

FTJ 71

Folklife Traditions Journal
Traddodiadau Bywyd Gwerin

Sept 2022 Medi

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version,
adapted from
FW as printed



Gwilym Davies, 1946-2022



Women in Traditional Folk Song by Rosie Upton
The Three (or Two) Crows by Charles Menteith
Who was Kishmul? by Roy & Lesley Adkins

Kalenda maya, the troubadours, and the lessons of traditional music by Ian Pittaway

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the Folklife Traditions Journal pages
from **Folklife West print magazine**

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Tar Barrel Rolling, Ottery St Mary, Devon; 5th Nov. Photo © Colin Davies.

See our "SEASONAL LOCAL CELEBRATIONS" listings, back cover.



Abbots Bromley Horn Dance, Abbots Bromley, Staffs, 1st Mon. after 1st Sun. after 4 Sept; and **Mari Lwyd**, different places - different days, S.E. Wales; before Christmas to New Year's Day. Photos © Doc Rowe.



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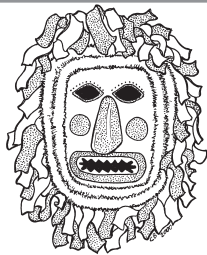
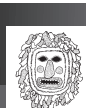
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* Researched articles & folklife news, plus adverts from Folklife West *



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Sept 2022

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The FTJ PAGES ARE INCLUDED WITH FOLKLIFE WEST PRINT MAGAZINE, SEE folklife-traditions.uk

Folklife Traditions Journal ♦ Traddodiadau Bymyd Gwerin

FW's FOLKLIFE TRADITIONS JOURNAL

Our aims include stimulating a wider interest in folk studies & folk culture: the FT Journal

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DIRECTORY summaries from online www.folklife-traditions.uk

- ♦ FOLKLIFE SOCIETIES list online only on above website
- ♦ FOLKLIFE STUDIES & INSTITUTIONS list on website
- ♦ SEASONAL LOCAL CELEBRATIONS, list & photos mostly by Doc Rowe back cover, + front cover photos

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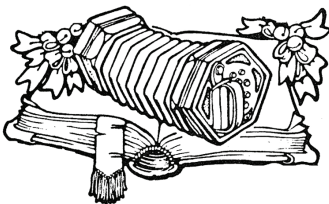
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• FTJ Archive: individual FTJ issues, index, links to articles

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Thanks to John Crane, who has kindly reworked his logo for the editors' former Book End Folk Books for reuse for the Journal.

Call for articles for next issue.

Readers tell us - how much they enjoy these articles - so we'd like more!

From next issue, we'd like to make the Journal also available separately.

1. Researched articles about a collected song or tune, word limits: no minimum - we get articles which are anything from just a song and a few lines or up to 500 words; other articles are often 1000 to 1500, our maximum is 2500 words.
2. To introduce society, institution, etc, up to 1000 words. Thereafter, short news items/dates from society, institutions welcome; longer items, please consult editor. Photo(s) welcome, usually printed mono, but may be in colour on cover if room (depends on adverts).

Folklife news: societies & organisations



trac, Music Traditions Wales ®

The folk development organisation for Wales, which works to promote our traditional music, dance and song at home and beyond. It is funded by the Arts Council of Wales and the Welsh Government. www.trac.cymru

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- Tunes: get playing videos, soundfiles, and dots. <https://resources.trac.wales/tunes>

trac organises Gwerin Gwallgo, a residential Folk Weekend for 11-18s [see our *FESTIVALS & WORKSHOPS DIARY*]

See trac website, <https://trac.wales>, for news, directory, listings, resources, and on Facebook, at facebook.com/traccymruwales, where you will find videos, details of online gigs, etc. @ trac, Music Traditions Wales, trac<at>trac.cymru, 01446 748 556, <https://trac.wales>



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Folk singer and researcher Dr Fay Hield at The University of Sheffield is leading a team of academics and community partners to work together to identify the current problems and test out potential solutions.

Access Folk is built on co-production principles where the people affected have real power to direct the research.

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Anyone over 18 with ideas or experience that feed into the specialist areas can join the Consulting Groups. We are looking for professional experience and marginalised lived experience in particular, though all with an interest are welcome.

