

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”: Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## Introduction

Americans of recent generations will remember a game on the children’s television show *Sesame Street* called “One of these things is not like the others,” which teaches young children to balance similarities and differences by establishing categories. Most people today would have no problem playing that game with these three tunes:

- (1) the Scottish fiddle dance tune “John Anderson My Jo,” probably derived from a bawdy song;
- (2) “MacLeod’s Rowing,” a *Piobaireachd* (“pibroch”) for Highland bagpipe;
- (3) Jean-Baptiste Lully’s air “Sommes-nous pas trop heureux” from the ballet *L’Impatience* (1661).

The last here certainly seems the odd one out. It is French and the other two are Scottish. More importantly, by today’s usual reckoning standards, it is “classical”: part of a well-funded world of urban, sophisticated music-making – and part of a literate tradition in which authorship is clearly established, and pieces are communicated as fixed texts reflecting that author’s apparent intentions. The other two tunes, meanwhile, are apparently varieties of “folk” or “traditional” music: part of a communal tradition, usually disseminated anonymously through oral communication, and thus undergoing constant minor variations and additions.

Facile categorizations such as those encouraged by the *Sesame Street* game are always problematic on closer view of course, and “folk” and “classical” are among the most problematic of all. For example, one could easily argue, as many writers now do, that the pibroch is a form of classical music. Unlike the lighter forms of piped Highland music, pibrochs are long, carefully laid-out, ceremonial pieces in an elaborate variation form, with each of the increasingly complex sections having a specific name and placement. Authorship claims have quite often been staked as well – the piece in the list above is reputedly by Donald Mór

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”: Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The invention of “folk music” and “art music”*

MacCrimmon.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, though pibrochs have been passed down orally, for centuries they were spread only among the professional piping elite, through an oral mnemonic system called *Canntaireachd* (in which syllables represent notes and ornaments) that was a closely guarded tradition among this elite. Most Highland pipers in the eighteenth century – including Donald Mór MacCrimmon – were trained musicians under the direct patronage of Highland clan chiefs. Thus, despite the fact that the Highland pipe is often considered an emblematic “folk” instrument,<sup>2</sup> it is easy to contend that there are both folk and art genres for the instrument. Such considerations would create a second possible scenario for answering which piece “does not belong” in my list: the fiddle dance (no. 1) would stand out as the only real “folk” tune.

But these little problems with sorting the list are really only symptoms of a much larger mess: defining folk and art music in the first place. Most attempts so far have treated the terms as categories that can be applied objectively from outside. Consider the “official” definition of folk music laid out in 1954 by the International Folk Music Council (henceforth IFMC). I quote it in full because I will refer back to it later:

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 and 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 re-fashioning and re-creation of the music by the community that gives it its folk character.<sup>3</sup>

Because this characterization attempted to consolidate working definitions used by many different collectors and scholars over several

<sup>1</sup> See William Donaldson, *The Highland Pipe and Scottish Society 1750–1950: Transmission, Change, and the Concept of Tradition* (East Linton, East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 405–6, for a consideration of the attribution of this piece.

<sup>2</sup> This itself is a bit ironic, since the other bagpipes that were common in Scotland (the Lowland or Border pipes, and the Northumbrian or small pipes) were actually played by less well-trained musicians, and were used for less specialized repertoires (though they probably shared much of their lighter repertoire with the Highland pipe). In any case, these instruments have since the nineteenth century been largely eclipsed in the public imagination by the Highland pipe as representing Scottish tradition.

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 7 (1955), 23. This definition was often invoked and cited; see for example Maud Karpeles’s Preface in Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, 4th rev. edn (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1965), xvi–xvii.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

generations, some of its criteria were under debate at the time; and certainly every fixed definition of folk music has been controversial ever since. Eventually, the issue became thorny enough that in 1980–1 a series of deliberations within the executive board of the IFMC itself resulted in the organization rechristening itself as the International Council for Traditional Music.<sup>4</sup> While this change reflected a trend toward the diversification of scholarly methods and of the objects of study (a trend brought about by the increasing interaction of folk-musical study with ethnomusicology ever since that discipline emerged clearly at mid-century),<sup>5</sup> the implicit assumption lingered that folk music, even under alternative names such as "traditional music," was an objective and meaningful category. As a result, the meat of the IFMC definition soldiered onward, often in unspoken form, and so did the attendant debates and problems.

