor of my proposal.

The myopia of the academics was still a favorite topic of mine, when one morning, a few weeks later, I happened to meet Goddard Lieberman, President of Columbia Records, in a Broadway coffee shop. His reaction to my story was to agree on the spot that it would be an interesting idea to publish a World Library of Folk Music on LP- if I could assemble it for him at a modest cost. Out of my past there then arose a shade to lend a helping hand in my project.

The first song recorded for the Library of Congress, Leadbelly's Goodnight Irene, had just become one of the big popular hits of the year; and it seemed to me, in all fairness, that my share of the royalties should be spent on more folk song research. Thus, within ten days of my chat with Lieberman, I was sailing for Europe with a new Magnecord tape machine in my cabin and the folk music of the world as my destination. I loftily assured my friends at the dock that, by collaborating with the folk music experts of Europe and drawing upon their archives, the job would take me no more than a year. That was in October of 1950.

It was July, 1958 before I actually returned home with 20 of the promised 40 tapes complete. Seventeen LPs in all, each one capsuling the folk music of as many different areas and edited by the foremost expert in his particular field, were released on Columbia; and eleven LPs on the folk music of Spain were edited for and released by Westminster. "Irene" had long since ceased to pay my song-hunting bills. As a matter of fact, for several years I had supported my dream of an international "vox humana" for several years by doing broadcasts on the British Broadcasting Corporation's Third Programme. I had also become a past master in wangling my recorder and accompanying bales of tapes through customs, as well as by a dyed-in-the-wool European tyrant in the dining room of a continental hotel.

There were several reasons why my efficient American planning of 1950 had gone awry. For one thing, only a few European archives of folksong recordings existed which were both broad enough in scope and sufficiently "hi-fi" to produce a good hour of tape that would acceptably represent an entire country. For another, not every scholar or archivist responded with pleasure to my offer to publish his work in fine style and with a good American royalty. There was the eminent musicologist who demanded all his royalties (whatever they were to be) in advance because he did not trust big American corporations (he was a violent anti-communist as well) . Yet another was opposed to release his recordings prior to publication of his own musical analysis of them. Others, as curators of state museums, were tied down by red tape. In one instance, despite unanimous agreement in favor of my recording project, it took a year for the contract to be approved by the Department of Fine Arts and then a year more for the final selection of the tracks to be made. As for the folklorists of Soviet Russia, ten years of letter writing has yet to bring an answer to my invitation for them to contribute to the "World Library" project.

I simply could not afford to go everywhere myself. Much "World Library" material had to be gathered by correspondence- and that in a multitude of languages. So a huge file of letters accompanied me wherever I went, and inevitably there were a number of painful misunderstandings. One well-meaning gentleman hired a fine soprano to record his country's best folk songs. Another scholar, from the Antipodes and more anthropologist than musician, sent me beautiful tapes of hitherto unknown music- all recorded consistently at wrong speeds, but with no information to indicate the variations. The most painful incident, and one which still gives me nightmares, concerns a lady who, on the strength of my contract, made a six month field trip and then sent me tapes of such poor technical quality that all the sound engineers in Paris were unable to put them right. I had no choice but to return the tapes, and the lady soon found

herself with no choice but to leave her native land to escape her creditors.

Despite such problems, the job as a whole went smoothly, for the Library of Congress Archive records had preceded me and made friends for me everywhere. My European colleagues must have enjoyed leading their provincial American co-worker through land after unknown land of music, and though I had sworn to stay away from field recording and to act merely in the capacity of editor, the temptation posed by unexplored or inadequately recorded areas of folk music in the heart of the continent from which our civilization sprang was simply too much for me.

It so happened that mine was the first high-fidelity portable tape recorder to be made available in Europe for folk song collecting. So I soon put it to work in the interest of the music that my new-found colleagues loved. The winter of 1950 I spent in Western Ireland, where the songs have such a jewelled beauty that one soon believes, along with the Irish themselves, that music is a gift of the fairies. The next summer, in Scotland, I recorded border ballads among the plowmen of Aberdeenshire, and later the pre-Christian choral songs of the Hebrides- some of them among the noblest folk tunes of Western Europe.

In the summer of 1953, I was informed by Columbia that publication of my series depended on my assembling a record of, Spanish folk music; and so, swallowing my distaste for EL Caudillo and his works, I betook myself to a folklore conference on the island of Mallorca with the aim of finding myself a Spanish editor. At that time, I did not know that my Dutch traveling companion was the son of the man who had headed the underground in Holland during the German occupation; but he was recognized at once by the professor who ran the conference. This man was a refugee Nazi, who had taken over the Berlin folk song archive after Hitler had removed its Jewish chief and who, after the war, had fled to Spain and was there placed in charge of folk music research at the Institute for Higher Studies in Madrid. When I told him about my project, he let me know that he personally would see to it that no Spanish musicologist would help me. He also suggested that I leave Spain.