In the coming months there will be opportunities to get involved through a folk singers' survey to understand what existing singers get out of it and an events survey to see where folk singing is happening. We will also be recruiting for 'ask a friend' activities to explore the experience of people who don't currently sing. People are invited to sign up to the Newsletter via the website for more information.

More information about Access Folk can be found here: <https://accessfolk.sites.sheffield.ac.uk/about> More information about the Consulting Groups can be found here: <https://accessfolk.sites.sheffield.ac.uk/activities/consulting-groups/call-to-action>

To speak to the team, please contact: accessfolk@sheffield.ac.uk or 0114 222 0466.



Access Folk Team 2022, L to R: Dr Fay Hield; Helen Grindley, Project Manager; Esbjörn Wettermark, Research Associate.



Folklife West is a 56-page magazine with articles (**FTJ pages**), folk news, and adverts. It is run by a non-profit group of volunteers, and has always run at a loss . . .

Below, our general information page about **Folklife West** - also copied online, free to view, on www.folklife.uk

Additionally, from next issue (Jan. 2023), we will also sell **FTJ** separately - this online edition being a trial run for that.

- The annual cost for 3 issues will be £10 UK, £16 EU, £20 rest of world.
- For payment details, please see foot of page.
- The same adverts will appear in **Folklife West** and in **FTJ**, costs as below.
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❖ SEP 2022 ❖ FOLKLIFE WEST, No 71 ❖

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We are not a reviews magazine, we recommend **Living Tradition**.
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Deadlines

- **FW Jan** < Jan • Feb • Mar • Apr > **Copy by 20 Nov**
- **FW May** < May • Jun • Jul • Aug > **Copy by 20 Mar**
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Changes after deadline? Possibly, conditions are:

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- News must be **no longer than previously sent** ... by 6 Dec, Apr, Aug

Articles for Folklife Traditions Journal pages ... 2 months (= 1 Nov, Mar, Jul)

- **Non-Members' news** to Correspondents 2 months (= 1 Nov, Mar, Jul)



Kalenda maya, the troubadours, and the lessons of traditional music

by Ian Pittaway



Raimbaut de Vaqueiras as depicted in a 14th century French manuscript (BnF ms. 854, folio 75v).

this is the largest single collection, and one of only two manuscripts dedicated entirely to this repertoire.

Kalenda maya is one of the most well-known pieces of medieval music. It is a 12th century song by troubadour, Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, one of the Occitanian (later southern French) poets and singers who developed the musical tradition of *fin'amor*, refined or perfect love. This article discusses the problems of interpreting the notation of *Kalenda maya*, penned when written music was still developing in medieval Europe. Can there be a definitive version when there are textual variants of the same song or melody? How credible are renditions of *Kalenda maya* that impose a musical rhythm not present on the original page? And what does the folk music tradition, which faces similar issues of variation and interpretation, have to teach us?



The melody of *Kalenda maya* can be heard played two ways on medieval gittern at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYq8VMcM1cs>

Interpreting the manuscript I: the definitive version

Raimbaut de Vaqueiras and other troubadours, Occitanian poets and singers of the 11th to 13th centuries, developed the musical tradition of *fin'amor* of which *Kalenda maya* is part. The source of the song is a manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 22543) written in western Provence in c. 1300, now known as troubadour manuscript R, entirely dedicated to troubadour songs, preserving 950 poems, 160 with their melodies. Though there are a large number of 13th and 14th century manuscripts including troubadour material,

Another version of the *Kalenda maya* melody is used in an anonymous trouvère song, *Souvent souspire mon cuer* – *Often sighs my heart* – in a 14th century manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque l'Arsenal MS 5198). The trouvères were the French counterparts of the Occitanian troubadours. The five verses of *Souvent souspire* are on the same theme as *Kalenda maya*: she is beautiful; I am hopelessly in love with her; she doesn't want me; I am heart-broken.

The troubadours in the south and the trouvères in the north of (what is now) France developed a large body of songs which were being committed to writing during the same period. There has been much academic discussion and disagreement over the accuracy and interpretation of their written music.

The first issue is one of musical provenance. Many troubadour songs exist in different versions showing significant melodic variations. This is a problem if one is seeking an original or definitive version. I would argue that variants are no problem at all since variation is a necessary feature of the musical milieu of these songs, as it is with other traditional, communally-shared music to this day.