While folk music scholars were struggling to define their domain, "art music" (or "classical music") had come to represent a canonized and canonic body. Probably for this reason, there was no official definition along the line of the IFMC's folk music definition. When threatened, musicians and critics have defended their "artistic" ground, but the onus of defining classical music has instead tended to fall on the champions of other musics: on would-be revisers of educational curricula, or on dispossessed outsiders to the classical community. Today "serious music" is less and less an acceptable synonym for classical music, but with the (nominal) passing of such culturally hegemonic complacency, defining classical music has only become more openly pressing. As anyone has found who has ever taught a survey course on "Western Art Music" and tried to justify why the curriculum covers what it does – and excludes what it does – it is virtually impossible to define such a domain in isolation. Perhaps the best way to group this music is to say that it is a body of music based primarily on literate dissemination;<sup>6</sup> but then many new pieces that are considered classical are not so – avant-garde electronic music communicated primarily in recorded form, for example. (Or else,

<sup>4</sup> See Philip V. Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), xii–xv; also *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 14 (1982), Editor's Preface; and Erich Stockmann, "International Folk Music Council / International Council for Traditional Music – Forty Years," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 20 (1988), 1–10, esp. 8.

<sup>5</sup> The older name for the organizations seemed to encourage only the study of music among rural groups within Western societies, and to discourage the study of musics from classless, unindustrialized cultures. For some brief comments on the coexistence and cross-influence between the International Folk Music Council (IFMC) and the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) after the latter was founded in the early 1950s, see Bruno Nettl, "The IFMC/ICTM and the Development of Folk Music in the United States," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 20 (1988), 19–25, esp. 23–4.

<sup>6</sup> This is the working definition used by Richard Taruskin in his massive *Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1: xxii–xxiii.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The invention of "folk music" and "art music"*

if recordings count as extensions of written tradition, then much rock music would have to be grouped as classical, since most of it is disseminated in recorded form.) Furthermore, a definition based only on literate dissemination downplays the myriad other connotations that have been attached to "classical music." Yet, other criteria are more problematic still: if clear authorship and a relatively unchanging form (melodic or otherwise) were the defining elements of "art" music, then "Happy Birthday to You" would have to be considered in this category – its authors' estates have sued over unauthorized public use.<sup>7</sup> Trying to make a certain level of "complexity" the defining element seems downright wrong-headed – wrong-headed because such arguments have historically been the most culturally loaded, yet they still fail to withstand scrutiny.<sup>8</sup> If complexity were the defining criterion, then where should minimalist music be placed, or Gregorian chant, or even a Puccini aria, not to mention the many kinds of jazz and rock and other musics that are extremely "complex" (whatever that term means)?

Patent, "objective" definitions of both folk and art music, whether by the IFMC, textbook authors, or anyone else, are doomed to inconsistency, tautology, and ultimately self-contradiction because folk music and art music are not timeless, objective truths, but very human constructions. Reminders from linguists and philosophers of language that signifiers gain their meaning from use and contrast take on crucial weight here. Especially relevant is Wittgenstein's insistence that most terms encompass not single distillable essences but interlinked "family resemblances."<sup>9</sup> If, as Wittgenstein implies, definitions of almost *any* terms are complicated by this phenomenon, surely abstractions such as "folk music" and "art music" must be among the hardest to approach. However, we should not give up all attempts at pinning down the terms, as temptation may beckon.<sup>10</sup> The stakes are highest with the very

<sup>7</sup> For a thumbnail history of this song and its use, see James J. Fuld, *The Book of World-Famous Music: Classical, Popular and Folk*, 5th edn (New York: Dover Publications, 2000), 266–8; and note the three-way categorization in the title of the book itself.

<sup>8</sup> In defining its scope, even the most recent edition of the college textbook *Listening to Music*, by Craig Wright, 4th edn (Belmont, CA: Thomson/Schirmer, 2004) seems to hinge on this factor, and lumps all other music (rock, folk, etc.) under the term "popular." Wright stakes his claim: "But popular music, unlike classical, rarely contains multiple levels of musical activity, and for this reason does not require, and does not reward, concentrated thought" (4).

