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LEARNING LINEAGE AND
THE PROBLEM OF AUTHENTICITY IN OZARK FOLK MUSIC

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Music
The University of Mississippi

by

KEVIN L. THARP

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ABSTRACT

Thorough examination of the existing research and the content of ballad and folk song collections reveals a lack of information regarding the methods by which folk musicians learn the music they perform. The centuries-old practice of folk song and ballad performance is well-documented. Many Child ballads and other folk songs have been passed down through the generations. Oral tradition is the principal method of transmission in Ozark folk music. The variants this method produces are considered evidence of authenticity. Although alteration is a distinguishing characteristic of songs passed down in the oral tradition, many ballad variants have persisted in the folk record for great lengths of time without being altered beyond recognition. This fact reveals the existence of a formidable teaching and learning method that deserves extensive investigation.

This research represents a deeper understanding of how folk musicians learn the music they perform. It includes information about methods of folk music teaching and learning not previously recorded in the extant research. Informants' statements about their personal learning experiences can be connected to widely accepted theories of learning. These connections are some of the most important findings reported in this research. In addition, this research provides an exploration of folk musicians' beliefs about the roles of family lineage, places of birth, and methods of transmission in authentic folk music performance. This work contains evidence of a fundamental change in what folk musicians consider authentic methods of transmission. The

exploration of authenticity, the effects of technology on folk music learning, and oral transmission provided here is a step forward in the study of Ozark folk music.

Keywords: Authenticity, British Ballads, Folklore, Informal Learning, Music Education, Oral Transmission, Ozark Folk Music

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CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

A folksong is a song that lives in people. One singer teaches it to another without benefit of sheet music, or printed words, or records. In fact, publication of a folksong tends to imprison it. But, the *real* test of a folksong is oral transmission. It's taught by singing and learned by hearing—from generation to generation.

-Mary Celestia Parler¹

A great number of ballads and American folksongs remain in the contemporary folk repertoire. The folk record contains an inexhaustible wealth of music that in some cases remains nearly identical to its earliest known versions. Some ballads and folksongs are severely degraded while others persevere through the variants they precipitate. Francis James Child collected and compiled over 300 ballads of English and Scottish origin along with many American variants. The original 10 volumes of Child ballads were published between 1882 and 1898.² While the work of Child represents a literary approach to documenting the English and Scottish ballads, Bertrand Harris Bronson's work includes over 2,000 pages of ballad tunes and texts. Bronson (among others) published an abundance of variants for each of Child's ballads.³ In the early 20th

¹ *The Search for Yokum Creek*, Mary Celestia Parler, produced by CBS/The University of Arkansas, aired 1954, on CBS, accessed February 16, 2019, Periscope Film, <https://youtu.be/0JX5vQFDln4>

² Child, Francis James, ed., *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Helen Child Sargent, and George Lyman Kittredge (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1932).

³ Bronson, Bertrand Harris, *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads: With their Texts, according to the Extant Records of Great Britain and America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962).

century Cecil J. Sharp and others collected and published hundreds of English folksong texts and tunes in America.⁴

The folksong collections of Frank C. Brown, Max Hunter, Mary Celestia Parler, Vance Randolph, and John Quincy Wolf abound with versions of American folk tunes and British ballads, some of which were badly degraded while others were reasonably well-preserved at the time of collection.⁵ Many badly-degraded examples are missing some to most of their text when compared to more well-preserved examples. Well-preserved examples typically contain less than but as many as forty stanzas.⁶ The persistence of such a wealth of songs into the current repertoire points to the existence of a very effective teaching and learning method.

A previous personal experience with folksong collecting revealed a problem worth exploration. In the spring of 2015, I travelled to the home of a family friend and potential folksong informant, Ms. Glenda Black, to learn about the singing traditions and methods of

⁴ Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (New York, NY: The Knickerbocker Press, 1917).

⁵ Frank C. Brown, The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore, Duke University Library Digital Collections, Accessed April 9, 2015. <https://ia802509.us.archive.org/33/items/frankbrowncolle03fran/frankbrowncolle03fran.pdf>; Max Hunter, The Max Hunter Collection, Missouri State University Digital Collections, Last modified April 12, 2018, Accessed October 16, 2019; Mary Celestia Parler, The Ozark Folksong Collection, University of Arkansas Library Digital Collections, Accessed March 27, 2015; Vance Randolph, *Ozark Folksongs* Collection (State Historical Society of Missouri), 1946; John Quincy Wolf, The John Quincy Wolf Collection Ozark Folksongs, Last modified October 29, 2007. Accessed October 16, 2019. <http://web.lyon.edu/wolfcollection/>.

⁶ David Atkinson, "The Ballad and Its Paradoxes," *Folklore* 124, (Aug. 2009): 123.

transmission in the Montgomery and Choctaw County area of the north central Mississippi hills. Ms. Black performed sixty songs which she identified as “old songs—folk and bluegrass.”⁷

Ms. Black described her life as a child working with her parents as farmers and singing with the adults alongside whom she worked. She explained that her parents never sought to teach her folksongs, but rather she picked them up from hearing her parents and others sing. Ms. Black stated that she knew of very few other people who might know the same songs that she had learned, but that some members of her community do know some folksongs. She explained that her older sister knows the same songs, but suffers from dementia and cannot recall them on her own. She fears that when she is gone, the old songs will die with her. She stated that she and her deceased older brother knew the most songs of all her siblings. According to her, the two of them once knew “three or four hundred songs.”⁸ She explained, however, that the songs she knows are fragments. She declared, “Daddy may have sung only one verse of a song or just the chorus of it. So, whatever he sang is what I know and I remember.”⁹ She explained that sometimes part of a song comes to her, she wishes to remember more, and she thinks, “Where are you, Willard [her deceased older brother], when I need you?”¹⁰

The songs represented in the collections of Bronson, Child, Brown, Parler, Randolph, and Wolf are generally more complete than those performed by Ms. Black and contain some transcriptions of dialogue pertaining to when, where, and how the sources learned their songs.

⁷ Ms. Glenda Black, interview by Kevin Tharp, 4 April 2015, Hunstville, Mississippi, digital video recording.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Specific statements about the learning methods employed when sources acquired their repertoire are scarce to nonexistent in the extant folksong collections. Where statements regarding teaching and learning methods exist, they are limited to generalities. However, these general statements are quite similar across all the collections.

Brown's narrative entries preceding each folksong contain notes about how the song was learned by the source. Such statements are of very similar content. In one entry, Brown states, "Reported in 1915 by Miss Iris Chappelle of Creedmore, Granville county [North Carolina], as obtained from her mother, who learned it as a child" ¹¹ Another of Brown's entries reads, "Most or all of her songs Mrs. Glasscock learned from her parents" ¹² Brown later notes that a song was offered to him, "as learned 'At his mother's knee" ¹³ Another similar entry reads, "As she learned it from her grandmother" ¹⁴ Later still, Brown remarks that a song was "reported by Miss Fries as obtained from Miss Etta Shaffner, who learned it from her mother." ¹⁵ Statements are similar in the Ozark Folksong Collection. Mary Celestia Parler documents Inez Gibson's statement regarding how she learned the song, "Weeping Willow." Gibson states, "Another one I learned from my mother." ¹⁶ Parler also reports a similar statement by Mrs. Retha

¹¹ Brown, *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, 34.

¹² *Ibid.*, 103.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁶ Inez Gibson, interview by Mary Celestia Parler, May 18, 1959, Reel 311, Item 7, *The Ozark Folksong Collection*, University of Arkansas Library Digital Collections, Accessed October 16, 2019.

Hanna, regarding “Billy Boy.” Hanna states, “My mother used to sing it many years ago.”¹⁷ Wolf includes dialogue following some of his song lyric transcriptions. Regarding her offering of “Bury Me Beneath the Willow,” Mrs. W. B. Apple claims, “I don’t remember who I learned it from. I learned this also when I was about 12 or 13 years old...Everybody in this part of the country knew the old song, and I just learned it from some of my school friends, but I don’t know which one.”¹⁸ In talking about “When I Was Single,” Mrs. Apple explained, “I don’t remember. I was very small when I learned that, and I don’t remember.”¹⁹ While these types of statements provide evidence of oral transmission, they do not provide answers to questions about the specific teaching and learning methods by which folksingers obtain their repertoire.

Statement of Purpose

The present research seeks to determine how folksingers learn their repertoire. In addition to teaching and learning techniques, the study seeks to determine if these methods are responsible for the degraded or well-preserved states of folksingers’ individual offerings or if factors such as frequent performance, music performance skill level, and memory abilities are responsible for the state of preservation of folksongs and ballads. While the folksong genre has been widely researched and an abundance of documented examples is evident, little research has attempted to reveal the specific teaching and learning methods employed in the transmission of

¹⁷ Retha Hanna, interview by Mary Celestia Parler, August 18, 1959, Reel 315, Item 7, The Ozark Folksong Collection.

¹⁸ Mrs. W. B. Apple, interview by John Quincy Wolf, July 20, 1962, The John Quincy Wolf Collection Ozark Folksongs.

¹⁹ Ibid.

folksongs. Although some general statements that address folksong learning are recorded in the extant literature, these statements yield no more than presuppositions to the imminent discourse. Therefore, it is the principal aim of this researcher to discover how and why folksong transmission occurs. To that end, the following questions direct the investigation:

1. What details do folksingers recall about the process of learning repertoire?
2. What kinds of non-music activities typically accompany folksong learning?
3. What are the authenticity concerns of Ozark folk musicians?
4. What sources constitute acceptable examples from which to learn?
5. What beliefs do folksingers hold about the length of time required to learn songs?
6. What beliefs do folksingers hold about how often performance must take place in order to keep a song in working memory?
7. What do folksingers believe to be the causes of song degradation or preservation in the folk record?

Methodology

Informants for this study are folk music performers in the Ozark region of Arkansas who are currently or were previously connected with the Ozark Folk Center State Park, the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, and living members of the *Singing in Zion*²⁰ Gilbert family. These sources are persons identified by gatekeeper, Alan L. Spurgeon, as authentic exemplars of the

²⁰ Robert Cochran, *Singing in Zion: Music and Song in the Life of an Arkansas Family* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1999).

balladry and folksinging tradition. Many of these sources had been previously interviewed and recorded performing folksongs and ballads during the 1990s and again in the 2000s. The original research presented here consists of a detailed account of the narratives obtained from the aforementioned informants (see Appendix A). This information was acquired through open-ended questioning techniques designed to procure specific rather than general descriptions of teaching and learning methods in traditional folksong transmission. Interview questions led participants to explore their memories of folksong learning in a manner that allowed as much freedom of discussion as was reasonable. Structure was only imposed inasmuch as was needed to redirect interviewees to relevant topics.²¹ In addition, the researcher sought to acquire answers to questions regarding memorization techniques, longevity of accurate memory for songs, the roles of teachers and learners in the tradition, and what constitutes authenticity in folksong performance and transmission.

Obtaining anecdotal evidence of informants' perceptions concerning the techniques they employ provides an opportunity to draw conclusions about specific folksong learning methods and their connections to previously documented characteristics of informal learning. According to the findings of Green, relevant themes and characteristics in informal learning are listening, aural copying, watching, imitating, self-directed learning, and group-learning activities.²²

Kastner points to several additional relevant characteristics. She states that musical decisions are

²¹ Tim Robinson, "Popular Musicians and Instrumental Teachers: The Influence of Informal Learning on Teaching Strategies," *British Journal of Music Education*, 29, no. 3, (November 2012): 359-370.

²² Lucy Green, "Popular Music Education In and For Itself, and For 'Other' Music: Current Research in the Classroom," *International Journal of Music Education*. 24, no. 2, (August 2006): 106.

independently devised in informal learning. Informal learners experiment often during the process of formulating accurate reproductions of the music they attempt to learn.²³ The present research will connect informants' statements regarding their perceptions of folksong learning to the preceding characteristics.

Audio/video recordings of informant interviews are archived in an encrypted digital format for immediate and future analysis. The present research report includes transcriptions of relevant narrative and notable performances of folksongs.²⁴ It is the immediate goal of this research to obtain a more thorough understanding of current and past informal music learning methods and tenable explanations for the persistence of balladry and folksong performance traditions. The longstanding American tradition of balladry and folksong performance and its centuries-old lineage may point to valuable knowledge about music learning and reveal an effective method for music teaching and learning in formal music education settings.

Delimitations

Although the possibilities for exploration in this research are far-reaching, the current inquiry seeks only to generate a report of answers provided by informants. This research is limited to teaching and learning methods in the English and Scots-Irish folksong traditions of sources in the Ozark region of Arkansas. This research also represents an attempt to reveal the current authenticity standards Ozark folk musicians use as value judgment criteria. Methods of

²³ Julie D. Kastner, "Exploring Informal Music Learning in a Professional Development Community of Music Teachers," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 202, (Fall 2014): 72.

²⁴ Bertrand H. Bronson, "Mrs. Brown and the Ballad," *California Folklore Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (Apr. 1945):129-140.

inquiry are constrained to open-ended questioning. No preconceived theory was employed as a basis for this work. The research presented here consists of information that was uncovered in the interview process in addition to a limited amount of informants' biographical and musical background information. Conclusions about the efficacy of learning strategies and the longevity of songs in the folk record are drawn from the narrative descriptions given by informants. These conclusions are rooted in obvious connections to scholarly literature concerning authenticity standards, learning theory, and memory function. However, quantitative behavioral analyses of actual folksong learning in progress are beyond the scope of this work.

CHAPTER II:

RELATED LITERATURE

English and Scottish Popular Ballads

According to Helen Child Sargent and George Lyman Kittredge, a ballad is “a short narrative poem, adapted for singing, simple in plot and metrical structure, divided into stanzas, and characterized by complete impersonality so far as the author or singer is concerned.”²⁵ Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp distinguish the ballad from the folksong in this manner,

Broadly speaking, however, the ballad is a narrative song, romantic in character and, above all, impersonal, that is to say, the singer is merely the narrator of events with which he personally has no connection and for which he has no responsibility. The song, on the other hand, is a far more emotional and passionate utterance and is usually the record of a personal experience—very frequently of an amatory nature.²⁶

W. K. McNeil makes a more simple distinction. He claims, “*Ballad* is the term applied to traditional songs that tell a story, while *folksong* is reserved for those numbers that do not contain a narrative.”²⁷ Sargent and Kittredge describe ballads as a form of sung story-telling and assert that the story does not have an author. The story-teller is strictly a narrator and plays no role in the story itself, nor does he or she interject emotion or “take sides for or against any of the

²⁵ Child, Francis James, ed., *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, xi.

²⁶ Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, xii.

²⁷ W. K. McNeil, *Southern Mountain Folksongs: Traditional Songs from the Appalachians and the Ozarks* (Little Rock, AR: August House Publishers, 1993), 15.

dramatis personae [characters of the narrative].”²⁸ David Atkinson contends that ballads are “one of the seminal genres for the study of folklore in the English language.”²⁹ Ballads usually begin “*in medias res* [in the middle of the narrative]” and are “arranged episodically in scenes”³⁰ Atkinson explains that they are “constrained in their length”³¹ Ballad themes are “often presented through a kind of heightened realism, perhaps even magical realism”³² The content of ballads is in sharp contrast with the unexceptional lives of those who typically sing them.³³

Because the literary content of ballads is distinctive, this subject requires special attention. Bertrand Bronson contends that the most common ballads “are motivated by passionate love, though the emotion itself is not the focus of interest. Neither the joys nor the pains of love are of primary concern, but the practical consequences.”³⁴ He states, “Love, in fact, is in these songs an illness from which no one recovers.”³⁵ He contends that a possible reason for the persistence of British ballads through time is that they are very memorable. He argues that character roles are limited to “character-in-action, and action, generally speaking, to action-in-

²⁸ Child, Francis James, ed., *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, xi.; W. K. McNeil, *Southern Mountain Folksongs*, 35.

²⁹ David Atkinson, “The Ballad and Its Paradoxes,” 123.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Bertrand H. Bronson, “About the Commonest Ballads,” *Journal of the International Folk Council* 9, (1957): 24..

³⁵ *Ibid.*

crisis.”³⁶ Most ballads are limited to two characters and “phrasal repetition” is used “as an aid to memory.”³⁷ Bronson states, “Of the primary ingredients of a tale—action, character, description—it is noteworthy that folk ballads have relatively little concern for description, limiting it mainly to adjective and epithet—often cliché.”³⁸ He maintains that the wax and wane of action “is what holds attention.”³⁹ The ability of ballads to hold the attention of the folk may be one reason for the persistence of balladry into the present. However, as McNeil contends, the persistence of balladry and folksong performance may simply be a matter of emotional connection to the past. The tradition itself may be a means of expressing one’s pride of heritage, respect for “a beloved person close to the singer,”⁴⁰ or merely a matter of fondness for the stories and melodies.⁴¹ Cochran’s description of musical tradition among the Gilbert family reflects a similar opinion. He contends,

The family music tradition is never in stasis; it changes unceasingly, grows as new material is added and shrinks as new custodians find old favorites uncongenial to their own developing tastes. And it continues to function as it has always functioned—as a center of family entertainment and family history, a frame for memory, and a guide for behavior.⁴²

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁸ Bertrand H. Bronson, “Traditional Ballads Musically Considered,” *Critical Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 33.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ W. K. McNeil, *Southern Mountain Folksongs*, 35.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Robert Cochran, *Singing in Zion: Music and Song in the Life of an Arkansas Family*, 83.

The performance of British ballads and American folksongs is a well-documented phenomenon among the Appalachian and Ozark Mountain inhabitants of North America. Folklore, the category of study to which British ballads and American folksongs belong is defined by McNeil as, “material that is passed on orally, informally, and becomes traditional; undergoes change over space and time, creating variants and versions; is anonymous in the sense that most bearers of folklore are not concerned with who the original creator was, or even that there *was* an original creator; and finally, usually is formulaic.”⁴³ Sargent and Kittredge claim, “There is ample evidence for the antiquity of popular ballads in England. Nobody doubts that the Angles and Saxons had them in abundance when they invaded Britain, and the medieval chroniclers testify to the continuance of the ballad-singing habit.”⁴⁴ According to Hubert G. Shearin, the North Americans who persist in this tradition are of English, Scottish, and Irish descent and brought the singing traditions of their “Mother Country” with them.⁴⁵ Although many popular ballads have centuries-old origins, many of these stories-in-song have degraded with time and transmission. Many have survived in print or as a result of frequent performance and corroboration by other singers whose memory of the songs is clear.⁴⁶ It is often argued that writing down ballads is detrimental to the process of variation. This is not necessarily a fact.

⁴³ McNeil, *Southern Mountain Folksongs*, 12.

⁴⁴ Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Helen Child Sargent, and George Lyman Kittredge, xiv.

⁴⁵ Hubert G. Shearin, “British Ballads in the Cumberland Mountains,” *The Sewanee Review* 19 no. 3, (Jul. 1911): 313-314.

⁴⁶ Bertrand H. Bronson, “The Morphology of the Ballad-Tunes (Variation, Selection, and Continuity),” *The Journal of American Folklore* 67, no. 263 (Jan.-Mar. 1954): 2. Neely, Charles. “Four British Ballads in Southern Illinois.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 52, no. 203 (Jan.-Mar. 1939): 75-81.

Atkinson contends that many variants of the same ballad exist in print and that printed ballads are often identical to those being performed by folk singers.⁴⁷ Researchers often discover British ballads in various forms with altered texts and tunes. Variations are seen by Bertrand Bronson as a negative effect. He argues that ballad researchers should seek to study “controls” and leave alone the variation that “will in due course alter itself out of recognition.”⁴⁸ Bronson states that the more popular ballads, if sung often, will be preserved in spite of imperfect memories and other various influences.⁴⁹

Transmission

Ballads are often passed down from one generation to the next. Sargent and Kittredge contend that as ballads are transmitted by oral tradition, they are altered and reflect the “habitual dialect of the singer or reciter.”⁵⁰ However, the modern ballad singer does not create a new ballad, but rather he or she creates a variant.⁵¹ Wayland Hand gives an account of his collection of ballads in Utah and California. He states that Mrs. Rosalie Sorrels learned several ballads from a family ballad notebook that originated with her grandmother.⁵² Hand also collected a fragment of Child 81, “Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard” from Mary G. Brown, of Riverside, California. According to Hand, “Miss Brown heard it as a little girl in Delaware County, Indiana,

⁴⁷ Atkinson, “The Ballad and Its Paradoxes,” 128.

⁴⁸ Bronson, “The Morphology of the Ballad-Tunes (Variation, Selection, and Continuity),” 1-2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁵⁰ Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Helen Child Sargent, and George Lyman Kittredge, xv.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Wayland D. Hand, “Two Child Ballads in the West,” *Western Folklore* 18, no. 1 (Jan 1959): 42-45.

in the early 1900's, first from her English grandmother, and then from her mother. The ballad continued to be sung in the family when it later moved to Milton, Wisconsin, north of Madison."⁵³ It is generally considered that rote-learned ballads are more susceptible to degradation than those learned from print. However, Atkinson asserts that this idea is modern and a result of mass literacy. He maintains that before literacy was common, "individuals' mnemonic powers could often be highly developed."⁵⁴ As evidence, he references articulate knowledge of the Bible by those who are illiterate.⁵⁵ The manner in which ballads are transmitted, degrade, or are preserved are myriad.

Bronson explains that Francis James Child's criterion for authenticity in balladry is strict oral tradition. Bronson states,

He [Child] was best satisfied when he could discover no evidence, either extrinsic or intrinsic, that a text had had any previous connection with print. In an unbroken oral tradition, he believed, were to be found the specimens of greatest authenticity, because such texts were least likely to have been affected by any sort of deliberate alteration. But the very conditions of transmission make it, of course, all but impossible to check the accuracy, or fidelity, of the record from stage to stage. For it almost never happens that an interceptor secures successive copies of a ballad in a consecutive line of descent. We only know that changes occur even under ideal conditions, for the existence of variant texts puts the fact beyond dispute.⁵⁶

Bronson notes that one of Child's ballad sources "was an eighteenth-century Scotswoman, Mrs. Brown of Falkland, in Fife . . . [who] learned her repertory as a child from the singing of three persons: an aunt, her mother, and an old nurse of the family."⁵⁷ The oral tradition of balladry is

⁵³ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁴ Atkinson, "The Ballad and Its Paradoxes," 128.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bertrand H. Bronson, "Mrs. Brown and the Ballad," 129.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 129-130.

important and authenticates a source's offerings.⁵⁸ However, altered texts and tunes are the inevitable result of transmission. Bronson states, "But if any version of a ballad is the net result of the talents and of the shortcomings of the individual singers who have successively possessed it, it is obvious that we cannot be precise or rigid in defining 'pure' tradition."⁵⁹

Ballad Identification

Bronson explores existing ballads that were printed, along with their tunes, as early as the 16th century and argues that many texts share similar tunes.⁶⁰ He claims that the treatment of ballad texts without reference to their tunes is incomplete and that ballad tunes often dictate the proper organization of stanzas. In addition, he explains that musical traditions often dictate repeats of melodic material for sequential lines of text.⁶¹ He states, "The melodic tradition and the textual tradition of the ballads may be pursued independently . . . they are neither coincident nor commensurate with each other."⁶² Derek Furr gives account of the impact of Alan Lomax's work on the preservation of American folk heritage through electronic recording media. He explains that Lomax claimed electronic recording solved literary problems associated with

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁶⁰ Bertrand H. Bronson, "On the Union of Words and Music in the "Child" Ballads," *Western Folklore* 11, no. 4 (Oct. 1952): 238-239.

⁶¹ Bertrand H. Bronson, "The Interdependence of Ballad Tunes and Texts," *California Folklore Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Jul. 1944): 185-207; Bronson, "Traditional Ballads Musically Considered," 31.

⁶² Bronson, "The Interdependence of Ballad Tunes and Texts," 238.

quatrains and spellings. Recordings also “uncover a greater degree of variation than even [Sir Walter] Scott or Child could capture.”⁶³

Bronson argues that specific tunes can be traced “into the past”⁶⁴ in order to find a connection to its origin in print.⁶⁵ Place names are evidence of a ballad’s origin if the events therein are recorded in other historical documents. However, as Bronson states, place names are often used as a literary, rhythmic, or rhyming device. He adds, place names in ballads are often wholly fictional, merely connotative, topographically devised (e.g., “river name + *side*”⁶⁶), or are “real, but unrecognised place names, or for otherwise seemingly meaningless words or phrases.”⁶⁷ Because ballads are both literary and musical, identification is a nuanced endeavor.

Bronson asserts that ballad tunes may not be readily identified, but that it may “be possible to track a melodic idea or pattern . . . in our own century and run down variant forms of the same tune, not related to such a text, in old songbooks or manuscripts, native or foreign; and in some cases may reach a date prior to that of any text in Child’s canon.”⁶⁸ Sargent and Kittredge state that some ballads originate with events that actually occurred and can be historically verified. Under these circumstances ballad origins and identities can be

⁶³ Derek Furr, “Re-Sounding Folk Voice, Remaking the Ballad: Alan Lomax, Margaret Walker, and the New Criticism,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 59, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 237.

⁶⁴ Bronson, “On the Union of Words and Music in the “Child” Ballads,” 237.

⁶⁵ Bronson, “Professor Child’s Ballad Tunes,” *California Folklore Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (Apr. 1942): 185-200.

⁶⁶ David Atkinson, “Toponymy of the Child Ballads: Problem of Representation in Written and Oral Texts,” *Folklore* 120, (Dec. 2009): 254.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Bronson, “On the Union of Words and Music in the “Child” Ballads,” 237.

approximated.⁶⁹ Bronson asks, “What constitutes identity in ballads?” He asserts, “In truth, [this is] a philosophical—a metaphysical—question, to which Child himself kept making practical, unmetaphysical answers.”⁷⁰ He proffers that answers to this question rely on intuition and practicality.⁷¹ Bronson states,

We make such a judgment on the basis of aesthetic considerations sifted from a multitude of impressions and associations and purified, as we hope, by experience and knowledge of good music of many kinds. . . . It is only when we can examine large masses of authentic materials that we can begin to be confident that our generalizations are based not on editorial re-creations or the idiosyncrasies of individual transmitters, but on the genuine habits of folk singing in a given time and area of culture.⁷²

Bronson details the late-1800s movement toward folk tune revival. He explains that Child’s work was literary and excluded melody. Musicians such as Ralph Vaughan Williams and Cecil Sharp were instrumental in the recovery of many ballad and folk tunes.⁷³ Bronson contends that narrative is not the characteristic upon which folksongs survive, but rather their union with melody. When paired with melodies, ballad texts are more likely to conform to digestible phrases whereby people enjoy and remember them. He supposes that ballad tunes in conjunction with texts is what has given ballads their longevity.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Helen Child Sargent, and George Lyman Kittredge, xvi.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 239.

⁷³ Bertrand H. Bronson, “Traditional Ballads Musically Considered,” *Critical Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 29-30.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-35.

The work of Francis James Child and that of Bertrand Bronson has been sufficiently discussed. However, it is worth noting here that their combined publications are the definitive starting place for a study of balladry and folksong collection.