Daniel Francis O'Neill

Captain Daniel Francis O'Neill

In the first three decades of the 20th century, Captain Daniel Francis O'Neill, Chief of Police in Chicago, and his notation assistant, Sergeant James O'Neill (no relation), collected traditional Irish tunes for the book first published in 1907, now known as *O'Neill's 1001 Gems: The Dance Music of Ireland*, or *O'Neill's Music of Ireland*, or *O'Neill's 1001 Jigs, Reels, Hornpipes, Airs and Marches*. The tunes they collected from Irish-American pipers and fiddlers had been transmitted from person to person, from generation to generation. James O'Neill wanted to write accurate notation so, when he asked a musician to play a piece again, perturbed that it wasn't what he'd played last time, the player responded, 'But that's the point!'

Raimbaut died in 1205, and his *Kalenda maya* was written down a century later in a musical milieu that was orally transmitted, not fixed in writing. In other words, the troubadour repertoire was accessed in the same way as other traditional forms of music, evolving over time, passed from person to person, not fixed or final. In a later era, 17th century broadside ballads such as *Barbara Allen* and *John Barleycorn* became traditional songs, spreading around regions of England and to other countries and continents of the English-speaking world, spawning multiple different versions of their lyrics and melodies, being sung in all their variant versions even to this day. The effect of their travel and the fact that singers were active participants in a living oral tradition meant that each consciously or unconsciously changed note, word or phrase was potentially passed on into the tradition and sung by others. Sometimes a song would travel for miles and years virtually unaltered; other times new singers would spawn verses and melodies that accumulated such a degree of change that they transformed its identity into what became a new branch of the song's family tree.

Having different versions of words or a melody is only a problem if we seek a 'definitive version' and expect all manuscripts and sung renditions to be faithful copies of one 'true original'. There are two cultural clashes at play here, the first medieval, the second more universal.

The first clash is between the rigidly fixed and repeatable music of the church and secular musical freedom. Large elements of the medieval church considered any personal expression or deviation in music to be hubris, bringing attention to oneself rather than giving glory to God. Composers of new church music had to find ways around this stricture if their music was to be heard, and they did so by adding elaborate new voices to existing, well-established music. This was still too much for some ecclesiastical fundamentalists. It is instructive that Robert of Courçon (Robert Curzon), English cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church and one of the angry voices railing against an individual singer's or composer's creativity, called deviation from plainchant "minstrelish and effeminate ... wanton singers ... they may be tolerated if they avoid minstrelish little notes" (*Summae de eiusdem*, early 13th century). In other words, they may be tolerated if they do not add flourishes as secular singers do, as that emphasises the individual identity of the singer, which must be hidden to give glory to God. The fundamentalist ecclesiastical dream was of an unbroken tradition



of church music, plainly sung, passed on orally and faithfully and replicated note for note from before the days of written music notation.

It was doomed from the start: singers cannot help creative deviations, whether they want to do it or not. As ecclesiastical music theorist Johannes Cotto (John Cotton or Johannes Afflighemensis) wrote in his *De musica cum tonario*, c. 1100, “For one says, ‘Master Trudo taught it to me thus,’ another adds, ‘But I learned it this way from Master Albinus,’ and a third, ‘Certainly Master Salomon sings it very differently’.” And lest I delay you with more obscurity, it is rare that three people agree about one chant. For surely so long as everyone prefers his own master, there are as many variations in singing as there are Masters in the world.” If you are a singer yourself and learn music by heart for performance rather than singing from notation, you’ve probably had the same experience as me, akin to the phenomenon described by Johannes Cotto: you forget a line, go back to the music, read through the song as originally learned, not seen in some years, and exclaim: ‘Did I really ever sing *that*? But I *must* have done!’