<sup>9</sup> See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, bilingual edn with English trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), esp. sections 66–7 (pp. 31–2).

<sup>10</sup> This path is tempting precisely because it seems to avoid the errors and value-judgements implied by conventional definitions, but it creates more questions than it answers. Thus, for example, recent editions of another introductory college music textbook, *Listen*, basically resort to defining "classical" music tautologically as music that is considered "classical." (Joseph Kerman and Gary Tomlinson, *Listen*, brief 5th edn [Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004], xii–xiii.) On the folk side, a similar example is Bohlman's otherwise meticulous *Study of Folk Music in the Modern*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

terms that are often hardest to define, because aesthetic categories are inherently socio-political instruments.

In cases such as the categories of folk and art musics, it is the histories of the concepts – the nebulous masses of connotations that build around them – that give them meaning. Charting this process is an act of historical “defining” that uncovers the deeper assumptions and prejudices that the terms have picked up. (This includes considering past definitions that have been offered as well.) To some extent, scholars have already set about tracing the historical paths of the concepts “folk music” and “art music.” Some have sought to document, others to reform. In Germany, there is a hundred-year-old established scholarly discourse examining the term “Volkslied,” which was coined by Johann Gottfried Herder long before “folk song” entered the English language. Much of the German debate has hinged on the question of whether Herder created the concept itself, or just the name.<sup>11</sup> In the last few decades, some scholars, especially British Marxists, have gone further than historicizing the notion of folk song, by attacking it outright as ideologically dangerous. Dave Harker’s *Fakesong* is the most extended, trenchant, and provocative study along these lines – although, like most of the German studies, it considers song texts largely to the exclusion of music.<sup>12</sup> Harker shows how most of the material presented under the label “folk song” since the eighteenth century has been manipulated and bowdlerized by bourgeois intellectuals to conform to their ideas of “the folk,” and to serve their own ends. Following lines similar to Harker’s, other writers have sought to replace the term “folk” (and thus “folk song” and “folk music”) completely.<sup>13</sup>

*World*, which deliberately and explicitly avoids defining “folk music”; Bohlman leaves it up to his readers’ historical sense of the term to determine what he means by the world in different contexts (*The Study of Folk Music*, xviii).

<sup>11</sup> The most important contributions on the subject have been: Erwin Kircher, “Volkslied und Volkspoese in der Sturm- und Drangzeit: Ein begriffsgeschichtlicher Versuch,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Wortforschung* 4 (1903), 1–57; John Meier, *Kunstlied und Volkslied in Deutschland* (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1906); Paul Levy, *Geschichte des Begriffes Volkslied*, *Acta Germanica: Organ für deutsche Philologie* 7, no. 3 (Berlin: Meyer and Muller, 1911); Julian von Pulikowski, *Geschichte des Begriffes Volkslied im musikalischen Schrifttum: ein Stück deutscher Geistesgeschichte* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsbuchshandlung, 1933); Ernst Klusen, “Das Gruppenlied als Gegenstand,” *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung* 12 (1967), 21–42; Klusen, *Volkslied: Fund und Erfindung* (Cologne: Hans Gerig, 1969); Walter Wiora, “Das Alter des Begriffes Volkslied,” *Musikforschung* 23 (1970), 420–8 (trans. as “Reflections on the Problem: How Old is the Concept Folksong?” *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 3 [1971], 22–33).

<sup>12</sup> Dave Harker, *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British “Folksong,” 1700 to the Present Day* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> See for example Charles Keil, “Who Needs ‘The Folk’?” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 15 (1978), 263–5; and Michael Pickering and Tony Green, “Towards a Cartography of the Vernacular Milieu,” in *Everyday Culture: Popular Song and the Vernacular Milieu*, ed. Pickering and Green (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1987). A good review of the literature on this subject is given by James Porter in

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The invention of "folk music" and "art music"*