I had not really intended to stay. I had only a few reels of tape on hand, and I had made no study of Spanish ethnology. This, however, was my first experience with a Nazi and, as I looked across the luncheon table at this authoritarian idiot, I promised myself that I would record the music of this benighted country if it took me the rest of my life. Down deep, I was also delighted at the prospect of adventure in a landscape that reminded me so much of my native Texas.

For a month or so I wandered erratically, sunstruck by the grave beauty of the land, faint and sick at the sight of this noble people, ground down by poverty and a police state. I saw that in Spain, folklore was not mere fantasy and entertainment. Each Spanish village was a self-contained cultural system with tradition penetrating every aspect of life; and it was this system of traditional, often pagan mores, that had been the spiritual armor of the Spanish people against the many forms of tyranny imposed upon them through the centuries. It was in their inherited folklore that the peasants, the fishermen, the muleteers and the shepherds I met, found their models for that noble behavior and that sense of the beautiful which made them such satisfactory friends.

It was never hard to find the best singers in Spain, because everyone in their neighborhood knew them and understood how and why they were the finest stylists in their particular idiom. Nor, except in the hungry South, did people ask for money in exchange for their ballads. I was their guest, and more than that, a kindred spirit who appreciated the things they found beautiful. Thus, a folklorist in Spain finds more than song; he makes life-long friendships and renews his belief in mankind.

The Spain that was richest in both music and fine people was not the hot-blooded gypsy South with its flamenco, but the quiet, somber plains of the west, the highlands of Northern

Castile, and the green tangle of the Pyrenees where Spain faces the Atlantic and the Bay of Biscay. I remember the night I spent in the straw hut of a shepherd on the moonlit plains of Extremadura. He played the one-string vihuela, the instrument of the medieval minstrels, and sang ballads of the wars of Charlemagne, while his two ancient cronies sighed over the woes of courtly lovers now five hundred years in the dust. I remember the head of the history department at the University of Oviedo, who, when he heard my story, cancelled all his engagements for a week so that he might guide me to the finest singers in his beloved mountain province. I remember a night in a Basque whaling port, when the fleet came in and the sailors found their women in a little bar, and, raising their glasses began to sing in robust harmony that few trained choruses could match.

Seven months of wine-drenched adventure passed. The tires on my Citroen had worn so smooth that on one rainy winter day in Galicia I had nine punctures. The blackhatted and dreadful Guardia Civil had me on their lists- I will never know why, for they never arrested me. But apparently, they always knew where I was. No matter in what Godforsaken, unlikely spot in the mountains I would set up my gear, they would appear like so many black buzzards carrying with them the stink of fear- and then the musicians would lose heart. It was time to leave Spain. I had seventy-five hours of tapes with beautiful songs from every province, and, rising to my mind's eye, a new idea- a map of Spanish folk song style- the old choral North, the solo-voiced and oriental South, and the hard-voiced modern center, land of the ballad and of the modern lyrics. Spain, in spite of my Nazi professor, was on tape. I now looked forward to a stay in England which would give me a chance to air my Iberian musical treasures over the BBC.

In the days before the hostility of the tabloid press and the Conservative Party had combined to denature the BBC's Third Programme, it was probably the freest and most influential cultural forum in the Western world. If you had something interesting to say, if the music you had composed or discovered was fresh and original, you got a hearing on the "Third." Some of the best poets in England lived mainly on the income gotten from their Third Programme broadcasts, which was calculated on the princely basis of a guinea a line. Censorship was minimal- and if a literary work de

manded it, all the four-letter anglo-saxon words were used. You could also be sure, if your talk was on the "Third," that it would be heard by intelligent people, seriously interested in your subject.

My broadcast audience in Britain was around a million, not large by American buckshot standards, but one really worth talking to. I could not discuss politics- my announced subject being Spanish folk music- but I was still so angry about the misery and the political oppression I had seen in Spain that my feelings came through between the lines and my listeners were- or so they wrote me- deeply moved. At any rate, the Spanish broadcasts created a stir and the heads of the Third Programme then commissioned me to go to Italy to make a similar survey of the folk music there.

That year was to be the happiest of my life. Most Italians, no matter who they are or how they live, are concerned about aesthetic matters. They may have only a rocky hillside and their bare hands to work with, but on that hillside they will build a house or a whole village whose lines superbly fit its setting. So, too, a community may have a folk tradition confined to just one or two melodies, but there is passionate concern that these be sung in exactly the right way.

I remember one day when I set up the battered old Magnecord on a tuna fishing barge, fifteen miles out on the glassy, blue Mediterranean. No tuna had come into the underwater trap for months, and the fishermen had not been paid for almost a year. Yet, they bawled out their capstan shanties as if they were actually hauling in a rich catch, and at a certain point slapped their bare feet on the deck, simulating exactly the dying convulsions of a dozen tuna. Then, on hearing the playback, they applauded their own performance like so many opera singers. Their

shanties- the first, I believe, ever to be recorded in situ- dealt exclusively with two subjects: the pleasures of the bed which awaited them on shore, and the villainy of the tuna fishery owner, whom they referred to as the pesce cane (dog-fish or shark) .