The problem of seeking a ‘definitive version’ also raises the clash between the artist-as-individual, wishing to protect the integrity of their work, and communal creativity in a largely oral/aural culture. The individual artist’s wish for fixity and control on the one hand, and the fluidity and unpredictability of music that is publically shared on the other, were somewhat at odds even within the era of troubadour activity. While there are clear examples of textual relationships between written troubadour compositions, there are also significant differences in music which can only be accounted for by variations created by the oral tradition. It is entirely understandable that a songwriter such as a troubadour, with their name to a song, wishes their art to be preserved as they originally made it. However, the predominant oral tradition, with its accretions and improvisations, made identical transmission impossible. If some troubadours disliked this fact, they were fighting the inevitable, and an important means by which their work was carried.

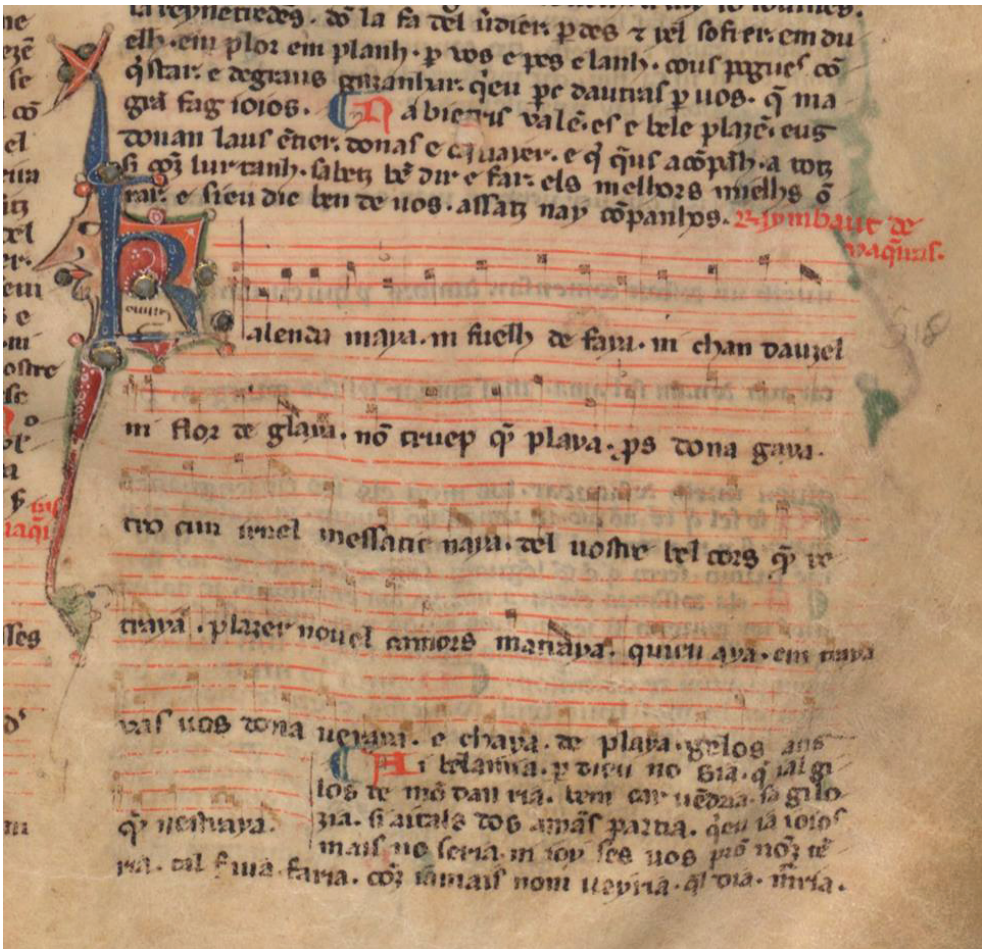
It follows that, in a predominantly oral culture, a ‘definitive version’ is a vain hope. I suggest we accept this as a testament to the richness of communally-carried music. If the story of Raimbaut de Vaqueiras hearing an estampie and remoulding it into *Kalenda maya* is true, then the melody of the song is already neither definitive nor original, being derived from a previous instrumental melody. Since we don’t know the circumstance of the composition of *Souvent souspire* and the precise relationship between it and *Kalenda maya*, we cannot give precedence to either version of the melody. It may be that two composers had the idea of using the same melody quite independently, so one was not based on the other, but both were based on a common ancestor; or it may be that *Souvent souspire* is derived directly from *Kalenda maya*. This question can never be answered, nor does it need to be: we can accept both songs as products of a multifarious oral tradition.