But neither "folk" nor "classical" have really been replaced as labels. Certainly the layperson has no qualms about using these categories when walking into a music store (as Anne Dhu McLucas has pointed out in a recent reconsideration of the definition of "folk song");<sup>14</sup> and even in scholarship the terms persist, either openly or under the surface. (Substituting the word "traditional" for "folk," even in official group names such as the IFMC/ICTM, has often implied no deeper rethinking.) Entire social groups have formed around these labels, and it is only because the terms are so well established that they can be put through new contortions and still apparently retain a meaningful essence. As one example, during the 1950s and 1960s, "folk music" was appropriated by "counter-cultural" elements of society as a political tool, and – despite initial resistance from some factions of the "folk revival" movements at the time – many topical songs written by performers such as Bob Dylan, Ewan MacColl, Phil Ochs or Buffy Sainte-Marie were drawn under the folk umbrella. (Even some forms of rock have made a bid to construe themselves as "folk," based on their communal and "authentic" associations.<sup>15</sup>) These changes, of course, have only broadened the connotations of the term folk music,<sup>16</sup> yet both performers and listeners these days remain acutely aware of whether they are participating in "folk"/"traditional" music or "classical"/"art" music (or a third category, "popular" music). When they straddle the lines they do so self-consciously. Folk music and art music, being recent constructions that have portrayed themselves as timeless categories, share much with the idea of "invented traditions."<sup>17</sup> Forged to

"Convergence, Divergence, and Dialectic in Folksong Paradigms: Critical Directions for Transatlantic Scholarship," *Journal of American Folklore* 106 (1993), 61–98. There is also a brief consideration in Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music*, xvi, xix.

<sup>14</sup> See Anne Dhu McLucas, "The Multi-Layered Concept of 'Folk Song' in American Music: The Case of Jean Ritchie's 'The Two Sisters,'" in *Themes and Variations: Writings in Honor of Rulan Chao Pian*, ed. Bell Yung and Joseph S. C. Lam (Harvard University Music Department and The Institute of Chinese Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1994), 212–30.

<sup>15</sup> On this, see Simon Frith, "'The Magic that Can Set You Free': The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community," *Popular Music* 1 (1981), 159–68.

<sup>16</sup> They also complicate an argument such as Harker's, since the acceptance of these protest songs as "folk" reverses some of the power-relations he sees in the term. (Though Harker considers the mid-twentieth-century folk song revival in his last chapter, on A. L. Lloyd, he approaches it primarily from the angle of scholars in the movement rather than from the perspective of audiences and performers. Lloyd himself did perform, but his extensive scholarship made him somewhat atypical, and he rejected the broadening of the "folk" category to include the likes of Bob Dylan.) For a collection of different viewpoints on the folk revival (primarily in the US), see Neil V. Rosenberg, ed., *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–14.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

fulfill specific social purposes when they were new, they also have the power to adapt. Indeed, these terms must still be necessary in the contemporary world, or they would not have such lasting power.<sup>18</sup> To understand fully the persistence and influence of these categories, we must not only recognize the fact that each is open to variations bearing loose "family resemblances," we must also realize something that has not been considered much in the existing literature: the specific historical interdependence of "folk" and "art" as a binary, dialectical pairing.<sup>19</sup> These signifiers have gained their referents through contrast and opposition to each other: throughout their history, the fact that "folk music" and "art music" have functioned in dialogue with each other has rendered their force exclusive rather than inclusive. Thus, for example, each criterion listed above as a potential defining feature of art music fails because it begins as an attempt to exclude specific kinds of music from the definition, and then cannot manage to keep out another specimen or kind of music that also does not "belong." We end up with a group of definitions of what art music *isn't*, not a single definition of what it is. A look at the problematic IFMC definition of folk music cited at length above shows that it works the same way: the boundaries of folk music are determined tautologically by opposition to art music (and here popular music as well).

Since folk music and art music came to exist only in relation to each other, the present study undertakes to "define" these labels by examining the history of their mutual dependence. The reader will notice that as I deconstruct the binary opposition between folk music and art music, I am drawn into using several other binaries (local/universal, oral/literate, music/words, function/origin). Some of these will also be interrogated in the course of my study, but each needs to be treated differently, since not all binary oppositions are created equal. Some are embedded in three-way relationships (as both folk and art would come to stand in opposition to "popular"). Some map more or less problematically onto other sets of oppositions. A few appear clear opposites; others shade into each other or even imply a conflation of otherwise incongruous levels. Overall, I have tried to avoid looking at such dichotomies from any single dogmatic angle, since both structuralist and deconstructionist approaches often obscure the differences between types of dialectical opposition, not to mention between specific oppositions. Some binary pairs have been used (and abused) in ways

<sup>18</sup> Thus McLucas, for example, rejects disposing of the term "folk song," stressing instead the need to clarify and refine which aspects of the "multi-layered" concept are implied in each use of the moniker ("Concept of Folk Song," 229).

