The Country Music Reader
FOR LOLA,

MY STEADFAST WRITING COMPANION
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**Song Index**
When we have the opportunity to engage with the voices from the past, our understanding of history is significantly improved. As students of music history, we often use scores and recordings as key primary documents, but a sole focus on musical works presents only one side of the story. By reading criticism, memoirs, and reportage in conjunction with our listening and score study, we can begin to grasp the complexity of the historian’s task. Such sources force us to make sense of complex debates, interrogate historical rhetorics, and engage with the life experiences of history’s very human actors. Moreover, such readings allow us to understand music history not simply as the result of musicians’ work but also as a product of many figures, often with competing interests and goals.

This book has been designed with the primary goal of providing access to the voices of people who have created country music culture over the course of the genre’s nine-decade history. In addition to musicians, this collection also includes the thoughts of folksong collectors, radio producers, recording engineers, music critics, and—perhaps most important—country music fans. It is my hope that you will read these sources alongside such narrative histories as Bill C. Malone’s *Country Music, U.S.A.* (3rd ed. [with Jocelyn R. Neal], Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010) or Jocelyn Neal’s *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), listen to recordings made by pioneering country musicians, view documentary films about the genre, and watch the rich array of country music videos that are now widely available on the Internet.

Although *The Country Music Reader* is organized chronologically, the sources also lend themselves to topical or thematic treatment. In particular, readers will note a focus on the production and dissemination of country recordings, debates about country music authenticity, and gender in country music. It is my hope that readers will make use of the sources anthologized here in ways that suit their pedagogical styles and the learning goals of their particular courses.

In compiling and editing this collection, I have been inspired by the work of many music historians, and *The Country Music Reader* bears the traces of these influences. Richard Taruskin and Pierro Weiss’s *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents* (Belmont, CA: 2nd ed., Thomson/Schirmer, 2008); David Brackett’s *The Rock, Pop, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates* (3rd ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Judith Tick and Paul Beaudoin’s *Music in the USA: A Documentary Companion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Thomas Goldsmith’s *The Bluegrass Reader* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); and Robert Gottlieb’s *Reading Jazz: A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, and Criticism from 1919 to Now* (New York: Vintage, 1999) have served as useful models as I have worked to select relevant sources, compose insightful critical introductions, annotate readings, and organize the anthology. Moreover, my decision to include many of the sources found here was influenced by the outstanding work of three generations of country music historians, and it is my hope that their voices also speak through *The Country Music Reader*. 
Acknowledgments

A project of this magnitude would be impossible if not for the support and assistance of a wonderful group of colleagues, assistants, mentors, friends, and family members.

This project began with the assistance of Millikin University’s Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship and Undergraduate Research Fellowship programs, which facilitated the hiring of two outstanding undergraduate research assistants, Will Frankenberger and Alyssa Callaghan. Together, they compiled an initial bibliography of periodical sources and supplied me with a seemingly endless array of outstanding primary source material drawn from a wide range of music and general interest periodicals. Moreover, their willingness to jump headlong into a project as large as this has inspired me to continue moving forward, even when my own confidence flagged. I am especially grateful for the lasting friendships we have developed over the years since their graduation, and I am extremely proud of their accomplishments in life. Millikin University also granted me a semester of academic leave in the Fall 2010 term, which granted me the opportunity to begin putting this project together in earnest. After joining the faculty of West Virginia University’s School of Music in the fall of 2013, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work with Anne Stickley, an exceptional undergraduate student who provided valuable assistance with fact-checking, copyediting, and indexing. I would like to thank Keith Jackson, director of the WVU School of Music, and Paul Kreider, dean of the WVU College of Creative Arts, for their financial and intellectual support of this project.

Along the way, numerous librarians and archivists have pointed me to useful sources, made collections available, and helped me track down arcane publications. At Millikin University, Ruth Nihiser processed endless interlibrary loan requests for primary and secondary literature. A visit to Middle Tennessee State University’s Center for Popular Music in May 2010 provided the opportunity to meet Linda Cockrell and Grover Baker, both of whom offered access to their repository of country music publications and provided great restaurant recommendations. Finally, Steve Weiss and Aaron Smithers at the Southern Folklife Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were gracious hosts in March 2012 when I visited to explore their extensive vertical files.

I am also deeply grateful for the many people who have granted permission to reprint many of the readings below. Several authors and their heirs generously offered these sources at no cost, while others were more than willing to negotiate reasonable fees.

I have also been the beneficiary of the remarkable support of my colleagues and mentors. At Millikin University, Steve Widenhofer, Laura Ledford, and Barry Pearson were more than generous in both their financial support of and enthusiasm for my research on this book, and Dave Burdick and Andy Heise’s constant reminders of the need to pick and sing while I write about this wonderful music served me well throughout the development of this project. At WVU, I have had the great pleasure of receiving the support of my colleagues Andrea Houde, Janet Robbins, Nick Perna, Mike Vercelli, and Chris Nichter. Several colleagues have sent along materials that I considered for publication here, including Stephanie Vander Wel, Paul Wells, Kevin Fontenot, Nate Gibson, and David Pruett, and I am grateful for their generosity. Chris Wells read a draft of this book and challenged me to consider the subtleties of language and its impact on the ways we might read the people and practices discussed in these sources. Doug Shadle has been a steadfast supporter of my work and a true friend over the many years that
this project has been in development. Rich Kienzle has been a regular correspondent over the past several years and has thoroughly enriched my appreciation for and knowledge of good country music journalism. Jocelyn Neal, Mark Katz, Christopher Wilkinson, and Mary Ferer have served as valuable mentors throughout this project and beyond. I strive to “pay it forward.”

I have been blessed with many friends who deserve recognition for the things they have done to provide support over the years that this book has been developing, including Chuck Kerwin, Nancy Freeman, Matt Meacham, Ian and Anne Helmick, Jj Kidder, Katie Sullivan, Rachel Weiss, SarahEmily Lekberg, Cate Edwards, the members of the Millikin University Big Bluegrass Band, and the fine folks at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Decatur, Illinois.

Suzanne Ryan has been especially instrumental in seeing this project from its infancy to its completion. Her encouragement has challenged me to consider possibilities that I may have never thought available to me and to push through the nagging voices of self-doubt to create something of which I am truly proud.

Finally, I know that I could not do anything without the love and support of my partner in this life, Melanie, who models kindness, patience, generosity, and love in all she does.
Note on Sources

The sources that are collected here are taken from a wide array of published memoirs, newspaper and magazine articles, fan newsletters, and trade publications. It was my goal to select articles that represented diverse perspectives on country music and its significance to the broader landscape of American popular music. Consequently, the voices of skeptical journalists, avid fans, and passionate songwriters and recording artists are placed alongside one another in an effort to situate country music within the broader contexts of its production and reception.