Interpreting the manuscript II: notation

The second issue is the accuracy of notation once the music has been committed to writing. Even when fixed in ink, a monophonic text cannot tell us about the accompaniment, the composer’s preferred instrumental arrangement (if any); his/her vocal style (there were male and female troubadours: trobador and trobairitz); or the pace of a particular song. A continuing question among medieval music scholars is how to interpret some of the earliest music manuscripts that are non-mensural, i.e. they do not indicate melodic rhythm.

There have been a range of theoretical solutions to the problem of rhythm in troubadour songs, still debated today. I don’t intend to rehearse all the suggested solutions and arguments here, except to say that the theoretical basis of all these solutions share the same level of corroboration in the troubadour texts and other sources of the time: none at all, since the texts are silent on the matter, and no music theorist of the medieval period discussed the subject.

Interpreting the manuscript III: the rhythm of *Kalenda maya*



Notation for *Kalenda maya* in Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds français 22543, f. 62r; giving the music and naming the author, Raimbaut de Vaqueiras.

CONTINUES OVER PAGE

We welcome researched songs and tunes, and details of local traditions, for these
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Kalenda maya, the troubadours, and the lessons of traditional music by Ian Pittaway

FROM PAGE 5

Those who believe *Kalenda maya* to have been written non-mensurally need a principle on which to add rhythm to what is seen on the page. The basis for doing so is the medieval church's rhythmic modes, six underlying pulses for ecclesiastical chant. They were as follows.

Medieval rhythmic modes

1 2 3 4

5 6

Rhythmic modes can be helpful in giving shape to a secular melody written non-mensurally, but this method has problems. In early music debates there has been a great deal of controversy over whether these modes apply only to the polyphonic ecclesiastical music for which they were explicitly intended or also to monophonic secular music of the period. In other words, it is a question of whether the rhythmic modes were only part of the musical life of the church or a reflection of music-making generally.

This debate has aroused great passion among modern early music theorists, but lack of evidence means that definitive answers are not possible for any particular piece of non-mensural secular music. Nevertheless, the favoured 20th century versions of *Kalenda maya* are based on the first rhythmic mode, shown below in modern notation. There are other similar versions, i.e. other rhythmic solutions in the first mode.

My second rendering of *Kalenda maya* follows what I take to be the rhythmic signs given in the manuscript. It seems to me that the scribe in this piece – and throughout the whole of this manuscript – appears to have written intentional mensural neumes, using the long as the foundational value; with ligatures to indicate melismata (a single syllable sung on more than note); occasional plicas, tails indicating an additional note; and vertical lines indicating caesuras or rests.



Both of these versions of the melody are conjectural. The first version uses the first rhythmic mode, which may or may not have been intended. The second version takes the notation as mensural, which the scribe may or may not have intended. Other solutions are theoretically possible. *Kalenda maya* can easily be played in the second rhythmic mode, for example.

Such are the problems in attempting to arrive at a musically credible and performable version of *Kalenda maya*. Plausible answers are possible. Provable answers are more elusive.

Creative conclusion



Above: The oral tradition, the historically predominant way of transmitting music: not a note of written music to be seen. Communal creativity and variation are not only encouraged, but inevitable.

Where music was written non-mensurally, the contemporaneous musician familiar with the melody would have filled in the rhythm from memory, but after several hundred years we either have to let the music remain silent or be creative – by reference to rhythmic modes or otherwise – to make it playable. This necessarily creates for us a range of variant readings, and we are in similar territory to the traditional musician, reshaping and remoulding the raw material that has been passed down into a piece of musical art that is at once communal and yet highly personal.

Secular medieval music was never intended to be simply sung or played from the page. If Raimbaut felt free to adapt and change the melody he heard then, in the light of early music practice, surely we can, too. After all, through most of history, the vast majority of musicians have been part of a creative oral tradition that is not tied rigidly to a manuscript or set unalterably in stone by an individual composer. We see this in the troubadour and trouvère traditions, despite them having named composers; we see it in medieval song variants, such as *Kalenda maya* and *Souvent souspire* and similar examples; and we see it still in O'Neill's Irish-American fiddlers and pipers and in traditional music around the world. As the musician said to note-taker James O'Neill when O'Neill complained that it wasn't what he'd played last time: 'But that's the point!'

