

Introduction

Many, if not all, of music's essential processes may be found in the constitution of the human body and in patterns of interaction of human bodies in society. Thus all music is structurally, as well as functionally, folk music.

(Blacking 1973: xi)

Essentials of Folk Performance

At the legendary Woodstock Festival in 1969, Joan Baez, a few songs into her set, introduces the Stones' song 'No Expectations' ('one of my husband David's favourite songs'). She tells how the federal marshals picked him up from their home for resisting the draft. After singing the song, she picks up the story by relating how David had managed, after 'two and a half weeks', to convince forty-two other federal prisoners to join in what she refers to as a 'very, very good hunger strike'. She links this to her introduction to what she calls an 'organising song', i.e. Phil Ochs's 'Joe Hill'. The introductions to the two songs in front of an audience of thousands could best be characterised as a chat, in which she tells them that she and her unborn baby are doing well, that David has been transferred from county to federal jail, how the four marshals were hours late because they were too proud to ask for directions to her remote home and how one of the activist anti-draft girls at the farewell party had stuck a 'Resist the Draft' sticker onto their bumper as the Feds drove off 'on the wrong side of the road'. The combined account, punctuated by audience responses in the form of laughter and applause, is approximately two and a half minutes long.

The song 'Joe Hill' is an ode to a Swedish-American union organiser and writer of rabble-rousing labour movement songs (born Joel Emanuel Häglund, also known as Joel Hillström). Hillström was executed on a highly dubious murder charge in 1915, probably rigged by the 'copper bosses' (as they are referred to in the song) because of his political activities. In the song, which represents a dream, the narrative 'I' asks how it is possible for Joe Hill to be 'alive as you and me'. It contains the central notion expressed by Joe Hill that 'what they can never kill / went on to organize / went on to organize', in

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keeping with Hill's final exhortation on the eve of his execution: 'Don't mourn, organize.'¹ The song repeats the last line of every stanza and is thus suited for an audience to join in, although it is impossible to tell with certainty from the Woodstock recording whether they did.

In spite of singing at a festival remembered primarily for its size, the way Baez performs the set is more in keeping with the intimacy of a club or a coffee house. She uses her platform not only to revive the memory of a labour activist in the decade after the McCarthy anti-communist witch-hunts in her choice of song (without mentioning the songwriter), but also links it, through the introduction, to the anti-Vietnam War protest movement of the period, thus taking on the US establishment of 1969 on two quite different levels. By that time, she had been involved in the folk scene for a good ten years and had a track record as a folk artist and an activist, the latter of which she has occasionally emphasised as being more important for her.

The audience, as far as can be heard on the recording, seems to go along with her story and her stance, as if they felt they were in a more intimate setting than a huge field on Max Yasgur's farm in upstate New York. They give the impression that they are in agreement with her criticism of the draft and her outlook on the necessity to 'organise'. In other words, despite the unlikely setting, this can be described as a genuine folk performance in the sense that

- it is *embedded in a tradition and complies with a practice* in terms of Baez's interaction with the audience, her detailed and personal introduction to the song, having adopted it as a piece of commonly owned music, not as the work of an author
- it adopts a *critical stance*, being *socially and politically* in opposition to established points of view and responding to contemporary anti-communist and pro-Vietnam War positions
- it creates a *rappport with an audience* through the interaction in the introduction and the potential for creating a community by joining in with the song and clearly by the mutually established theme of 'organising'
- it relies for all these aspects on the *singer's sincerity and credibility*, for which Baez was known even then
- it goes *beyond entertainment*, in the sense (a) that it calls to mind historical injustice and the related historical figure of Joe Hill and (b) that it contains at least a suggestion if not a plea for activism.

Our interest in the subject of folk song performance, which we have actively pursued since our student days, arises out of all these points, admittedly present in other kinds of music, but arguably not to this degree. The points listed above have motivated us to write this book, and they represent a thread that runs through our account. Aspects of folk performance give us insights into the

¹ See at: www.iww.org/content/dont-mourn-organize, accessed 29 May 2015.

workings of communities of practice, discourse communities, constructions of tradition, authenticity and identity, and they can be analysed using terms such as *indexicality*, *style* and *stylisation*, ‘*text*’ and *entextualisation*, *enregisterment*, etc. But things would be slightly one-sided if our discussion did not include other aspects that play into the topic. Song performances always involve performers and audiences in multimodal communication. Even though songs are primarily made manifest in sound, we cannot ignore the relationship between performance and phonological requirements arising out of this fact. Nor is it wise, as far as ‘text’ and entextualisation in the form of song lyrics are concerned, to ignore certain aspects of stylistics.