All sources are reprinted with permission of the copyright holder in the event that it was possible to determine who the copyright holder is. In several instances, however, the anthologized source was determined to be orphaned after significant effort to track down the copyright holder. Permissions are noted with each source, as specified.

In order to create a book of manageable length, the sources anthologized here have been lightly annotated. Readers are encouraged to consult such standard reference works as The Grove Dictionary of American Music, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) and The Encyclopedia of Country Music, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) for more information about the biographies of many people named here. Discographcial information is also readily available in numerous sources, including Tony Russell’s magnificent Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921–1942 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Guthrie T. Meade, Jr., Dick Spottswood, and Douglas S. Meade’s Country Music Sources: A Bibliographic Discography of Commercially Recorded Traditional Music (Chapel Hill: Southern Folklife Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries in Association with the John Edwards Memorial Forum, 2002); and Joel L. Whitburn’s Hot Country Songs, 1944–2012, 8th ed. (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, 2012). Finally, each source is followed by a list of suggested readings that can provide still more historical and cultural context, and it is hoped that readers will seek out this outstanding work.
The Country Music Reader
Linton K. Starr

“Georgia’s Unwritten Airs Played by Old ‘Fiddlers’ for Atlanta Prizes: Untutored Players from Hillsides and Marshes Perform Traditional Southern Melodies on Wire-Stringed Violins—Society Folk and Workers in Audiences ‘Shuffle Feet’ to Contagious Strains—‘Bald Mountain Caruso’ and Treble-singing Dog at Unique Convention” (1914)

Although the decade of the 1920s is often referred to as the “Jazz Age,” it might just as easily be described as the “Hillbilly Age.” Much as jazz was thought to embody the noise and racial boundary-crossing of the modern age, early hillbilly recording artists were believed to hail from idyllic rural landscapes, invoking images of noble Anglo-Saxons and notions of pure and unbroken folk traditions that were untainted by the influence of the modern life and the popular music industry along the way. Yet, even a cursory survey of the careers of the early hillbilly recording

artists suggests that they were far more cosmopolitan than marketing materials might have suggested. Even if they had been born in a rural community, they were often shaped by the modern urban environments of such southern cities as Atlanta, Charlotte, Nashville, and Dallas, where they worked in mills and factories, played music for rural émigrés, and had face-to-face exchanges with African American musical traditions. Moreover, the urban environments in which many of these musicians and their audiences worked were filled with modern entertainment options, including motion pictures, radio broadcasts, and phonograph records.²

Many of the most successful of the early hillbilly recording artists drew upon their urban experiences to create repertories that reflected the unique experiences of the South’s new urban dwellers, skillfully blending traditional tunes and styles with modern music, deliberately adopting the hillbilly image and portraying stereotypical behaviors,³ and promoting their music through a variety of media.

Perhaps the most successful of this first group of hillbilly recording artists was Fiddlin’ John Carson (ca. 1868–1949). Born in rural Fannin County, Georgia, and raised in the Reconstruction-era South, Carson has often been described as a transitional figure in the history of north Georgia fiddling, whose repertoire embraced both the late-nineteenth-century dance tunes and styles of north Georgia and the influences of the modern popular music industry.⁴ In the 1890s, he frequently moved between the rail yards and cotton mills of the Atlanta area and the rural farmlands of north Georgia; and in 1900, he moved permanently to Atlanta, where he went to work at Exposition Cotton Mills. In 1913, Carson began performing at the annual Georgia Old-Time Fiddlers’ Convention, a contest that he won multiple times, catapulting him to regional fame. The same year, Carson wrote “Little Mary Phagan,” the first of three ballads he composed about the murder and sexual assault of a thirteen-year-old mill worker and the sensational murder trial of


2. Patrick Huber has explored the role of urban and semi-urban textile mill towns in shaping the image, repertoire, and accessibility of hillbilly music in his Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).


mill superintendent Leo M. Frank, and he played a central role in encouraging populist anger that led to the Frank’s lynching in 1915.\(^5\)

In 1922, Carson became the first hillbilly musician to perform on radio, broadcasting on Atlanta radio station WSB (“Welcome South, Brother”), opening the door for many of the region’s fiddlers to perform in the new medium and generating widespread regional interest in his music.\(^6\) When Okeh Records producer Ralph Peer (1892–1960) traveled to Atlanta in June 1923 to record local talent, furniture store owner Polk Brockman, who owned the Atlanta Okeh dealership, convinced Peer to record Carson and to press five hundred copies for distribution in the Atlanta area. The record—“Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane” b/w “The Old Hen Cackled and the Rooster’s Going to Crow”—sold briskly, demonstrating both the demand for Carson’s music and a potentially greater demand for hillbilly music, and encouraged Peer to continue traveling throughout the South in search of new musicians and new songs.\(^7\) Recording at various times for Okeh’s “Popular Music Series” and “Old Time Tunes” series, Carson recorded 123 sides, including traditional fiddle tunes, topical ballads, and sentimental and popular numbers.

The following article, published in the art music–focused periodical *Musical America* in 1914, offers a richly detailed description of Atlanta’s annual Old Fiddlers’ Contest. The Contest was one of three major events on the city’s musical and social calendar, along with an annual visit from New York’s Metropolitan Opera and the spiritual performances at the “Colored Music Festival.” As Gavin James Campbell has demonstrated in his study of turn-of-the-twentieth-century musical life of Atlanta, these events—all of which were held at the city’s Armory-Auditorium—helped the residents of this dynamic southern city make sense of rapid social change in the city and the broader American South.\(^8\) The juxtaposition of powerful political, business, and cultural leaders in attendance and the “untutored” musicians performing onstage was common in the

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6. Huber, 72. There is some uncertainty as to the precise date that Carson made his WSB debut. Wayne W. Daniel (*Pickin’ on Peachtree: A History of Country Music in Atlanta, Georgia* [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990], 50) cites local legend that he performed on 23 March 1922, just eight days after the station went on the air, and Norm Cohen suggests that the debut was 9 September 1922 (“Riley Puckett: ‘King of the Hillbillies’,” *JEMF Quarterly* [Winter 1976], repr. in *Exploring Roots Music: Twenty Years of the* JEMF Quarterly, ed. Nolan Porterfield [Lanham, MD and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2004], 145).


emerging industrial center. The simultaneous fascination with and disdain for the “unwritten airs” that Lindon K. Starr, a music critic for the Atlanta Journal and correspondent to Music America, heard at the Old Fiddlers’ Contest was likely a commonplace, as well. Note, for instance, the representation of Carson’s speech in dialect, the description of the music heard there as “contagious,” and the comparisons between Carson and classical superstars Enrico Caruso and Jan Kubelik.