This is an edited version of the article at <https://earlymusicmuse.com/kalendamaya/> which includes a video performance on gittern of the two versions of *Kalenda maya*.

Ian Pittaway © 2022

Early Music Muse: musings on medieval, renaissance and traditional music, <https://earlymusicmuse.com>, is a site is written by Ian Pittaway, singer and player of medieval, renaissance and early baroque music on period instruments – harp, lute, bray harp, cittern, gittern, citole, etc. – and traditional/folk music on modern guitars in various tunings.

Folklife news from societies & organisations : updates

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Women in Traditional Folk Song *by* Rosie Upton

I suspect this article may be controversial with accusations of sweeping generalisations, bias and that I've simply got it wrong! When I was invited several years ago to make a presentation about the role of women in folk song my first thought was of Joan Baez singing the Wagoner's Lad:

"Oh, hard is the fortune of all woman kind
She's always controlled, she's always confined
Controlled by her parents until she's a wife
A slave to her husband the rest of her life"

This verse I recently learnt after hearing a talk by Vic Gammon, originated in a ballad opera The Country Bumpkin written by Henry Cary in 1730. A verse that accurately reflects the position of women at that time and beyond.

The abuse of women in varying degrees by their husbands who believed it was their absolute right was endemic in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries. Women were regarded as little more than a chattel with few legal rights to property or money until the Married Women's Property Act of 1870. It was culturally acceptable and legally sanctioned that husbands had the right to beat their wives as a form of correction. The perpetrators were rarely reported partly because their wives, who usually suffered in silence, were fearful that if they complained their situation would only be made worse. There was no escape from the marital home for most women and divorce was not an option for the poor even after the first divorce law The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. For many young women, especially the wealthier classes, the suitability of future husbands and their marriage was controlled by their parents and the stigma for all of remaining unmarried was an even worse fate. Attitudes may have changed in most societies today but discrimination against women still exists as does domestic abuse.

Ever since I wrote my student dissertation (in the early 1970s) on the pamphlet literature of Mother Shipton the Yorkshire Witch, I've been interested in how women have been portrayed in pamphlets, broadsides and through song. Mother Shipton was not portrayed as some kindly soothsayer or even as wise female Nostradamus but as an 'ugly' old woman covered in warts.

Women throughout the past, with a few notable exceptions, have either been written out of history, forgotten or demeaned and their work marginalised. It is all too often, though not always, the same narrative in traditional folk song. I'm not suggesting that there aren't many songs and ballads that are supportive of women, nor that all men are to blame, but there are too many that conform to the stereotype. It isn't surprising really, given that history was written by men. Most broadside writers, printers and sellers would have been men. Too often throughout history our achievements have gone un-noticed, ignored by a patriarchy prejudiced against us. The voices of too many women forgotten and their contribution to our lives erased.

I must at this point play tribute to the numerous women folk song collectors most notably Lucy Broadwood, Maud Karpeles and Anne Geddes Gilchrist, the many others as well as their male counterparts who collected songs and made a valuable record of songs and tunes previously only passed on through the oral tradition. Many of these songs collected from and sung by women.

We need to set the record straight and perhaps there has become a need for us not just to write our own history but our own songs, which I'm pleased is happening today more than ever. Obviously paying tribute to women like Peggy Seeger and some of my favourite songwriters such as Karine Polwart and Grace Petrie whose iconic songs really resonate about the lives of women in the 20th and 21st centuries. And of course the women singers who continue to sing traditional folk songs today.

The role of women in folk song can all too often be limited to the love interest, for humour or worse, and to be sexually exploited. A view generally accepted by male-controlled society in the past and regrettably by some even today! These songs that are indicative of the vulnerability of women.

In traditional ballads we are frequently un-named when we are wronged or acts of violence perpetrated against us. We are more often than not simply the victims. Our back stories are unheard and the exact nature and reason for crimes against us untold. Folk songs mirror society so it is perhaps not unexpected. Gender based violence is all too common and we are victims of misogyny – rape, murder, domestic violence. The perpetrator in such songs often takes centre stage, we learn a lot about him and his crimes, whereas the victim is marginalised, we know very little about her and hear little of her own story. She is merely the rape or murder victim. There are many ways in which women are vulnerable, the most obvious is to seduction and pregnancy. We have been, and continue to be, exploited and brutalised in life and this is reflected in song.