The Structure of the Book

We use this introductory chapter to explain how the book is structured, why we have decided to set up a website accompanying the book and how the reader might most efficiently make use of the website. The website also contains video clips of a concert given at Cecil Sharp House, the home of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, by Maddy Prior in October 2008, as an iconic example of what we define in Chapter 2 as a ‘representational performance’, and to which we refer in greater detail in several chapters throughout the book. We also include in the Introduction our own sociolinguistic definition of what we consider a ‘folk song’ to be, which differs radically from all other attempts at a definition that we have found in the literature, and we discuss in detail one example, the traditional ballad ‘The Unquiet Grave’.

The book contains the present introduction and twelve chapters. We have chosen to consider Chapter 1 as the Prologue to the book since it opens the scene on language and song performance by focusing on the necessity to consider both language and music as socially emergent in instances of interaction. It stresses the ritual significance of combining language and music in song, thus satisfying, we hope, one of the assumed synonyms for ‘prologue’ defined in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary as a ‘warm-up’. It is an important ‘warm-up’ in that it deals with the place of music and language in the phylogenetic development of the human species from a socio-cognitive perspective. Analogous to the Prologue, we have elected to call Chapter 12 the ‘Epilogue’, i.e. what Merriam-Webster defines as ‘a concluding section that rounds out the design of a literary work’. The book is certainly not ‘literary’, but it *is* intended to be a ‘work’. Hence Chapter 12 ‘rounds’ the contents ‘out’ by providing an assessment of what our focus on the performance of folk song has achieved and what insights have been gained with respect to further research on more ‘classical’ areas of sociolinguistic research (e.g. different forms of verbal interaction, language contact situations, identity construction, etc.) from a performance perspective.

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Chapters 2, 3 and 4 constitute Part I, entitled ‘Creating Community and Identity through Song’, in which we set up a sociolinguistic model of song performance and, within that model, demonstrate that the emergent social process of performing song as a means to construct, affirm and transform communities is what justifies the term ‘folk song’. ‘Folk song’ cannot therefore be seen as a song ‘genre’, but rather as any song that helps to create a ‘folk’, or a community. It is also important to differentiate between types of performance, and one useful categorisation is to distinguish between ‘relational performances’, whose main focus is to create a community through joint performance, and ‘representational performances’, where performers and audiences are more clearly separated (see Chapter 2) and have the ritual functions of re-presenting and receiving and evaluating significant social issues. A central element in both performance types is the function of ‘answering back’ socially (cf. Chapter 4).

Part II, ‘Variation in Language and Folk Song’, consists of Chapters 5 to 7, in which the theoretical and methodological focus is on variation and change through time in the performance of songs. Recent work in historical sociolinguistics is invaluable here, but Chapter 7 presents a set of possible counter-arguments to the argument that a performance is an emergent social process, arising from the urge to perpetuate songs by transcribing and recording them, i.e. by treating them like ‘insects caught in amber’. In Part III, ‘Folk Song Performance and Linguistics’, which consists of Chapters 8 to 11, we discuss such issues as voicing, text and entextualisation, stylisation, indexicality and enregisterment through the social process of song performance geared towards the construction, reconstruction, affirmation and transformation of communities.

A Reference Performance

In Chapter 10, we argue that it is difficult if not impossible to work with videotaped examples of relational performances (see Chapter 2), yet it was also relatively difficult until a few years ago to access entire performances online, as restrictions on the lengths of video clips resulted in a tendency to break down representational folk performances, i.e. concerts and staged sets in festivals, into individual short snippets. The practical impact of this procedure is that many can only be viewed, to all intents and purposes, out of the context of the overall performance. Nevertheless, by way of a reference performance for the duration of this book, we are lucky to have obtained all the clips made from a concert given in Kennedy Hall, Cecil Sharp House, on 23 October 2008, by Maddy Prior and the two musicians she was working with at that time, Giles Lewin on the fiddle and the Arabic oud and Kit Haigh on the guitar.² She also invited John Kirkpatrick (accordion and concertina) and Barney Maze-Brown

² The title of the concert was ‘Back to the Tradition’.

(cello) to play along in certain pieces, and her daughter Rose Kemp and singers June Tabor and Tim Hart to sing a number of songs with her.

The BBC originally made a video recording of the whole concert, but afterwards cut it down to a twenty-minute clip, omitting some of the songs and, unfortunately for our purposes, virtually all of the crucially important verbal insets typical of folk performance, in which the singer keys the audience into the performance mode of the song. As we show in Chapter 11, such keyings-in and keyings-out are an important part of the register common among the discourse community of folk music. Apparently, the original video recording is now no longer available, but most of it can be viewed on individual clips, with the majority of the keyings-in and keyings-out retained, making it a unique, and for our purposes central, document. In fact, most of the concert can be reconstructed from these clips, except for the keying-in of 'Dives and Lazarus' in the first half of the set and that of 'The Trooper's Nag' at the beginning of the second. There is thus enough material to be able to use this concert as a good example of a staged representational folk performance.