The Atlanta convention also provides a view of the lively community of fiddlers who worked in and around the Georgia capital. Carson, who had earned fourth place in the inaugural contest the prior year, was a purported crowd favorite, perhaps as a consequence of his brashness and willingness to bend the rules of the contest—which prohibited singing—to please the audience. But he was far from the only popular fiddler at the event. Gid Tanner, later the leader of the popular musical and comedic group the Skillet Lickers, performed and was photographed for the Musical America piece that follows; it was likely there that Tanner heard a string band known as the Lickskillet Orchestra, which likely influenced the name of Tanner’s later group. Additional fiddlers hailed from other parts of the South, allowing audiences, themselves arriving in Atlanta from the surrounding area, to hear a wide variety of fiddling styles and a tunes taken from traditional Irish fiddle music, as well as sentimental and minstrel songs.

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ATLANTA, GA., MARCH 16—This is the story of the recent gathering of a hundred Georgia country musicians, who played on wire-stringed fiddles unwritten tunes that tradition only has kept alive for years. It lasted for a whole week in the city auditorium in Atlanta, on the stage where the Metropolitan Opera stars will sing next month. There were “fiddlers” from the Blue Ridge mountains [sic] and the South Georgia marshes—a more nondescript collection has never before been grouped together on a single stage in Atlanta.

10. The hillbilly image of ignorant, lazy rural whites contrasted with an equally prominent image of the southern mountaineer as the last bastion of pure white masculinity in an era during which urban white men were increasingly concerned about the state of white masculinity. Several historians have traced this history, including Campbell, Music and the Making of a New South, 100–42; Harkins, Hillbilly, 3–9; and Huber, Linthead Stomp, 65–67.
It may have been the desire to hear “native” music, or the fact that many of Georgia’s most prominent men spent joyous moments of their boyhood at country dances, but, anyway, at the opening night the front row was occupied by Col. William Lawson Peel, president of the Atlanta Music Festival Association and one of the south’s leading bankers; Judge Richard Russell, of the Georgia Court of Appeals; James G. Woodward, mayor of Atlanta; Edwin Arthur Craft, Atlanta’s municipal organist, and many other notables.

AUDIENCE OF 5,000

From front row to back sat richly gowned society leaders, side by side with working folk in rough attire. The big auditorium was packed with 5,000 persons, and on the stage sat the most picturesque looking bunch of “fiddlers” imaginable.

The chairman signaled for silence. “The next, ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “is ‘Fiddlin’ John Carson, of Blue Ridge, Georgia.’

‘Fiddlin’ John edged forward to the cane-bottomed chair in the center of the stage, sat down, crossed his legs and tucked his “fiddle” under his chin. He drew his bow across the catgut, and his heel beat a staccato refrain on the floor as he coaxed out a familiar tune. The audience leaned forward. Droned “Fiddlin’ John:

“When I was playin’ wid my brudder,

“Happy was I.

“Oh, take me to my kind old mudder,

“There let me live and die.”

The audience began beating time to the refrain, and the Old Fiddlers’ convention was well under way!

Suddenly “Fiddlin’ John swung into the strains of “Hop, Light, Ladies.” Col. William Lawson Peel, musical expert, nudged Justice “Dick” Russell, of the Georgia Appellate Court, who sat next to him, and the two leaned forward. There was a soft shuffling of patent leather shoes on the floor, a little louder, louder still, and then—

“Swing your corners! Ladies change!” shouted Col. Peel, craning forward the better to watch the fiddler’s bow. “All hands ‘round!”

After that, joy reigned. Atlanta society folk shuffled their feet to the lilting strains of “Wild Hog in the Cane Brake” and cheered wildly when some unusually inspiring measure set the fiddlers to dancing. There was straw-beatin’ and jig-steppin’, singing and banjo-picking, and there was merriment from the first notes of “Cacklin’ Hen” to the final [strains] of the good old Georgia tune, “Mullinax.”

OLD TUNES RELISHED

It was the same on the second night and the following evenings. “Red-Necked” Jim Lawson of Milton County “woke ’em up” with “Joe Clark,” another “fiddler” played “Devil in the Wheat Patch” in an entrancing manner. Such tunes as “Old Zip Coon,” “Billy in the Low Ground,” “Katie Hill,” “Soapsuds Over the Fence” and “Moonshiner Bob” fairly poured from the fiddles.
And there was singing by Zeke Wardell, billed as the “Bald Mountain Caruso,” a young mountainer who turned out to be the possessor of a tenor that amazed his hearers.

On the last night of all the prizes were to be awarded to the best of all “fiddlers.” “Fiddlin’” John Carson started for the Auditorium in the early afternoon of that day, with many a pause to view the sights of the city. His beloved fiddle was tucked under his arm in a pillow slip, and at the heels, tugging at a bit of plow-line, trotted “Trail,” the sorriest looking hound that ever bayed at the moon.

“No dogs allowed,” said the janitor at the Auditorium, curtly.


“MOUNTAIN KUBELIK” AND HIS DOG

By this time the custodian of the building, who knew of “Fiddlin’” John’s fame, had reached the door. He admitted the “fiddler” and his dog, and that night the mountain Kubelik played while old “Trail” sang. His song was the echo of a fox chase under a Georgia moon, then a memory of the biggest coon ever treed. As he warned to his work his master’s playing became gradually a more *obbligato* to his solo.

When he paused “Fiddlin’” John laid down his violin as the audience cheered. The judges withdrew and “Fiddlin’” John sang “Run, Nigger, Run, Patterroll’ll Ketch You,“\(^\text{14}\) while they made up their decision.

“Fiddlin’” John then was declared the best of Georgia fiddlers, with “Shortly” Harper as next best, and the convention adjourned.

Georgia’s own peculiar music floated back to the hills and lowlands for another year’s tuning up preparatory to the next Old Fiddlers’ convention, and the stage was swept for grand opera.