<sup>19</sup> This aspect of the concepts, though mentioned (including by those who would do away with the term "folk" – see for example Keil, "Who Needs 'The Folk?'" 263), has not been explored in detail.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The invention of "folk music" and "art music"*

worth illustrating, even if others may be necessary as we try to interpret history to make this very point. In turning to history, it also becomes apparent how both sides of a dialectical pair are so often based on the same cultural movements and assumptions. This last is certainly true of folk music and art music. Instead of tracing only the individual paths of these two categories, the common set of ideas that nourished both and led to their differentiation must also be examined.

Perhaps the most striking observation that comes from looking at "art music" and "folk music" together, as two sides of a new way of thinking about music, is that both ideas depend on investigation of creative sources. That is, the categories are separated based primarily on criteria involving musical origins: where a piece was written, in what context, and by what person, or what kind of person(s). To claim that original creative sources are essential criteria in defining art music is perhaps not contentious, since we tend to think immediately about composers when we think of this category. About folk music, the proposition might seem more tenuous. The apparent focus on modes of transmission and social interaction in many accounts of folk music, however, betrays only superficial concern with the uses of the music as a defining element of folk music itself. In definitions, attention to use has tended ultimately to devolve upon questions of creation and origin; it is just that creative "origin" picks up a wider meaning, stressing a gradual, collective ontogeny – a process rather than a moment. The IFMC definition is the *locus classicus* of this thinking, setting folk music apart from art and popular musics because of its continual "re-fashioning and re-creation . . . by the community." What really defines folk music here is the process of creation.<sup>20</sup> Granted, in the last twenty-five years ethnomusicological approaches to folk music have resulted in a more genuine turn toward examining how this music is *used* by groups of people. Still, to a large extent these newer approaches need to take on *a priori* definitions of "folk music," for such definitions are necessary to dictate what falls within or without the scope of study in the first place.<sup>21</sup> The social groups that have

<sup>20</sup> Even apparently divergent theories such as those of Phillips Barry, who claimed that "any definition [of folk song] by *origin* is beside the point" ("William Carter, the Bensontown Homer," *Journal of American Folklore* 23 [1912], 159, n. 2, italics original), ultimately embraced the idea that what defined folk song was its "communal re-creation" in transmission (*ibid.*, 165, 168), regardless of the individual origins of different items. This, of course, ends up dwelling on the questions of creative origins in the same way as does the IFMC definition (and the working definitions used by Cecil Sharp and other notable collectors). So it is not surprising that Philip Bohlman opens his book on *The Study of Folk Music* with a chapter on origins, noting that "the need to relate folk music to its beginnings persists as an essential and pervasive component of folk music theory" (2).

<sup>21</sup> This problem was isolated by Georgina Boyes ("New Directions – Old Destinations: A Consideration of the Role of the Tradition-Bearer in Folksong Research," in *Singer, Song and Scholar*, ed. Ian Russell [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986], 9–17).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”: Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

formed around labels such as folk and classical have relied on similar tacit understandings of the categories – understandings which formed gradually through definitions that were based on creative origins.<sup>22</sup> The origin-based categories from the nineteenth century seem to continue lingering at the root of our musical divisions.

