

Book Review

Selling Folk Music: An Illustrated History. Ronald D. Cohen and David Bonner. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018. ISBN 978-1-62846-215-9. Pp. 1-169, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, photographs, illustrations, notes on illustrations, index. Printed case binding \$75.)

If the graphic exploration of how folk music in the United States has been commercially packaged and sold over the decades is of interest, then this publication would make for essential reading. *Selling Folk Music: An Illustrated History* offers an understanding of a marketized, populist view of a folk music in the United States of America, with the odd hint of its connection with the United Kingdom around the revivalist period of the 1960s especially. It presents, in colour, all manner of ephemeral artefacts and paraphernalia used throughout a portion of the twentieth century in the commercial promotion and production of a folk music. Within its pages the reader (or perhaps viewer would be a more appropriate term) will find an admirably broad, knowledgeably selected, and chronologically presented treasure trove of concert posters and flyers; covers from books, songbooks, magazines, and albums. Not to mention examples of sheet music, movie lobby cards and posters through the ages too. There is also a focus upon the 1964 hootenanny craze, which produced further artefacts, such as a candy bar, pinball machine, bath powder, paper dolls, Halloween costumes, and beach towels.

It is the view of this reviewer that this publication should be viewed as research in its own right, but research that focuses specifically on the United States scenes and even more so on those that have connections with Alan Lomax. The evincing of this particular is perhaps to be expected given one of the author's publication history and knowledge of the individual (Cohen, 2010, 2003). In the vein of Lomax's 'cantometrics', which spawned so many other 'metrics', one wonders whether such research could also instigate some kind of 'aesthetometrics'? This is not just a parenthetical remark either, the more meaningful contribution that this publication offers folkloristics is how it might be considered a foray into arts-based practice as research; albeit through something more similar to curation rather than an inquiring practice. It would be hard to suggest that this was a new way of cataloguing historical developments of a genre, nor of folk music, but it certainly does catalogue a specific form of what Bendix (1988) described as 'folklorism' and which others, such as Bausinger (1990), went on to discuss.

Nonetheless, to borrow Brunwand's (1968) terms of the 'folk', 'normative' and 'elite' traditions, the publication takes the viewer on a seamless and well mapped out journey through a particular strand of a normative expression of a folk music tradition. In doing so, it demonstrates the dynamic interrelatedness and exchanges between modes of tradition and their participants. It is particularly interesting to see how the variety and heritage of such an expression might be visually navigated in a way that gives prominence to the normative commercial transformations of a folk music. In short, the colourful illustrations and thorough introduction present a vivid and complex history that conventional research simply could not offer.

It is a shame that the author felt the need to position or justify the research as a companion to other text-based publications in the introduction, even if it is done so only partially. Although one can see its value in this regard, the book is focused and thorough enough to stand on its own merits; it deserves no apologetic warrant for its existence. It is a piece of work that if appreciated from a particular methodological perspective and recognised as dealing with a focused content and context, is a rich resource as well as the presentation of an informed analysis.

SIMON POOLE

Works Cited List

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