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14. A popular and frequently documented song from the mid-nineteenth century, the song warned of “patrollers, or white guards; on duty at night during the days of slavery; whose duty it was to see that slaves without permission to go, stayed at home” (Thomas W. Talley, quoted in Charles K. Wolfe, ed., *Thomas W. Talley’s Negro Folk Rhymes* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991], 30. The song was recorded by musicians in Atlanta and Nashville (Guthrie T. Meade with Dick Spottswood and Douglas S. Meade, *Country Music Sources: A Biblio-Discography of Commerically Recorded Traditional Music* [Chapel Hill: Southern Folklife Collection, 2002], 762).
FOR FURTHER READING


Cecil B. Sharp

*English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*

(1917) [excerpt]

During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, amateur and professional folklorists scoured the Appalachian Mountains in search of ballads, or narrative songs, that had been carried to the region with the earliest British migrants and passed down through the oral tradition for hundreds of years. Informed by the work of Francis James Child, who had published five volumes of ballads from the British Isles between 1883 and 1898, folklorists and “songcatchers” such as Cecil Sharp and Olive Dame Campbell, among others, worked under the premise that the isolation of the central and southern Appalachians would have preserved linguistic and musical practices that dated to Shakespeare’s England. Scouring small towns and rural communities

throughout the Appalachian South, these scholars practiced what is commonly known as “salvage folklore” in a last-ditch effort to document these seemingly unchanged musical and literary practices before modern life encroached into the region.2 Although folklorists failed to consider Appalachia as a dynamic region that had engaged in commerce and cultural exchange with the rest of the American South for decades prior to their arrival, their efforts to document the region’s ballad traditions resulted in several valuable collections of music and lyrics that continue to inform traditional music-making throughout the region. Furthermore, many of the songs that were documented by Child, Sharp, and Campbell found their way onto early hillbilly recordings, often with string band accompaniments that refinshed the ballads for a contemporary audience.

The following excerpt, drawn from the preface of Campbell and Sharp’s landmark 1917 study _English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians_, presents Appalachia as an inherently musical region that unpretentiously bears the rich traditions of English balladry that had been nearly eradicated by the Industrial Revolution of Victorian England. Revealing their anxieties about the rapid modernization of British life, Sharp’s preface depicts Appalachia as an idyllic rural hinterland where song is tied to the rituals of everyday life. Although their portrait of the region was certainly grounded in some element of the truth, it is important to note that such romanticized portrayals of Appalachia later filtered into the marketing of early hillbilly music and helped to perpetuate stereotypes about the region for generations to follow.

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The effort that has been made to collect and preserve in permanent form the folk-songs of England during the last twenty or thirty years has resulted in the salvage of many thousands of beautiful songs. It was pardonable, therefore, if those who, like myself, had assisted in the task had come to believe that the major part of the work had been completed. So far as the collection in England itself was concerned, this belief was no doubt well founded. Nevertheless, in arriving at this very consolatory conclusion, one important, albeit not very obvious consideration had been overlooked, namely, the possibility that one or other of those English communities that lie scattered in various parts of the world might provide as good a field for the collector as England itself, and yield as bountiful and rich a harvest. The investigation which my colleague Mrs. Campbell began, and in which later on I came to bear a hand, has proved that at least one such community does in fact exist in the Southern Appalachian Mountains of North American. The region is an extensive one, covering some 110,000 square miles, and is considerably larger than England, Wales, and Scotland combined. It includes about one third


of the total area of the States of North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Alabama, and Georgia. The total population exceeds five millions, or, excluding city dwellers, about three millions.

**The Country and its Inhabitants.** The reader will, I think, be in a better position to appreciate and assess the value of the songs and ballads which form the major part of this volume if, by way of preface, I give some account of the way in which they were collected and record the impression which the inhabitants of this unique country made upon me. But I must beg him remember that I claim to speak with authority only with respect to that part of the mountain district into which I penetrated and that the statements and opinions which are now to follow must be accepted subject to this qualification.

I spent nine weeks only in the mountains, accompanied throughout by Miss Maud Karpeles, who took down, usually in shorthand, the words of the songs we heard, while I noted the tunes. Mr. John C. Campbell, the agent for the Southern Highland Division of the Russell Sage Foundation, went with us on our first expedition and afterwards directed our journeyings and, in general, gave us the benefit of his very full knowledge of the country and its people. Our usual procedure was to stay at one or other of the Presbyterian Missionary Settlements and to make it our centre for a week or ten days while we visited the singers who lived within a walking radius. In this way we successively visited Whit Rock, Allanstand, Alleghany and Carmen, Big Laurel and Hot Springs, in North Carolina, and thus succeeded in exploring the major portion of what is know as the Laural Country. Afterwards we spent ten days at Rock Fork, Tenn., and a similar period at Charlottesville, Va. I should add that had it not been for the generous hospitality extended to us by the heads of the Missionary Settlements at which we sojourned, it would have been quite impossible to prosecute our work.

The present inhabitants of the Laurel country are the direct descendants of the original settlers who were emigrants from England and, I suspect, the lowlands of Scotland. I was able to ascertain with some degree of certainty that the settlement of this particular section began about three or four generations ago, *i.e.* in the latter part of the eighteenth century or early years of the nineteenth. How many years prior to this the original emigration from England had taken place, I am unable to say; but it is fairly safe, I think, to conclude that the present-day residents of this section of the mountains are the descendants of those who left the shores of Britain some time in the eighteenth century.

The region is from its inaccessibility a very secluded one. There are but few roads—most of them little better than mountain tracks—and practically no railroads. Indeed, so remote and shut off from outside influence were, until quite recently, these sequestered mountain valleys that the inhabitants have for a hundred years or more been completely isolated and cut off from all traffic with the rest of the world. Their speech is English, not American, and, from the number of expressions they use which have long been obsolete elsewhere, and the old-fashioned way in which they pronounce many of their words, it is clear that they are talking the language of a past day, though exactly of what period I am not competent to decide. One peculiarity is perhaps worth the noting, namely the pronunciation of the impersonal pronoun with an aspirate—"hit"—a practice that seems to be universal.

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Economically they are independent. As there are practically no available markets, little or no surplus produce is grown, each family extracting from its holding just what is needed to support life, and no more. They have very little money, barter in kind being the customary form of exchange.

Many set the standard of bodily and material comfort perilously low, in order, presumably, that they may have the more leisure and so extract the maximum enjoyment out of life. The majority live in log-cabins, more or less water-tight, usually, but not always, lighted with windows; but some have built larger and more comfortable homesteads.

They are a leisurely, cheery people in their quiet way, in whom the social instinct is very highly developed. They dispense hospitality with an openhanded generosity and are extremely interested in and friendly toward strangers, communicative and unsuspicious. “But surely you will tarry with us for the night?” was said to us on more than one occasion when, after paying an afternoon’s visit, we rose to say good-bye.