Collections

There are numerous folksong collections in existence, many of which are available online as digital collections where researchers can study the texts and listen to recorded versions of authentic folksingers' songs. The Max Hunter Folksong Collection is available online at Missouri State University and consists of "almost 1600 Ozark Mountain folk songs" collected by Hunter between 1956 and 1976.⁷⁵ Others are available in print complete with texts and transcriptions of ballad and folksong tunes. One such collection is The John Quincy Wolf Folklore Collection in the Regional Studies Center at Lyon College in Batesville, Arkansas. Wolf collected Ozark folk music from 1952 until 1963 and, according to Ethel Simpson, is responsible for the discovery of Almeda Riddle.⁷⁶ Brooks Blevins credits Wolf with the discovery of both Almeda Riddle and "Aunt" Ollie Gilbert.⁷⁷ According to Blevins, Ollie Gilbert, Almeda Riddle, and Jimmy Driftwood would become the most famous of the area performers. He states of Gilbert, "[Her] phenomenal repertoire of British ballads [was] eventually displayed at the Smithsonian Folk

⁷⁵ Max Hunter, The Max Hunter Folk Song Collection, Missouri State University Digital Collections.

⁷⁶ Wolf, The John Quincy Wolf Collection Ozark Folksongs.; Ethel C. Simpson, "From the Archives: The John Quincy Wolf Folklore Collection at Lyon College," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (Autumn 2006): 302-303.

⁷⁷ Brooks Blevins, *Hill Folks: A History of Arkansas Ozarkers and Their Image* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

Festival in Washington, D. C.”⁷⁸ Of Riddle, he explains, “[Her] endearing stage presence and artistic capabilities made her the region’s most prominent folk singer and, next to Driftwood, the chief celebrity of the Ozark folk revival.”⁷⁹ In addition to recording Almeda Riddle, Wolf collected songs of Neal Morris [Jimmy Driftwood’s father], Oscar and Ollie Gilbert, and Jimmy Driftwood, among hundreds of others.⁸⁰ Wolf states as criterion for selection of folksong sources the following:

I have chosen those (1) who consider their songs important, who take pleasure in singing them, and who are known as folksingers among their circle of friends; and (2) who have an important repertory of folksong acquired through oral tradition...all live in rural areas and represent a grass-roots point of view or were living in the country when they learned their songs.⁸¹

The Ozark Folksong Collection “was a joint activity of the University [of Arkansas] English Department, the Speech Department, and the University Libraries.”⁸² With Professor Mary Celestia Parler as “primary collector,”⁸³ the project began in 1949, was concluded in 1965, and is “the most complete collection of traditional music and associated materials from Arkansas and the Ozarks in the nation. The physical collection contains audio recordings of songs, oral histories, anecdotes, and tales from over 700 performers.”⁸⁴ Like many other digital collections,

⁷⁸ Ibid., 250.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ John Quincy. Wolf, “Folksingers and the Re-Creation of Folksong,” *Western Folklore* 26, no. 2 (April 1967): 102; Wolf, “The John Quincy Wolf Collection Ozark Folksongs.”

⁸¹ Wolf, “Folksingers and the Re-Creation of Folksong,” 102.

⁸² Parler, The Ozark Folksong Collection.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

the Ozark Folksong Collection contains text and tune transcriptions. Both the Ozark Folksong Collection and the Wolf Folklore Collection cross-reference folksongs with other collections including The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina, at Duke University; the Vance Randolph Collection, in the American Folklife Center of The Library of Congress; and the Parler and Wolf collections, respectively.⁸⁵

The Ozark Folk Center State Park in Mountain View, Arkansas, opened in 1973. Since that time, the center's Music Auditorium has produced many concerts where local, regional, and touring folk musicians populate the stage offering a wealth of authentic performances. From 1973 to 2007, every special event concert was recorded and archived on site. The majority of these recordings remain in the collection at the center. However, according to Daren Dortin, Music Director, the recordings became sporadic around 2007 due to aged and failing equipment. This condition continued to limit the center's ability to capture performances until 2014, when The Ozark Highlands Radio Program was launched. The creation of that program and subsequent funding allowed the center to acquire new equipment. Although all of the 30 to 40 yearly feature performance are now recorded and added to the archives, decisions about which non-feature performances are recorded are dictated by available digital storage space.⁸⁶ In 2008, the archived recordings from 1973 until that year were transferred to the Arkansas State Archives in Little Rock and underwent digitization. The recordings are now part of the Ozark Cultural Resource Center collection. The Arkansas State Archives' statement regarding the collection is as follows:

⁸⁵ Brown, The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore.; Wolf, The John Quincy Wolf Collection Ozark Folksongs.; Parler, The Ozark Folksong Collection.

⁸⁶ Daren Dortin, telephone conversation, October 30, 2019.

Transferred from the Ozark Folk Center to the Arkansas State Archives in 2008, the Ozark Cultural Resource Center (OCRC) collection contains thousands of original audio and video records related to Ozark culture from throughout the 20th century. The OCRC collection also contains research material, sheet music, information on the history of specific songs, photographs, pamphlets, books, artifacts, and other historical resources related to the culture, music and traditional crafts of the Ozark region.⁸⁷

The collection is only available to researchers on site. According to the Arkansas State Archives, the collection is not accessible online due to the vastness of the materials and recordings. The collection is too large and the funding too scarce to permit online accession.

Music Education as Folk Tradition

Patricia Shehan Campbell argues that the progression of trends in research in music education has reached an openness toward “newly emergent”⁸⁸ techniques and approaches to gaining knowledge about “how music is received, processed, and acquired, and how music is shared, taught, and transmitted.”⁸⁹ She posits that perspective and matters of cultural relativism are imminent and urgent themes from which discourse in music education can benefit. She suggests that researchers study nonstandard methods of music teaching and learning outside of academia.⁹⁰

It is possible that the learning styles employed in the instrumental folk music tradition are similar to the learning styles of the sung folk music tradition. Hoyt F. LeCroy and Emery C.

⁸⁷ Bridget Wood, email message to author, October 30, 2019.

⁸⁸ Patricia Shehan Campbell, “A Matter of Perspective: Thoughts on the Multiple Realities of Research,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 191.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 191-201.

Warnock report on the effectiveness of the informal learning styles employed by Southern Appalachian musicians in the acquisition of Bluegrass and Country instrumental music performance skills.⁹¹ They describe the intricacies of “jam session” phenomena and contend that learners are initiated into the Southern Appalachian “jam session” tradition in very specific ways. They assert that these methods of learning are equivalent to many of the prescribed objectives in the former “National Standards for Music Education as defined by the American Music Educators National Conference.”⁹² LeCroy and Warnock state, “This study focused on components of the Southern Appalachian learning process which may have potential for curricular instrumental education regardless of genre of music.”⁹³

LeCroy and Warnock conducted intensive observations of the informal learning practices of Southern Appalachian musicians for a decade and in a less intensive capacity “extending into the present.”⁹⁴ They presented “21 music educators, primarily from the History Special Research Interest Group of MENC: The National Association for Music Education”⁹⁵ with video-taped examples of Southern Appalachian jam sessions for review. LeCroy and Warnock asked the music educators to “comment as to whether the video clips showed evidence of progress toward the former National Standards for Music Education.”⁹⁶

⁹¹ Hoyt F. LeCroy, and Emery C. Warnock, “Informal Learning in Music: Deriving Curricular Processes from Historic Socio-Cultural Constructs,” manuscript in the author’s possession, Richmond Hills Public Schools, Richmond Hill, GA.

⁹² Ibid., Research Design section, para. 2.

⁹³ Ibid., Introduction section, para. 4.

⁹⁴ Ibid., Research Design section, para. 1.

⁹⁵ Ibid., para. 4.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

LeCroy and Warnock report that evaluators judged the videos of informal learning as pertinent to each of the nine former (1994) National Standards for Music Education. Evaluators judged the videos as follows:

- Standard 1: *Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music*, Considerable Evidence
- Standard 2: *Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music*, Considerable Evidence
- Standard 3: *Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments*, Considerable evidence
- Standard 4: *Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines*, Some Evidence
- Standard 5: *Reading and notating music*, No Evidence
- Standard 6: *Listening to, analyzing, and describing music*, No Evidence
- Standard 7: *Evaluating music and music performances*, No Evidence
- Standard 8: *Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts*, No Evidence
- Standard 9: *Understanding music in relation to history and culture*, Some Evidence.⁹⁷

They surmise that the Southern Appalachian instrumentalists evaluated “might be judged favorably on certain achievements required by the National Standards for Music Education.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ibid., Music Educators Survey section, summary.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

LeCroy and Warnock also conducted a survey of “American professional Appalachian musicians.”⁹⁹ They found that the jam session served as a “*de facto* curriculum”¹⁰⁰ and was the “dominant element”¹⁰¹ of the instrumentalists’ informal learning structure. In addition to identifying the “dominant element” of informal learning in the Southern Appalachian jam session, LeCroy and Warnock identify several characteristics of the jam session that may be useful in the formal music education setting. They assert that these characteristics are:

- Flexible scoring
- Focus on performance music
- Creativity in performance
- Large group rehearsal climate
- Teacher demonstration as model
- Appalachian fiddle tunes as technique builders
- Teacher as facilitator¹⁰²

While the informal learning structure of Southern Appalachian musicians does not appear to provide methods of increasing the ability to read and notate music; listen to, analyze, and describe music; or evaluate music and musical performances; the evidence LeCroy and Warnock present does validate the claim that Southern Appalachian jam session learning methods and practices might be useful in formal music education settings.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Ibid., Professional Bluegrass Musicians Survey section, para. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., para. 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., para.3.

¹⁰² Ibid., Potential Applications For Instrumental Music Curricula section.

¹⁰³ LeCroy, and Warnock, “Informal Learning in Music.”

While claims about the efficacy of informal music learning methods in the formal music education setting are tentative, it is apparent that the informal learning methods of instrumental folk musicians and folksong and ballad performers are effective. The long-standing performance traditions of these phenomena are reliable support of the presupposition that informal learning is effective in the folk music genre. The centuries-old lineage of many folk texts and tunes is verifiable evidence of the efficacy of folk music learning methods.

Informal Learning

Informal learning processes are an essential method by which human beings learn the skills and knowledge needed to function in their natural setting. Musicians who perform music in the traditions of genres outside the corpus of western art music may not possess the musical skill acquisition techniques that are afforded by a formal music education. However, they do become adept at learning to perform music. According to Jenkins, “Informal learning is nothing new; it is almost certainly older than formal learning.”¹⁰⁴ He argues that formal learning is a method by which one attempts to “refine, regulate, and control certain aspects of informal learning.”¹⁰⁵ In the absence of a refined ability to read music notation, musicians must resort to other methods of skill acquisition.

Musicians who perform folk music and wish to perform it with some degree of integrity (especially those who perform with a group of musicians) must figure out how to correctly play and sing the songs they wish to perform. While the benefits of a formal music education are

¹⁰⁴ Phil Jenkins, “Formal and Informal Music Educational Practices,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 19, no. 2, (Fall 2011): 180.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

apparent, informal music learning processes may be just as beneficial to those who employ them. Informal learning occurs as a result of the natural need to function in everyday life. It is a self-motivated action that enriches the life of the informal learner and allows him or her to better perform the relevant daily tasks. A goal of formal music education must be to provide musical knowledge and performance opportunities that enrich the lives of students. The informal learning processes employed by folk musicians and the situation-specific skills and knowledge they acquire as a result of informal learning meet or exceed that goal.

Informal learning occurs in the absence of a formal curriculum, instruction, grading, and an assigned teacher.¹⁰⁶ Informal music learning is identifiable by the following characteristics: “experimentation with sounds, integrated musical roles, aural copying, and autonomy in making musical decisions.”¹⁰⁷ Price defines informal music learning as “activities that young people organise and lead themselves without supervision.”¹⁰⁸ Socialization-related learning is a type of informal learning that fulfills the needs of persons to better operate under the requirements of their social setting. Seel defines socialization-related learning as “a curiosity-driven process whereby individuals seek new information needed to situationally perform specific tasks and roles in light of cultural norms and expectations.”¹⁰⁹ Musicians who participate in group performance must become proficient or risk being ostracized. Therefore, individuals who do not

¹⁰⁶ Norbert M. Seel, (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*, (New York, NY: Springer, 2012); Julie D. Kastner, “Exploring Informal Music Learning,” 72.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ David Price, “Musical Futures: An Emerging Vision,” (2005), accessed, February 14, 2019, <https://www.musicalfutures.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/anemergingvision.pdf?76db58>, Envisioning a Musical Future section, para. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Seel, 3126.

read music must use informal learning processes to become socialized in order to meet the expectations of the group.

As Gower contends, informal music learning in school settings is often misunderstood by colleagues who view informal learning activities as uncontrolled, noisy, and chaotic. She states that misunderstandings stem from the limited knowledge of “the entire process.”¹¹⁰ Fellow teachers and administrators who observe only one lesson do not see the long term results of individualized learning wherein students choose the music they wish to play and begin to learn on their own or in groups. Gower states, “Some music educators feel that allowing students to express themselves using their own language is an example of how informal approaches represent ‘dumbing down’ in the music classroom...”¹¹¹ Kastner contends, some music teachers are not able to balance the formal role of teacher with the conflicting role of an informal music facilitator. In addition, she explains that music teachers who employ informal music learning practices often act “more as a coach [‘being flexible, and providing “space” for the student to learn’] rather than an instructor.”¹¹² Green states that although educators have brought popular music into the classroom, incorporated it into the curriculum, and attempted to use it as a tool to increase students’ interest in classical music, the informal learning processes used by popular

¹¹⁰ Anna Gower, “Integrating Informal Learning Approaches into the Formal Learning Environment of Mainstream Secondary Schools in England,” *British Journal of Music Education*. 29, no. 1, (March 2012): 13.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹² Kastner, “Exploring Informal Music Learning,” 73.

musicians have been “largely ignored.”¹¹³ Green explores “five main characteristics of informal learning practices.” She states,

First, informal learners choose the music themselves, music that is already familiar to them, that they enjoy and strongly identify with. . . . Second, the main informal learning practice involves copying recordings by ear, as distinct from responding to notated or other written or verbal instructions and exercises. Third, not only is the informal learner self-taught, but crucially, learning takes place in groups. This occurs through conscious and unconscious peer-learning involving discussion, watching, listening to and imitating each other. . . . Fourth, informal learning involves the assimilation of skills and knowledge in personal, often haphazard ways. . . . Finally, throughout the informal learning process, there is an integration of listening, performing, improvising and composing, with an emphasis on creativity.¹¹⁴

Jenkins suggests that careful study reveals two main characteristics of informal learning.

Informal learning is “*context-sensitive and/or experience-dependent*.”¹¹⁵ Informal learning methods are more useful where the learner’s body is of primary use. He asserts, “Hands-on experience in a variety of different situations is crucial to acquiring proficiency at the task. This is not true. . . for learning syntax or gaining historical information because these areas of knowledge. . . don’t depend on particular circumstances . . . [and are] largely conceptual.”¹¹⁶ Seel contends that informal learning is necessarily defined by the ways in which it is different from formal learning and that formal learning is characterized by the following three identifiers:

¹¹³ Lucy Green, "Popular Music Education In and For Itself, and For ‘Other’ Music: Current Research in the Classroom," *International Journal of Music Education* 24, no. 2 (August 2006): 101-102.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹¹⁵ Jenkins, “Formal and Informal Music Educational Practices,” 182.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

1. A specified curriculum
2. Taught by a designated teacher or group of teachers
3. With the learning attainments of individual learners being assessed and certified in some way.¹¹⁷

Several researchers have used multiple ethnographic designs to gather data and identify informal music learning processes inside and outside of classrooms.¹¹⁸ The ethnographic model serves to gather as much information about subjects and behaviors as possible through “video and audio recording, field notes, multiple interviews, participant observation, and informal conversations”¹¹⁹ as well as “student artifacts, self-documentation by participants, and log files on computers.”¹²⁰

Green conducted informal learning research in “three pilot schools in London, and four main study schools in Hertfordshire.”¹²¹ The students brought music from home and were assigned the task of “copying the song aurally from the recording as a group, using their own choice from a selection of instruments....There was no teacher in the room, and the boys were

¹¹⁷ Seel, 1557.

¹¹⁸ Tim Robinson, “Popular Musicians and Instrumental Teachers: The Influence of Informal Learning on Teaching Strategies,” 359-370; Janice Waldron, “YouTube, Fanvids, Forums, Vlogs and Blogs: Informal Music Learning in a Convergent on- and Offline Music Community,” *International Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 1 (February 2013): 91-105.

¹¹⁹ Sharon Davis, “Informal Learning Processes in an Elementary Music Classroom,” *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* no. 198, (October 2013): 28.

¹²⁰ Seel, 2978.

¹²¹ Green, “Popular Music Education In and For Itself,” 107.

not aware that they were being recorded.”¹²² She found that a “natural learning process”¹²³ had transformed what began as noise into a culminating performance of a pop song wherein the students performed with attention to melody, rhythm, and song structure. After just 10 minutes alone, students began “working out the notes on the piano,”¹²⁴ discussing the number of beats per phrase, and organizing their performance to match what they heard on the recording.

The student activities described by Green are a process of music learning without guidance from authority figures, a prescribed curriculum, or any method of certifying progress and mastery.¹²⁵ In addition, the report she makes reveals several underlying necessities in the informal music learning process. Although learning of this kind requires multiple failed attempts that lead to success, learners must remember how to replicate successful attempts with a high degree of accuracy. While the primary task here would be described as experimentation and aural copying that leads to accurate execution, memorization must also be recognized as a necessary function. Without the convenience of a written record upon which to rely, those who employ informal learning methods must make attempts to approximate correctness and endeavor to replicate successful approximations toward the goal of accuracy and musicality. This process requires memorization. Seel defines incidental learning as learning that occurs “as the by-product of any activity not explicitly geared to”¹²⁶ the intended learning outcome. Since memorization, in

¹²² Ibid., 107-108.

¹²³ Ibid., 108.

¹²⁴ Green, "Popular Music Education In and For Itself," 108.

¹²⁵ Ibid.; Seel, 1557.

¹²⁶ Seel, 1519.

the case of Green’s research participants, is not the primary objective, but rather a secondary outcome of the process, it is an example of incidental learning.

Music and Memory

While Green’s research describes the process of informal music learning wherein memorization is an eminent, but unintended outcome, other researchers have studied the effects of an array of variables on memory for music.¹²⁷ Parks and Dollinger used the term “positivity effect” to describe the effect of increased memory and recognition for music that carried a positive or pleasant connotation.¹²⁸ They studied a range of young and middle-aged adults and compared their memory of musical excerpts in several positive and negative emotion-connected conditions. They had musicologists identify stimuli (emotive film music) as either pleasant or unpleasant. Participants listened to excerpts with headphones and pressed keyboard keys (e.g., “r” for recognize) to express different levels of recognition from various sources (i.e., treatment, or previous experiences). While there was no significant difference in recognition between older and younger groups, the two groups significantly varied in their abilities to identify positively-connoted and negatively-connoted music. Other researchers have studied the positivity effect in relation to nostalgia and recognition ability. While both positive and negative emotions were

¹²⁷ William Aubé, Isabelle Peretz, and Jorge L. Armony, “The Effects of Emotion on Memory for Music and Vocalisations,” *Memory* 21, no. 8 (November 2013): 981–990; Frederick S. Barrett, Kevin J. Grimm, Richard W. Robins, Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, and Petr Janata, “Music-Evoked Nostalgia: Affect, Memory, and Personality,” *Emotion* 10, no. 3 (June 2010): 390–403; Sherrie L. Parks and Stephanie Clancy Dollinger, “The Positivity Effect and Auditory Recognition Memory for Musical Excerpts in Young, Middle-Aged, and Older Adults,” *Psychomusicology* 24, no. 4 (2014): 298-308.

¹²⁸ Parks and Dollinger, “The Positivity Effect,” 289.

connected to nostalgia, non-nostalgic music was connected with feelings of irritation and mixed emotions.¹²⁹ Previous research also shows that people feel as though they remember music better when it is heard in conjunction with strong emotive elements even when accuracy of recall is low.¹³⁰

The melodic and rhythmic construction of melodies may also affect subjects' ability to recall music heard while engaged in an unrelated task. According to Dowling and Tillman¹³¹ and another study by Dowling and Bartlett,¹³² melodic contour and interval composition affects memory and recognition of unique melodies. Cutietta studied the ability of collegiate music majors and non-music majors to memorize and perform a unique melody over a five-week period. Results showed that music majors recalled significantly more melodies than did non-majors and that subjects tended to use grouping techniques based on mode, meter, melodic arc, and interval relationships that influenced their ability to recall melodies.¹³³ Schellenberg, Stalinski, and Marks suggest that listeners who hear a melody more than once are better able to identify that melody when it is presented in a sequence of similar melodies. Key, tempo, and

¹²⁹ Barrett, Grimm, Robins, Wildschut, Sedikides, and Janata, "Music-Evoked Nostalgia," 390–403.

¹³⁰ Aubé, Peretz, and Armony, "The Effects of Emotion on Memory for Music and Vocalisations," 981–990.

¹³¹ W. Jay Dowling and Barbara Tillmann, "Memory Improvement while Hearing Music: Effects of Structural Continuity on Feature Binding," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 32, no. 1 (September 2014): 11-32.

¹³² W. Jay Dowling and James C. Bartlett, "The Importance of Interval Information in Long-Term Memory for Melodies," *Psychomusicology: A Journal of Research in Music Cognition* 1, no. 1 (March 1981): 30-49.

¹³³ Robert A. Cutietta, "The Influence of Metre, Mode, Interval Type, and Contour in Repeated Melodic Free-Recall," *Psychology of Music* 24, no. 2 (1996): 222-236.

timbre elements of melody are encoded as separate entities, but they do affect the ability to identify familiar melodies. They posit that two hearings of a unique melody is enough experience to improve melody recognition.¹³⁴

In another study, Schellenberg and Habashi claim that recognition of melodies is not dependent on tonicity, tempo, or timbre. The researchers varied the key, tempo, and instrument of melodies from pretest to posttest and assessed the identification ability of subjects. They contend that mental melody representations are not related to key, tempo, or timbre. Memory was consolidated after two listenings and had not degraded within a one-week time span.¹³⁵ The research of Schellenberg and Habashi and of Byron suggests that melodic features such as contour and interval are more salient features than key, tempo, and timbre and may affect the ability of subjects to recall melodies heard while engaged in an unrelated task. Continuous repetitions of a melody with unique contour and intervallic construction may increase the ability of participants to recall that melody.¹³⁶

According to Duke and Davis, memory function is improved during periods of rest following practice sessions.¹³⁷ They tested the effects of sleep on procedural memory

¹³⁴ E. Glenn Schellenberg, Stephanie M. Stalinski, and Bradley M. Marks, "Memory for Surface Features of Unfamiliar Melodies: Independent Effects of Changes in Pitch and Tempo," *Psychological Research* 78, no. 1 (January 2014): 84-95.

¹³⁵ E. Glenn Schellenberg and Peter Habashi, "Remembering the Melody and Timbre, Forgetting the Key and Tempo," *Memory & Cognition* 43, no. 7 (October 2015): 1021-1031.

¹³⁶ Ibid.; Timothy Patrick Byron, "The Processing of Pitch and Temporal Information in Relational Memory for Melodies," (PhD diss., University of Western Sydney, Sydney, Australia, 2008).

¹³⁷ Robert A. Duke and Carla M. Davis, "Procedural Memory Consolidation in the Performance of Brief Keyboard Sequences," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 54, no. 2 (2006): 111-124.

consolidation and found that memory function is “stabilized during waking hours following practice; memories are further refined, and in some cases skills are enhanced, during sleep.”¹³⁸ Although they found significant variance between the amounts of improvement across individuals, all five test groups experienced increased memory and motor skill following sleep. Duke and Davis attribute this improvement to sleep-based memory consolidation. As Duke and Davis specify, “It is tempting to extrapolate from these data and make recommendations about musicians’ practice, but such extrapolations are unwarranted at this time.”¹³⁹ The limited scope of this study and its method of silent keyboard sequence memorization render the results nominally applicable to musical practice. While these results may not be immediately applicable to performance practice at this time, it is apparent that sleep does play a role in memory acquisition.

The research of Weiss explores the possibility that the human voice as a category of timbre may affect memory for melodies. He contends that because part of the brain is dedicated to voice recognition “but not the verbal content of utterances,”¹⁴⁰ listening to melodies being sung may increase the speed with which listeners obtain memory for melodies. Weiss also contends that highly-trained musicians actively participate in listening through mental “motor representations.”¹⁴¹ Saintilan found similar effects where instrumentalists report experiencing mental imagery while performing well memorized music. Participants stated that the mental

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁴⁰ Michael William Weiss, “Vocal Timbre Influences Memory for Melodies,” (master’s thesis, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, 2011), 14.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

images they experience contain representations of piece-specific motor functions, physical touch, spatial requirements, instrument-specific patterns, and other internalizations for music with which they have extensive knowledge.¹⁴²

According to Weiss, multiple areas of the brain are activated when a listener hears an instrument with which he or she is very familiar. Highly trained musicians not only listen to the music, but also create a mental image of themselves playing the music to which they attend.¹⁴³ This action may be responsible for the positive effects of mental practice as it increases memory for melodies and performance-specific motor skills. Weiss' experiments found a significant difference between memory for melodies presented in vocal timbre and those played on instruments. According to Weiss, "The extreme familiarity of the voice may confer processing advantages over instruments even if typical exposure to the voice is through speech rather than singing."¹⁴⁴ A later study by Weiss, Trehub, and Schellenberg confirms these findings. Their work revealed a similar effect wherein participants were better able to recognize familiar melodies when they were presented vocally rather than on piano, marimba, or banjo.¹⁴⁵ According to Weiss, Trehub, and Schellenberg, this work represents "unequivocal evidence that vocal melodies are remembered better than instrumental melodies."¹⁴⁶ It is possible that prior

¹⁴² Nicole Saintilan, "The Use of Imagery During the Performance of Memorized Music," *Psychomusicology* 24, no. 4 (Jan. 2014): 309-315.

¹⁴³ Weiss, "Vocal Timbre Influences Memory for Melodies."

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴⁵ Michael W. Weiss, Sandra E. Trehub, and E. Glenn Schellenberg, "Something in the Way She Sings: Enhanced Memory for Vocal Melodies," *Psychological Science* 23, no. 10 (Aug. 2012): 1074-1078, <https://doi-org.umiss.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0956797612442552>.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1077.

experience with the human voice generally, vocal timbres, the norms of specific genres, intervallic and rhythmic construction, melodic contour, and other fundamental and aesthetic elements of music may affect memory for melodies more than the fundamentals themselves.