There are numerous examples in folk song but I select a few here because they are well known and the reader will be familiar with the stories.

It is jealousy in 'Worcester City' or 'Poison in a Glass of Wine' (Roud 218) that results in a murder which the assailant justifies by taking her in his arms and saying he has drunk the poison and will die with her. It is indicative of the power or abusive control a man can wield over a woman so clearly evidenced by domestic violence today. In too many murder ballads we don't know why she was killed. Was it rape, was she pregnant, was he jealous or was it revenge? There are in some ballads such as 'Banks of Red Roses' (Roud 603) an implied sense of remorse or is it merely guilt?

It is this same misogyny that often leads to suicide in many folk songs. The young woman is powerless, dishonoured, demeaned, discarded or deserted - usually when she finds herself pregnant. We do well to remember that there were few options in the past for a young single woman finding herself pregnant and unmarried. 'Died for Love' (Roud 60) is a sadly familiar story of a young woman deserted by the father of her child. If her family failed to support her there were few alternatives but the work house or suicide.

There are plenty of songs about young girls desirous of marrying, or looking forward to it, as there were few other options. The fear of being left unmarried was great because for the 'spinster' the choices were loneliness, looking after ageing parents, poverty and shame.

'Bedlam City' (Roud 968) and 'Maid in Bedlam' or 'Through Moorfields' (Roud 605) sadly mirroring Victorian society where a woman could be incarcerated through no fault of her own. Though many regard 'I Live not where I Love' (Roud 593) as the most perfect love song, the final verse could imply that the young woman raves about finding her lover who had made false promises and deserted her. No doubt suicide in the mountains being preferable to incarceration in Bedlam!

It is the woman who is the murderer in 'The Cruel Mother' (Child 20, Roud 9) but we aren't told why she did it or why is she condemned. This is a particularly cruel title. The fault cannot be hers alone, surely the father has some responsibility. He may have forced himself on her. Whose children were they anyway? The children of her lover, the man who raped, abused or victimised her, her brother, father or as in some versions her father's clerk. Incest is suggested in numerous songs such as 'Lucy Wan' (Child 51, Roud 234), 'The Bonny Hind' (Child 50, Roud 205) and 'Sheath and Knife' (Child 16, Roud 3960) in which the pregnant girl is apparently killed to prevent discovery. Incest was rightly a taboo subject but not uncommon.

In 'Little Musgrave' and 'Matty Groves' (Child 81, Roud 52) Lord Barnard's wife commits adultery but does she really deserve to die and her lover,



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and the Maid' is one such example away with it.

The ability to outwit men by cross-dressing in the pursuit of love and to secure a husband, rather than as a representation of her sexuality, are completely improbable and romantic. Songs such as 'Sovay, Sovay' or 'The Female Highwayman' (Roud 7) who dresses as a highwayman to prove the faithfulness of her lover, or in songs like the 'Golden Glove' or 'Squire of Tamworth' (Roud 141) where the woman gives up marriage to a wealthy and powerful man to dress as a hunter to secure the farmer she really loves. If only life was so simple. More realistic are songs where women disguise themselves as men in order to go to sea or into battle, and there are a few well documented historical cases, one even being admitted as a Chelsea Pensioner! But alas, for the most part these songs merely reinforce the belief that the traditional role of a woman is to be a wife. Would the 'Female Cabin Boy' (Roud 239) really consent to the captain's advances or was she simply used for his gratification? I would have preferred the heroine in 'William Taylor' (Roud 158) rather than just wanting to find her true love had actually just gone to sea because she had a spirit of adventure and that was what she wanted to do. At least in some versions she's made a bold commander!

There was a widely held superstition, still held in some parts, that women on ships brought bad luck. The woman's fate in 'Banks of Green Willow' (Roud 172) is to be drowned with her child after being courted by a sea captain. Did he lure her to sea, demanding she brings her "father's gold and mother's money", in order to dispose of her and gain her riches? I am rather fond of the final verse in a version collected by Alfred Williams in which he shows remorse.