They know their Bible intimately and subscribe to an austere creed, charged with Calvinism and the unrelenting doctrines of determinism or fatalism. The majority we met were Baptists, but we met Methodists also, a few Presbyterians, and some who are attached to what is known as the “Holiness” sect, with whom, however, we had but little truck, as their creed forbids the singing of secular songs.4

They have an easy unaffected bearing and the unselfconscious manners of the well-bred. I have received salutations upon introduction or on bidding farewell, dignified and restrained, such as a courtier might make to his Sovereign. Our work naturally led to the making of many acquaintances, and, in not a few cases, to the formation of friendships of a more intimate nature, but on no single occasion did we receive anything but courteous and friendly treatment. Strangers that we met in the course of our long walks would usually bow, doff the hat, and extend the hand, saying, “My name is [———]; what is yours?” an introduction which often led to a pleasant talk and sometimes to singing and the noting of interesting ballads. In their general characteristics[,] they reminded me of the English peasant, with whom my work in England for the past fifteen years or more has brought me into close contact. There are differences, however. The mountaineers is freer in his manner, more alert, and less inarticulate than his British prototype, and bears no trace of the obsequiousness of manner which, since the Enclosure Acts robbed him of his economic independence and made of him a hired labourer, has unhappily characterized the English villager. The difference is seen in the way the mountaineer, as I have already said, upon meeting a stranger, removes his hat, offers his hand and enters into conversation, where the English labourer would touch his cap, or pull his forelock, and pass on.

A few of those we met were able to read and write, but the majority were illiterate. They are, however, good talkers, using an abundant vocabulary racily and often picturesquely. Although uneducated, in the sense in which that term is usually understood, they possess that elemental wisdom, abundant knowledge and intuitive understanding which those only who live in constant touch with Nature and face to face with reality seem to be able to acquire. It is

to be hoped that the schools which are beginning to be established in some districts, chiefly in the vicinity of the Missionary Settlements, will succeed in giving them what they lack without infecting their ideals, or depriving them of the charm of manner and the many engaging qualities which so happily distinguish them.

Physically, they are strong and of good stature, though usually spare in figure. Their features are clean-cut and often handsome; while their complexions testify to wholesome, out-of-door habits. They carry themselves superbly, and it was a never-failing delight to note their swinging, easy gait and the sureness with which they would negotiate the foot-logs over the creeks, the crossing of which caused us many anxious moments. The children usually go about barefooted, and, on occasion their elders too, at any rate in the summer time. Like all primitive peoples, or those who live under primitive conditions, they attain to physical maturity at a very early age, especially the women, with whom marriage at thirteen, or even younger, is not unknown.

I have been told that in past days there were blood-feuds—a species of vendetta—which were pursued for generations between members of certain families or clans; but, whenever circumstances connected with these were related to me, I was always given to understand that this barbarous custom had long since been discontinued. I have heard, too, that there is a good deal of illicit distilling of corn spirit by “moonshiners”, [sic] as they are called, in defiance of the State excise laws; but of this, again, I personally saw nothing and heard but little. Nor did I see any consumption of alcohol in the houses I visited. On the other hand, the chewing or snuffing of tobacco is a common habit amongst the young and old; but, curiously enough, no one smokes. Indeed, many looked askance at my pipe and I rarely succeeded in extracting more than a half-hearted assent to my request for permission to light it.

That the illiterate may nevertheless reach a high level of culture will surprise those only who imagine that education and cultivation are convertible terms. The reason, I take it, why these mountain people, albeit unlettered, have acquired so many of the essentials of culture is partly to be attributed to the large amount of leisure they enjoy, without which, of course, no cultural development is possible, but chiefly to the fact that they have one and all entered at birth into the full enjoyment of their racial heritage. Their language, wisdom, manners, and the many graces of life that are theirs, are merely racial attributes which have been gradually acquired and accumulated in past centuries and handed down generation by generation, each generation adding its quota to that which it received. It must be remembered, also, that in their everyday lives they are immune from that continuous, grinding, mental pressure, due to the attempt to “make a living,” from which nearly all of us in the modern world suffer. Here no one is “on the make”; commercial competition and social rivalries are unknown. In this respect, at any rate, they have the advantage over those who habitually spend the greater part of every day in preparing to live, in acquiring the technique of life, rather than in its enjoyment.

I have dwelt at considerable length upon this aspect of mountain life because it was the first which struck me and further, because, without a realization of this background, it will be difficult for the reader to follow intelligently what I have to say. But before I leave this part of my subject[,] I must, in self-justification, add that I am aware that the outsider does not always see the whole of the game, and that I am fully conscious that there is another and less lovely side of the picture which in my appreciation I have ignored. I have deliberately done so because that side has, I believe, already been emphasized, perhaps with unnecessary insistence, by other observers.
The Singers and their Songs. My sole purpose in visiting this country was to collect the traditional songs and ballads which I had heard from Mrs. Campbell, and knew from other sources, were still being sung there. I naturally expected to find conditions very similar to those which I had encountered in England when engaged on the same quest. But of this I was soon to be agreeably disillusioned. Instead, for instance, of having to confine my attention to the aged, as in England where no one under the age of seventy ordinarily possesses the folk-song tradition, I discovered that I could get what I wanted from pretty nearly every one I met, young and old. In fact, I found myself for the first time in my life in a community in which singing was as common and almost as universal a practice as speaking. With us, of course, singing is an entertainment, something done by others for our delectation, the cult and close preserve of a professional caste of specialists. The fact has been forgotten that singing is the one form of artistic expression that can be practiced without any preliminary study or special training; that every normal human being can sing just as every one can talk; and that it is, consequently, just as ridiculous to restrict the practice of singing to a chosen few as it would be to limit the art of speaking to orators, professors of elocution and other specialists. In an ideal society[,] every child in his earliest years would as a matter of course develop this inborn capacity and learn to sing the songs of his forefathers in the same natural and unselfconscious way in which he now learns his mother tongue and the elementary literature of the nation to which he belongs.

And it was precisely this ideal state of things that I found existing in the mountain communities. So closely, indeed, is the practice of this particular art interwoven with the ordinary avocations of everyday life that singers, unable to recall a song I had asked for, would often make some such remark as, “Oh, if only I were driving the cows home I could sing it at once!”. [sic] On one occasion, too, I remember that a small boy tried to edge himself into my cabin in which a man was singing to me and, when I asked him what he wanted, he said, “I always like to go where there is sweet music.” Of course, I let him in and, later one, when my singer failed to remember a song I had asked for, my little visitor came to the rescue and straightway sang the ballad from beginning to end in the true traditional manner, and in a way which would have shamed many a professional vocalist[. . . .] I have no doubt but that this delightful habit of making beautiful music at all times and in all places largely compensates for any deficiencies in the matter of reading and writing.

But, of course, the cultural value of singing must depend upon the kind of songs that are sung. Happily, in this matter the hillsman is not called upon to exercise any choice, for the only music, or, at any rate, the only secular music, that he hears and has, therefore, any opportunity of learning is that which his British forefathers brought with them from their native country and has since survived by oral tradition.