Prior Experience and Memory

Schematic expectancies are the result of enculturation. According to Justus and Bharucha, the result of listeners' experience with the Western-European tonal system precipitates the formation of musical schemata or schematic expectancies due to long-term "passive perceptual learning."¹⁴⁷ Veridical expectations are the result of relatively short exposure periods. They "inform predictions about specific things in particular situations."¹⁴⁸ Simchy-Gross states, "If you hear an unfamiliar song play 12 times on the radio over the course of an hour-long road trip, for instance, that song—and the sequential orderings of its musical events—will be veridically familiar by the time you arrive at your destination."¹⁴⁹ Engaging veridical expectancies through relatively short-term exposure to continuous repetitions of a single novel melody with unique contour, a preference for diatonic triad pitches, and an overall strong metrical tendency may increase memory abilities. A melody with these particular properties might also increase memory function by conforming to subjects' schematic expectancies.

¹⁴⁷ Timothy C. Justus and Jamshed J. Bharucha, "Modularity in Musical Processing: The Automaticity of Harmonic Priming," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 27, no. 4 (August 2001): 1000.

¹⁴⁸ Rimmon Simchy-Gross, "How Musical Oddballs Warp Psychological Time," (master's thesis, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, 2016), 5.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Peebles explores expectancies and the perception of closure within segments of music.¹⁵⁰ She contends that the structure of music naturally conforms to the phenomenon wherein humans form schematic expectancies in everyday life. The proclivity to perceive beginning and end segments causes people to predict segment ends as a long-term learned behavior. Because these segments are perceptible only in a temporal context, they are classified as events. Peebles clarifies, "Event segmentation is an automatic, heirarchical process, and is essential for guiding memory and learning."¹⁵¹ Each musical segment, from a single tone, to an entire piece of music is perceived as an event. Since people continuously group more singular events into larger groups of events in an attempt to understand the actions that lead from event beginning to event end, they learn to expect what will come next in the sequence. Event segmentation as a perception is the result of the subconscious anticipation of event closure.¹⁵²

The experiments Peebles conducted assessed the ability of first year undergraduate music students and graduate students or professional musicians to predict closure in the music of notable Western-European composers throughout history. Those participants with more training in music were better able to predict segment ends for variables such as cadence types that signal either arrival or change. Peebles' findings corroborate the assumption that more musical experience leads to higher accuracy of predictions for event segmentation and closure due to the formation of musical schemata.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Crystal Peebles, "The Role of Segmentation and Expectation in the Perception of Closure." (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2011).

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 68.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

Hutchins conducted three experiments wherein participants were primed for the expectation of a distinct pitch that was repeated in a melody.¹⁵⁴ The researcher had participants listen to melodies of varying length and where the target pitch appeared a varying number of times. The experiments omitted the final pitch of each melodic sequence and had participants submit a guess as to the final pitch by singing the pitch as quickly as possible. The researcher excluded incorrect pitch attempts and then measured latency from the beginning of the last pitch of the presented melody to the beginning of the participants' attempt at performing what they believed would be the final pitch. Hutchins found that for longer melodies where more examples of final pitch priming occurred, where the target pitch was the tonic, where examples of pitch priming were closer together in the presented melody, and where pitch priming was closer to the target, participants sang the final pitch with less latency. Hutchins surmises that longer melodies provide more opportunities for prime pitch repetition and strengthens the participants' perception of tonality. In addition, participants who were more adept at producing a correct final pitch attempt quickly had more years of experience in ensemble singing and musical instrument training. Prior knowledge and long-term exposure to music with similar characteristics enhances the ability of listeners to identify items that conform to standards of the genre.¹⁵⁵

In a similar study, Byron explored the roles of time-based properties, pitch interval magnitude, veridical expectancy, and melodic contour on subjects' ability to identify differences

¹⁵⁴ Sean Hutchins, "Implicit Memory for Music: Factors Affecting Musical Priming and Their Time Courses," (PhD diss., McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 2008).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., Peebles, "The Role of Segmentation and Expectation in the Perception of Closure."

between various presentations of a melody and altered versions of that melody.¹⁵⁶ The study provides some interesting results regarding the specific factors that influence memory for melodies. Byron found that subjects were more able to identify rhythmic, metric, and melodic contour differences when melodies were relatively short. However, length of melody did not affect the ability to distinguish between intervallic alterations. Pitch had a stronger effect on ability to identify meter and rhythm alterations than did time-based properties on pitch alteration discrimination. Byron found that reversing the order of standard and altered melody presentations, thereby “disrupting veridical expectancies,”¹⁵⁷ caused sweeping low scores for correctness in subjects’ discrimination attempts.

Shanahan and Albrecht studied the transmission chain methodologies of several prominent researchers in the field of social learning.¹⁵⁸ Shanahan and Albrecht explain that many transmission chain experiments require participants to listen to a musical phrase and reiterate what they have heard. According to Shanahan and Albrecht, “The simplest form of transmission chain is a linear transmission chain, in which one person directly demonstrates to another.”¹⁵⁹ They argue that experiments wherein an individual participant is required to listen and reiterate lack the characteristics of real world transmission customs and practices. Music learners most

¹⁵⁶ Timothy Patrick Byron, “The Processing of Pitch and Temporal Information in Relational Memory for Melodies (PhD diss., Western Sydney University, Sydney, Australia, 2008).

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹⁵⁸ Daniel Shanahan and Joshua Albrecht. “Examining the Effect of Oral Transmission on Folksongs,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 36, no. 3 (2019): 273-288, doi: 10.1525/mp.2019.36.3.273.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 274.

often acquire melodies from “multiple versions of the melody [and] from multiple sources.”¹⁶⁰ Additionally, many researchers who explore transmission employ methodologies that require only recognition of target melodies.¹⁶¹ They contend that linear transmission chain methodologies are less realistic than real life transmission methods. However, they also recognize that diffusion techniques or multiple chain procedures may mitigate aberrations, and choose a multiple linear transmission chain method for their experiment.¹⁶²

Shanahan and Albrecht had participants appear in groups of four. One of the four participants listened to an unfamiliar melody and passed it on by singing the melody to the next participant from memory. Each participant passed the melody on in this manner, but in a different order for each melody. Results show that in linear transmission of this kind melodies that contain the seventh scale degree as the penultimate pitch resolving upward to the tonic “are 1.09-1.44 times more likely to be transformed into”¹⁶³ cadences that contain the second scale degree as the penultimate pitch resolving downward to the tonic. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, Shanahan and Abrecht analyzed several folksong collections. They found that vocal music was more likely to end in descending motion from the second scale degree to the tonic.¹⁶⁴ A reason for this phenomenon is not given, but they posit that the reasons may be physiological and due to ease of vocal production.¹⁶⁵ However likely that this is the cause of

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 275.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 278.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 280-281.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 281-282.

variation in the folksong record, it is possible that Shanahan and Albrecht's participants reiterated altered melodies due to prior experience with similar melodies. If supertonic-tonic cadences are more common in the folk record, then participants' schemata may have a negative effect on memory of new melodies. This may be especially true where multiple experiences with a new melody are not offered (i.e., practice).

The presence of text and melody combination may increase memory function. Various methods of text setting may affect the ability of subjects to attend to textual and melodic information. Gordon conducted a series of experiments wherein electroencephalographic information was paired with behavioral responses as indicators of word recognition.¹⁶⁶ Subjects listened and indicated whether textual changes had occurred throughout various iterations of performances including textual, melodic, or harmonic alterations (i.e., primes and targets). Gordon found that when expectancies were violated, the area of the brain responsible for memory and attention was engaged. Furthermore, Gordon found that memory for text and melody are interrelated. When familiar texts were sung on different melodies, subjects exhibited difficulty identifying the textual targets. In addition, Gordon suggests that familiar texts and melody combinations are so interrelated that subjects are unable to purposefully attend to text alone or melody alone "precisely because the two dimensions cannot be separated."¹⁶⁷ Gordon also found that when textsettings were syllabically aligned with stressed syllables on strong beats subjects were more successful in the task of word/pseudo-word identification. Even in the absence of melody, syllabic stress in particularly strong beat rhythm has been found to "capture

¹⁶⁶ Reyna Leigh Gordon, "Neural and Behavioral Correlates of Song Prosody." (PhD diss., Florida Atlantic University, 2010).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

attention and make it possible for articulators to produce periodic, perceptually salient events.”¹⁶⁸

This could explain why some music is more easily committed to memory. Gordon explains:

Typical textsetting behaviors on the part of composers, such as placing stressed syllables on strong metrical positions, and on the part of performers, such as lengthening well-aligned syllables more than misaligned ones... could be accounted for by the present findings. Moreover, by showing that alignment modulates lexical decision-making, these results are an encouraging first step in understanding why good textsettings are easier to learn and memorize....¹⁶⁹

Long-term exposure and genre-specific experience with music of the Western-European canon may cause those with more musical training to be better able to understand, predict intervallic and rhythmic progression, and remember melodies that conform to Western-European construction standards.¹⁷⁰ The roles of schematic and veridical expectancies in memory for music is well-researched and understood to be a by-product of a necessary developmental process whereby humans learn to understand the world.¹⁷¹ The natural predisposition to group information about textual peculiarities, melodic and rhythmic construction, and event segmentation into schemata suggests that musicians with more training and experience may be better able to recognize and remember melodies that conform to the schemata they possess.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 131.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 138.

¹⁷⁰ Byron, “The Processing of Pitch and Temporal Information in Relational Memory for Melodies,”; Hutchins, “Implicit Memory for Music: Factors Affecting Musical Priming and Their Time Courses,”; Peebles, “The Role of Segmentation and Expectation in the Perception of Closure.”

¹⁷¹ Simchy-Gross, “How Musical Oddballs Warp Psychological Time.”

The Task of Memorization

Ginsborg attempted to understand the methods by which singers memorize the music they perform.¹⁷² She contends that the task of memorization, when approached as a necessity of the work done by professional performers and voice teachers, is the result of purposeful interactions with music. Approaches to the task of memorization by “students, amateur singers and professional singers”¹⁷³ are varied, but emerging trends appear to include elements such as a focus on counting aloud, words only practice, music only practice, or words and music together initial attempts. Ginsborg charged the singers with memorizing an unknown song of approximately one and a half minutes in length and “sufficiently complex to engage the most musically-proficient expert over six 15-minute practice sessions, without being too difficult for the least experienced student...”¹⁷⁴ She found that none of the participants were completely successful in the task of memorizing within the given time frame, and the more experienced singers were not faster or more accurate than the less experienced. However, the “fast, accurate memorisers used more different modes of attempt than the slow, inaccurate memorisers did.”¹⁷⁵ According to Ginsborg, singers who employ active memorization strategies are more efficient than those who rely on incidental learning. However, some participants did rely on incidental learning. They only made attempts to perform without the aid of music notation in the final sessions. Ginsborg states, “In fact there were no differences between the groups, divided either

¹⁷² Jane Ginsborg, "Classical Singers Learning and Memorising a New Song: An Observational Study," *Psychology of Music* 30, no. 1 (April 2002): 58-101.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

by experience or by memorising proficiency, in the number of bars they produced from memory.”¹⁷⁶ It is clear that more research is needed to understand the task of active memorization techniques and to produce a system of effective strategies upon which singers might rely.

Mishra examined the extant body of research concerning models of music memorization and designed or compiled what she believes is a research-based model of memorization techniques and stages.¹⁷⁷ She sorted through existing research, analyzed, and organized the findings of psychologists in order to offer students and pedagogues an explanation of memorization whereby they might better understand and more efficiently execute the task of music memorization. Mishra found that memorization occurs in a three-stage system of learning wherein a learner is enculturated and previews a new piece of music, processes the details of the music and practices its foundational qualities in the second stage, and then automatizes what he or she has learned in the final stage. Students who master the performance of new pieces of music demonstrate a skill-specific knowledge that is the result of general knowledge about how to interpret the details of a new piece of music.¹⁷⁸

Musicians interpret new music in the context of the skills they have already acquired. However, memory for music may also occur as a result of hearing only, may be influenced by accompanying emotions, affected by attention to unrelated tasks, or may be affected by the fundamental construction of the music and lyrics themselves. The specific qualities of music

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 96.

¹⁷⁷ Jennifer Mishra, "A Theoretical Model of Musical Memorization," *Psychomusicology - A Journal of Research in Music Cognition* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 75-89.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

combined with the uniqueness of text, feelings toward the music or an unrelated primary task, and the melodic and rhythmic content of music may affect persons' ability to remember the music to which they casually listen. Memorization may occur as an unintended outcome of the process of learning to execute various techniques in performance or practice. Incidental learning of unique melodies may occur while people are engaged in other tasks, and this effect may be strengthened by a person's familiarity with the norms of the genre.

Implications and Future Research

The relatively large body of research in the areas of memory, the effect of distractions, emotions and correlated behaviors, and the processes that occur in the brain during memory experiments makes it clear that much is known about the subject of music and memory. However, many research findings are inconsistent, contradictory, or counterintuitive.¹⁷⁹ It is clear that specific musical features such as melodic contour, text/rhythm alignment, length of melody, and the degree to which melodies conform to Western-European standards and listeners' schemata all affect memory abilities.¹⁸⁰ Preferences for particular genres, feelings of nostalgia, and the perception of music's power to evoke emotion have also been shown to affect memory

¹⁷⁹ Nathan O. Buonviri, "Effects of Visual Presentation on Aural Memory for Melodies," (PhD diss., Temple University, 2010); Kimberly M. McCarter, "The Effect of Auditory Stimulation on Learners with Different Learning Styles," (PhD diss., Capella University, 2008).

¹⁸⁰ Byron, "The Processing of Pitch and Temporal Information in Relational Memory for Melodies,"; Gordon, "Neural and Behavioral Correlates of Song Prosody,"; Hutchins, "Implicit Memory for Music: Factors Affecting Musical Priming and Their Time Courses,"; Peebles, "The Role of Segmentation and Expectation in the Perception of Closure,"; Schellenberg and Habashi, "Remembering the Melody and Timbre, Forgetting the Key and Tempo,"; Simchy-Gross, "How Musical Oddballs Warp Psychological Time."

for melodies.¹⁸¹ Since there is a dearth of information regarding the subject, it may be useful to explore any possible connection between unrelated primary tasks and memory for music as an unintended learning outcome. Future research might also seek to compare the strength and longevity of memory of melodies as an active task and where memorization is achieved through incidental learning. Research such as this could increase our understanding of formal and informal learning methods, provide a method of increased memorization efficiency and expedition, and explain the longevity or degradation of memory for music. In addition, the long history of balladry and folksong performance traditions reveals a poignant logical conclusion. If ballad singing dates as far back in history as is accounted for in the writings of Child and many other researchers,¹⁸² and many of the examples in contemporary use are variants of those originals,¹⁸³ then the teaching and learning methods of performers in oral transmission traditions must be exceedingly effective. Any music teaching and learning method as effective as this deserves further exploration and documentation.

¹⁸¹ Aubé, Peretz, and Armony, “The Effects of Emotion on Memory for Music and Vocalisations.”; Barrett, Grimm, Robins, Wildschut, Sedikides, and Janata, “Music-Evoked Nostalgia: Affect, Memory, and Personality.”; Parks and Dollinger, “The Positivity Effect.”

¹⁸² Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, xiv.

¹⁸³ Bertrand H. Bronson, “Traditional Ballads Musically Considered,”; Bronson, “Professor Child’s Ballad Tunes.”; Atkinson, “The Ballad and Its Paradoxes,” 128.

CHAPTER III:

IN THE HILLS OF ARKANSAS

Ballad and Folk Song Collecting in the Arkansas Ozarks

Dr. Alan Spurgeon, of the University of Mississippi, and a number of his current and former students have conducted Ozark balladry and folk song research. Spurgeon began collecting Ozark ballads in 1993 while teaching at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Students began to accompany him into the field to record and interview informants in 1995. These students assisted Spurgeon in his work and pursued original research that led to successful theses. Some of this research was included in Spurgeon's 2002 book of play parties, *Pig in the Parlor: And 20 More Authentic Play Parties*.¹⁸⁴ In 2005 Spurgeon published *Waltz the Hall: The American Play Party*.¹⁸⁵

In 1996, during Spurgeon's tenure at Southwestern, his advisee, Christopher Scott Barber, submitted a master's thesis presenting his analyses of "Barbara Allen" variants in the Parler Collection at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.¹⁸⁶ Barber's work is one result of a grant secured from the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies of the Fulbright College of the

¹⁸⁴ Alan L. Spurgeon, *Pig in the Parlor: And 20 More Authentic Play Parties* (Dayton, OH: Heritage Music Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁵ Alan L. Spurgeon, *Waltz the Hall: The American Play Party* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).

¹⁸⁶ Christopher S. Barber, "A Study of the Variants of 'Bonny Barbara Allen' in the University of Arkansas Folklore Collection" (master's thesis, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, 1996).

University of Arkansas. Under the provisions of that grant, Barber, Glen Dale Barney, and Spurgeon were to transcribe and notate the vocal music contents of the University of Arkansas Folklore Collection.¹⁸⁷ Barber chose to analyze the variants of “Bonny Barbara Allen” because it “is the most familiar and one of the oldest Child Ballads . . . comprises the largest number of variants in the University of Arkansas collection . . . [and] is the best known traditional folk ballad in English.”¹⁸⁸ He identified several common features of the variants, categorized the three introduction types, transcribed the first verse melodies of the 31 variants with audio recordings, and included lyric transcriptions of all 33 variants. His work is a thorough analysis of the “Bonny Barbara Allen” variants in the Parler collection.

In 2001, David Gadberry submitted his master’s thesis at Southwestern Oklahoma State University. Dr. Spurgeon worked as Gadberry’s advisor and participated in the field work. Between 1997 and 2001, Robert Cochran of the University of Arkansas, Gadberry, and Spurgeon conducted several interviews with Mary Jo Davis Henderson. Henderson is a folk singer and folk song collector who was prominently featured in the CBS short film, *The Search for Yokum Creek*.¹⁸⁹ Several members of Henderson’s Davis family are included in Bronson’s *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, where Bronson credits Parler as the contributor of Davis family variants.¹⁹⁰ Gadberry’s thesis documented Henderson’s family background, musical traditions, the family’s relationship with Mary Celestia Parler, and their contributions to the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁸⁹ *The Search for Yokum Creek*, CBS/The University of Arkansas, 1954.

¹⁹⁰ David Gadberry, “Mary Jo Davis Henderson: Her Life and Contributions to Ozark Regional Folk Music,” (master’s thesis, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, 2001), 8.

Parler collection. In addition to documenting biographical information, Gadberry transcribed and notated 30 ballads and folk songs from the University of Arkansas Folklore Collection and Henderson as a primary source.¹⁹¹

In the fall of 2006, Spurgeon, then at the University of Mississippi, and his student, Justin E. Wallace, began collecting ballads in the Ozarks. Having inquired of several possible sources who either were unavailable or unable to help, Spurgeon and Wallace made contact with The Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View, Arkansas. Spurgeon and Wallace were attempting to collect ballads not long after the death of The Ozark Folk Center's folklorist, W. K. McNeil.¹⁹² However, the center's Assistant Manager, Elliot Hancock, proved himself a capable gatekeeper by helping to arrange eight field interviews. Spurgeon and Wallace were able to collect ballads from Mary Gillihan, Sheryl Irvine, Judy Klinkhammer, Kay Thomas, Marion Spear, Deb Burnett and her sister Marsha, Brooke Barksdale (now Tidwell), Peggy Wolfenbarger and her sister Maxine Smith, Kathy Sutterfield, and May Ott. These interviews yielded a total of "49 Child ballads and 64 other songs (including British ballads not in the Child corpus)."¹⁹³ Dr. Spurgeon's prior work and interest in the folk music of the Ozarks laid the foundations for my own interest in music learning among folk musicians.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.; Alan L. Spurgeon and David Gadberry, "Mary Jo Davis Henderson: Her Life and Contributions to Ozark Regional Folk Music," *Mid-America Folklore* 29, no. 1/2 (2001): 7.

¹⁹² The death of McNeil would have a significant effect on the future of the Ozark Folk Center. According to some of the informants for the present research, his absence led to a loosening of the historical accuracy guidelines for which he was a stickler. See Appendix A for more information.

¹⁹³ Justin E. Wallace, "British Ballads in the Arkansas Ozarks: Survivals of Oral Tradition" (master's thesis, University of Mississippi, 2008), 22.

Method

Back Down in the Ozarks

Dr. Spurgeon and I began to discuss possible informants for this project in February of 2019. Since he and several of his former students had previously conducted ballad research in the Ozark Mountains, we came to the conclusion that his prior sources would be the most convenient and accessible informants for this study. Dr. Spurgeon and I did not participate in the day-to-day activities of the informants for this research. We did not observe folksinging activities as a means to procure the information that is necessary to describe the social interactions and learning processes of folksingers. One might expect this kind of interaction between researchers and informants in an ethnographic study such as this. Instead, we interviewed the informants and I interpreted the descriptions of folk music learning, family histories, and beliefs about authenticity in order to make pertinent conclusions regarding the relevant aspects of Ozark folk music culture. Dr. Spurgeon was confident in the knowledge and authenticity of his prior informants. His confidence was compelling evidence of the possibility that they would provide useful answers to my research questions. In addition, Dr. Spurgeon and I had travelled to The Ozark Folk Center the preceding October to interview Kathleen Jensen for a book chapter on music education in Arkansas that Dr. Spurgeon was preparing. We also interviewed Mary Gillihan during that same visit for my own enlightenment.

I was taken with the quaint beauty of the Folk Center campus, the surrounding area, and the welcoming attitude of the interpreters I met at the crafts village. I felt at home there. As I toured the grounds, I found myself in the leather-craft hut manned by the mother of one of my wife's former co-workers in our hometown. Although this was the only person there with whom I

had any real connection, every encounter seemed as amiable. The affable nature of the people I met that day gave me the sense that I would be able to gain the trust of other Folk Center interpreters and area natives. I knew that I would be able to obtain honest answers to any questions I posed regarding my research.

Initial attempts to obtain contact information for Brooke Barksdale Tidwell, Sheryl Irvine, Judy Klinkhammer, and Marion Spear were fruitless. Several weeks passed, and Dr. Spurgeon began to seek this information through other channels. In April of 2019, he called the home of Sheryl Irvine several times to no answer. He was persistent, and eventually made contact with a family member who informed him that Sheryl had passed away in February. He contacted Kathleen Jensen again and was surprised to learn that Judy Klinkhammer was also among the departed. She passed in 2015. Keith Symanowitz, events programmer at the folk center, later responded with assistance and proved himself as a valuable resource in our search for informants.

Dr. Spurgeon procured contact information for several possible informants. Marion Spear did not respond, but others were willing to participate. We achieved contact with Brooke Barksdale Tidwell through social media and email in May, 2019. Later in the summer, Keith Symanowitz provided contact information for Kay Thomas, whom we met and interviewed. Kay provided information for Kathy Sutterfield, whom we met and interviewed. Susan Young at the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History in Springdale, Arkansas, provided contact information for Lyle Sparkman, whom we met and interviewed. Dr. Spurgeon knew Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller from his prior work with their mothers, Phydella Hogan and Helen Fultz. He called Martha and

arranged a meeting. We were able to conduct all interviews over two days in June, and we conducted follow-up interviews with Lyle Sparkman and Kyla Cross at the end of October, 2019.

Interviewees

Kay Thomas, Kathy Sutterfield, and Mary Gillihan comprised a group of folk center interpreter/performers who had not been born and raised in Mountain View or Stone County, Arkansas. Kay, Kathy, and Mary are in their early or mid-sixties. Although not natives of the specific geographic location, their transplant statuses and experiences learning from the folk of the area give them a unique perspective on the music that comes from that area.

Lyle Sparkman, Martha Estes, and Jeanie Miller are the most experienced folksingers of this group. They are beyond 70 years of age. The information provided by Lyle, Martha, and Jeanie, who are products of generations-old family musical traditions combined with that of informants who come from different areas or traditions may homogenize the results of this study. Brooke Barksdale Tidwell and Kyla Cross are more difficult to categorize. They are the youngest members of this group. Kyla is 14 years of age, and Brooke is in her mid-to-late 30s. Their musical lives are comprised of a mixture of local tradition and outside influence. It is my supposition that an exploration of the beliefs held by a cross section of folksingers with differing backgrounds, influences, and experiences provides an opportunity for a more robust explanation of the process of learning, the importance of lineage, and the problem of authenticity in Ozark folk music.

Mary Gillihan

Dr. Spurgeon and I visited the Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View, Arkansas, October 4th and 5th of 2018 to interview Kathy Jensen and May Gillihan for a book chapter on music education in the Arkansas public schools that Dr. Spurgeon was asked to write. I accompanied him on the trip to operate the recording equipment and to ask Mary Gillihan some questions about folksong learning. We met Mary in the folk center's main office building, set up audio recording equipment, and conducted the interview. Our approach was to pose few questions and allow Mary to explore her thoughts on folksong learning, transmission, and authenticity. I explained my prior research and what I believed would be important to the present research. Mary spoke at length about these topics. She was strong-minded regarding authenticity. She explained the progression of historical accuracy guidelines at the folk center, and elucidated her own beliefs concerning what are and are not acceptable sources from which to learn folk music. Mary Gillihan's ideas regarding what is important in folksong learning and authenticity helped identify several themes and phenomena that would also emerge as nearly standard beliefs in most other informants for this project.

Brooke Barksdale Tidwell

Brooke Barksdale Tidwell moved to DeKalb, Texas around the beginning of 2018. Since she no longer lived in Calico Rock, Arkansas, and she would not be in the Mountain View area anytime soon, we decided to conduct our interview over the telephone. After several emails and text messages we arranged a date and time that was convenient for both of us. I called Brooke and we spoke at length. Our two hour conversation was pleasant, and her answers to my

questions regarding folksong learning proved quite useful. She began learning music fairly recently compared to others who experienced the folk center from its opening years in the early 1970s. Since Brooke was the youngest of the interviewees connected with the Ozark Folk Center, she provided a slightly different perspective of the folk center's music community, on music learning, authenticity, and performance practice.

Kay Thomas

Dr. Spurgeon and I confirmed meeting times for four interviews in the second week of June. We made the 5 hour drive from Oxford, Mississippi to Mountain View during the morning of June 19th, arriving with plenty of time to look around the shops on the square before heading on to the home of Kay Thomas. We ascended to Kay's mountaintop home where she lives with her husband, John. Dr. Spurgeon and I arrived just before 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Kay came out to greet us, and we stood beside the cliffs overlooking the beauty of the wooded valley just steps from her front door. I proceeded to unload my photography gear and paperwork, snapped a few still photographs of the scenic overlook, and rejoined the conversation. She invited us in and continued to converse with Dr. Spurgeon, taking care to make me feel included. Once inside, I immediately mounted the camera on its tripod, chose a vantage point, set my recording equipment, and put my interview questions in order.

Kay was already discussing pertinent information when I pressed the record button. The interview was a success, and she answered all my questions with attention to detail and a matter-of-fact, yet benevolent approach. She recalled her experiences at the folk center and working alongside the native folk musicians with a fondness that drew me in to her stories. She would

often look into a corner of the room while she spoke and thought, as if reviewing the pictorial archives of her memory, searching for the information I requested. John would periodically enter the kitchen to check on the stone fruit cobbler he was baking. Kay talked for just over two hours, nearly uninterrupted by Dr. Spurgeon's and my redirections or probing queries. We concluded the interview, packed up the equipment, and prepared to vacate, as we had quite a long drive to Fayetteville that evening. Unbeknownst to us, however, the delicious dessert John prepared was our after-interview treat. Having refreshed ourselves with cobbler and ice cream, we took our leave, and traversed the long, twisty road to Fayetteville, arriving just after 10 o'clock, p.m. We checked in to our hotel, discussed the day's occurrences and our plans for the next, and retired for some much needed rest.