As we explain through Chapters 1 and 2, venues for both relational and representational performances are important as they define physically or metaphorically the nature of the symbolic container in which the performance is distinguished from other activities in the everyday world beyond the performance itself. The fact that Maddy Prior's concert took place in Cecil Sharp House (see page 6) is significant in that Cecil Sharp House in the London Borough of Camden has become what it set out to be in the 1930s, viz. the focal point of the folk music community in England, with its extensive collections of songs, broadsheets, dances, etc., available for public consultation (e.g. The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, The Full English Digital Archive), and with facilities for performances and dances in Kennedy Hall.

The seating capacity in Kennedy Hall (See page 7) is around 400, and it is ideal for dancing purposes as it has a low stage along the back wall on which the players can stand (or sit), with the rest of the hall given over to the dancers. Singers, players, dancers and audience enter via the two doors on the right in Image Intro. 2. Singers are suitably close to their audiences, less so than they would be in a pub venue but far more so than on a stage at a festival. It is this proximity to the audience within an enclosed space that creates the most salient characteristic feature of a folk performance, distinguishing it from most other forms of music performance, i.e. the singer's/musician's will to communicate with the audience, to involve the audience in the singing and to bond with the audience in creating a community of practice for the duration of the performance.

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$\text{♩} = 130$

may the sun - shine warm your back may a soft breeze dry all tears

may the moon's sil - ver light ba - nish your dark dreams and fears

Figure Intro. 1. *Musical notation*



Image Intro.1. *The entrance to Cecil Sharp House, photo by courtesy of Alexandra Burton, Assistant Librarian (Maternity Cover), The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society*

The only differences between Kennedy Hall and the snug at the Eel's Foot pub in Eastbridge, Suffolk, shown in Image 3.2 in Chapter 3 are that of size and the fact that Maddy Prior and the other musicians are professionals. The social bonding function is common to both venues.

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The Website

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Image Intro. 2. *Kennedy Hall in Cecil Sharp House, photo by courtesy of Alexandra Burton, Assistant Librarian (Maternity Cover), The Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society*

From time to time throughout the book we refer to the Cecil Sharp House concert by Maddy Prior, and we have put the links to the video clips onto a website prepared in conjunction with this book. Readers who wish to acquire a feel for the whole performance are unfortunately constrained to view each clip separately, since it is not possible to recombine them into the total performance, but we have also prepared a transcript of each clip in the order in which the songs were performed, giving at least a written impression of the whole concert. Our suggestion to the reader is to look at the clips prior to tackling Chapter 1. However, readers who are keen to plunge straight into the business of reading the book will still have other opportunities to consult the Cecil Sharp House concert, notably in Chapter 2, where we discuss ‘Who’s

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the Fool Now?', in Chapter 5, where we take a look at 'The Four Loom Weaver', sung a cappella by June Tabor and Maddy Prior, and in Chapter 11 where we use the concert to provide evidence of a folk performance register that is enregistered with every performance, albeit in different ways by different artists.

The website also contains links to other significant video clips, our own renderings of some of the songs mentioned within the book with their lyrics and tunes as far as copyright restrictions have not presented a problem. Where we did not succeed in obtaining permission, links to websites that present versions of the lyrics for public access are provided there too.

Conventions

This is an opportune moment to present a few conventions followed in the book. Whenever an element referred to in the text is included on the website, we note the cross-reference to the website with the symbol ☹ together with a number, making it relatively easy to identify on the website. For example, the discussion of the ballad 'The Unquiet Grave' towards the end of this introduction is given as ☹1 both in the text and on the website.

The *tunes* are presented as simple melodies, and, as such, they represent a melodic 'skeleton', i.e. the tune without the variations or embellishments that singers usually introduce in emergent performances, an issue we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, and without instrumental arrangements, apart from chord symbols where they are helpful. However, the chords are to be seen as suggestions only and individual performers may use different chords altogether.

The *lyrics* are presented as lines in stanzas corresponding to segments of the music; the end of a stanzaic line is marked either with a breath symbol (') in the musical notation if it is in the middle of a line of music, or we split the bar to have a new line of the song correspond to a new line in notation. Where the focus is on the relation between stress patterns and musical notation (cf. Figure Intro 1), the beginning of each line of the lyrics, as in Bronson (1959), follows a breath symbol (cf. bars 2 and 6 in Figure Intro 1). The lyrics contain no punctuation at all since they represent not a written text, but the act of languaging³ in a song. Our only concession to the conventions of graphology has been to begin the names of people and places with a capital letter.