When, by chance, the text of a modern street-song succeeds in penetrating into the mountains[,] it is at once mated to a traditional tune […] and sometimes still further purified by being moulded into the form of a traditional ballad […] But this happens but rarely, for, strange as it may seem, these mountain valleys are in fact far less affected by modern musical influences than the most remote and secluded English village, where there is always a Parsonage or Manor house, or both, to link it to the outside world.

We found little or no difficulty in persuading those we visited to sing to us. To prove our interest in the subject and to arouse their memories, we would ourselves sometimes sing folk-songs that I had collected in England, choosing, for preference, those with which they were unacquainted. Very often they misunderstood our requirements and would give us hymns instead of the secular songs and ballads which we wanted; but that was before we had learned
to ask for “love-songs,” which is their name for these ditties. It was evident, too, that it was often assumed that strangers like ourselves could have but one object and that to “improve”, [sic] and their relief was obvious when they found that we came not to give but to receive.

It is no exaggeration to say that some of the hours I passed sitting on the porch (i.e. verandah) of a log-cabin, talking and listening to songs were amongst the pleasantest I have ever spent. Very often we would call upon some of our friends early in the morning and remain till dusk, sharing the mid-day meal with the family, and I would go away in the evening with the feeling that I had never before been in a more musical atmosphere, nor benefited more greatly by the exchange of musical confidences.

The singers displayed much interest in watching me take down their music in my note-book and when at the conclusion of a song I hummed over the tune to test the accuracy of my transcription they were as delighted as though I had successfully performed a conjuring trick.

The mountain singers sing in very much the same way as English folk-singers, in the same straightforward, direct manner, without any conscious effort at expression, and with the even tone and clarity of enunciation with which all folk-song collectors are familiar. Perhaps, however, they are less unselfconscious and sing rather more freely and with somewhat less restraint than the English peasant; I certainly never saw any one of them close the eyes when he sang nor assume that rigid, passive expression to which collectors in England have so often called attention.

They have one vocal peculiarity, however, which I have never noticed amongst English folk-singers, namely, the habit of dwelling arbitrarily upon certain notes of the melody, generally the weaker accents. This practice, which is almost universal, by disguising the rhythm and breaking up the monotonous regularity of the phrases, produces an effect of improvisation and freedom from rule which is very pleasing. The effect is most characteristic in 6/8 tunes, as, for example, No. 16G, in which in the course of the tune pauses are made on each of the three notes of the subsidiary triplets.

The wonderful charm, fascinating and well-nigh magical, which the folk-singer produces upon those who are fortunate enough to hear him is to be attributed very largely to his method of singing, and this, it should be understood, is quite as traditional as the song itself. The genuine folk-singer is never conscious of his audience—indeed, as often as not, he has none—and he never, therefore, strives after effect, nor endeavours in this or in any other way to attract the attention, much less the admiration of his hearers. So far as I have been able to comprehend his mental attitude, I gather that, when singing a ballad, for instance, he is merely relating a story in a peculiarly effective way which he has learned from his elders, his conscious attention begin wholly concentrated upon what he singing and not upon the effect which he himself is producing. This is more true, perhaps, of the English than of the American singers, some of whom I found were able mentally to separate the tune from the text—which English singers can rarely do—and even in some cases to discuss the musical points of the former with considerable intelligence.

FOR FURTHER READING


Another important source of country music mythology and imagery has been the music and lore of the American cowboy. Fascinating American audiences since the dime novels about cowboy life were widely circulated in the late nineteenth century, the cowboy’s life has been symbolic of Manifest Destiny, as well as American liberty and masculinity.¹ Although many popular cowboy singers performing at the height of the singing cowboy craze of the 1930s and 1940s sang compositions written by contemporary songwriters using modern harmonies and rhythms, cowboy singers have also drawn heavily from songs that have long histories on the ranges of North America.² A key source for many of these songs is folklorist John A. Lomax’s

Cowboys Songs and Other Frontier Ballads, first published in 1910. The collection, which also provided the source material for composer Aaron Copland's ballet Rodeo, included such famous songs as “I Ride an Old Paint,” “Jesse James,” and “The Cowboy’s Lament.” Like Cecil Sharp (see chapter 2) and Francis Child, Lomax was interested in preserving what was thought to be a dying vernacular art form, endangered by the end of America’s westward expansion, the rise of railroads, and the increasing urbanization of early-twentieth-century America. At the same time, he seemed to have little concern about efforts to commercialize cowboy singing, transcribing the songs in his collection to regularize rhythms and pitches so that others might sing them, and even aiding the career of a young singer and former student named Tex Ritter, who went on to an acclaimed career on stage and recordings.

In the excerpt that follows, extracted from the “Collector’s Note” that prefaced Cowboys Songs and Other Frontier Ballads, Lomax describes the role that singing played in the lives of mid-nineteenth-century cowboys, revealing that singing was a key entertainment on the long trail rides and cattle drives that they led, an essential tool used to move the cattle along, and a way of documenting their work and play. Lomax’s occasional lapses into romanticized language and comparisons between cowboys and the Knights of the Round Table also speak to his efforts to shape a distinctly American folklore built around the unique experiences of a diverse, multicultural America and equal to the lore of Europe.

“COLLECTOR’S NOTE”

Out in the wild, far-away places of the big and still unpeopled west,—in the cañons along the Rocky Mountains, among the mining camps of Nevada and Montana, and on the remote cattle ranches of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona,—yet survives the Anglo-Saxon ballad spirit that was active in secluded districts in England and Scotland even after the coming of Tennyson and Browning. This spirit is manifested both in the preservation of the English ballad and in the creation of local songs. Illiterate people, and people

5. Spanish spelling of canyons.
6. Victorian-era poets Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) and Robert Browning (1812–1889).
cut off from newspapers and books, isolated and lonely,—thrown back on
primal resources for entertainment and for the expression of emotion,—utter
themselves through somewhat the same character of songs as did their fore-
fathers of perhaps a thousand years ago. In some such way have been made
and preserved the cowboy songs and other frontier ballads contained in this
volume. The songs represent the operation of instinct and tradition. They are
chiefly interesting to the present generation, however, because of the light
they throw on the conditions of pioneer life, and more particularly because of
the information they contain concerning that unique and romantic figure in
modern civilization, the American cowboy.