Kathy Sutterfield

We arose the following morning, had a light breakfast in the hotel lobby, and made the short trip across town to Kathy Sutterfield's home in a historic district of Fayetteville. We arrived just before 9:30 in the morning of June 20th. Kathy met us at the door and welcomed us in from the sprawling front porch. She gave us a quick tour of her home, explaining that the house was very old but had been occupied by only a couple of families over the years. She was very proud that it had been restored as near to its original state as was practical and that she had taken care to adorn the home with antique furnishings and fixtures. As we finished viewing the first floor, Kathy asked whether we'd rather conduct the interview in the parlor or the piano and instrument room, and we decided on the room with musical instruments. I set up my recording equipment and pressed the button to begin capturing video as quickly as I could. She, like Kay, had already

begun talking about folk music learning and her time at the folk center in Mountain View. Kathy was graceful and kind, and she provided useful answers to my research questions and in-depth descriptions of her music learning process. We completed the interview, and then we discussed her instrument collection and whether she preferred the Martin D-28 or HD-28 guitar. Then we went to meet with Lyle Sparkman at the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History in Springdale, Arkansas.

Lyle Sparkman

We arrived at the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History in Springdale, Arkansas, with only a few minutes to spare, entered the building, and were greeted warmly by employees Susan Young and Allyn Lord who had helped arrange the meeting. After a short tour through the building, we were led to a suitable location for an interview. As I set up the recording equipment, Lyle arrived and entered the room. It was immediately apparent that he was a knowledgeable source. He began describing his family singing tradition, his life of ballad collecting, and his performing experiences. It was quite clear that he was, as he described, an anomaly. He had been raised in a folk tradition and was educated in the scholarly pursuit of folklore study. In addition to bringing an understanding of folklore research, Lyle brought gifts. He had prepared a list of songs and ballads that he had learned and taught during his time as an educator at the Shiloh Museum. He also brought an annotated family history and song transcriptions. Before I was able to ask the first question, Lyle gave a detailed description of his entire family tradition of folksinging, the progression of his ancestry as they made their way to the Ozarks from the southeast, and his participation in the educative endeavors of the museum. Then he asked what I wanted to know. I

proceeded to question him about the particular facets of folk music learning about which I was interested. Interjection and redirection were seldom necessary.

Lyle seemed to know exactly what we were there for and provided it despite his wariness of outsider intrusion. He made it clear that he knew of some offending researchers, but that he also sensed we were not like them. Lyle answered as many questions as I had prepared and provided a few short examples of his family versions of some ballads. He was reluctant to sing more than a few lines of any song, but not for lack of knowledge. He was a self-proclaimed introvert and shy about singing. Lyle concluded the interview with a short example of his family version of “Barbara Allen,” and the promise that he would ask his young student, Kyla Cross, to participate in the research by singing some ballads for us.

Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller

After meeting with Lyle Sparkman and having lunch, we drove southeast to nearby Goshen, Arkansas. We arrived at Martha Estes’ and Jeanie Miller’s local church a few minutes before 3 o’clock, found the entrance to the recreation center, and entered. First attempts to find Martha and Jeanie were unsuccessful, but we eventually discovered them in a small conference room taking advantage of air conditioning. We would conduct the interview there. I set up the recording equipment as Dr. Spurgeon and the ladies sat around the long conference table engaged in conversation. Although they had already been talking about folksongs and the past research Dr. Spurgeon had done with them, Jeanie started the interview with a quip about how there is never any new information about old songs. The fact that Martha is the true jokester became apparent forthwith.

We began with information about the cousins' musical background, progressed through discussions of family history, music learning, and ended with beliefs about what is and is not to be considered authentic in folk music performance. These topics were punctuated with laughter at Martha's humor and nostalgic recollections of passed family members. Martha and Jeanie were perhaps the most down-to-earth interviewees I encountered, and I was left with the feeling that these were old friends or that I was meeting them for the second time. We concluded the interview after a few short hours, packed up, and went to our hotel for a couple of hours before visiting the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville that night. We stayed the night in Fayetteville and drove home the next morning.

Kyla Cross

Dr. Spurgeon and I returned to Springdale, Arkansas, on October 23rd, 2019, for a second meeting with Lyle Sparkman and to record his 14 year old student, Kyla Cross. I left Cleveland, Mississippi, early that morning and travelled to Oxford, Mississippi, to meet Dr. Spurgeon. We set out for Springdale by way of I-40 from Memphis, Tennessee, but were delayed just west of West Memphis, Arkansas due to an accident-related road closure. Traffic was stopped for an hour or more. Traffic flow eventually resumed, and we arrived in Springdale around 6 o'clock. We checked in to our hotel, went to dinner, and returned to the hotel to discuss the subject matter of the next day's interview session. Lyle had sent us a list of ballads that Kyla might sing for us. We examined the list, checking *Youtube.com* and the digital folksong collections for versions of the songs from the list and finding very few of them. We would soon learn that the reason for our inability was that Lyle had done his research. He had Kyla prepare to sing songs that were rare in

the extant collections or that had never been recorded, including several from his own family tradition.

We were scheduled to meet Lyle and Kyla at the Shiloh Museum at 8:30 a.m., October 24th. It was raining, and there was a slight chill in the air. We arrived at the same time as Lyle, greeted each other, and entered the museum together. Allyn Lord, museum director, had graciously agreed to open the museum early so that we could conduct our interview. She showed us to the multi-purpose conference hall, suggesting that it would be the best location for recording. We agreed, and I set up the recording equipment as Kyla arrived with her grandparents. Lyle, Dr. Spurgeon, Kyla, and her grandparents discussed plans for the interview, the purpose and future use of our research, and when Kyla would need to be picked up from the museum.

Lyle began by introducing us to Kyla as an adopted eighth generation member of his family singing tradition. He explained that since he had taught her in the style of his family, that she would be responsible for continuing the tradition by sharing it with others. Kyla shared 18 folksongs and ballads with us. Many of these were versions and variants not yet recorded in the extant collections. We questioned Kyla about the processes she used to learn her songs, memorization techniques, performance idiosyncrasies and idioms, and about the difficulties of recalling lyrics and melodies while performing.

Kyla is a unique young lady. She is particularly well-mannered, well-versed, and well-adjusted. She answered every one of our questions with a degree of accuracy and measured specificity that I have rarely observed in a person of her age. When Kyla had sung all that she cared to sing, Lyle dismissed her to the adjacent room, and prepared himself to sing some of his

family songs with topics not appropriate for even a well-adjusted young person. Lyle sang 6 excerpts of ballads and folksongs, and ended the interview with a humorous story from local folklore. We gathered the equipment, took a photograph, packed up, and began the long drive home.

Road closures forced us into detours through scenic routes, curvy two-lane mountain roads, and long waits where single stop signs prevented traffic from entering highways easily. Another accident stopped traffic for a couple of hours just east of West Memphis. We arrived in Oxford around 7:30 p.m., and parted ways as I made the two-hour trip home to Cleveland.

CHAPTER IV:

BACKGROUNDS AND BELIEFS ABOUT LINEAGE AND TRANSMISSION

Backgrounds

According to McNeil, the Ozark and southern Appalachian regions of the United States “have strong connections, historically and in the minds of many people.”¹⁹⁴ While he acknowledges that this connection may be warranted with respect to some anthropological features, he claims that many people incorrectly estimate the strength of the similarities between these regions.¹⁹⁵ McNeil explains that there were and are multiple contributors to the heterogenous population of Ozark inhabitants. In fact, he argues that, “There is no such thing as Appalachian or Ozark culture in the sense of traits uniformly held throughout either region; actually, it is more accurate to think of Appalachian and Ozark cultures [as distinct].”¹⁹⁶ It is precisely this point that is illuminated when a comparison is made between the beliefs held by many of the informants for this project and the facts they provide about their own familial lineages, migration patterns, and musical backgrounds. With respect to beliefs about authenticity in folk music, lineage and a sense of belonging to the Ozark region appear to be important facets of the musical culture. However, if they are well-versed in the idioms and customs, musicians

¹⁹⁴ McNeil, *Southern Mountain Folksongs*, 11.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 14.

who might be identified as transplants, interlopers, or even outsiders are not necessarily viewed as inauthentic. For these reasons, the following exploration of informants' backgrounds is worthy of consideration.

Mary Gillihan

Mary is a recently retired interpreter/performer for the Ozark Folk Center. According to her, she and a friend frequently travelled together. Camping and canoeing were among their usual activities. Upon reading of the Folk Center in the *Chicago Tribune*, they decided to visit shortly after the Folk Center opened in 1973. Mary was so intrigued by the Ozark landscape and people that she moved from her home in Charleston, Illinois, to Mountain View not long after her initial visits.¹⁹⁷

Although she may be considered by some as a transplant to the Ozarks, Mary is not the first in her family to live in the area. She claims a connection to the southern Illinois Ozarks through her great-grandmother who lived there. Through this connection, her family's musical tradition was passed down to her father who learned such songs as "The Letter Edged in Black" and "The Gypsy's Warning" from his mother.¹⁹⁸ Mary did not learn her family's versions of old songs when she was a child. She did, however, sing in church. And, she learned "Lord Lovell" [Child 75] from one of her junior high school teachers.¹⁹⁹ She did have a cursory knowledge of balladry and some experience with singing. She began learning ballads and old

¹⁹⁷ Mary Gillihan, interview by Alan Spurgeon and Kevin Tharp, Mountain View, Arkansas, October 15, 2018.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

folk songs after she moved to Mountain View and met Robert Gillihan, who is now her husband. Mary explains that Dr. McNeil, Almeda Riddle, and other notable Folk Center musicians were her primary sources for ballads and old folk songs.²⁰⁰

Brooke Tidwell

Brooke has strong family ties to the Mountain View area. She explains that her great-grandfather Teague was from Fifty-Six, Arkansas, a small town near Mountain View. That part of her family lived near West Memphis for generations before Brooke's mother married and brought the family back to their "ancestral home," because "they didn't want to raise a family in the flat land."²⁰¹ According to Brooke, a large portion of the land that used to belong to her family is now owned and occupied by the Ozark Folk Center State Park. She believes that many families still harbor feelings of resentment for the state's compulsory acquisition of family lands. However, Brooke contends that Folk Center efforts and programs are responsible for preserving the folkways of the Ozark people—ultimately a good thing.²⁰²

Brooke's musical experience is varied and began early. Because she was home-schooled, she did not receive a formal instrumental or choral music education. Instead, she became interested in the guitar because her mother taught her "a few chords."²⁰³ She pursued a more thorough knowledge of the guitar on her own and later took guitar and fiddle lessons. She

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Brooke Tidwell, telephone interview by author, DeKalb, Texas, June 9, 2019.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

maintains that her musical education was informal. She says, “People would just show me things . . . I just learned by ear.”²⁰⁴ Brooke believes that the Folk Center was an important part of her musical background. She was able to access the many recordings held in the archives of the Folk Center as a source of learning. In addition, the balladry and fiddle workshops she attended helped guide her music learning, as did her participation in the Friday and Saturday night community picking circles on the town square.

Kay Thomas

Kay is a musician and performer who was the Crafts Director for the Folk Center for nearly 30 years.²⁰⁵ While she admits that she learned a lot about Mountain View area folkways from Folk Center icons like “Aunt” Ollie Gilbert, Retha Brewer, and Clyde Blair, her own family history in Arkansas goes back to just after the Civil War. She says that her family migrated from the Carolinas, “through Georgia, Alabama, [and] Mississippi.”²⁰⁶ According to her family history research, she learned that her family was in Mississippi during the Civil War and moved “up into what would have been Indian Territory” after the war.²⁰⁷ Her parents moved from Little River County, Arkansas, to Little Rock in the 1940s. Although she was raised in Little Rock, Kay

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Kay Thomas, interview by Alan Spurgeon and Kevin Tharp, Izard County, Arkansas, June 19, 2019.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

frequented the Mountain View area as a young adult, eventually making work at the Folk Center her career.²⁰⁸

Kay's musical background is a mixture of formal and informal learning. She participated in choral music programs in secondary school. She was also influenced by her father's fiddle playing and knowledge of old folk songs, her family's Church of Christ musical traditions, and her love for music of the 1960s folk music revival. Kay says that she still owns the Joan Baez songbook she obtained in the '60s. She states, "I learned my three or four [guitar] chords and I had my Joan Baez songbook . . . I was singing ['Lady Mary'] one day and . . . my mother heard me singing that song . . . and she said, 'Your grandmother sang that.'"²⁰⁹ Balladry and folk music was part of her family history even if she was not born and raised in the delineated Ozarks.

Kathy Sutterfield

Kathy is a retired K-12 language arts teacher and longtime Folk Center performer. Her mother came from a large family in southern Arkansas, and her father's family was from the Clinton area south of Mountain View.²¹⁰ Although her maternal grandmother sang and played the organ and guitar, Kathy was not raised in a home that engaged in folk music either through performing or as a pastime. According to her, she grew up listening to the music of Perry Como, Nat King Cole, and other popular musicians of the era. She says, "We didn't listen to country

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Kathy Sutterfield, interview by Alan Spurgeon and Kevin Tharp, Fayetteville, Arkansas, June 20, 2019.

music . . . old-time music or anything like that.”²¹¹ Kathy’s path to musicianship began when she was enrolled to take private lessons at the piano. She recalls, “I was in the third grade, and the [piano] teacher wanted me to play stuff like ‘The Clown,’ ‘The Bicycle,’ and I’m like, you know, I want to play real music like [Herb] Alpert and the Tijuana Brass . . . I quit, and then I just learned to play on my own.”²¹² Kathy became interested in playing the guitar and singing early in life. She explains that she liked the music of Peter, Paul, and Mary. Her parents recognized her interest. When she was in the sixth grade her parents gave her a guitar and a Peter, Paul, and Mary songbook. She began to learn the instrument on her own.²¹³

Kathy abandoned her pursuit of music after high school, but regained interest upon hearing John McCutcheon perform old-time music at a theater in Little Rock. She was so intrigued by McCutcheon’s performance that she started playing music again and even began to learn the fiddle and banjo as a result of her renewed interest.²¹⁴ Kathy and her husband moved to Mountain View in 1987, and she began performing at the Folk Center not long after they moved there. She explains that her experience there was an excellent learning opportunity, and that she gained a lot of useful skills. Kathy recalls, “That was when a lot of the old guys were still there. They were so good—Bookmiller Shannon . . . Bob Blair and Mary Gillihan . . . Monte Avery.”²¹⁵ While she was not born into a long family tradition of balladry and folk music performance, she learned the musical idioms and customs of the region from area folk musicians. She said, “I think

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

that while I'm not the authentic real deal, and I'm not the original, I like to think that I help keep all of this going."²¹⁶

Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller

First cousins Martha and Jeanie boast a long family history of balladry and folk singing. They are members of the famed Gilbert family of Robert Cochran's *Singing in Zion*. Martha is the daughter of Phydella Gilbert Hogan, and Jeanie is the daughter of Helen Gilbert Fultz.²¹⁷ While Jeanie contends that their heritage is "hodgepodge American, because they [their ancestors] came from separate places,"²¹⁸ Martha claims more specific knowledge. She recently became aware of a historical artifact documenting one of their ancestor's 1841 land grant procurement in the Goshen, Arkansas, area.²¹⁹ According to Martha, the artifact shows that the ancestor submitted an application that was approved eight years later. If the documentation is correct, it places Martha and Jeanie's family in the Goshen area in 1833.²²⁰ In addition to specific evidence of their family's residence in the Goshen area of the Ozarks, Martha has specific knowledge of their lineage. She had her DNA tested and found that many of her genetic contributors were of "British, Irish, and Scottish"²²¹ descent. As do many of the other informants

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Cochran, *Singing in Zion*.

²¹⁸ Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, interview by Alan Spurgeon and Kevin Tharp, Goshen, Arkansas, June 20, 2019.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

for this research, Jeanie claims that their “musical heritage came through the *Scotch-Irish*”²²² ancestry. Jeanie emphasizes the term, “Scotch,” and explains that her family always used that term instead of Scots-Irish.

Martha and Jeanie were both immersed in their family’s musical traditions. Their families sang together as part of daily life. Because these musical activities were normal occurrences, they were unaware that the music they were learning was folk music, or that any of the songs were centuries-old. Jeanie explains, “We didn’t know that when we were growing up—that these were old. They were just family songs.”²²³ Martha concurs, “Mother would sing all the time, and I thought that mother was always singing because I wanted to hear it.”²²⁴ While Martha does not consider herself a musician and only sings occasionally, Jeanie carries on the family’s traditions. She and her son, Nathan, continue to play instruments and sing the songs of the Gilbert family.²²⁵

Lyle Sparkman

Lyle is unique in his connections to the Ozark folkways. He was raised in a family of active folk music practitioners whose traditions go back more than a few generations. In fact, his daughter “is the 8th generation in Washington County . . . her 5th great-grandparents are buried

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

down at the Higgs Community there at Middle Fork at White River.”²²⁶ Lyle offers a piece of his family history as proof of the Ozark “deep stock”²²⁷ from which he comes. He says,

My third great-great-grandfather was the—brought the first Anglo-American family into southern Williamson County, and he was a hunter-trapper and he was befriended by the various tribes that were there . . . [the Sparkmans’ familial journey was from] North Carolina, to Tennessee, to Missouri, to me sitting right here with you, here and now, with a version of “Barbara Allen” whose closest version is in Black Mountain, North Carolina.²²⁸

Lyle came to his thorough knowledge of balladry and folk songs through family immersion. But, he is also a collector of folklore and music. He recounted the moment that he realized his family was different with respect to their musical traditions. When he was in a high school English class he noticed a section of his textbook on ancient ballads. He recognized ballad titles as music from his family tradition and he began to research the subject outside of class.²²⁹

Lyle completed his teaching degree and began work near the Missouri-Arkansas border. Shortly thereafter, he was contacted by a professor of Anthropology at Southwest Missouri State University. Dr. Russell Gerlach tapped Lyle as a source who could effectively act as gatekeeper, collector, and informant. Lyle began recording Joe Blunk and Joe Tilden’s traditional music in Stone County, Missouri.²³⁰

Lyle is not only a knowledgeable source of ballads and Ozark folk songs, he is also a multi-instrumentalist and teacher-mentor to a large number of students. Until recently, Lyle was a

²²⁶ Lyle Sparkman, interview by Alan Spurgeon and Kevin Tharp, Springdale, Arkansas, June 20, 2019.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

folk music educator for one of the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History’s educational programs. Lyle was able to pass on his family singing tradition to a number of students. His curriculum consisted of 108 ballads and folk songs that he passed on to his students.²³¹ He refers to one of his students as an “adopted . . . 8th generation cultural Ozarker”²³² because of the traditional oral transmission techniques by which she learned her ballads and folk songs.²³³ Lyle is an exemplar of authenticity, a link in the chain of folk music transmission, and an “educated hillbilly”²³⁴ who is well-versed in the academic pursuit of understanding and preserving folkways.

Kyla Cross

Kyla, as previously discussed, is a 14 year old folk singer and former student of Lyle Sparkman. Kyla began her study of folk songs and ballads at the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History in Springdale, Arkansas, when she was much younger. She and the other students in Lyle’s charge began learning in the traditional manner—oral transmission. However, Lyle soon discovered that since they only met for lessons on Tuesday mornings, the students would forget much of what they had learned the previous week. They remedied the problem by turning to the recordings of the Mary Celestia Parler Collection at the University of Arkansas²³⁵ and those of

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Lyle Sparkman and Kyla Cross, interview by Alan Spurgeon and Kevin Tharp, Springdale, Arkansas, October 24, 2019.

²³³ Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Parler, The Ozark Folksong Collection.

the Wolf collection at Lyon College.²³⁶ According to Lyle, this method is “authentic, because they come from oral tradition . . . in this particular case a significant percentage of what she [Kyla] sings have never been recorded in that version. That’s because it comes from my family or people that I’ve known.”²³⁷ Although Kyla learned the bulk her songs under Lyle’s tutelage or with his guidance, she knows some songs from her own family tradition. Kyla’s version of “Sweet Betsy from Pike” is a combination of her great-grandfather’s text and Lyle’s family melody. Kyla also possesses a rarity in her version of “Lady Fair.”²³⁸

Because of Kyla’s connection to Lyle, his family’s musical tradition, and the nature of their teaching and learning methods, Kyla’s place in the chain of folk music transmission is more nuanced. There is no doubt that she is a folksinger or that her songs are authentic. She has learned ballads and folk songs in a manner that passes Mary Celestia Parler’s “real test.”²³⁹ Her songs are “taught by singing and learned by hearing—from generation to generation.”²⁴⁰ The nuance lies in the fact that she availed herself of modern technology and a combination of Lyle’s and her own family tradition as a sources for oral transmission.

The backgrounds and diverse musical experiences of these informants is representative of the kind of heterogeneity Dr. McNeil refers to when he explains the migration of different

²³⁶ Lyle Sparkman and Kyla Cross, interview by Alan Spurgeon and Kevin Tharp, Springdale, Arkansas, October 24, 2019. ; Wolf, *The John Quincy Wolf Collection Ozark Folksongs*.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*; Kyla Cross’ version of “Lady Fair” is now in the author’s possession as a digital audio/video recording. Randolph’s documentation of the ballad by Emma Dusenbury is a text-only transcription.

²³⁹ Mary Celestia Parler, *The Search for Yokum Creek*.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

cultures into the Ozarks. The variety of beliefs and ideas they offer about authenticity in Ozark folk music and the consensuses that become apparent upon analysis of these ideas provide robust conclusions where mere assumptions were previously held.

Beliefs

The beliefs of this project's participants about lineage and transmission methods and what does or does not pass the test of authenticity are a mixture of stringent rules and laissez-faire attitudes. This topic is a tangled one, full of contradictions, disagreements, and compromises. Some informants hold multiple conflicting beliefs. Others believe authenticity is situationally relative. Researchers and folklorists such as Parler, McNeil, Bronson, and Child identify some common characteristics by which we might recognize and categorize folksongs and ballads. However, the duty to assess and maintain a standard of authenticity remains with the folk to whom the music belongs and from whom it emanates.

It is neither my intention to put forth any axiom nor to cut the Gordian knot. Rigidity would limit the characteristic evolution that permeates the folk music genre and keeps it alive. Dismantling the characteristics that make the genre unique would render its customary requirements too flexible for it to remain folk music. It appears that current beliefs about what is or is not to be accepted as Ozark folk music are just flexible enough to allow the genre to continue. The issues that induce authenticity judgements among this group of Ozark folk musicians are many. The most prominent of these issues are musicians' places of birth and dialect, transmission methods, sources of learning, artistic decisions (i.e., whether or not a musician has taken liberties with lyrics and/or melodies), and evidence of respect for the past.

The informants for this research hold to authenticity standards influenced by the norms of a current society of folk musicians. They hold to beliefs made common by the necessary contexts of the modern world in which they live. Technology is a primary actor in this more modern folk music culture. Earlier folklorists and folk music scholars created parameters or conducted their work under the parameters of different circumstances. They were constrained by the absence of imminent progress. If we are to better understand current authenticity trends, the standards to which earlier scholars held require modernization.

In the preface to his 1857 *English and Scottish Ballads*, Child describes the authenticity standards to which he held when choosing which ballads were from oral tradition and which were not worthy of consideration as authentic examples of popular ballads.²⁴¹ He claims that the most authentic ballads he compiled “have been gathered from oral tradition,—whether ancient or not. Widely different from the true popular ballads, the spontaneous products of nature, are the works of the professional ballad-maker, which make up the bulk of Garlands and Broad-sides. These, though sometimes not without grace, more frequently not lacking in humor, belong to artificial literature . . .”²⁴² These words reveal Child’s own interpretation of what is and is not to be accepted as an authentic example of a ballad in the folk record. It appears that Child harbors contempt for those examples that are not active in the culture—many of the “Roxburghe and Pepys broadsides.”²⁴³ He contends that the best ballad examples are ones for which there are

²⁴¹ Francis James Child, *English and Scottish Ballads*, trans. Various (Project Gutenberg, August 11, 2011), vii, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/37031/37031-h/37031-h.htm>.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, viii.

many extant variants.²⁴⁴ Sargent and Kittredge explain that the popular ballad differs from other poetic genres in that these literary works are the sole property of a single person.²⁴⁵ Sargent and Kittredge claim,

Not so with the popular ballad. Here the mere act of composition (which is quite as likely to be oral as written) is not the conclusion of the matter; it is rather the beginning. The product as it comes from the author is handed over to the folk for oral transmission, and thus passes out of his control. If it is accepted by those for whom it is intended, it ceases to be the property of the author; it becomes the possession of the folk, and a new process begins, that of oral tradition which is hardly second to in importance to the original creative act. As it passes from singer to singer it is changing unceasingly. . . . Taken collectively, these processes of oral tradition amount to a second act of composition, of an inextricably complicated character, in which many persons share (some consciously, others without knowing), which extends over many generations and much geographical space, and which may be as efficient a cause of the ballad in question as the original creative act of the individual author.²⁴⁶

It is possible that Child, Sargent, and Kittredge believed the existence of variants to be evidence of oral transmission. If they held active variants as evidence of oral transmission, it is likely that face-to-face oral transmission was their principal authenticating criterion. The same is true of Cecil Sharp. He concludes that the true folk song differs from the art song in its communal evolutionary process of continual re-composition. He argues, “In the course of its descent through the ages, the folk-song undergoes ceaseless and continuous change.”²⁴⁷ Sharp’s definitive statement fortifies the point and settles the matter at hand: “Communal authorship and communal expression are the natural corollaries of oral transmission.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, x; See also, Atkinson, “The Ballad and Its Paradoxes.”

²⁴⁵ Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Helen Child Sargent, and George Lyman Kittredge, xvii.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Cecil Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* (London: Simpkin, 1907), 14.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Bronson makes it clear that he holds a similar view toward the authenticity of ballads and folk singers. He argues that the variant, more specifically, the process of change that occurs from generation-to-generation is what lends the folk genre its particular uniqueness and authenticity.²⁴⁹

According to Bronson,

The true folk singer carries in his or her memory the mental image of a song, malleable in verbal and melodic detail, to be given new realization in every fresh rendition. The differences may be almost unnoticeable, but it is next to impossible for a singer to give an identical repetition of the same song. The notes of the successive stanzas will be affected by the words; the unmemorized words will not be repeated verbatim; the unmemorized notes will be slightly varied as they recreate the tune. The changes will be minute, in accordance with the limited range of traditional idiom. Tradition is a fluid medium, never quite the same, ever renewed. That is what keeps it inexhaustibly interesting and alive.²⁵⁰

Bronson argues that the kind of evolution that a song in the folk record is subjected to from generation-to-generation is one characteristic trait of folk culture.²⁵¹ He was definitely not averse to textual, rhythmic, or melodic alterations. Whether or not he would approve of deliberate alterations to a song by an individual is unclear. However, it is clear that Bronson takes oral transmission to be an authenticating feature of balladry and folk singing.