In the mountains above San Remo I recorded French medieval ballads, sung as I believe ballads originally were, in counterpoint and in a rhythm, which showed that they were once choral dances. In a Genoese waterfront bar I heard the longshoremen troll their five-part tralaleros- in the most complex polyphonic choral folk style west of the Caucasusone completely scorned by the respectable citizens of the rich Italian port. In Venice I found still in use the pile-driving chants that once accompanied the work of the battipali, who long ago had sunk millions of oak logs into the mud and thus laid the foundation of the most beautiful city in Europe. High in the Apennines I watched villagers perform a threehour folk opera based. on Carolingian legends and called maggi (May plays)- all this in a style that was fashionable in Florence before the rise of opera there. These players sang in a kind of folk bel canto which led me to suppose that the roots of this kind of vocalizing as we know it in the opera house may well have had their origin somewhere in old Tuscany. Along the Neapolitan coast I discovered communities whose music was North African in feeling- a folk tradition dating back to the Moorish domination of Naples in the ninth century. Then, a few miles away in the hills, I heard a troupe of small town artisans, close kin to Shakespeare's Snug and Bottom, wobble through a hilarious musical lark straight out of the commedia del' arte.

The rugged and lovely Italian peninsula turned out, in fact, to be a museum of musical antiquities, where day after day. I turned up ancient folk song genres totally unknown to my colleagues in Rome. By chance I happened to be the first person to record in the field over the whole Italian countryside, and I began to understand how the men of the Renaissance must have felt upon discovering the buried and hidden treasure of classical Greek and Roman antiquity. In a sense, I was a kind of musical Columbus in reverse. Nor had I arrived on the scene a moment too soon.

Most Italian city musicians regard the songs of their country neighbors with an aversion every bit as strong as that which middle-class American Negroes feel for the genuine folk songs of the Deep South. These urban Italians want everything to be "bella,"- that is, pretty, or prettified. Thus (in the fashion of most of our own American so-called folk singers active in the entertainment field) the professional purveyors of folk music .in Italy leave out from their performances all that is angry, disturbing or strange. And the Radio Italiana, faithful in its obligations to Tin Pan Alley, plugs Neapolitan pop fare and American jazz day after day on its best hours. It is only natural that village folk musicians, after a certain amount of exposure to the TV screens and loudspeakers of RAI should begin to lose confidence in their own tradition.

One hot day, in the office of the program director of Radio Roma, I lost my temper and accused him of being directly responsible for destroying the folk music of his own country, the richest heritage of its kind in Western Europe. At this really charming fellow I directed all the hopeless rage I felt at our so-called civilization- the hard sell that is wiping the world slate clean of all non-conformist culture patterns.

To my surprise, he took up my suggestion that a daily folksong broadcast be scheduled for noon, when the shepherds and farmers of Italy are home and at leisure. I then wrote a romantic article for the radio daily, called The Hills Are Listening, in which I envisioned my friends and neighbors taking new heart as they heard their own voices coming out of the loudspeakers. Then, months later, I learned to my embarrassment that my piece had finally seen publication in an obscure learned journal and that the broadcasts were put on late in the evening, well after working class Italy is in bed- and on Italy's "Third Program" to boot, which only a small minority of intellectuals ever listen to.

When are we going to realize that the world's richest resource is mankind itself, and that of all his



creations, his culture is the most valuable? And by this I do not mean culture with a capital "C"- that body of art which the critics have selected out of the literate traditions of Western Europe -- but rather the total accumulation of man's fantasy and wisdom, taking form as it does in images, tunes, rhythms, figures of speech, recipes, dances, religious beliefs and ways of making love that still persist in full vitality in the folk and primitive places of our planet. Every smallest branch of the human family at one time or another has carved its dreams out of the rock on which it has lived- true and sometimes pain- filled dreams, but still wholly appropriate to their particular bit of earth. Each of these ways of expressing emotion has been the handiwork of generations of unknown poets, musicians and human hearts. Now, we of the jets, the wireless and the atom blast are on the verge of sweeping completely off the globe what unspoiled folklore is left, at least wherever it cannot quickly conform to the success-motivated standards of our urban- conditioned consumer economy. What was once an ancient tropical garden of immense color and variety is in danger of being replaced by a comfortable but sterile and sleep- inducing system of cultural super-highways- with just one type of diet and one available kind of music.

It is only a few sentimental folklorists like myself who seem to be disturbed by this prospect today, but tomorrow, when it will be too late- when the whole world is bored with automated mass-distributed video-music, our descendants will despise us for having thrown away the best of our culture.

The small triumph referred to in the early part of this article- the growing recognition of the importance of folk and sometimes primitive music on long-playing records- is a good step in the right direction. But it is only a first step. It still remains for us to learn how we can put our magnificent mass communication technology at the service of each and every branch of the human family. If it continues to be aimed in only one direction- from our semi-literate western, urban society to all the "underdeveloped" billions who still speak and sing in their many special languages and dialects, the effect in the end can only mean a catastrophic cultural disaster for us all.