The profession of cow-punching, not yet a lost art in a group of big
western states, reached its greatest prominence during the first two decades
succeeding the Civil War. In Texas, for example, immense tracts of open
range, covered with luxuriant grass, encouraged the raising of cattle. One
person in many instances owned thousands. To care for the cattle during
the winter season, to round them up in the spring and mark and brand the
yearlings, and later to drive from Texas to Fort Dodge, Kansas, those ready for
market, required large forces of men. The drive from Texas to Kansas came
to be known as “going up the trail,” for the cattle really made permanent,
deep-cut trails across the otherwise trackless hills and plains of the long way.
It also became the custom to take large herds of young steers from Texas as
far north as Montana, where grass at certain seasons grew more luxuriant
than in the south. Texas was the best breeding ground, while the climate and
grass of Montana developed young cattle for the market.

A trip up the trail made a distinct break in the monotonous life of the
big ranches, often situated hundreds of miles from where the conventions of
society were observed. The ranch community consisted usually of the boss,
the straw-boss, the cowboys proper, the horse wrangler, and the cook—often
a negro [sic]. These men lived on terms of practical equality. Except in the
case of the boss, there was little difference in the amounts paid each for his
services. Society, then, was here reduced to its lowest terms. The work of the
men, their daily experiences, their thoughts, their interests, were all in com-
mon. Such a community had necessarily to turn to itself for entertainment.
Songs sprang up naturally, some of them tender and familiar lays of child-
hood, others original compositions, all genuine, however crude and unpol-
ished. Whatever the most gifted man could produce must bear the criticism
of the entire camp, and agree with the ideas of a group of men. In this sense,
therefore, any song that came from such a group would be the joint product
of a number of them, telling perhaps the story of some stampede they had all
fought to turn, some crime in which they had all shared equally, some com-
rade’s tragic death which they had all witnessed. The song-making did not
cease as the men went up the trail. Indeed the songs were here utilized for very

7. For more on African American cowboys, consult Sara R. Massey, ed., Black
Cowboys of Texas (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).
practical ends. Not only were sharp, rhythmic yells—sometimes beaten into verse—employed to stir up lagging cattle, but also during the long watches the night-guards, as they rode round and round the herd, improvised cattle lullabies which quieted the animals and soothed them to sleep. Some of the best of the so-called “dogie songs” seem to have been created for the purpose of preventing cattle stampedes,—such songs coming straight from the heart of the cowboy, speaking familiarly to his herd in the stillness of the night.

The long drives up the trail occupied months, and called for sleepless vigilance and tireless activity both day and night. When at last a shipping point was reached, the cattle marketed or loaded on the cars, the cowboys were paid off. It is not surprising that the consequent relaxation led to reckless deeds. The music, the dancing, the click of the roulette ball in the saloons, invited; the lure of crimson lights was irresistible. Drunken orgies, reactions from months of toil, deprivation, and loneliness on the ranch and on the trail, brought to death many a temporarily crazed buckaroo. To match this dare-devilry, a saloon man in one frontier town, as a sign for his business, with psychological ingenuity painted across the broad front of his building in big black letters this challenge to God, man, and the devil: The Road to Ruin. Down this road, with swift and eager footsteps, has trod many a pioneer viking [sic] of the West. Quick to resent an insult real or fancied, inflamed by unaccustomed drink, the ready pistol always at his side, the tricks of the professional gambler to provoke his sense of fair play, and finally his own wild recklessness to urge him on,—all these combined forces sometimes brought him into tragic conflict with another spirit equally heedless and daring. Not nearly so often, however, as one might suppose, did he die with his boots on. Many of the most wealthy and respected citizens now living in border states served as cowboys before settling down to quiet domesticity.

A cow-camp in the seventies generally contained several types of men. It was not unusual to find a negro [sic] who, because of his ability to handle wild horses or because of his skill with a lasso, had been promoted from the chuck-wagon to a place in the ranks of the cowboys. Another familiar figure was the adventurous younger son of some British family, through whom perhaps became current the English ballads found in the West. Furthermore, so considerable was the number of men who had fled from the States because of grave impudence or crime, it was bad form to inquire too closely about a person’s real name or where he came from. Most cowboys, however, were bold young spirits who emigrated to the West for the same reason that their ancestors had come across the seas. They loved roving; the loved freedom; they were pioneers by instinct; an impulse set their faces from the East, put the tang for roaming in their veins, and sent them ever, ever westward.

That the cowboy was brave has come to be axiomatic. If his life of isolation made him taciturn, it at the same time created a spirit of hospitality, primitive and hearty as that found in the mead-halls of Beowulf. He faced the wind and the rain, the snow of winter, the fearful dust-storms of alkali desert wastes, with the same uncomplaining quiet. Not all his work was on the ranch and the trail. To the cowboy, more than to the goldseekers,
more than to Uncle Sam’s soldiers, is due the conquest of the West. Along his winding cattle trails the Forty-Niners found their way to California. The cowboy has fought back the Indians ever since ranching became a business and as long as Indians remained to be fought. He played his part in winning the great slice of territory that the United States took away from Mexico. He has always been on the skirmish line of civilization. Restless, fearless, chivalric, elemental, he lived hard, shot quick and true, and died with his face to his foe. Still much misunderstood, he is often slandered, nearly always caricatured, both by the press and by the stage. Perhaps these songs, coming direct from the cowboy’s experiences, giving vent to his careless and his tender emotions, will afford future generations a truer conception of what he really was than is now possessed by those who know him only through highly colored romances.

The big ranches of the West are now being cut up into small farms. The nester has come, and come to stay. Gone is the buffalo, the Indian warwhoop, the free grass of the open plain;—even the stinging lizard, the horned frog, the centipede, the prairie dog, the rattlesnake, are fast disappearing. Save in some of the secluded valleys of southern New Mexico, the old-time round-up is no more; the trails to Kansas and Montana have become grass-grown or lost in fields of waving grain; the maverick steer, the regal longhorn, has been supplanted by his unpoetic but more beefy and profitable Polled Angus, Durham, and Hereford cousins from across the seas. The changing and romantic West of the early days lives mainly in story and in song. The last figure to vanish is the cowboy, the animating spirit of the vanishing era. He sits his horse easily as he rides through a wide valley, enclosed by mountains, clad in the hazy purple of coming night,—with his face turned steadily down the long, long road, “the road that the sun goes down.” Dauntless, reckless, without the unearthly purity of Sir Galahad though as gentle to a pure woman as King Arthur, he is truly a knight of the twentieth century. A vagrant puff of wind shakes a corner of the crimson handkerchief knotted loosely at his throat; the thud of his pony’s feet mingling with the jungle of his spurs is borne back; and as the careless, gracious, lovable figure disappears over the divide, the breeze brings to the ears, faint and far yet cheery still, the refrain of a cowboy song:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Whoop\-pee ti yi, get along, little dogies;}
\textit{It’s my misfortune and none of your own.}
\textit{Whoop\-pee ti yi, get along, little dogies;}
\textit{For you know Wyoming will be your new home.}
\end{quote}