As for modern methods of music dissemination, Bronson seems to count the advent of recording as a process that is detrimental to the living nature of folk music. He argues a number of points to this conclusion.²⁵² Because recordings can now be transmitted world-wide with ease, the genre of folk song is no longer unique in the ways it once was. He contends that some

²⁴⁹ Bronson, "Traditional Ballads Musically Considered," 41.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Bertrand Bronson, "Cecil Sharp and Folksong: A Review Article," *Western Folklore* 27, no. 3 (Jul. 1968): 200-207. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1498106>.

primary features of folk singing, “communal expression, re-creation, preference, has died of a surfeit.”²⁵³ Since access to songs is now abundant, it is more likely that new learners will do as classically trained musicians do. They will study the recording and replicate it with precision. This new process replaces the former tradition and causes it to “become universalized and no longer distinctive.”²⁵⁴ He also argues that the advent of recording has caused the folk singing tradition to become “primarily purposive.”²⁵⁵ Those who engage it the tradition now do so as an act of collective expression “to promote or oppose an idea, a cause, or some program specific or general . . . sharing political or class attitudes more or less clearly defined—the sort of subjects formerly felt to be basically alien to the impersonality of folk tradition.”²⁵⁶ Perhaps his most condemnatory argument is that the folksinging tradition has become less a tradition and more of a professional endeavor. According to Bronson, professionalism in folk music and the tendency to seek fame and monetary gain in exchange for folk music performance is antithetical to the norms of traditional folksinging prior to the advent of recorded music.²⁵⁷

McNeil explains that a sense of regional belonging is one feature of Ozark culture.²⁵⁸ He says, “One is not regarded as a ‘true’ insider unless he or she is born in the region. Sometimes—but not usually—this cultural attitude is carried to extremes and there is a real hostility towards

²⁵³ Ibid., 201.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ McNeil, *Southern Mountain Folksongs*.

outsiders.”²⁵⁹ The insider-outsider mentality he describes is evident in the comments of some informants for this research. One would put forth a convincing argument to claim that this regionalist attitude could support the kind of communal second-level of authorship described by Child, Sargent, and Kittredge.²⁶⁰ Membership in the culture either by birth or acculturation affords the folk singer a measure of authenticity. It is quite possible that regional affiliation as an authenticating feature has remained unchanged throughout the generations. It most likely is not affected by technological advances and the influences of cultural flow and modernization.

It is likely that authenticity was a matter of little or no concern before the influx of technology and subsequent cultural globalization. Before the advent of recording, ballad and folksong collectors would have had little cause to concern themselves with the question of whether or not a singer’s offering was learned by oral tradition or if a singer was a true member of folk culture. These concerns are relatively new compared to the centuries-old tradition of folk singing. As members of the Information Age, we must concern ourselves with such matters. However, the duty to maintain a standard of authenticity remains with the folk.

Places of Birth and Dialect

Martha and Jeanie are very clear in their stance against inauthentic “Faux Folk.”²⁶¹ They both harbor severe disdain for musicians who perform music that is not organically produced. Jeanie noticed what she believes was the false nature of the 1960s folk revival. She expresses her

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁶⁰ Child, *English and Scottish Ballads*; Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. Helen Child Sargent, and George Lyman Kittredge.

²⁶¹ Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019.

dislike for the movement and its music with the remark, “It wasn’t true folk music . . . they should have called it what it was, *Faux Folk*.”²⁶² Martha expresses similar feelings as she verbally rejects the current trend of Fayetteville, Arkansas, Roots Celebration administrators hiring outsiders as folk music performers. She believes the Fayetteville Roots Celebration musical acts are inauthentic. According to her, the celebration was a true roots festival when it included local performers. She objects, “But now they’re bringing in professionals from around, from Canada, from anywhere, and it’s just another music festival—no authenticity at all.”²⁶³ These sentiments do not necessarily declare any authenticating criterion. However, Martha’s inclusion of references to where the musicians are from demonstrates her belief that folk musicians are more authentic when they are from the area, or that they at least need to have lived in the Ozarks long enough to have been immersed in the culture. Although her word choice seems to indicate place of birth as an authenticating criterion, Martha’s beliefs become more clear when she recounts a common occurrence. Her disapproval of faux folk performers may be due to their apparent cultural appropriation. She clarifies, “They come in, and they say, ‘y’all,’ meaning one person. They don’t know that we used to say, ‘you’uns’ [a contraction of you + ones] either, but they’ll say it the wrong way. . . . That irritates me.”²⁶⁴ This anecdotal explanation illuminates a possible reason for place of birth as an apparent authenticating criterion. It may not actually be place of birth that is at issue, but rather disingenuous use or simply misuse of idiomatic speech.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

It is possible that dialect and manner of speech are seen by some as identifying features of Ozark folk authenticity. However, because place of birth and dialect are nearly inseparable, neither of these can be premises of a cogent argument for or against the authenticity of folk musicians. Persons with generations-old family musical traditions are free to move and take up residence in any location they please. Those who choose to do so do not lose their authentic Ozark music traditions, nor do they lose their authenticity credentials.

Place of birth and dialect are more likely features that local people use to identify outsiders. According to Lyle Sparkman, those who are not immersed in folk traditions “may not really be able to understand, truly, the depth of the traditional music . . . you start out a little defensive because you’re wary of others who are not kith and kin, not cut out of the same cloth.”²⁶⁵ It is apparent that folk musicians with a strong connection to the past and their own Ozark culture are more protective of it. A healthy respect for the past and its cultural traditions may be the most important facet of Ozark folk music authenticity. Respect for the past seems to be an element of every authenticity concern discussed by this group of informants.

Authenticity and Transmission

Several formidable scholars have proposed criteria whereby the authenticity of folk songs and ballads might be measured. Many of these include methods of transmission as a primary feature. Of Child’s criterion, Bronson states, “In an unbroken oral tradition, he believed, were to be found the specimens of greatest authenticity, because such texts were least likely to have been

²⁶⁵ Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019.

affected by any sort of deliberate alteration.”²⁶⁶ Deliberate alteration is an issue addressed by several of the informants for this research. Some of these informants believe deliberate alteration is unacceptable while others hold opposing beliefs.²⁶⁷ Both Parler and McNeil contend that traditional folk music is transmitted by informal learning and oral tradition.²⁶⁸ Multiple researchers refer to oral tradition or what could be described as observational learning²⁶⁹ and immersion as the method by which their sources learned ballads and folk songs.²⁷⁰

Some of the sources for this research express the belief that traditional oral transmission methods determine authenticity. Others believe that methods other than face-to-face, person-to-person oral transmission are acceptable and lead to authentic performances. Lyle Sparkman provides a nuanced perspective of what authenticity means with regard to transmission methods. He answers the question of how he came to know ballads and folk songs with the following explanation. Lyle answers, “I came by the music the traditional way, and there is no variance to that whatsoever. . . . I sang to my daughter exactly like I was sung to at bedtime. . . . She comes by it naturally.”²⁷¹ Coming by it naturally, as he describes, is oral transmission. Lyle believes that it is the process of folk song and ballad learning that leads to authenticity. He claims, “Process, to me, in authenticity has to do with the ability to be able to reproduce what you’ve learned early

²⁶⁶ Bronson, “Mrs. Brown and the Ballad,” 129.

²⁶⁷ Mary Gillihan, October 15, 2018; Brooke Tidwell, June 9, 2019; Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019.

²⁶⁸ Parler, *The Search for Yokum Creek*; McNeil, *Southern Mountain Folksongs*, 12.

²⁶⁹ See Chapter 5 for more information on specific folk music learning methods.

²⁷⁰ Bronson, “Mrs. Brown and the Ballad.”; Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*; Wolf, *The John Quincy Wolf Collection Ozark Folksongs*.

²⁷¹ Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019.

from an original source.”²⁷² Lyle’s word choice here necessitates the presence of three elements that yield authenticity. The first of these is a learner who is able to hear examples of folk songs and ballads. The second is an ability to imitate and recreate what the learner has heard. The third element is the presence of some source from which the songs must be transmitted orally. In addition to these foundational elements, Lyle’s addition of the requirements that learning must occur *early* and be from an *original* source may be inconsequential. Lyle was teaching music from his family tradition to a class of students at the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History. Lyle considers these students, who ranged from eight years of age to adulthood, “8th generation”²⁷³ Ozark folk musicians. Lyle himself was the direct source, his ancestors were the *original* source, and his adult students had not come by this music *early*. Explication of these facts and comparison to his other statements regarding authenticity reveal that Lyle considers only one element a requirement for authenticity in folk music learning—oral transmission.²⁷⁴

According to Lyle, the question of what constitutes authentic sources of learning is a nuanced topic. Lyle was confronted with the difficult task of teaching ballads and folk songs to students with whom he only met for classes once a week. Because he was teaching them in the traditional manner, the students were not able to recall the music they were learning from one lesson to the next. Lyle recognized the need for a method by which students might avail themselves of the wealth of recorded authentic versions of Ozark folk music. His students were mostly young people who were well-acquainted with technology. They were able to access these

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Kyla Cross and Lyle Sparkman, October 24, 2019.

authentic recordings throughout the week for practice sessions. As he contends, “Authenticity in oral tradition, is based on aural learning and the ability to replicate what you’ve heard—that’s it in a nutshell.”²⁷⁵ He asks, “Well, what is the difference between having a living body in front of you and having a deceased person whose voice has been recorded? Is it inauthentic because Almeda Riddle is deceased? Is it inauthentic because Ollie Gilbert is no longer with us?”²⁷⁶ Lyle contends that learning from recordings is not inauthentic as long as the learner is faithful to what Lyle refers to as the “styling” of the recorded performer.²⁷⁷ He believes that the “true measure of authenticity”²⁷⁸ is the final product—the performance.

Kay Thomas holds a similar view wherein the final product is the measure of authenticity. She contends that transmission methods are tools by which folk musicians build a repertoire. The use of tools such as records, radio, written sources, or oral listening and replication are all valid ways to learn folk music. Any of these can lead to authentic performances.²⁷⁹ However, she explains that when she began work at the Folk Center, she was “kind of a purist and a snob.”²⁸⁰ She claims, “After I realized where the basis of this music had come from, you know, then I didn’t want to learn it from Joan Baez. I wanted to learn it from another authentic person.”²⁸¹ The sentiment Kay expresses here leads to the assumption that she believes an individual person is

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Kay Thomas, June 19, 2019.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

either authentic or inauthentic. According to Kay, one authentic person was “Aunt” Ollie Gilbert. Kay explains that Ollie Gilbert was someone who knew many old ballads and folk songs. She had learned these old ballads and folk songs from her family or from members of her community. However, Kay contends that Ollie Gilbert didn’t hold to any authenticity criterion regarding transmission methods or sources. Kay says, “She’d start singing and she might be singing something really old . . . and then she might sing *Harper Valley PTA*. . . . She didn’t categorize them in any certain way other than her one criteria is that she liked the story and committed it to memory because of that.”²⁸² Kay claims that if Ollie Gilbert liked the story in a song, “She would learn them from wherever she could.”²⁸³

Kay further explains her opinion that folk musicians of the past would have availed themselves of a variety of tools with which to learn their music if modern tools like radio and records had been available. She believes that what constitutes authentic transmission methods are processes and products. Furthermore, she believes that opportunity and the lack of modern materials and tools is what lead to the commonly accepted idea that person-to-person oral transmission is *the* authentic learning method. Kay demonstrates the nuance of this issue and the problems generated by strict authenticity guidelines and standards with the following narrative concerning her work as head of the Folk Center crafts area.

We were trying really hard to keep the demonstrations that we did authentic. So, if somebody wanted to use a little fabric marker to do embroidery, you know, I would say, "We don't need to do that. Other people can buy that. You need to do the real embroidery. Get your embroidery thread out and actually do that instead." I'd say, "Don't use double knits. Don't use double knit fabric. Use wool or cotton or linen on your fabrics. We have to watch about things like that." And then one day I went into where Mrs. [Retha] Brewer

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

was. She worked in our country kitchen. She was cooking on a wood cook stove and she said she had a rug she wanted to show me. It was made out of Colonial bread wrappers . . . She said, "My daughter just throws stuff away. She just wastes stuff all the time." She said, "I've been saving these bread sacks. I can't throw them away." She said, "And pantyhose—she just tosses her pantyhose away." And she said, "Look-a-here." She had stripped the pantyhose in to long—not threads but something that she could use—nylon thin strips. And what she'd do is she would braid those sacks. She told me that she had one that she used for a bath mat. She had it for 9 years and she was so proud of that and as I talked to her, light bulbs went on kind of like with Ollie, and I realized that the material she was using was not important to her. When she only had wool and cotton that's what she used for her rugs or for whatever if that was the fabric. But it wasn't that that was important to her. And being a purist, it was that you didn't throw anything away. And so she had braided these long strips of the Colonial bread sacks and then she had whipped them together with the nylon pantyhose and it was actually an odd looking but decent looking rug after you knew what it was—this little bath mat size—and I did not have the heart to say anything to her. I just listened to her tell me all the stories and the stuff about it and I thought, let me think this over so Instead of saying "You can't do that," it became clear that that was going to become more of an interpretive thing.²⁸⁴

Kay explains that she relates this story in order to express an idea about authenticity in folk music learning. She says that before the advent of recording devices, folk musicians might often meet a person who was passing through. If this person was in possession of songs that were not known in the area, and they were good songs, the people of the area would have learned them. She maintains that if they liked a song or the story it told, they would have learned it. She says, "If [a passer-through] had been from some northern state, they'd have learned it from him. There was no criteria like that. If they liked it, they would have learned it by any means. And as soon as they could learn something off of radio, they would have done it."²⁸⁵ This argument is compelling evidence for the kind of flexibility that is necessary for the folk music genre to perpetuate itself. It is also possible that the undeniable validity of this logic necessitates a new

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

perspective of authenticity. This new perspective is one wherein authenticity as it pertains to modern day transmission methods and sources of learning is subjective rather than bound by strict standards.

Mary Gillihan agrees that authenticity in folk music is an argument not easily resolved with objective typifying standards. She argues that transmission, sources of learning, and authenticity in folk music is a multi-faceted discourse. Mary contends that whether the discussion is about folk music from the 1940s, the 1960s, or old ballads and folk songs from England, Scotland, and Ireland, the important issue is actually cultures. She states, “That was folk music at that time, and that’s culture.”²⁸⁶

Mary provides a unique interpretation of authenticity in folk music. She uses the standards put forth by McNeil to legitimize the use of radio as a source of learning that leads to authentic folk music performance. She argues, “I know what Dr. McNeil always said was, ‘The things that make a tune a folk tune are that it changes over time and space; it is usually handed down in the oral tradition; people don’t care where it was written, you just sing it.’”²⁸⁷ Mary expands the boundaries of conventional interpretations of McNeil’s authenticity standards when she argues that Ollie Gilbert’s use of music she learned from the radio became folk music when she adapted the songs to her own performance style. Mary recounts, “Ollie Gilbert always said, ‘If I like it, I’ll make it mine.’ She didn’t care if it was something from ages and ages ago, like, you know, the last two centuries, or she was singing something she heard on the radio. To her,

²⁸⁶ Mary Gillihan, October 15, 2018.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

that was folk music. It was because she had made it her own song.”²⁸⁸ Ollie Gilbert learned these radio songs by listening to another person sing (oral transmission), and she created a variant when she personalized them (they changed over time).

It is apparent that a paradigm shift has occurred in the fundamental standards and conventions related to folk music authenticity. It is possible that person-to-person transmission became a standard identifying feature of folk music authenticity because of the lack of mediascape. It is also possible that folk music has been forced into new defining characteristics because of the advent of modern media and the widespread availability of recorded music. Nevertheless, none of the informants for this research would reject performances learned from recordings as inauthentic. While they do cite person-to-person oral tradition as a dominant method of folk music perpetuation, they all claim that the style in which a folk song or ballad is performed is the most important factor in authenticity judgements. When asked if learning a Child Ballad from a recording of Joan Baez is authentic, Jeanie Miller responds, “No.”²⁸⁹ However, when asked if learning a Child Ballad from a recording of her mother yields an authentic performance, she maintains that when the recorded version is authentic, and the learner takes care to replicate the lyrics, tune, and style of the recorded version, it is authentic. She agrees that the tradition of the song itself, not the manner in which it is passed down is the measure of authenticity.²⁹⁰ It is clear that evidence of respect for the past, specifically cultural

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019. I suspect that Jeanie Miller regards Joan Baez as an inauthentic person in spite of her musical integrity.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

musical norms and traditions, are the most important features of authentic folk music performances.

Respect for the Past and Longevity

Respect for the past appears in many of the informants' responses to questions about authenticity. It also emerges as a possible reason for the perpetuation of balladry and folk singing practices across multiple generations. Furthermore, respect for the past is a possible explanation for the similarity of some modern versions of ancient ballads to their oldest known examples. Many informants mention the strength, relatability, or relevance of a song's story as a possible reason for the longevity of that song. Others point to a feeling of connection to their family traditions, deceased friends, or to their ancestors as a reason to participate in and pass on the tradition of folk singing.

When asked about the importance of passing on family singing traditions, Jeanie Miller claims, "I think it's very important. I know for me, [it gives] a sense of continuity, you know. I connect with my ancestors, and I . . . was glad when Nathan [her son] became interested in some of the old ones . . ." Kathy Sutterfield believes that family tradition and nostalgia are partially responsible for balladry and folk song preservation. She contends that before radio and television, balladry was a means of family entertainment. She says, "That's how people told stories and that's how—they would get together and sing songs and that was kind of like their news."²⁹¹ She offers accounts of visitors at the Folk Center who would speak to her after a performance. According to Kathy, audience members would say things like, "You know, my

²⁹¹ Kathy Sutterfield, June 20, 2019.

grandmother [sang that song]. . . . I remember hearing that song. I haven't heard it in years. . . .
”²⁹² She contends that ballads and folk songs she performed often “brought back some nice
memories”²⁹³ for people who heard her sing them.

According to Mary Gillihan, Almeda Riddle intentionally passed a song on to her. Mary recounts, “Almeda did when she came and said, ‘I want you to learn “The Old Elm Tree,” because I’m tired of remembering it.’ ”²⁹⁴ Mary says, “It was important to her to give it to someone, you know. Now I’ve given it to someone else.”²⁹⁵ Mary is disappointed with the performance of the person to whom she gave the song because in her opinion that person does not sing it the way Almeda Riddle sang the song. Mary’s respect for Almeda Riddle and her singing style is evident. She contends that whenever she sings one of Almeda Riddle’s songs, she attempts to sing it the way Almeda Riddle sang it. This apparent respect for individuals is one possible explanation for the kind of accuracy in folk music transmission that would allow specific variants of ballads or versions of folk songs to persist in the folk record across generations.

Kay Thomas confirms this assumption when she explains her approach to teaching the songs of someone whom she holds in high esteem. If she were to teach a ballad, she claims that she would make it clear that the version she was passing down was special. She states that she would say, “ ‘Your grandfather or your great-grandfather sang this song and this is the way he

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Mary Gillihan, October 15, 2018.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

sang it. These are his verses. There might be many more verses, but these are the ones he used,' so that they would know the difference. . . . If I've learned something from Aunt Ollie Gilbert, I would sing it the way Ollie Gilbert did—just to honor her."²⁹⁶ Kay also had occasion to learn songs from Clyde Blair. According to Kay, Clyde Blair insisted she sing his songs exactly the way he taught them. She recounts that he had learned "Mockingbird Hill" from someone else and used their exact words in his own performances. When Kay learned the song from Clyde Blair, she changed the words in one the phrases "because the words didn't make any sense [grammatically]."²⁹⁷ Kay exclaims, "And he stopped me and said, 'That's not the way I taught you that song . . . if I teach you a song, I expect you to sing it the way you learned it.'"²⁹⁸ Kay believes that carrying on songs in the style of the people from whom she learned them is important to her. Her respect for people in her past motivates her to maintain the tunes, lyrics, and unique stylistic idiosyncrasies of the Ozark folk music she performs.

Because Lyle Sparkman was tasked with teaching folk songs and ballads, his experience serves as evidence of the expectations of those who pass down folk music. As previously noted, he began teaching students in the traditional manner—person-to-person oral transmission. After he realized that one session per week was not enough contact time for students to accurately recall the prior week's lessons, Lyle devised a system that he calls "electronic augmentation."²⁹⁹ His students would listen to recordings of folk singers during the week and return for Lyle's

²⁹⁶ Kay Thomas, June 19, 2019.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019.

guidance. Lyle explains, “I’d pick the best [recorded] singers I knew, the best songs I knew, and fortunately, because at this point [I had] decades of experience with the subject, I knew what the song should be.”³⁰⁰ He declares that he was able to correctly judge the authenticity of the recordings he assigned, correct his students, and guide them to a higher degree of accuracy regarding authentic performances. He states, “I would correct their styling, because I knew what was right or wrong. And, I would work with them personally—on getting this so that the performance piece is authentic.”³⁰¹ If folk music learners’ respect for persons, culture, and traditions causes more accurate replication of songs, and folk music teachers expect learners to accurately reproduce the songs they learn, then a tradition such as this could accurately maintain songs and ballads across generations.

The authenticity standards put forth by earlier scholars are valid. However, it seems that interpretations of some of those standards have changed. The kind of flexibility found in the statements of the informants for this research may have existed in the beliefs of folk musicians in eras past. It is clear the influx of technology has influenced the methods of folk music transmission. However, there are some common traits of folk musicians past and present regarding these standards. They regard oral transmission as the dominant method for music learning. Respect for the past, persons, cultural preservation, and a desire to pass on family traditions guide artistic decisions and authenticity judgements. It seems that the musicians who are responsible for perpetuating the Ozark folk music genre hold to standards that are flexible

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

enough to allow the music to change over time. They govern themselves and maintain the authenticity standards they establish.

CHAPTER V:
LEARNING OZARK FOLK MUSIC

Memory

Music learning requires memory ability. Jane Ginsborg's research led her to the conclusion that singers who consciously work toward memorization are more efficient in that task than those who rely on incidental learning through repetition or long-term exposure.³⁰² She contends that those singers who use an array of memorization methods are faster and more accurate than those who use fewer "modes of attempt."³⁰³ Informants for this research who learned the bulk of their folk songs and ballads during childhood do not recall any of their models having employed specific teaching and learning methods. However, it is possible that they availed themselves of multiple memorization methods and simply forgot. Those informants who first engaged in folk song and ballad learning in late childhood and during adulthood report having exercised purposeful memorization strategies. They also report learning as a result of being immersed in the music performance culture (see Appendix A).

In the context of folk music learning, memory ability is of great significance. One common belief among informants for this research is that they possess, or more accurately,

³⁰² Ginsborg, "Classical Singers Learning and Memorising a New Song."

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 93.

possessed superior if not extraordinary memory abilities in their youth (see Appendix A). Cecil Sharp makes note of the extraordinary memory abilities of the folk when he states,

To those unacquainted with the mental qualities of the folk, the process of oral transmission would be accounted a very inaccurate one. The schoolman, for example, accustomed to handle and put his trust in manuscripts and printed documents, would look with the deepest suspicion upon evidence that rested upon the memories of unlettered persons. In this, however, he would be mistaken, as all collectors of folk-products know well enough. My own experience enables me to vouch for the amazing accuracy of the memories of folk-singers.³⁰⁴

Brooke Tidwell explains that the process of folk music learning has changed. Her experience was certainly different from the tradition described by earlier scholars. While she did participate in learning through oral transmission and immersion in the music culture, she did so under more modern circumstances. She participated in workshops at the Folk Center where musicians provided music learning experiences that might be thought of as comparable to the kind of learning that takes place in family traditions. She believes that these workshops are a satisfactory substitute for family musical traditions.³⁰⁵ Perhaps her “relentless interest”³⁰⁶ in folk singing was the primary contributor to her musical skill and repertoire acquisition abilities. Although Brooke was enrolled in private music lessons for a short time, she contends that the ease with which she could memorize music precluded any need to learn to read notation. She says, “It was so easy for me to memorize the melody in my head, and do it by ear, that her [Brooke’s piano teacher] trying to force me to read the music—I didn’t like that.”³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions*. 16.

³⁰⁵ Brooke Tidwell, June 9, 2019.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Brooke has noticed a difference between the amount of effort needed to learn instrumental music versus vocal music. She says, “[To learn] a fiddle tune, you might sit down with somebody and they’d . . . break it down in parts to teach it to you and that, I think it’s a little bit different with the songs. If there’s words to something, then the melody sticks in my head really easy. So, I don’t, I didn’t necessarily have to ever have a repeat of the melody of something.”³⁰⁸ This observation is supported by the findings of Reyna Leigh Gordon. Gordon’s research reveals that strong connections between the syllables of song texts and their rhythmic settings increase the ease with which a song is memorized. In addition, Gordon’s findings suggest that when a song’s text setting adheres to the norms of a well-known genre, the song is easier to remember.³⁰⁹

It is likely that the relatively simple rhythmic and melodic structures of folk songs and specific knowledge and familiarity with the norms of the genre is what causes heightened memory abilities among folk musicians. Brooke answers the question, “How long does it take to memorize a song?” She says, “Used to, I could—if I could just get like an hour stretch—I could memorize one because I could really focus on it.”³¹⁰ She further explains that a ballad with many verses might be easier to learn “because you just have to learn the story and because the words kind of flow poetically, you can remember what place you’re at and you can learn those [more easily].”³¹¹ Brooke says that even if she forgets parts of a song, she can easily secure it in her memory by revisiting recordings.³¹²

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Gordon, “Neutral and Behavioral Correlates of Song Prosody.”

³¹⁰ Brooke Tidwell, June 9, 2019.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

Kathy Sutterfield has also noticed a connection between her interest level, melody and text combinations, and the ease with which she can memorize songs.³¹³ Toward the effect of that combination she explains,

I don't feel like I'm super talented. And so, you know, a lot of us have our own thing Like, I cannot color. If you give me a coloring book, I can't color. I can't draw. I have no artistic anything. But this, you know, my brain sticks to music and tunes, so if I hear a song that I like, the melody, the words, it just sticks in my brain. And, it goes over and over. So, if I were someplace and a little lady sang "The Three Babes," well, by the time I went home, I had gone over that melody so many times in my head that I would have the melody. And then I would start looking for versions of it to find words or whatever.³¹⁴

Kathy says that the process of memorization is more difficult for her now than it once was.

According to her, "It used to be that I could just sing over a song a time or two and have it. . . .

Now, how long does it take? I can still do it in a day, but it used to be that I could do it in a matter of a few minutes."³¹⁵ If she has not performed a song in a long time, she might need to review the song to recall it correctly. She says that she performed so much that many songs are secure in her memory, but that she "might not get the verses in the exact same order"³¹⁶

Kathy says that when she recalls a song she can often hear the voices of the "little old ladies"³¹⁷ from whom she learned in her mind. She says, "They would be singing a lot of times, sort of, in their falsetto voice, you know how they'd hang onto their words or slur them. That's just—I wish other things would stick in my brain as well as the words"³¹⁸ She notes a point here that is

³¹³ Kathy Sutterfield, June 20, 2019.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

supported by the research of Michael Weiss wherein he found that vocal qualities increase memory ability.³¹⁹ It is possible that prominent vocal qualities, such as those Kathy describes, influence the strength of memories.