On the other hand, as I will argue, musical categories were based until the early eighteenth century almost exclusively on the functions of music, so the folk and art categories would have been quite foreign ideas at that time. I thus begin my investigation at the crucial juncture of the eighteenth century when there was an increasing emphasis on music’s origins (for reasons detailed in Chapter 1), laying the groundwork for new, origin-based categories to form. By a long century later – in the mid-1800s – folk music and art music had acquired connotations more or less consistent with their present meanings. Additionally, by the mid-nineteenth century, the third category, popular music, had begun to establish itself – multiplying the possible combinations of binary and ternary oppositions through which both folk and art could henceforth

Boyes argues that although nowadays “the focus of folksong research has shifted from the item of tradition to performers and their performance” (11), “It seems that the concept of tradition applied by researchers is still circumscribed by the idea of the traditional item. Having established tradition bearers as being those individuals who know a body of items classified as traditional, most fieldworkers then take a circular path to the point that defines as suitable for traditional song research those items which are known by the individuals they classify as tradition bearers” (16). Boyes has reiterated these claims more recently (in *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* [Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993], 16–17). Indeed, such assumptions do seem to continue; it is hard to study “folk music” as a practice without assuming that it also has a circumscribed domain of texts. As recent examples, see Niall MacKinnon, *The British Folk Scene: Musical Performance and Social Identity* (Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1994); Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music*; Anthony McCann, “All That Is Not Given Is Lost: Irish Traditional Music, Copyright, and Common Property,” *Ethnomusicology* 45 (2001), 89–106.

<sup>22</sup> In a field project I did on the “San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers” in 1997, I found that the members perceived clear differences between their world and the “classical” world. The main elements binding the group together were social: they found the folk community “creatively and organizationally unhierarchical,” and welcomed its accepting, warm, accessible, nurturing atmosphere. Many of them had been put off by the rigidity, competition, and unimaginativeness they had experienced in their past “classical” training. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they tend to view the “folk” experience socially, they still need to define the repertoire boundaries of the “folk” music that binds them together; and this is tacitly done through questions of origin. (The process can sometimes be indirect as well: for my informants, some of the hierarchical nature of the “classical” world stemmed from the idea that there was a “right” and “wrong” way to perform based on single authorial intentions, which of course implies a repertoire of pieces by single “composers.”) Thus, even when “folk” and “classical” are approached from the angle of their communal use, they generally still require the origin-based definitions as a foundation. For further considerations of the interaction between repertoire and the socially defined groups based around the “folk music” and “art music” worlds, see Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-making in an English Town* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 42–6, 65–70.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86303-2 - The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner

Matthew Gelbart

Excerpt

[More information](#)*The invention of "folk music" and "art music"*

define themselves by processes of exclusion. (The IFMC definition is one example of the subsequent threefold contrast.) Even the lasting terminology was coming into use in the middle of the nineteenth century. Because the basic constellation of the folk and art music categories, including their emerging relationship to popular music, was in place by around 1850, I have cut off my detailed examination at this point. It would be impossible here properly to document the explosion of creative, scholarly, and lay interest in the relationship of folk music and art music that came in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or the explosion of the popular music industry at the same time. These later events have been well studied; and in any case, my contention is that such mushrooming effects depended on the ideas laid in place just beforehand – that is, on the ideas outlined in this book.

Nevertheless, since this study's relevance is predicated partly on the fact that the categories continue to underlie today's musical world, I have, especially toward the end of the book, often glanced ahead to show how the patterns examined here have persisted. The labels began to inspire musicians, but often also to entrap them – forcing them into pigeonholes that frequently confined their aesthetic choices and the reception of their pieces. As the categories have lasted to the present, so have both the inspiration and the prejudices they have carried to composers, performers, and listeners. The time thus seems right for a careful musicological investigation into the common origins of the folk/art pairing – covering the interaction of aesthetics and politics with music theory, historiography, disciplinary history, composition, and reception. This investigation should account for the force and persistence of our musical categories – shedding light on how and why "art" composers used "folk" music in their pieces, how and why "folk" musicians and collectors operated, and how and why audiences have developed and divided as they have. In the process, it can also suggest alternatives to the anachronism of projecting modern values and labels backwards into the minds of musicians from the mid-eighteenth century and before, and pose some challenges for reshaping our musical world today.

**The special roles of Scotland and Germany**

The folk and art music categories have been transnational: by the mid-nineteenth century, every European nation had discovered its own "folk," and ideas of timeless "art" masterpieces were establishing themselves across Europe and beyond.

Nevertheless, the concepts of folk music and art music formed originally in more focused debates. It turns out that ideas about Scottish music were the initial catalyst in the conceptual polarization that became the folk/art dichotomy. There is a clear reason for Scotland's