As for the songs of this collection, I have violated the ethics of balladgatherers, in a few instances, by selecting and putting together what seemed to be the best lines from different versions, all telling the same story. Frankly, the volume is meant to be popular. The songs have been arranged in some such haphazard way as they were collected,—jotted down on a table in the rear of saloons, scrawled on an envelope while squatting about a campfire, caught behind the scenes of a broncho-busting outfit. Later, it is hoped that enough interest will be aroused to justify printing all the variants of these songs, accompanied by the music and such explanatory notes as may be useful; the negro [sic] folk-songs, the songs of the lumber jacks, the songs of the mountaineers, and the songs of the sea, already partially collected, being included in the final publication. The songs of this collection, never before in print, as a rule have been taken down from oral recitation. In only a few instances have I been able to discover the authorship of any song. They seem to have sprung up as quietly and mysteriously as does the grass on the plains. All have been popular with the range riders, several being current all the way from Texas to Montana, and quite as long as the old Chisholm Trail stretching between these states. Some of the songs the cowboy certainly composed; all of them he sang. Obviously, a number of the most characteristic cannot be printed for general circulation. To paraphrase slightly what Sidney Lanier said of Walt Whitman’s poetry, they are raw collops slashed from the rump of Nature, and never mind the gristle. Likewise some of the strong adjectives and nouns have been softened,—Jonahed, as George Meredith would have said. There is, however, a Homeric quality about the cowboy’s profanity and vulgarity that pleases rather than repulses. The broad sky under which he slept, the limitless plains over which he rode, the big, open, free life he lived near to Nature’s breast, taught him simplicity, calm, directness. He spoke out plainly the impulses of his heart. But[,] as yet[,] so-called polite society is not quite willing to hear.

Source: John A. Lomax, Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads (New York: Macmillan, 1910), xvii–xxv.

FOR FURTHER READING


“What the Popularity of Hill-Billy Songs Means in Retail Profit Sensibilities:

The Widespread Vogue of the Funereal Type of Songs Is Attested by Publishers and Record Manufacturers—Is It of Significance as Indication of Public Taste?”

(1925)

The Talking Machine World was the most important consumer and trade publication treating the products and practices of the recording industry in the first decades of the twentieth century, and its contributors frequently used their columns to editorialize about the state of contemporary musical tastes. Emerging alongside jazz and blues recordings, hillbilly recordings proved particularly problematic for some writers who were puzzled by the widespread acceptance of

“low-brow” musical entertainments that were created by marginalized peoples: working-class blacks and whites. Many contemporary commentators saw the popularity of these genres not as evidence of American music’s richness but as a sign of the nation’s aesthetic and moral decay. Although the writer in the excerpt that follows is hopeful that the rise of hillbilly recordings in the mid-1920s might diminish the popularity of jazz (which, by virtue of its obvious associations with African American culture, was deemed to be a serious problem), he also does not appear to appreciate Sharp’s and Lomax’s assertions that these songs might represent the truest expressions of American, and even European, folk cultures. Rather, the simplicity of hillbilly music’s “weird funereal offerings” is cast here as little more than a welcome respite from the complex jazz arrangements.

At the same time, this report also highlights the important role that sheet music sales played in the success of the early-twentieth-century music industry. The essayist’s excitement about the “return to songs” suggests that people might purchase sheet music of these new compositions so that they could play them in their own homes, just as they had during the nineteenth-century heyday of the American popular song publishing. Dance arrangements, it seems, were not as lucrative as the new hillbilly songs, no matter how déclassé they may have seemed.

The advent or revival, or whatever you choose to call it, of what are described as the “hill-billy” songs signifies more than the mere vogue of such publications. The “Death of Floyd Collins,” “Wreck of the Shenandoah,” “At My Mother’s Grave,” and other such songs which have had fairly widespread popularity may mark the initial move in the passing of jazz. Whether or not the popularity of such works continues, it is questionable that music lovers will accept the situation as an improvement. This, however, and other indications show a grasping out on the part of music purchasers for something besides the generally over-arranged jazz offerings.

It must be remembered that these weird funereal musical offerings have been preceded by several months by other offerings, the outstanding

3. Kathy J. Ogren has noted that, during the 1920s, “many critics of jazz attacked the music as ‘noise,’ and compared it to a plague or disease threatening to destroy the civilized world. Most criticisms clustered around moral, aesthetic, or professional values challenged by jazz. All objections by whites to the music were, of course, based on the premise that blacks were inferior to whites” (Kathy J. Ogren, *The Jazz Revolution: Twenties America and the Meaning of Jazz* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 153).
feature of which was that they were in most simplified song form. In fact, some of the outstanding record sellers to-day and for the past few months have been solo numbers with minor accompaniment. All of this undoubtedly shows the earmarks of a new phase of the popular music and record business. It would seemingly demonstrate that the public is returning to songs. The first love, of course, is songs of the ballad order because they are the most impressive, have the widest appeal and sale. We may expect other types of songs to follow closely. Probably we have had an over-production of songs of the fox-trot order and in self-defense the public has revolted and turned to that which was a most radical change, the sob songs of several generations ago, brought up to date and made into a pathetic song on some current topical event or catastrophe. Psychologically this can be answered, it being well known that when groups revolt, they go to extremes.

The fact that the public or a fair portion of it has decided on a funeral dirge type of offering should not be taken as an atavistic tendency. It is rather a desire for something different. This desire can be taken advantage of by both the popular publisher and record maker, and songs of good ballad order, love songs and other numbers particularly lending themselves to solo voices with a minimum of arrangement should meet the situation and bring on a period of prosperity that would be far larger than the results obtained by merely catering to what may be a limited vogue for songs of pathos. Probably one of the best points for the publisher and record maker to remember in the present trend of public taste is the fact that at least for some period the sales of dance music will not markedly depreciate. It will probably be many months before any real indentation will be made in the sales of such works. The demands for songs are to a great extent added sales.

As far as dance music is concerned there is hardly a likelihood that any considerable change will be made in the demand for dance. The situation may indicate, however, that we need a new type of dance or a new type of dance music. Something in more simplified form and one holding continuously to the melody of the piece without diverting to super accompaniments.

The modern dance orchestra despite its many weaknesses, none of which is eradicable, has performed a very big work in disseminating music to the great multitudes. Not only that, but it has been the means of acting as an incentive to hundreds of thousands of the younger generation who have taken up musical instruments of every class from the lowly ukulele to our almost as popular saxophone. None would wish to see a trend in musical taste that would in any measure kill off this power that is influencing, musically, so many of the younger generation.

5. Sparse instrumental accompaniment.