Kay Thomas obtained her love of poetry and recitation from her father who impressed its importance on her at an early age. He also exposed her to folk songs.³²⁰ It is likely that through this early and long-term exposure to the folk song genre and practice in memorization that she increased her memorization abilities. Kay explains that memory tasks are more difficult now than when she was younger. She says, “I can really see a difference in—as time goes on it is harder to learn and harder to keep. I can remember words from things that I learned as a girl much easier. It’s like those songs and poems that I learned when I was in my 20s—I could probably do better on that than something I learned not long ago.”³²¹ She says that if she wants to learn a song now, it might take as much as a week to learn three verses. However, it was easier when she was younger. She says, “It amazes me that at 18 or 20 I could learn things a lot faster and easier.”³²² When she was playing and singing with Clyde Blair and other musicians at the Folk Center, she had the opportunity to use recorded examples of songs, but she “was young enough, and it was more of the way people learned things a long time ago is you remembered.”³²³

³¹⁹ Weiss, “Vocal Timbre Influences Memory for Melodies.”; Weiss, Trehub, and Schellenberg, “Something in the Way She Sings.”

³²⁰ Kay Thomas, June 19, 2019.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

If Kay forgets parts of a song and wishes to refresh her memory, she says that she would make use of the archived folk song collections or consult her collection of song lyrics and notes. She says, “If it was a song from Ollie Gilbert . . . I’d try to find [a recording of] Ollie . . . so that I could remember how they did the songs.”³²⁴ She explains that she would also contact other folk singers who knew the person from whom she originally learned and ask for help.³²⁵ The same is true of Mary Gillihan. She says, “I would bring together several people. . . . I call it the collective consciousness. Sometimes you just have to, you know, to bring the whole piece of work together.”³²⁶ This kind of communal remedy for forgotten details is likely responsible for the persistence of variants. It also strengthens authenticity standards, and keeps the regional style characteristics similar across generations.

Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller were raised in a family that was famous for their singing tradition. They were immersed in the folk genre from the earliest age. They were unaware of the importance and lineage of the songs in their family tradition. Jeanie says, “We didn’t know that when we were growing up—that these were old. They were just family songs.”³²⁷ Martha agrees, “And they sang all the time. I was never taught any of those songs, and never asked anybody.”³²⁸ Jeanie contends that she and her cousin learned the songs by repetition. To the question of memory abilities, Jeanie says, “Oh, well, we all had—we’re all pretty bright. We were all pretty bright. We could memorize easily and so if you want it—if I wanted to learn a

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Mary Gillihan, October 15, 2018.

³²⁷ Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019.

³²⁸ Ibid.

song, I could learn it like in a day, you know, a few hours—sit down with it—not that long. But other things we’ve learned just by repetition. We had heard it, and we had heard it, and we had heard it”³²⁹

Lyle Sparkman makes the most bold declaration of his extraordinary memory abilities. He says, “I had a prodigious memory as a youngster. I don’t any longer. And, it wasn’t eidetic. I didn’t have a photographic memory, but I had a prodigious memory which allowed me to remember in great detail . . .”³³⁰ He further explains that when he was in junior high school, one of his initial writing assignments was an autobiography composition. He claims that he was not able to communicate the events of his life beyond age 3 because he recalled them in such detail that he would tire of writing.³³¹

Lyle declares that his music learning began very early in life because of the family singing tradition into which he was born. He says, “When I was really young, my mom and dad would come in to bed, and then they would sing me songs to sleep. . . . And we’d be singing in the car. We weren’t commercial singers, but we were singers, and that’s how that stuff became acquired. This is all unconscious acquisition.”³³² He goes on to say, “There wasn’t a single lick, note, or word written down for the first 18 years of my life.”³³³ When taken together, these two statements might be understood as a depiction of oral transmission alone. Taken separately, two facts emerge. First, Lyle’s family engaged in the process of oral transmission. The second of

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Ibid.

these statements reveals the method by which his musical skill and knowledge was acquired. The music Lyle learned early in life is a result of incidental learning and enculturation. He refers to this process as “unconscious acquisition.”³³⁴

Many of the informants for this research make reference to their ability to easily memorize songs. Some proclaim extraordinary memory abilities. However, they all make statements that point to the use of repetition, written, and/or recorded examples of songs as memory aids. As previously noted, the use of these aids does not exclude the informants from their status as authentic examples of Ozark folk musicians. Nor does their use of these aids diminish their claims of superior memory abilities. As Ginsborg concludes, singers who avail themselves of multiple memorization techniques are more successful in memory recall.³³⁵ Because they are the specific references to learning methods in Ozark folk music, informants’ statements about repetition, immersion in the music performance culture, and, unconscious acquisition deserve further exploration.

Informal Learning

The work of Albert Bandura corroborates many of the assumptions and possible explanations for phenomena previously described in this chapter.³³⁶ Bandura identifies four requirements that allow behaviors learned from models to manifest in the observer. These requirements are: attention to a model’s behavior, retention in memory, reproduction of the

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ginsborg, “Classical Singers Learning and Memorising a New Song.”

³³⁶ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977).

behavior, and some motivation to reinforce the behavior.³³⁷ If these requirements are accurate, and we apply them to music learning, then we may have a cogent explanation of the heretofore elusive methods of traditional folk music teaching and learning.

Bandura gives an example of the reasons an observer might not accurately learn from a model. He explains, “The failure of an observer to match the behavior of a model may result from any of the following: not observing the relevant activities, inadequately coding modeled events for memory representation, failing to retain what was learned, physical inability to perform, or experiencing insufficient incentives.”³³⁸ The converse must be true in order for an observer to accurately match the behavior of a model. However, in the case of accurately matched behaviors, the observer must succeed in all of these. Bandura notes that the efficacy of observational learning is decreased if performance trials are not attempted by the learner within a short time after modeling occurs.³³⁹

It is not a coincidence that these are the very requirements folk music learners must achieve in order to be successful performers who operate within the norms and standards of the genre. These requirements appear to be the very elements of informal learning that drive oral transmission in the folk tradition. An application of Bandura’s observational learning requirements to the folk tradition would yield the following premises. If the oral tradition is a successful method of teaching and learning, the oral tradition learner must attend to the proper elements of a model’s performance (e.g., pitch, rhythm, timbre, tempo, text, etc.). He or she must

³³⁷ Ibid., 23-29.

³³⁸ Ibid., 29.

³³⁹ Ibid., 34.

form a precise memory of the details of a model's performance and possess the physical and technical abilities required to perform the music. In addition to these, a learner must recognize some benefit to performing the music he or she has learned or intends to learn. This perceived benefit may be, as in the cases of Brooke Tidwell and other informants,³⁴⁰ that the process or product is very interesting to the learner, he or she feels a connection to a loved one through song performance, or the learner recognizes the positive attention a performer receives. Mary Gillihan says, "I've got to like something about it, or find some reason why I would learn it other than just because it's popular. If I don't like it, I'm not going to learn it."³⁴¹ Another possible motivation to accurately reproduce the musical behaviors of members of the folk tradition might be, as LeCroy and Warnock contend, the likelihood of being excluded from the musical culture's activities for a lack of appropriate skills or knowledge.³⁴²

Lyle Sparkman explains that when he was young his parents, grandparents, and great grandparents sang daily. He says, "My grandmother Sparkman would sing in the kitchen. She's singing "The Lass of Loch Royal" [Child 76], and she would sing with a refrain that I've never heard recorded in any version. . . . That's just working in the kitchen, so you pick up that stuff incidentally."³⁴³ Lyle also engaged in research and further folk singing learning in adulthood. He went to friends and family members in search of more songs and information.³⁴⁴ Brooke Tidwell

³⁴⁰ Brooke Tidwell, June 9, 2019; Kay Thomas, June 19, 2019; Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019; Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019; Mary Gillihan, October 15, 2018.

³⁴¹ Mary Gillihan, October 15, 2018.

³⁴² LeCroy and Warnock, "Informal Learning in Music."

³⁴³ Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

had a different experience than that of Lyle. She was not raised in a family that sang old songs as a daily activity. However, she did acquire an in-depth knowledge of the Ozark folk tradition.

Brook says, “Around the Folk Center and the Mountain View square, they have people that just sit around and pick and play on Saturdays and Friday nights. I grew up playing there. I’d be out at 2 or 3 in the morning sitting around playing music. . . . You’ll hear a song that you like or think that’s a neat song, then you seek out to learn that song.”³⁴⁵

Kay Thomas, who learned songs from Ollie Gilbert, Clyde Blair, and others at the Folk Center was motivated by a distinct interest in the music of the Ozarks and respect for the sources of the songs she learned. She says, “If I’ve learned something from Aunt Ollie Gilbert, I would sing it the way Ollie Gilbert did—just to honor her. . . . If you were going to say, ‘I learned this from Clyde Blair,’ you better sing it the way Clair Blair sang it.”³⁴⁶ She explains that there was no perceptible teaching method or technique at play during the learning process, but that she would attend to the person from whom she was learning and attempt to play and sing the song the way it was delivered to her.³⁴⁷ Kathy Sutterfield relays similar sentiments and experiences with Folk Center icons, Bookmiller Shannon, Bob Blair, Monte Avery, and others.³⁴⁸ Kathy gives the most detailed account of teaching and learning of all the informants. According to her,

Bookmiller Shannon would say,

‘What do you want to hear today?’ and you might say, ‘Oh, maybe your favorite tune today,’ or he might hit off one and I would try it. Of course, the way I learn tunes, you

³⁴⁵ Brooke Tidwell, June 9, 2019.

³⁴⁶ Kay Thomas, June 19, 2019.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Kathy Sutterfield, June 20, 2019.

have to get the tune of the melody in your head. If I don't have the melody in my head, I can't play it. I don't care if I have the notes or not. I just have to. And he would play it, and it would get in my head. And then, the lessons were very unplanned, very impromptu, so not as much as you would get from a piano lesson. [They were] not as structured, but he would play, and listen to me play and, you know, [He would say] 'Work on this little part right here.' They enjoyed when you learned. And, that's the same way a fiddle player that I played with was, Monte Avery. He also taught me to play backup to fiddle. He said, 'A bad back up can screw up any good fiddle player, so you need to be able to back people up as well as to play fiddle.' So, he would play fiddle and he would stop and he would say, 'No!' or whatever and so they didn't mind correcting you. . . . You got a lot of feedback. . . . They would slow down and show me the pull offs and the hammer-ons, and they were very patient. But, yes, they would slow the tune down. And they were all extremely pleasant to work with. But they loved sharing their craft, or their skills and their talent.³⁴⁹

This is an excellent example of the kind of teaching and learning activity that is necessary for genre-specific norms to persist in the folk record. However, the instance Kathy recounts here may be more closely akin to formal teaching and learning methods. As previously noted, Phil Jenkins describes formal learning as a process by which learners “refine, regulate, and control certain aspects of informal learning.”³⁵⁰ There is no formal curriculum, instruction, assessment, or assigned teacher in informal learning processes.³⁵¹

If folk musicians throughout history have engaged in activities like the one Kathy describes in this example, then folk music is passed down through quasi-formal learning methods. It is clear that Kathy's example includes instruction and formative assessment, and the more experienced musicians were de facto teachers. In addition, Kathy sought to refine, regulate, and control her attempts in order to replicate the musical examples of her teachers. She was

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Phil Jenkins, “Formal and Informal Music Educational Processes,” 180.

³⁵¹ Norbert M. Seel, (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Sciences of Learning*, (New York, NY: Springer, 2012); Kastner, “Exploring Informal Music Learning,” 72.

provided with feedback. Whether a formal curriculum exists is arguable, but Kathy was not under the assigned authority of the other musicians from whom she learned even if the situation was one in which her mentors were more skilled and knowledgeable. Furthermore, the mentors from whom Kathy learned were merely offering suggestions and providing musical examples for reference. They were not imposing strict requirements or forcing her to replicate their personal interpretive minutiae. It seems that these mentors were allowing Kathy to develop her own individual style within the boundaries of genre-specific norms. Kathy says, “They were very patient. Most of it was just by repetition. They play it and I’d get it in my head, then I try to play it and they say, ‘Ahh, that doesn’t sound like it. Oh, that’s terrible!’”³⁵² Because of the apparent mixture of formal and informal learning characteristics, it is unclear whether Kathy’s example of folk music transmission is a result of formal or informal learning.

Many of the informants for this research were at least exposed to folk music at an early age. Some were both exposed to folk music at an early age and engaged in folk music performance at an early age. Others were fully immersed in the Ozark folk music tradition in early adulthood. None of them arrived at an acute knowledge of the tradition’s norms in isolation. They were introduced to and educated in the norms and standards of the genre by persons who were already skilled and knowledgeable.

In the cases of informants who were fully immersed in the Ozark folk traditions of the Mountain View, Arkansas, area as young adults, collaboration among peers in addition to the mentorship of more experienced folk musicians certainly contributed to their Ozark folk music enculturation. They were all engaged in activities where cooperation with each other and an older

³⁵² Kathy Sutterfield, June 20, 2019.

generation of Folk Center musicians was of great benefit to their musical performance skills. Folk Center icons such as Almeda Riddle, Ollie Gilbert, Bookmiller Shannon, Clyde Blair, and others set the standards that a younger generation worked to achieve in their own performance abilities.

Lyle Sparkman, Kyla Cross, Martha Estes, Jeanie Miller, and Brooke Tidwell all engaged in rigorous music learning activities at very early ages. They all possess vast folk music repertoires and knowledge about the norms and standards of the genre. Nowhere is the strength of early engagement with folk music learning more apparent than in Kyla Cross and the musical examples she provides. Because she began learning ballads and folk songs at a very early age and worked under the guidance of a knowledgeable mentor, she achieved a high degree of skill. Her skills and knowledge are beyond what one might assume she could achieve by the age of 14. The process of folk song and ballad learning for Kyla was one in which she would listen to recordings and imitate the sounds she heard. She would then return to Lyle weekly to refine her performances. According to Lyle,

When we first started the teaching it was strictly traditional. I would sing to her, she would pick it up, but we only got together once a week on Tuesday mornings. So, when the next Tuesday came she may have lost the tune. So, we figured out that we had technology to our advantage that wasn't always there. So, that way we could select things that she could listen to during the week to retain the tune. From that point on, I'm the one that chose the variants that she learned.³⁵³

Kyla says, "There were some notes that we had to fight for. I couldn't quite get them. I was going flat or sharp, so the recordings helped with that too."³⁵⁴ Kyla and Lyle would meet during

³⁵³ Kyla Cross and Lyle Sparkman, October 24, 2019.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

the week to refine the melodic, rhythmic, and other genre-specific characteristics of Kyla's performance.

Details of how folk singers learned the songs they sing are limited to vague statements in many of the major folk song collections. Where these statements appear, they are mere generalizations. Statements like, "I learned it from my mother,"³⁵⁵ "I don't remember who I learned it from,"³⁵⁶ or "I don't remember. I was very small when I learned that, and I don't remember"³⁵⁷ are a common occurrence among informants who learned much of their repertoire when they were very young.

Martha and Jeanie maintain that their family members were constantly singing. They learned the music of their family tradition through "osmosis,"³⁵⁸ as Martha describes it. She says, "I was never taught any of those songs, and never asked anybody."³⁵⁹ Jeanie concurs,

Well, usually mom sang after supper, around the stove in the winter, and out on the porch in the summer, and by that time we were a little bit settled down. We'd gather around her and listen to the song. Sometimes she'd tell stories and sometimes she'd read to us. But that was the main time that we'd learn things, and we liked them, so we just sat around and listened. When she [Martha] says they sang all the time, mom sang when she was cooking, she sang all the time, and we didn't necessarily gather around her at that time. We were just aware that she was singing, and you know it was part of home.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ Inez Gibson, interview by Mary Celestia Parler, May 18, 1959, "The Ozark Folksong Collection."

³⁵⁶ Mrs. W. B. Apple, interview by John Quincy Wolf, July 20, 1962, "The John Quincy Wolf Collection Ozark Folklore."

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

Martha and Jeanie claim not to be able to estimate the number of songs they know but that the number is substantial. Jeanie says that when Mary Celestia Parler asked her mother, Phydella Hogan, how many songs she and Helen Fultz knew, Parler was astonished by their answer. Parler exclaimed, “ ‘That’s not possible! Nobody knows that many songs.’ ”³⁶¹ Jeanie did not disclose the number of songs her mother and aunt claimed to know.

Perhaps the strengths of oral transmission in this centuries-long tradition are early exposure to interesting music and guidance from more skilled and knowledgeable peers or adults.³⁶² As Lev Vygotsky contends, “Children can imitate a variety of actions that go well beyond the limits of their own capabilities. Using imitation, children are capable of doing much more in collective activity or under the guidance of adults.”³⁶³ He goes on to say, “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child’s independent developmental achievement.”³⁶⁴ It is possible that children who are immersed in family singing traditions and who learn ballads and folk songs early do not recall specific instances of learning because they were functioning at a level beyond their individual developmental cognitive and physical capabilities when the learning occurred.

³⁶¹ Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019.

³⁶² L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 88.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

CHAPTER VI:

CONCLUSION

This research reveals several poignant facts about the beliefs of modern folk singers concerning authenticity and what constitutes acceptable sources for ballad and folk song learning. The method employed in this study is one in which authentic Ozark folk musicians provided answers to questions about their beliefs. The statements informants made regarding how folk music is learned and what issues induce authenticity judgements among folk music community members were useful in the construction of tenable conclusions regarding these matters. Analysis of the information provided by informants produced reliable answers to my research questions. Perhaps the most important of these findings is that a fundamental change has occurred in interpretations of authenticity standards. This apparent paradigm shift is due to an influx of technology and the effects of recorded examples from which persons may now learn without objection from the larger community of folk musicians who regulate the genre's norms. The present research also reveals information from which logical conclusions and reasonable suppositions may be made. Informants' statements about folk music learning can be connected to widely-accepted theories of teaching and learning. This report contains a detailed account of those connections and evidence of the changes that have occurred concerning authenticity in Ozark folk music.

With regard to research question 1 (What details do folksingers recall about the process

of learning repertoire?), there are two distinct types of learning situations in the Ozark folk music transmission process. The first and possibly the most powerful is early exposure to folk music as part of a family tradition. The second situation is one in which learning occurs in early adulthood with guidance from more skilled and knowledgeable peers or mentor figures. Each of these learning situations bring to fruition a sophisticated set of skills and knowledge that provide the learner with the ability to perform folk music. Both constitute methods that are acceptable within the norms of the genre and produce musicians who are likely to be thought of as authentic folk musicians.

It is clear that the most common and most authentic learning method in this tradition is oral transmission. Oral transmission can now be thought of in terms of listening to and replicating the material provided by a person either face-to-face or in recorded formats. Regardless of whether learners avail themselves of face-to-face models or recorded examples, memory function is an important aspect of folk music learning. Mental acuity and an uncanny ability to memorize and recall a vast repertoire has been documented by earlier scholars such as Cecil Sharp.³⁶⁵ Current informants similarly claim to possess robust memory abilities that allow them to quickly commit music to memory and hold it securely in their repertoires for many years. Although they claim to possess superior or even extraordinary memory abilities, the informants for this research typically do not recall methods of teaching and learning with much specificity. However, they do make statements that can be explicated and connected to known formal and informal learning methods.

³⁶⁵ Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions*.

The statements of Kathy Sutterfield regarding her work with Folk Center icons contain a good amount of detail. According to Kathy, her mentors would 1) slow the tempo of songs so that she could attend to details. They would 2) provide instructions in technique and 3) give generalized suggestions leading her to more accurate performance trials.³⁶⁶ This example of mentorship and informal learning conforms to the Julie D. Kastner's description of informal learning methods where teachers act "more as a coach ['being flexible, and providing "space" for the student to learn'] rather than an instructor."³⁶⁷ Brooke Tidwell attended workshops specifically designed to teach musical skills and information about the history of Ozark folk music.³⁶⁸ Kyla Cross was schooled in Ozark folk music performance by Lyle Sparkman who provided guidance and corrections.³⁶⁹ Learning through observation, repetition, correction by more knowledgeable musicians, and immersion in cultural music-making activities are common methods of learning among the informants for this research. This learning process is very similar to the characteristics of informal learning described by Lucy Green.³⁷⁰ Green describes a process wherein informal learners choose the music they are to learn based on personal interests. They engage in aural copying, self-actuated individual and group problem solving activities, and "assimilation of skills and knowledge in personal, often haphazard ways."³⁷¹ Green explains that, "Throughout the informal learning process, there is an integration of listening, performing,

³⁶⁶ Kathy Sutterfield, June 20, 2019.

³⁶⁷ Kastner, "Exploring Informal Music Learning," 73.

³⁶⁸ Brooke Tidwell, June 9, 2019.

³⁶⁹ Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019; Kyla Cross and Lyle Sparkman, October 24, 2019.

³⁷⁰ Green, "Popular Music Education in and For Itself, and For 'Other' Music."

³⁷¹ Ibid, 106.

improvising and composing, with an emphasis on creativity.”³⁷² The characteristics Green reports can easily be used to describe the Ozark folk music learning process.

Research question 2 (What kinds of non-music activities typically accompany folksong learning?) appears to be an issue of lesser importance. However, answers to this question provide details from which suppositions may be made about the power of early exposure to folk music. Answers to this question also help differentiate the two types of learning situations in which learners acquire skills and knowledge. Informants who were born into family traditions of folk music performance report an array of similar activities that accompanied their music learning early in life. These include the common occurrence of parent-led singing at bedtime, during daily chores to pass the time, and after the evening meal as entertainment. Those informants who arrived at folk music learning later in life did so as an intentional endeavor. For them, learning to perform Ozark folk music is a result of interest in the genre and a desire to learn the norms of the genre so that they could perform the music with a degree of authenticity and with musical integrity.

Research question 3 (What are the authenticity concerns of Ozark folk musicians?) and research question 4 (What sources constitute acceptable examples from which to learn?) are closely related issues. Ozark community members with family folk music traditions who have lived in the area of their childhood home for most of their lives do not typically accept outsiders as authentic Ozark folk musicians. However, transplants or outsiders who have lived in the Ozarks for enough time to have been immersed in the culture and who have learned and adhere to local customs are generally accepted. Musicians who learned their repertoire through oral

³⁷² Ibid.

transmission from well-respected members of the tradition are thought of as authentic folk musicians. Lyle Sparkman argues that the process of learning is what confers upon a person his or her authenticity credentials. He also believes it is an acceptable practice to learn from a recording of well-respected, authentic persons.³⁷³ Other informants hold similar beliefs. The content of a musical product often leads to authenticity judgements. However, as Kay Thomas explains, folk singers like Ollie Gilbert may or may not have been concerned with authenticity.³⁷⁴ Ollie Gilbert often sang popular music that was on the radio. According to Kay, if Ollie Gilbert liked a song, “She would learn them from wherever she could.”³⁷⁵

Kay Thomas and Mary Gillihan offer ideas about authenticity and sources of learning that constitute a reinterpretation of conventional authenticity standards. Mary says, “Ollie Gilbert always said, ‘If I like it, I’ll make it mine.’”³⁷⁶ If Ollie Gilbert learned popular music from the radio, changed it to make it her own, and passed it along to other musicians, then popular music from the radio became folk music. Any source may be an acceptable source from which to learn folk music. However, the process of learning and the manner in which the music is performed are more important details than the source of the music.

With regard to research question 5 (What beliefs do folksingers hold about the length of time required to learn songs?), informants who learned a great number of folk songs and ballads in childhood did so because they were immersed in family traditions. They typically do not recall

³⁷³ Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019.

³⁷⁴ Kay Thomas, June 19, 2019.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Mary Gillihan, October 15, 2018.

the details of these learning experiences, but rather recall that as a family, they were always singing. It may have taken many years to amass the repertoires they learned as children. Early experience with Ozark folk music certainly afforded these folksingers the benefit of an acute knowledge of the genre specific norms of Ozark folk music. Justus and Bharucha describe enculturation and development of schematic expectancies due to long-term “passive perceptual learning”³⁷⁷ as a process that could make it easier for a person to understand and learn music that conforms to the norms of a genre. Since all of the informants for this research continued to learn throughout their lives, they are able to express beliefs about how long it took to learn songs in early adulthood and now. Many of them claim to have possessed exceptional memory abilities in their youth. Lyle Sparkman claims to have had an extraordinary memory when he was young.³⁷⁸ Brooke Tidwell says she could learn a song in the span of one hour.³⁷⁹ Kathy Sutterfield claims that she could have learned an entire song “in a matter of minutes.”³⁸⁰ Jeanie Miller says that when she was younger she could memorize a song “in a day . . . a few hours”³⁸¹ A common belief among these folk singers is that their memory abilities diminished with age. Kay Thomas says that when she was in her 20s she could learn songs much more easily than now. She says that the task of learning an entire song now might take as much as a week.³⁸² She does not specify how many hours per day she typically spends learning a song. One might reject these

³⁷⁷ Justus and Bharucha, “Modularity in Musical Processing,” 1000.

³⁷⁸ Lyle Sparkman, June 20, 2019.

³⁷⁹ Brooke Tidwell, June 9, 2019.

³⁸⁰ Kathy Sutterfield, June 20, 2019.

³⁸¹ Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019.

³⁸² Kay Thomas, June 19, 2019.

claims of extraordinary memory ability as overestimations or exaggerations. However, a comparison to the observations of Cecil Sharp reconciles any misgivings. Sharp confirms the verity of these claims when he offers this thought, “My own experience enables me to vouch for the amazing accuracy of the memories of folk-singers.”³⁸³ The extraordinary memory abilities of folk musicians may be due to the use of “multiple modes of attempt.”³⁸⁴ Ginsborg found that the more successful members of her memorization task experiments used a variety of memorization methods.³⁸⁵

When asked about how they keep songs in their memory (research question 5, What beliefs do folksingers hold about how often performance must take place in order to keep a song in working memory?), informants typically redirect the issue to a more important topic. Instead of an estimate of how often they must perform a song to keep it in working memory, several informants discussed how they might recover a song if their memory diminished. They might consult the digital folk song collections, personal notes and transcriptions of songs, or ask for help from a peer who also knows and performs the song.³⁸⁶ Mary Gillihan says, “I would bring together several people. It was like when Sheryl [Irvine], when I couldn’t remember the one verse to the ‘Devil’s Nine Questions,’ and she started me on it right away. And thank goodness she was there, you know, because for whatever reason I didn’t remember that one.”³⁸⁷ Mary’s account of this memory recovery method is important because it supports long-held theories of

³⁸³ Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions*. 16.

³⁸⁴ Ginsborg, “Classical Singers Learning and Memorising a New Song,” 93.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Kay Thomas, June 19, 2019; Brooke Tidwell, June 9, 2019; Mary Gillihan, October 15, 2018.