Well it's probably time to end before I make too many enemies. After all for every Cinderella there is a Prince Charming and a couple of Ugly Sisters. So in folk song we must not forget the false nurses, the evil tempresses, the malicious witches, the malign mythical creatures and of course the Wicked Stepmother. But surely these are yet another way of demeaning women.

Rosie Upton © 2022

❖ I've been singing, promoting, writing and teaching about the folk music of these islands for the last 40+ years. I'm based in the small Wiltshire market town of Bradford on Avon and regularly travel to all parts. Contact me on rosieupton@icloud.com www.rosieupton.co.uk

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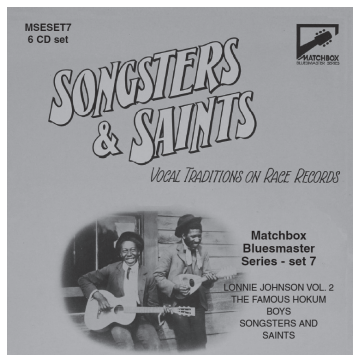


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A crow (from J.G. Wood 1872 *The Illustrated Natural History: Birds*, p.391), illustration from Roy & Lesley Adkins, for article *The Twa Corbies*, in our previous issue.



The Three (or Two) Crows by Charles Menteith

Roy and Lesley Adkins’ article in the May edition caused my thoughts to turn to songs about the same birds nearer to home and closer in time. Five examples on the Glostrad (1) website can be found by searching for “crows”. The website includes links to the original recordings, as well as MIDI versions of the tunes, to which you can listen. These versions fall into two categories, according to the food found by the crows, which is either an old ox (or horse), or the farmer’s corn. Two alternative tunes occur: either *The Old Hundredth* or *Ye Banks and Braes*, as shown by the following examples. The first uses the first strain of the *Banks and Braes* tune, which gets its name from Robert Burns’ use of it for his song *The Banks o’ Doon*, three versions of which he published in 1791 (2). The tune was older; Niel Gow, the fiddler (1727-1807), published it in 1788 in his *Second Collection of Niel Gow’s Reels*, although the tune is actually in 6/8 (3). The same tune has been widely used with the words of *The Foggy Dew*, as discussed previously in FW (4). And the crows’ food is an ox (5).

There Were Three Crows, Bob Cross

There were three crows _ sat on _ a tree _ and they were as black _ as crows _ could be.

Each verse is first spoken and then sung:

1. There were three crows sat on a tree
And they were as black as crows could be.
(Spoken: "All sing")

2. And one old crow said to his mate
"What shall we have this day for bait?"

3. They flew across the burning plain
To where an oxen had been slain.
4. They perched upon his big backbone
And pecked his eyes out, one by one.

5. Along came a farmer with his gun,
And shot them all, excepting one.

6. And that old crow flew into a tree
And said, "You old, you shan't shoot me."

In the next example, the tune is *the Old Hundredth*, so called because it is associated with the metrical translation, by William Kethe (6), of the 100th psalm, although the tune was originally associated, in the Genevan Psalter, with psalm 134. The tune itself is usually attributed to the French composer Louis Bourgeois (1510–c.1560) (7). And the crows’ meal comes from the farmer’s corn. (8)

There Were Two Crows, Charlie Clissold

1. There were two crows sat on a tree, As black as black as crows could be.

Said one old crow un - to his mate "What shall we have this day to eat?"

1. There were two crows sat on a tree,
As black as black as crows could be.
Said one old crow unto his mate
"What shall we have this day to eat?"

2. "We'll fly away to yonder barn
And fill our gutses up with corn.
And when we've ate and flown away
What will that poor old farmer say?"

3. "I'll go away and get my gun
And I'll shoot those buggers one by one,
For the more I sows, the more I grows,
It's all eaten by those bloody crows!"

Another version, with a tune usually associated with its last two verses, comes from Stan Cope, of Ashton-under-Hill, Worcs.(9) The writer introduced Gwilym and Carol Davies to Stan. As well as this song, Stan also sang *The Tree on the Hill*, published in the 1st edition of FolkWest, and *The Body in the Bag*. Stan was one of the original inhabitants of Ashton. He reminisced about feeding hay to the deer in winter.