The *transcription conventions* for the segments of conversation and discussion (and also for the keyings-in and -out of the Cecil Sharp House concert) are as follows:

³ For the definition of the terms 'languaging' and 'musicking', see Chapter 1.

.	a tone unit ending with falling intonation
?	a tone unit ending with falling (<i>wh</i> -question) or rising (<i>yes/no</i> -question) intonation
,	a tone unit ending with rising intonation
(0.8)	a pause measured in fractions of a second
(.)	a pause of less than (0.5) seconds in length
(..)	a pause of between (1.0) second and (2.0) seconds in length
(...)	a pause of longer than (2.0) seconds in length
<@>	laughter
<@abc@>	speech accompanied by laughter
?	a short utterance with a rise–fall intonation pattern
[/]	overlapping speech
[/]	
<??>	an uninterpretable utterance
to- to	stuttering
I/ what time is it?	self-interruption and restart
—	unfinished speech
:er: :erm:	filled pauses
^	rise-fall intonation pattern
\	end of tone unit

A Functional Definition of Folk Song

This book is about ‘folk song’, not the modern style of music and singing that is usually referred to as ‘folk music’ to distinguish it from other styles of music such as rock, pop, jazz, rap, country and western, classical and so on, but simply song that helps to create a ‘folk’. We are not trained musicians, although we have played and sung most of the songs we discuss throughout this book for the greater part of our lives – and have thoroughly enjoyed doing so. So we claim a right to investigate the social activity of singing from our own academic perspective – that of socio-linguists studying the social and linguistic significance of performing ‘folk song’.

A project of this kind is heterogeneous in the subject matter on which it draws. It thus needs to be inclusive with respect to the fields of study it relies on. Genres are notoriously difficult to delimit and define, and we choose to provide a functional rather than an essentialist definition of ‘folk song’. The expression ‘folk song’ has given rise to so much controversy over precisely what kind of music it refers to that we are constrained to define it very clearly in our own terms. Since we intend to retain the expression ‘folk song’ throughout this book, the decision calls for a justification before we continue. ‘Folk song’ is not a monolithic kind of music in terms of either its provenance or its age. Songs might at some stage in their history have had an author or authors whose

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identity has been lost in the mists of time. New songwriters cherish the directness of the folk lyric, its unashamed appeal to the emotions of the audience and the apparent artlessness of acoustic instruments in preference to polished production.

If ‘folk song’ were taken to be a translation of Herder’s expression *Volkslied*, it would mean something like ‘national song’ since *Volk* in German is translatable into English as ‘people’.⁴ But the lexeme ‘folk’ in modern English no longer refers to a people or a nation. In Britain, it has also been used to refer to the lower orders of the social class hierarchy, particularly to the rural labouring class, or what Cecil Sharp often referred to as the ‘peasantry’,⁵ and it was the indigenous music of the rural areas of Britain that came to be referred to as ‘folk music’. In North America, the term was used in a similar way, but it was extended to refer to the indigenous music of the working classes, rural or urban, in the 1930s before this became an accepted reference in Britain in the 1950s. After the Second World War, the International Folk Music Council struggled in their efforts to find an adequate all-embracing definition of ‘folk music’, and they finally came up with the following version in 1955:

Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved *through the process of oral transmission*. The factors that shape the tradition are: (i) continuity which links the present with the past; (ii) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or the group; and (iii) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.

The term can be applied to music that has been evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by popular or art music and it can likewise be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten living tradition of a community.

The term does not cover composed popular music that has been taken over ready-made by a community and remains unchanged, for it is the refashioning and re-creation of the music that gives it its folk character.⁶ [our italics]

The first impression given by this definition of folk music is that it attempts to ‘create’, by definition, a genre of music on a level with but nevertheless distinct from ‘popular music’ or ‘art music’. The first limitation of ‘folk music’

⁴ Herder first introduced the term in 1773, at the beginning of the German Romantic movement, anticipating the emergence of a German nation-state, which did not come about till after the Franco-Prussian War in 1871.

⁵ For example, consider the following extract from Sharp’s *English Folk Song, Some Conclusions* (1907): ‘The English peasant still exists, although the peasantry, as a class, is extinct. Reformers would dispel the gloom which has settled upon the country side, and revive the social life of the villages. Do what they will, however, it will not be the old life that they will restore. That has gone past recall. It will be of a new order, and one that will bear but little resemblance to the old social life of the “Merrie England” of history’ (p. 119).

⁶ *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 7 (1955), p. 23.