³⁸⁷ Mary Gillian, October 15, 2018.

folk song transmission, preservation of variants across generations, and communal second-level authorship of songs in the folk record.³⁸⁸

Reference to the use of documentation such as written notes, recordings, and digital collections in memory recovery strengthens the supposition that authenticity standards have been reinterpreted as a result of the wide-spread availability of technology. In addition, these kinds of regulatory measures help musicians maintain authenticity standards. Without reference to written or recorded examples, ballads and folk songs might become too far misaligned with the standards of the genre or suffer a more destructive consequence. The songs might become unrecognizable versions of themselves. Bronson asserts, “It is accepted doctrine today that if a tune be left long enough in oral circulation it will in due course alter itself out of recognition. . . . If the tune is flourishing in tradition, the individual’s loss will be made good by other singers, and violent change will be corrected.”³⁸⁹

In reference to research question 7 (What do folksingers believe to be the causes of song degradation or preservation in the folk record?), informants provide enthusiastic explanations for why the genre continues to thrive. Music of the Ozark folk tradition persists because it is still relevant. Both the melodic and rhythmic content and the subject matter of songs are still of interest to the musicians who carry on the tradition. The music serves several purposes. It is entertaining. Jeanie Miller says, “We preserve [the songs] because we like them.”³⁹⁰ In years past, folk music was the only entertainment outlet available to the people. This was especially

³⁸⁸ Child, *English and Scottish Ballads*; Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*; Bronson, “Traditional Ballads Musically Considered.” Sharp, *English Folk-Song; Some Conclusions*.

³⁸⁹ Bronson, “The Morphology of the Ballad-Tunes,” 1-2.

³⁹⁰ Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019.

true for those who lived before the advent of radio and recording technology. Folk music lived in the memories of the people who maintained it before recording technology was invented.

The stories folk music tells are interesting. Kay Thomas argues that “They just evoke those pictures, you know, and you live that story, and you feel for the—in this case [the story of “Pretty Polly”]—the loneliness, the isolation. . . . You’re able to identify with the sorrows of those people in the past.”³⁹¹ Mary Gillihan argues that those who carry on the tradition have a responsibility to do so.³⁹² The responsibility to pass on an individual song or the genre as an entity is in part due to respect for the past and for individual persons. Many informants discuss the immense respect they hold for persons in their past who participated in the folk music tradition. Those who come from family traditions preserve it because they feel connected to their ancestors through it.³⁹³ Folk music is part of their identity. The feeling of responsibility looms large for some. Kathy Sutterfield says, “I just feel like, you know, once it’s gone, it’s gone. If we don’t do preservation of it, it’s gone.”³⁹⁴ Brooke Tidwell believes that songs fall out of favor and die because the subject matter is no longer relevant. She believes that when songs are not interesting they die.³⁹⁵ She says, “People like Rhiannon Giddons, that are well-known, but that are still doing the old songs, they really present them in a way that is palatable to the general

³⁹¹ Kay Thomas, June 19, 2019.

³⁹² Mary Gillihan, October 15, 2018.

³⁹³ Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller, June 20, 2019.

³⁹⁴ Kathy Sutterfield, June 20, 2019.

³⁹⁵ Brooke Tidwell, June 9, 2019

public. To me, there's no way to take away the importance of presenting it to an audience in a way that's palatable, and that's going to change with the culture."³⁹⁶

³⁹⁶ Ibid..

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APPENDIX:
INFORMANT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Mary Gillihan

Mountain View, Arkansas

10/15/1018

Kevin Tharp-primary investigator

Alan Spurgeon-secondary investigator

Kevin: If you forget a song, how do you remember it?

Mary: I would bring together several people. It was like when Sheryl [Irvine], when I couldn't remember the one verse to the "Devil's Nine Questions," and she started me on it right away. And, thank goodness she was there, you know, because for whatever reason I didn't remember that one [reference to a video interview by Alan Spurgeon in 2007]. But we found out that sure enough in the photographs We had about eight people, and we nearly figured out between all of us every person in that photograph. Some people would know their family or say, like, "Their parents names are—There they lived out—They made that," and then somebody would get like their last name, and then *bingo!* Somebody would get their first name. So, sometimes I find it. I just call it the collective consciousness. Sometimes you just have it to, you know, to bring the whole piece of work together. I think that memory and music is very interesting, because this is something musicians often discuss in my group of folks. Because as we get older and forget things some of the things that myself, personally I don't forget is a song I sang 40 years ago. Sometimes somebody will ask me about one, and I'll go boom! You know, without thinking about it. So, we said do you think that's because the song was a good story, and we remember good stories? Do you think there was something in that song, or do you think our minds, as musicians and particularly story-song tellers or storytellers, do you think our mind has some place in it that just keeps that story even when other parts are gone? So, that's a lot said for a short time.

Kevin: Yeah, if someone asked me that question I would just say I don't know. I don't know why that happens.

Mary: I don't either but it makes for a great study.

Kevin: I wonder if the way people learn songs initially has something to do with how easily they remember later on?

Mary: It does. I think it depends. My husband, Robert Gillihan, he writes his stuff down, that he's trying to remember—and note taking. And, that sets it in his brain that way, and when he goes to remember in his mind's eye he pictures the page.

Alan: He can see the words?

Mary: He can see the words. I'm an aural learner. I get mine by rote.

Alan: Writing it down helps me, but I get mine by rote.

Mary: Me too.

Alan: When did you start here? You're from southern Illinois, right?

Mary: No, I'm from East Central Illinois. I've come to find out my great-grandmother moved down closer to the southern Ozarks. I found out that years later talking with my father about the choice of old songs he'd learned, and he said that his grandmother my great-grandmother Green she had actually learned those songs, which.

Alan: So, he learned them from her.

Mary: He learned them from her, and from his own mother too even though she didn't sing. She had, I had I guess words of my great-grandmother's, of her mother's, so I think that's how it came down to my father. I mean, I wondered why he'd learned them—"The Letter Edged in Black," and "Little Rosewood Casket," and "The Gypsy's Warning," and, you know, all of those. He said, "Well, your grandmother knew them." How come you didn't tell me? To which he answered, "How come you never asked?"

Alan: You never asked.

Mary: I guess not, even though I've been singing the old songs. I don't think he'd made that connection. I never got a chance to ask him, "Did you consider that an old song?" or "What did you know?" He did them because, you know, it was something that was familiar to him, and he can play them on a dulcimer too.

Alan: So, you learned a lot of these as a kid, as a kid you learned these songs from your dad.

Mary: No, my father did, but no. The only old things that I've learned, well that I would call old are ballads that I learned was in grade school, or 7th grade, junior high school. Mrs. Brock Jones, she taught an English ballad to our class if she did more than one I don't know. Where she got her information she did not say, but I remember that. I remember, but she taught us "Lord Lovel" [Child 75], which I've gone later back and looked up, and then realized it was a Child ballad. I don't even know if she told us that information at the time.

Alan: Well, a kid wouldn't—

Mary: Well, it was a song that we learned in school. In my family, we all sang in church, but in my family we didn't sing in English until I was in the seventh grade it was all Latin. I was Catholic, and the church had not changed until I was in the seventh grade, so when I sang in choir, you know, it was all Latin. It was a Latin mass and "Ave Maria" and the special songs at

Easter and Christmas and May day. My dad played the drums in high school, that was it. We just sang at church.

Alan: Why'd you come here?

Mary: Well, when I first visited here back in 1973, the Folk Center had just opened. We came to visit the Folk Center. My girlfriend who I traveled with had read about it. She lived up around Chicago and in a magazine that came with the *Chicago Tribune* she read about the Folk Center. She read where they were near the Buffalo River, and she and I previously had taken vacations together and canoed. We like doing that, camping and canoeing, so she went, "Oh, well this would be a perfect!" We can go to this Folk Center place, and then we can go to the national forest, and then we can go up to the Buffalo River. It's in close proximity, and this will be our vacation. The very first time I visited here, I really liked what the people were about. I thought the old timers, well, I called them at the time. The older people were really willing to share a lot of things they knew, and then we met some younger people up in the national forest who worked for the cave. It was just like people say—happened to come in to Mountain View. They came to our campsite, brought their guitars, the moon was full, and they were singing. What's not to love about all of that when you're 20 years old? You're kind of looking for a place, you know, what to do, you know, what to do, where to settle, perhaps. I tried a few other things which didn't really agree with me. Then once I got there we went up to the Buffalo River, and then we returned to Mountain View one more time. We returned after camping the first time, and that's when we met those young people on our second time. I just thought there was something great about the whole thing. Where I came from, Charleston, Illinois, where I was raised—I was born in one place, but I didn't live there until I was about 5. I moved to Charleston in Eastern Illinois, and it was a small town. We ran around everywhere. Kids were free to do what they wanted. We'd run around in groups, and they rode their bikes. I found that Mountain View is also a nice small town, you know, where I just felt comfortable. People were really nice, and I like the mountains. There was something about the Ozark Mountains that felt good. I went out and worked in Colorado and the Rockies. I love the Rockies, but it was just something, I don't know if savage is the right word,

but it wasn't as gently rolling. I felt more comfortable. The Rockies did not, and coming from flat Illinois, anything that was bigger than a mound, you're like "Whoa!" So. I just loved the Ozarks for all those reasons, and then settled here and loved the Folk Center. I kept bugging them, I just bugged them all the time until they gave me a job, finally. They must've said, probably like, "Would somebody give that girl a job? She'll never leave us alone." I'd call them and write them and visit them all the time! I really wanted to work here.

Kevin: And she's here all the time anyway.

Mary: Yeah, that's right. So, anyway I really love the Folk Center all these many years, and you know I'm retiring because I feel like it's really time I don't have the same passion for my job you know it's for my work. Now, sometimes it's a job, so I better leave while I'm still most effective and still sane.

Alan: I had just gotten married in '73, and I too read about the Folk Center, and we drove down. It was open year-round, and we came on a cold day. We came across the Sylamore River on that ferry.

Mary: Yes, me too.

Alan: My wife was young, 20 year old wife, was scared to death. I'm sure she just thought, "What have I gotten myself into? We can't. We'll stay one night, and then I'm out of here!"

Mary: Yeah, I saw the ferry because we came that way. We came into Stone County. My girlfriend and I, we came down that hill and there was a river and a sign that says, "Honk for ferry," and I thought "honk for ferry?" This sounds really interesting . . . for a year or more. At least the first whole year I was here the ferry still ran, and you know people from town and we'd all go out and catch the ferry when there was a full moon. They had a place where they liked to go and see it on a bluff that you could climb up to. It's now the scenic overlook. I know it now. I

didn't know it at the time. I just knew we got on the ferry, and everybody had to make sure the person you had to watch was watching, because if you didn't get back before 11p.m., they would close the ferry. Then you had to drive all the way around the long way around, but we would go there every time there was a full moon and just sit up there visit. We'd have a good time.

Alan: What else do you want to know, Kevin?

Kevin: How do you learn new songs?

Mary: Well, first of all even to learn the song I've got to like something about it, or find some reason why I would learn it other than just because it's popular. If I don't like it, I'm not going to learn it. I said thank goodness I've never been destitute and somebody offered me a hundred bucks to sing "Rolling in my Sweet Baby's Arms," because I would be like, "I think I could do something else." There's just songs I don't like for whatever reason, so I've got to state that right away. When I find the song that I really like then I would really want to learn it. Maybe I'll have it on a recording and then I'll put the CD on at home and listen to it. If I have it on a cassette, which is really good to have it in two forms, I'll listen to it when I drive in my van. I'm really an audio learner. There are times when I would write down words especially if it's something that I want to have Robert sing a part on, Dave sing a part on, or even if I want to have one of those guys sing it and I want to sing harmony, I'll write it down. It's easier for everybody to have a copy of it sometimes. I'll keep a copy of that on the piano, so I can always see it when I go by. How I learn a song also is I normally work it out on the autoharp, because I can work the chords. If it's a song that I'm not going to do a cappella. If I keep my instrument set out all the time is really the best way to go even though they get dusty, you know. I told somebody one time, they said, "You don't dust your autoharp?" Well, I'm too busy playing it anyway. We barely dust our home and here you want me to dust my autoharp? I got way better important things to do than housework, excuse me! Anyway, that's how I learn. I work up things on the autoharp, a tune, and if I am doing an cappella song, I may actually—if we're on a long trip—I may actually take those words with me while Robert's driving, and I would do it that way. You know, just read through

the words there, but sometimes we're on our back porch and we'll be learning a new song. I may bring the words out to the porch even if I don't bring my instrument, and we'll just, you know, sing through it a few times. I'm a real audio learner.

Kevin: Did you ever feel like you ever accidentally learned a song?

Mary: Yes, I was singing some songs from the 1950s, "I'm Going To Sit Down and Write Myself a Letter," well I wondered how come I knew the song, and it was just, like, I knew all the words already, the whole thing. I don't remember learning this song, but then when I got to talking a long time ago, I asked my mother, "So, did you know that song?" "Oh, yeah, we played it on the record player all the time." Mom was a big record and radio person. In our home, she had music a lot. We had a really wonderful record player that you pulled out, and I just remember this cabinet that pulls out. We didn't often get to touch the records when I was a kid. It was like my mom's the record disc jockey person. She played the radio all the time. She had the radio going in the house, but she mostly played the modern station, you know, the top 10 station. She listened to that. That's how I learned those old songs. I was just I was a kid and it was in the house and I would start singing along to them. I didn't spend a lot of time in the house as a kid, you know. I was outdoors. I never remember not being allowed to come in the house, but it's just like, there were much better things to do outside. And, when I was outside, I didn't have to do dishes and clean up.

Kevin: If I was inside the house, my mom had me doing something.

Mary: Yeah, we didn't get to go outside until we had our chores done, so I guess we'd hurry up and get stuff done so we can go outside. I think that's how I accidentally learned some songs. I'm trying to think, I may have heard some songs on the radio when they were popular that I was just listening to all the time. It's the same way when I was over, probably, early teens, because when we all got together at the swimming pool and gathered together, we always had a radio. Where we all hung out on beach towels underneath the trees. When we weren't swimming we always

had the transistor radio on. So, I may have. Now that I think about it, some of the songs that I do know, some of the Beatles tunes, and things like that, I may have started learning them there. I also have a big record collection. Now that LPs are back.

Alan: I'll tell you that it's a great thing! That they're back, because it sounds better.

Mary: I remember there were some young people that came in the Folk Center and they said they have an album. Now they call them vinyl, but I said you have an album? I said why, yes, you know that true sound of the of being live recorded on that. I'm like "Do you know how many hours I've spent in a recording studio trying to get rid of that authentic sound?" We wanted to make it all, you know, you could dump it over there, and then you're done, because every time you did you lost a generation. I said, "What? And now you like that stuff?" "I have friends that own recording studios who are just shaking their heads."

Alan: What were we thinking? When you came here, how did you start learning this folk music?

Mary: Robert Gillihan was singing choir when he and I first started singing together before we were married. He was doing some of the older songs, not real old though. His dad was playing more old fiddle tunes. So, I got used to old fiddle tunes, even though I, like a lot of other people, really did think they all sounded alike. Until, you know, I heard them many times, and started playing them myself, you know, that I really realized that there were distinct differences between those tunes. So, some of the very earliest things, was because Robert's dad played the fiddle. Then Robert and I both learned some standard songs going to school, even though for Robert, they weren't ballads like I had learned. They were still older, what might have been considered older tunes. Then, I was so fortunate the first year doctor McNeil came to the Folk Center, which was 1975, I think. He gave a ballad class, and I signed up. It was just that's where I learned "Devil's Nine Questions," was for him. I'd forgotten that it was number one Child. Dr. McNeil chronologically started, you know, the first one, and got as many as we could. I think it was like a 6 week, once a week, for six weeks, you know, for an hour or so. He would talk about

them and teach us to sing them. That was my first ballad, and then I met Judy. She was Clemson at the time, then became Klinkhammer. She and Robert were old friends from the early days in Mountain View when she lived in town. Robert was pretty young, maybe 19, and he would go to Judy's house, because she had music. So, he said, "I want you to go and meet this person, Judy." By this time she had moved out to the Rosenberg place out near Fox. So, we went there, and I'll just never forget. We were sitting in Judy's living room, just the two of us visiting, and she knew I liked to sing. We tried a few songs, and then she just started saying "Do you know this one? Do you know this one?" She'd sing it. It was a lot of tunes she threw out there, and she was very interested in having me learn them. She never said, "I wanted to pass this tune on to you." Not like Almeda did when she came, and said, "I want you to learn 'The Old Elm Tree,' because I'm tired of remembering it." She was really straightforward about it.

Alan: She knew she was getting older.

Mary: Yeah, that was when she would come to the Folk Center in her later years and she and I got to be friends and then we recorded her Robert and I did we went and got Dr. McNeil's tape deck and recorded her doing "The Old Elm Tree," and then I learned it. It was important to her to give it to someone, you know. Now I have given it to someone else. However, they haven't learned it like Almeda's version. I pretty much learned straightforward, but they haven't listened to it, in my opinion, haven't listened to it enough that they're getting the correct tune.

Alan: That's too bad.

Mary: I heard them sing it one time, so I made the suggestion. I said, "I would like to have you go back, and listen to the version that I gave you, because it was the most like Almeda sang it." So, they said, "Okay." So, we'll see. At least I have it, and they have a copy. I left a copy of her book that I had to that same person, you know.

Alan: You have a hope that they take it seriously, and want to learn.

Mary: I don't know that Almeda ever heard me sing it, to tell you the truth. She may have, but I don't remember deliberately her asking for it, or me saying, "Hey, this is what I've learned. If I did, I don't remember. I've just always performed it, and I perform it with the hand motions too, like she always did—the opening and closing.

Alan: Do you do the little lift thing?

Mary: I don't do it in that one, but when Charley Sandage wrote the tune, "They Sang On," I do it in that verse about Almeda.

Alan: Yes, you do.

Mary: In the verse about Almeda, I do. I said I'll just put this in because that's not my normal way of singing so it's when Almeda might have considered to be an affectation, because, I mean she commonly did it like her dad did, but I don't sing that way—throw that note up, you know, but I deliberately do it in that, because it's about Almeda.

Alan: You call it "throw that note up."

Mary: Yeah, I don't know what else it is. I know there's a man that describes it in the video about her the Starr and George—Starr Mitchell and George West. That man, when he's giving her the award in Washington makes mention of it. I don't remember what he calls it, but something about the high pitch range or something. He's referring to how he can't believe her father would sound like that, and that she in a higher range would sound like that.

Alan: I've kind of heard other people do it, old singers, wasn't just her. I've heard other people do that.

Mary: Yes.

Kevin: It's almost like a yodel.

Mary: Yes I think so. That's how I think of it—a little yodel.

Alan: That woman, Brooke Barksdale, you know that girl? She learned things from Almeda. I don't know if she'd remember a whole lot of it. I think she was too young. Is she still around?

Mary: She is. Somebody told me she was. I just read something about her, she might be back in Calico Rock. A couple years ago, she might have gone back. That's, I think where her mom still lives too, but I know she was traveling doing some singing.

Alan: What else do you want to know about, Kevin?

Kevin: Maybe you could talk about the problem of authenticity a little bit.

Mary: Authenticity in what fashion?

Kevin: The argument that says that the only authentic folk singing is songs that were passed down from one person to the next to the next in a clear lineage, and that learning songs from the radio is not authentic folk singing. That argument exists. How do you feel about that?

Mary: I think the folk music is a giant wide open subject, first of all. We can talk about the folk music of the 60s, of the 40s, you can talk about the old things from the old country. That was folk music at that time, and that's culture. I know what Dr. McNeil always said was, "The things that make a tune a folk tune are the fact that it changes over time and space; it is usually handed down in the oral tradition; people don't care where was written, you just sing it." Ollie Gilbert always said, "If I like it, I'll make it mine." She didn't care if she was singing something from

ages and ages ago, like, you know, the two last centuries, or she was singing something she heard on the radio. To her, that was folk music. It was because she had made it her own song. Then it became folk music, and she never stated it in that way. She did state that she liked it “Here’s a great tune, I like it.” I’m glad that there are sticklers, that there are traditionalists, that people just want to do it like it the oldest version of it they can find, or the way in which somebody did it out of respect. I would do it just like Almeda gave it to me, because I respect her in that fashion, you know. To me, that has to do with having the tune passed on to me, but this is just my opinion about how I feel about that. I don’t mind that people take some old songs and make it their own by adding a little bit different style. Words, I think to change words, I don’t really go for that! I think some words are specifically made to say specific things, and that those things should remain true to the song. Whether there’s something Charley Sandage just wrote yesterday, if I’m going to learn it the way he wrote it—who am I to change what he wrote? That’s kind of, you know, I don’t know what word I’d use, but I wouldn’t want anybody changing my words if I wrote them! Who do you think you are? You think this would be better here or easier to say, you know, that’s just, again, those are my opinions. I think those have a lot to do with what is folk music. We go round and round and round about it all the time. We really were sticklers in the Ozark Folk Center, because we did music copyrighted before 1941. Because there were so many changes, but then someone said, “Well, you know, we’re stuck in history.” Well, what do you want to be? What’s your mission? Do you want to be stuck in history, and hope they’ll be, maybe somebody will come along that will want to listen to the old stuff? Or, do you want to move beyond that? And, you know, be what I say, “Just like everybody else?” Or, do we understand both sides? If you don’t have a market for what you were doing, and you find a market for what you could do, then you might want to do that. Still be unique in our ways, but not necessarily hold to the boundary of 1941. We tried to loosen that. At first, we didn’t really have anybody, we never had a Dr. McNeil again, never has never been anyone. Somebody who did come close, that’s Rachel Reynolds. Do you know her?

Alan: Yeah, when she was at U of A, I did.

Mary: She was wonderful! Now she comes and visits a woman who's in our group.

Alan: Does she live in West Plains?

Mary: Yes, but they've been broken up, Mike. Yeah they've been broke up now for quite a few years, but Rachel comes back around. I'll have an opportunity to see her. I like her a lot, but if anybody could come close to, I would say, being a great folklorist for this kind of music, it would be Rachel.

Alan: And, she's from here?

Mary: She went to school here. The mother moved here, and so I've known Rachel since she was quite young, a girl.

Alan: Kevin, you should know her.

Mary: Yeah, she did something with the Mary parlor collection. She's gone back to Reynolds. She's just wonderful. Anyway, I think that when we loosed the 1941 boundary, there was nobody to be able to say, you know, or who was willing to say, "Maybe we shouldn't do this song at the Ozark Folk Center. Maybe we shouldn't, you know, do the Grateful Dead." Even though I wanted somebody to say, "What is this? Why did I choose to do this song in this venue?" That's what I think would clearly state. "Why the songs that you've got on the folk center stage nowadays?" "Why did I decide to do that in this venue?" And, not just because I think it's a folk song, why? Do you think it's a folk song? What would have you do this song here? . . . This is what has happened, you know, back again, at first it wasn't easy to take any of that. Myself, even, being an old-timer and stickler, watching the ways go by the wayside, and it just made for a major change, and history marches on. Life goes on. Things are never the same. You can't go back, and all those things make it hard—to see it change. For me first, it's not always easy, but I know it happens. By gum! I'm sure glad that there are sticklers to the tradition, because I think

that needs to be. In our days, we didn't have a choice. Nowadays we have a choice. We can do either or, both—why not do both? It's a hard one. If anybody puts a hard, fast rule on what is folk music, well, you've got to be specific.

Alan: I listened to Joan Baez.

Mary: You know, Dr. McNeil always called her a “faux folksinger.” “Oh! My gosh! The pseudo folk singer,” he would say. Dr. McNeil was a stickler, he was.

Alan: Kevin, do you know about Bill McNeil?

Kevin: Yes Well, you know that's the stance that some take. That once the song is written down, it has stopped living, and is dead in the folk tradition. For someone to learn it from a book, they're inauthentic. Well, how do you learn them now, because nobody—

Mary: That means that every person that learns a song better teach at least one of their songs to someone else.

Kevin: That doesn't really exist much anymore.

Mary: No, not much, and people die off, and if you don't think about asking until you're, you know, why would someone 17 think about asking someone who's 80 to teach them the song? Until they get to be 40, then they go “Darn, I wish I had asked!”

Kevin: I have asked some much older people who know folk tunes and ballads how they learned their songs and they say, “I learned that from my daddy while we were working in the field,” I think that's the key, is that families don't work together in generations anymore. My parents were school teachers we weren't working in the field together all day, and they weren't singing songs to pass the time.

Mary: It was so common all the old books, and all the old songs. Sometimes kids like the more gory, the scarier the better. They would think of, we should protect each other from that kind of thing today. Which, I can see both sides of that issue too, but yeah. That's a big responsibility to expect somebody to carry on a good song all the way, And, good songs will come back. That's the other thing, if it's written down musically, in some books that I've learned from, you know, as a musician, I could read music. And, there were the words. I may have had a vague remembrance of hearing somebody around here singing it years and years and years ago. So, I kind of remember how it goes, but—

Alan: But you couldn't learn the song if it wasn't written.

Mary: Yeah. I was glad I learned to read music, but I think sometimes, on the upright bass, I would've been better at hearing it if I hadn't. If you tell me the key, I'm much more likely to get it. . . . I have music books at home with basics, rudimentary, that I can always go to. . . . Dr. McNeil had probably the biggest sheet music collection this side of the Mississippi. That's another way I learned several songs, was through that. Being a Last Century Singer, we sing them from the page, so I didn't put them to memory, like I would. I would always be singing it from the page. I don't learn things nearly as well if it's on the page. That was a lot of fun! I have a ton of music, and there are actually some old Last Century Singers cassette tapes. They might be in the archives down in Little Rock [Arkansas].

Alan: Is that where all that stuff is?

Mary: Yes, the history commission.

Brooke Tidwell

DeKalb, Texas

6/09/2019

Telephone Interview

Kevin Tharp-investigator

Kevin: What is your level of education, did you go to college?

Brook: No, I just have a high school education, and now what's interesting is that both of my parents are college-educated. I was an adopted child, one of four adopted children. They couldn't have kids. One of my sisters went to college for a while, but none of us ended up getting a degree.

Kevin: When you were in high school did you sing in the choir or play in the band?

Brooke: I was actually homeschooled, and so, I just sort of naturally—was musical. I'll explain that by saying that, you know, when I was three years old I got up in church and sang "Victory in Jesus" and that was my first thing I had memorized all the words to—probably a couple of verses. I got up and sang. My parents had sung some in church until we came along. They did it until I was about two or three. They quit singing in church, because it was too hard toting kids around and trying to sing. So, I probably, even though I don't really remember singing in church, I probably have that subconsciously somewhere. So, I didn't have any school as far as school music education, but I just kind of grew up around some music. My mom was musical in a casual sense. That wasn't her formal education or anything. She knew a few chords on the guitar, and I was very interested and I sought it out. I wanted to learn to play the guitar, so she taught me a few chords and I would just sit in my bedroom and try to sing songs. I'd figure out where the chords went, so it's like, something that I just did. And, later on in my life, I think I was around 21, I started taking some fiddle lessons. So, I played guitar up to that point, and had had a few

guitar lessons. People would show me things, and then I started taking formal lessons, probably for about a year on fiddle. But I just learned by ear. I can play some right-handed on the piano, so I know enough formal theory to know that when I capo the guitar, I know how to count up the notes. So, I have internalized some theory. I didn't really do any sort of formal music theory or that sort of thing. I had sort of a relentless interest, and I wasn't one of those kids that—and my mom tried sending me to piano lessons. Oh, I did not like that at all. It was so easy for me to memorize the melody in my head, and do it by ear, that her trying to force me to read the music—I didn't like that. I just sort of rebelled against that idea, that I had to learn it a certain way, in some sort of box, I guess. That wasn't my style. I can appreciate people that, I know that I think the best is to be able to do both. So, I'm not one of those people that is sort of, in a sense, a purist or whatever about it. Because I think that if you can read music and play by ear it makes your life whole lot easier, because you can learn both ways. I was more and always have been more of a singer than a musician [instrumentalist], so my playing was always secondary to my singing and storytelling. I like songs that have good stories and good feelings to them, so my playing guitar is always secondary to that. Even when I played fiddle, it always was sort of like, I would play a break in a song. My family put together a band and we would play at the Folk Center and we traveled a little bit, but not much. So, I played fiddle and sang lead there. My brother was playing some rhythm guitar, and so they needed somebody to do something else. Some people are secondarily singers, but they're more of musicians, and I was more interested in singing and guitar was just a way to have some music with my singing.

Kevin: How long has your family lived in the area around Mountain View?

Brooke: My mom's family, the Teagues, were--my great-grandfather was born in Fifty-Six, Arkansas, which is just a little town right next to Mountain View. When he got of age, he moved down to the West Memphis area, Earle, Arkin, that area. He was being a sharecropper. My mom was born there. Then she moved after college back to the ancestral home. They didn't want to raise a family in the flat land. So, my ancestry there [Mountain View area] goes way back. The Folk Center land, the land that's now the State park used to be owned by my family, or a lot, a

big piece of it, you know, was taken and of course some of the people still hold a grudge about that. [The folk center] has carried on a lot of the tradition. I don't think I would have been immersed in that cultural tradition the way I am without the folk center, because it really—it offers opportunities for young people to be interested in the music and to also perform the music and it offers them an interaction with older people who may have also been carrying on that tradition that can pass things along. And, I did take several different workshops throughout the years that they offer there—a couple of times from a ballad singer, and I took some fiddle workshops as well. The folk center was definitely instrumental in my journey. I can't say that I wouldn't have done some of the same stuff without it, but I don't think it would have been as easy and might not have been the same sort of path that I took to doing it.

Kevin: Approximately how many folksongs do you know?

Brooke: I was thinking about that. I would say, if you included religious numbers, like you know, with church, it'd probably be at least 100, and it seems like—I have lists of songs that I work from, but then there's always some song—it's like an endless amount of songs that I might know at least a verse or two of, or a verse and a chorus of, and I might not have sat down and perfected my approach to the song, or something of that nature, but it's a lot of them. I've learned a lot of songs over the years.

Kevin: Would you say that you know complete versions of most of your songs compared to the sources you learned from?

Brooke: To say like, a complete version of something, can be somewhat misleading, because so many of the songs have different versions because they were in the oral tradition. You might go to Missouri and hear somebody singing one with a verse that you never heard before, but it's the same melody and they may have two or three verses that interchange with verses you know, but they're singing some more verses. Now that we have the internet, I think it's Missouri State University that has an archive of folksongs that I've gone to several times and they'll have the

original recording of like Alan Lomax or whoever. They would also have the written verses, but that particular folksinger that they recorded might not have known all the verses. Their parent might have sung them two or three verses that they could remember and then made up an extra verse. Then somebody else knew one of those verses and made up two other ones. So, on those old songs like that, they weren't put down from the person that wrote the song—didn't write it down on paper, so to speak. I think that might have been the case [degradation of folksongs] if it hadn't been for people in the 30s, 40s, 50s, going around recording songs at the time, where now we have access to those recordings. I might know one verse of something, I'd like to know more of that song. I might go try to find where it's been recorded or written down somewhere, where there might be more verses. Or, as I've done on several songs, I just write my own verses, and I think that's just perfectly fine in the folk tradition. I just write a couple extra verses for myself.

Kevin: How did you learn the songs you know? Who did you learn them from?

Brooke: I would say I learned from a lot of different people. One or two people that influenced my approach to music, but I think that I probably learned songs from lots of different sources equally. There wasn't like one particular person, they had the old tradition that is still going on, but it kind of goes up and down in attendance. Around the Folk Center and the Mountain View square, they have people that just sit around and pick and play on Saturdays and Friday nights. I grew up playing there. I'd be out at 2 or 3 in the morning sitting around playing music. You come across a lot of people traveling through and the local people. So, you'll hear a song that you like or think that's a neat song, then you seek out to learn that song, but you're picking up from a lot of different people. I wouldn't say there's one person that I learned a lot of songs from—would be the best answer.

Kevin: Were you given any specific instructions regarding melodies, rhythms, or lyrics? Did you seek out any instruction or learning sessions?

Brooke: Um, no. You might join in on the little music circle that they were doing and you might play along with the song because you were there and if there was a song you liked you might talk to the person and say I really like that song. Who originally did that or where'd you learn it from? There might be some dialogue about where the song came from, but not necessarily anything about learning the song. You wouldn't say, sit down with me and show me that, like you do with tunes. If you were wanting to learn a fiddle tune, you might sit down with somebody and them crank out the tune and try to teach—break it down in parts to teach it to you and that, I think it's a little bit different with the songs. If there's words to something, then the melody sticks in my head really easy. So, I don't, I didn't necessarily have to ever have a repeat of the melody of something. And, because most of the time, you can just go find a song, I would remember the melody of it and then I would just go find the words.

Kevin: What kinds of work or play activities might have accompanied your folksong learning?

Brooke: I think, workshops with people have helped for the generations that didn't have parents or grandparents doing that with them, because you'd get a little bit of that experience from ballad singers. They come in and you can go for a week and sort of just absorb how they process things, and how they go about playing or singing the music and that probably helps in some way, but it's not the same as it was back then, I don't think. Even though we learn it differently now, I think that music is a living thing. It's not going to just—our culture is always changing, and so the music that survives is the music that is really good, because there is always somebody that's going to carry on that song. And, so, if someone is good at telling the story of the song, then people are always going to be interested in listening to that. Sara Grey, she was telling me one time that the story in her approach, the story was the most important part, not the singing of it. Someone might be a really good singer—if they don't sing the song in a way that makes sense poetically—how you phrase it, then it's not going to sell the story right, and you're going to lose interest from people. In our area, we had Almeda Riddle and Aunt Ollie Gilbert, those were two people that I really like their music. They were dead before I ever got involve in the music, but in their recordings. One thing I noticed is that, I think they were recorded, them singing the old

songs and ballads because they were also good singers—I say *performers* loosely, because, you know Almeda Riddle travelled some when folk music was kind of getting a resurgence in the 60s and 70s. But, it wasn't necessarily that they were performers in the sense that we think of modern performers today, but that they were people that could capture your interest by the way that they told the story of the song they were singing. So, it may be a ballad that took 7 or 8 or 15 minutes to sing, but the audience was quiet and listened. Our attention spans are so short these days that you really have to present songs in a way that I think is gonna make people stay interested in the story so that it doesn't become boring if you're gonna sing a whole long song. That's why I think so many people shorten a ballad instead of singing a whole ballad. There's only very few places that you could actually sing all fifteen verses and it be appreciated. It's kind of this balancing act of trying to sing something so that people can have an appreciation. As I've got some friends, they think the audience is wrong because they're not interested. Instead of them presenting in a way to draw the audience in, there may be two people out of that audience that then start digging into folk music themselves just because you presented it in a way that was more palatable to what they know. If our object in folk music is to carry it on, and to see the next generation pick it up and to want to participate in it and keep the songs alive then you have to cater to that a little bit.

Kevin: Do you think the older generations thought about folksinging in terms of passing on a tradition, or was it just about storytelling?

Brooke: I think it was because that was their entertainment. Sitting around playing music was probably—music and dance was the two things that they had outside of just work sunup to sundown. Because that was their entertainment, it just was a product of that that it was passed along and learned. I remember hearing a story that Almeda Riddle told, “The House Carpenter,” I think was the song that I had recorded for your teacher [Alan Spurgeon]. She was talking about that song. I learned that song from a recording of her. She was talking about how she remembers her dad rocking her in a rocking chair singing that song to her and it was her dad and not her mom. And, that she kind of learned that. You don't think of that song as being anything close to a

nursery rhyme. There's quite a bit of darker and deeper subject matter in there. Sitting around to a child singing that song was just kind of interesting that she had remembered that sort of being passed along in that way. It's definitely different how things are passed along these days, because we have different types of entertainment and are more into those so people are not sitting around with music as your entertainment anymore. It was harder times. I think kids back then knew about hard stuff. Kids grew up around more hardship, so it didn't really seem like that big of a deal to sing those songs. Here in Texas, you don't really see the tradition for music like there [Arkansas], but up there where I lived. It was a lot more isolated for so much longer.

Kevin: How long does it take to memorize and learn a song?

Brooke: A lot longer now than before I had children. In the sense, I don't have much time that I can just sit and work on a song. Used to I could—if I could just get like an hour stretch—I could memorize one because I could really focus on it. Now, really I used to think about “Oh! there's a ballad with 15 verses.” Those are actually easier to me to memorize because you just have to learn the story and because the words kind of flow poetically, you can remember what place you're at and you can learn those. So, it really doesn't take all that long. Probably, to be where I would be to where I would feel comfortable standing up singing—do you mean as in, three hours of actual memorization time, but might have been over a week? Yeah, about a week, maybe.

Kevin: How often do you have to perform or review a song to keep it secure in your memory?

Brooke: I can jog my memory pretty fast if I look at a list of songs. I went back to some songs that I sang that was on my album. I did a CD about fifteen years ago, and I was thinking one day about a song that I had on there and I went back and I looked at it and I could remember pretty much all of it. There was like a couple of lines at the end of a verse, I couldn't, if that line went at the end of the 3rd verse or at the 5th verse, so I had to go look and see which placement it was at. But, pretty much I'm good with words. I can jog my memory pretty quick.

Kevin: If you hear another version of a song that you know, do any differences between conflicting versions affect how you perform the song?

Brooke: Actually that just came up in the festival I just sang at. I know the song, “Nine Hundred Miles” that was more popularized in the folk resurgence of the 60’s. I don’t remember who did a version of it. An earlier version was “Reuben’s Train.” Most of the words are the same, but the melody is different because one of them is more, modally, one is more in an actual minor key. I struggled with, I’ve had some confusion with that over the years. You’re supposed to play regular chords, but the banjo played in a modal key. I think that has happened over the years that, as it came down here that people didn’t realize that and the chords were straightened out in the Ozarks. She [a person Brooke performed with at a festival] did “Reuben’s Train.” I couldn’t sing it. I couldn’t get the melody of the way I sang it out of my head, but I could play the chords on the guitar, so she just sang it, and I just played the guitar. But, it would’ve taken me a lot more practice and effort to get over to that version of singing.

Kevin: What is authenticity in traditional folk singing?

Brooke: I’ve come across that in the folk industry, in the different bands that I know and have had workshops with particular bands that learned their tunes from a particular person in the Appalachians, like Tommy Gerald, or people that were fiddle players. They would go to their house and just hang out and just learn tunes all week from that person. But my thing is, who did Tommy Gerald learn them from? How far back can you go? Everyone puts their own bias to an extent onto a song or their own sort of emphasis. Even if you tried to play it exactly like Tommy Gerald played it, or sing a ballad exactly how Almeda Riddle sang it, you’re not gonna do that. I think it almost takes away. When I was working on the folk center, it almost I felt like, it puts a stifle on the creativity that is music. To expect—and also the independent spirit that was of the folk people and all of that culture that I sort of come out of which comes out of the Scotch and Irish. I don’t think that you can force somebody to do it the way that you think it should be done. I always kind of rebelled against that. Authenticity—why is that important? In one sense, I

understand the argument that people want to be able to hear how someone did it. But, I bet that they didn't do it the same way the person that they learned it from did it. So, where does the authenticity go back to? Do we need to put on an Irish accent when we sing so we can be authentic? I think that the songs keep evolving over time. I do see value in people knowing—starting from there. If you want to be a blues singer, find the oldest blues singer that you can find, talk to them, learn something from them. Find the oldest recordings you can find and start there. Progress from there into yourself. Because, to me, that's when you're being authentically true to yourself and that's when the music is true. They're asking you to just copy someone. Well, you play this song exactly the way they're playing it, or you're not doing it right. That doesn't mesh with me—not saying there's anything wrong with that, but I have a problem if they say what I do is wrong. It's all gonna be subjected to your accent, how you speak. I had a problem with the people that through my time of learning, that tried to tell me that I needed to do it a certain way. I think a lot of those people that were singing back then, they would've been, would've objected just as much to somebody telling them they had to do it a certain way.

Kevin: What are acceptable sources of folksongs? Is it okay to learn from the radio?

Brooke: I'll learn—sometimes learn a song from a contemporary artist of traditional music that I'd never heard that song before 'til I heard them sing it. To me, there's no way to take away the importance of presenting it to an audience in a way that is palatable to them and that's going to change with the culture. Sometimes I listen to old recordings, and I would not sit around and listen to that in the car when I was driving somewhere. But, because I like the old folk music, I may seek out a recording like that that's not very pleasant to listen to because I like the story that's in that song—so then I would learn that song and just present it differently to where people would actually enjoy listening to it in today's culture.

Kevin: Why do you think some songs have been preserved and others have degraded?

I think songs that become uninteresting in some way [die]. Whether that's due to the culture, they're no longer interested in the subject matter, or due to the length of a song, or maybe the people singing the songs are not presenting it in a way to garner interest. People like Rhiannon Giddens, that are well-known, but that are still doing the old songs, they really present them in a way that is palatable to the general public. To me, there's no way to take away the importance of presenting it to an audience in a way that is palatable to them and that's gonna change with the culture.

Kay Thomas

Izard County, Arkansas

6/19/2019

Kevin Tharp-primary Investigator

Alan Spurgeon-secondary Investigator

Kay: My parents were from Little River County and my dad said that he had one old mule that he farmed with. . . I asked him if he had any help and he said that he just had one old mule, and I guess times were really hard. They moved from Little River County to Little Rock in the 40s. I was born in 1950 in Little Rock. So, my connection with Little River County is just going back for reunions and that kind of thing, but I have an older brother and they wanted to get him in school. They were just trying to better themselves by moving from the farm and coming to Little Rock.

Kevin: Do you know how many generations your family has lived in the area? Or about when they came to this area of the country?

Kay: I know that from doing some family research that there were Finley's that came across from the Carolinas—so typical. They came through Alabama, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi. They were in Mississippi during the Civil War. And, right after the Civil War they came on up into what would have been Indian Territory at the time. And so, some of them got that far. And there would have been just—my dad would have been born in 1905 and he was in a little place called Goodwater and like he said you could stand on the Arkansas side and throw a rock over there. . . . I used to think that was really something when he would say that he was born in Indian Territory that was really interesting to me. He was a good storyteller and he played music and was a lot of fun—a lot of influence as far as I was concerned.

Kevin: When you say he played music was he a singer and an instrumentalist?

Kay: He played the fiddle and he sort of knew a lot of fiddle tunes and he was . . . the Church of Christ was the background so he sang and, you know, they're good singers, they just don't play music in church . . . the one that I attend in Calico Rock We don't have a piano and we like the tradition, you know, the shaped note tradition. We like to sing unaccompanied, but the particular church I go to does not think it's a mortal sin to have music—we're fine with that we just don't have it in our church only because people are so used to it and we like it. We just like it. We grew up that way. But that's the . . . I think a lot of people that grew up with that--doing parts. Singing was important to them. It helped my dad . . . I had never learned shapes, like he did. So he sang and he . . . I was born to them kind of late in life. He would have been 45 when I was born and I remember so many times . . . the songs that he would sing me and he would rock me—sometimes—rock me to sleep. And so he did railroad songs and later years I thought how funny it was because he was singing these morbid trainwreck songs. *On the Royal Palm and the Ponce de Leon was laughter bright and gay, and so the ones that crashed and the two engines met and in the minds of those who knew . . . they can't forget . . .* but he would sing those kinds of ballads, especially railroad. *Ben Dubarry was a brave engineer he had the throttle wide open—* there's just a whole slew of those railroad songs and that's just what he would sing. There were a couple of lullabies but . . . I believe it's on that little CD that I gave you. It's the first song that I can remember. *Oh dear, do you know? A long time ago too poor little babies there* I don't know where *stolen away on a bright summer's day left in the woods so the people will say—*now most people my age will know that in some tune and I have often thought that that became popular to keep kids close to you, you know, you didn't want to be too far away and be stolen away and have robins cover you with the leaves and that kind of thing. You have a vivid imagination when you're a kid. I told somebody—maybe John—that you couldn't lose me in town. I'll be right there since I heard that song but that's the kind of thing besides the gospel and things that you would hear at church, but my mother was—her maiden name was Barry—and they had come probably a slightly different route. Her family had come down from Ohio to—from Sageville, Ohio, and they had come down to Huntsville, Arkansas, and Ozark. There's a lot of Barrys in the cemetery there. That's south of Fayetteville in the Arkansas River Valley. So, her family was from that

neighborhood. She also was—she loved old songs—ballads. And her father was in the—followed the timber industry. In that CD, she had an unusual song that she had learned, you know—how those occupational songs—sometimes you'll have kind of a sea shanty song that will be used in the west, you know, maybe in the—that would be related material like, “Where the Bullets Fly,” you got the same tune and it came from another origin, but they co-opted the work. Instead of saying, “you're a cowboy” or “you're—I work the timber” and “The Summerlin Boy,” it's on there and she's the one that—there's a lot of lot of verses that are related to other songs but it's been used in a different trade.

Kevin: Did you go to singing school?

Kay: You know, I never did. My dad did when he was maybe growing up but by the time I grew up there in Little Rock—I don't even recall. . . . Well not came up here and when I was 18 and there were singing schools in the area. Now, at the Folk Center we had singing school teachers that would occasionally do that, like at a festival of some kind. But, not for a week at a time like people used to go to singing school. That's different.

Kevin: Did you sing in choir at school?

Kay: I did sing and things like that. A little bit, you know, if they had a glee club or something like that. I did. A little bit. I was really influenced by, you know, in the 1960s, folk music and in some ways even though it had commercial aspects to it, it was the...thing...culturally. And, it was kind of unusual because, well, I like Peter Paul and Mary, Joan Baez, you know, all of the people who were out at that time 'cause—Joan Baez had a lot of ballads, you know. I learned my three or four chords and I had my Joan Baez songbook. I still have my song book, and there was a song that they sang that was called, The Sad song or Lady Mary was the name of it and I believe she, that was her version, and I was singing that one day and the only grandparent I ever knew lived with us and—she died when I was about eight. And, my mother heard me singing that song and she said, “Where did you learn that?” And, I told her off my Joan Baez album. She

said, “your grandmother sang that.” And I thought that was kind of funny. That, you know, that instead of learning it from my grandmother, I learned it from Joan Baez. My mother recognized that as one that she had sung. Since then, you know, that was collected in the Ozark Folk songs that Vance Randolph did. May Kennedy McCord was the one, I think, he credits in his, but it was sung in the area. You know, in the Ozarks and what have you. So, I thought that was kind of full circle.

Kevin: Is it authentic? Is it okay to learn folk songs from the radio or records?

Kay: Well, you know, there was a lady here. You may have heard of her. They would call her Aunt Ollie Gilbert, and she's a famous ballad singer and knew hundreds upon hundreds of ballads and stories, and jokes and all kinds of things. She had an amazing memory. Her mother lived to be a-hundred and four, I think it was, and so, in 1968, when I started—when I moved up here and was so interested in the music and in the songs and the ballads and that kind of thing—Ollie lived in a little yellow house that was next to a hardware store on the square in Mountain View, and it was a little duplex house and at first, I was kind of a purist and a snob. After I realized where the basis of this music had come from, you know, then I didn't want to learn it from Joan Baez. I wanted to learn it from another authentic person. And, you know, over time, I guess, this is how I came to see it. Aunt Ollie she was one of the first ones that kind of impressed me. She loved those ballads and songs. She loved the story that they told. And, she would learn them wherever she could. She would. I would go down there and she would sing, you know, and we talked songs and she'd say, “Well, here's a good one” and she'd start singing and she might be singing something really old. There is, *come on you real rough and rowdy boys listen to me. Don't place your affection on the green bean tree for the leaves they will wither and the roots will decay and the beauty of a fair girl soon fades away.* And she'd sing that, but, you know, no doubt, is an old—by anybody's standards. She probably learned it from . . . I didn't ask her specifically, but I know it was from the area, and she probably learned it from her mother or from hearing it in the community and then she might sing “Harper Valley PTA.” She loved “Wreck on the Highway.” She would go through and she didn't categorize them in any certain in any certain

way other than her one criteria is that she liked the story, and committed it to memory because of that. It was the story. And “Harper Valley PTA” is a story. And I thought that was interesting. Another thing that kind of goes along with that, is there was a lady named Brewer and I was working at The Folk Center when it opened in 73 and an odd turn of events I ended up buying the crafts for the local craft guild—had the concession for crafts at the park. And, they lost the person that was doing that from the state so they asked me if I wanted to work full-time I was a part-time worker at the time for the guild and so I came over and worked full-time. And, then just in a very short time they split the programs into crafts and music. I happened to be doing and buying the crafts. So that's how I became crafts director. I did that for almost 30 years at the Ozark Folk Center so my job was in the craft—in crafting. It is my great good privilege to have known that generation of people—not only their music, but their lifestyle, their generosity. They were just the most hospitable, wonderful people the people that grew up there for generations and lived on little farms and came into the Folk Center just to spin or weave or to do blacksmithing or the skills that they brought with them. And, there was the lady that I mentioned, Retha Brewer, and she came from a big family—I believe 18 siblings. We were trying really hard to keep the demonstrations that we did authentic. So, if somebody wanted to use a little fabric marker to do embroidery, you know, I would say, “We don't need to do that. Other people can buy that. You need to do the real embroidery. Get your embroidery thread out and actually do that instead.” I'd say, “Don't use double knits. Don't use double knit fabric. Use wool or cotton or linen on your fabrics. We have to watch about things like that.” And then one day I went into where Mrs. Brewer was. She worked in our country kitchen. She was cooking on a wood cook stove and she said she had a rug she wanted to show me. It was made out of Colonial bread wrappers. Those plastic bread sacks and so you can—here I am a whippersnapper probably in my 20s and I was thinking how am I going to tell this Mrs. Brewer, you know, that and she's going on she's saying to me, you know, she said, “My daughter just throws stuff away. She just wastes stuff all the time.” She said, “I've been saving these bread sacks. I can't throw them away.” She said, “And pantyhose—she just tosses her pantyhose away.” And she said, “Look-a-here.” She had stripped the pantyhose in to long—not threads but something that she could use—nylon thin strips. And what she'd do is she would braid those sacks. She told me that she had one

that she use for a bath mat. She had it for 9 years and she was so proud of that and as I talked to her, light bulbs went on kind of like with Ollie, and I realized that the material she was using was not important to her. When she only had wool and cotton that's what she used for her rugs or for whatever if that was the fabric. But it wasn't that that was important to her. And being a purist, it was that you didn't throw anything away. And so she had braided these long strips of the Colonial bread sacks and then she had whipped them together with the nylon pantyhose and it was actually an odd looking but decent looking rug after you knew what it was this little bath mat size and I did not have the heart to say anything to her I just I just listen to her tell me all the stories and the stuff about it and I thought, let me think this over so . . . Instead of saying "you can't do that," it became clear that that was going to become more of an interpretive thing. We did not want to lose sight of the way things were done in the materials they were done with. You know a plastic bucket is not a staved bucket there are still limits to what you wanted to show people and how it was done but something like that became a tool and the reason I've gone all the way around the world to tell you that is in my own mind, people learn and I've heard people say that if somebody passed through they keep that person up . . . to ask them they would know tunes they knew they would try this was before tape recorders anything else it was a wonderful thing for them to be able to learn a tune or a part of it. It's like the "Arkansas Traveler," you know, the story behind that is that you learned part of the tune and then hopefully the next time somebody comes through you might learn the other part but they learned it anyway they could. Because like Aunt Ollie, they like the stories they like the songs and they like the tunes they weren't too terribly concerned with where they had—where they came from. So if they could have learned it from a fellow passing through that they thought was an unusually good singer or something like that that they really enjoyed they'd have learned it from him. If he'd have been from some northern state they'd have learned it from him. There was no criteria like that. If they liked it they would have learned it by any means. And as soon as they could learn something off of radio, that they would have done it. And if they went somewhere else, you know, to work or as people left this area in World War I or World War II and their world expanded, they would have learned other things—minstrel shows that had come through here. They would have learned them any way they could. And there's Uncle Floyd Holland and there's a man named Sanders

that I learned some tunes from and they learned a lot of they knew a lot of vaudeville kind of things because that's—they'd heard them, but like Aunt Ollie, it's just wherever they heard these tunes, they put them in their repertoire—if they liked it well enough to commit it to memory.

Alan: And radio came in here around the 30's or 40's.

Kay: It was a treat too—we've got a friend, Tommy Simmons who will soon be 91. He was raised over on Red River and he was part of the Simmons family, he gave a wonderful interview oh my goodness interviewed him it's just my talking back and forth but I wanted to hear all the stories I knew of him telling about a fight. They had the only radio down around Arlberg. I do believe it was—well if I could tell you who it was. Was it Dempsey? Do you know when he fought? It was a huge fight and it was—he said people came and stood outside. They raised the windows and people were outside in the yard and in the house and they were all listening to that fight on the radio 'cause they had the only radio. When John comes back I'll ask him. But that was—I think he was born in may be '20, '29 or something it could have been 39 could have been 38 or 39.

Alan: He wouldn't have remembered it if it was the 30's.

Kay: You bet he would remember 'cause that was exciting really exciting stuff. I think it's hard for us to think today—we have a lot. We're just bombarded all the time by technology and back then though, if it was brand new to you, you know, a radio would have been very exciting. You would have walked miles to have access and listen, you know, and stuff. Of course, people used to, would walk miles for a picking, to play music, you know, if there was a square dance. I've heard lots of stories in the area about people—there's a lady named Caroline Rainbolt and Caroline loved to dance. She was a really good jig dancer and she would say stay out. It sounds funny. She said she would walk and then stay all night. She said her father, his one criteria was that she would be home to plow or whatever they were doing—to work. She had to be home and ready to do that in the morning and that's to be—quite a deal. She would stay. To go to a dance

was just a huge. It was a great social event and so they would—people would come from near and far and they'd take furniture out of the houses many times, if it was a two pen dogtrot, a lot of times they'd stay. You didn't have that many musicians. You might have two or three. At the most you might have a fiddle and sometimes fiddlesticks. You might have a guitar or maybe or a banjo or it'd be really something if you had both, early on. And so you later they were playing and they usually got so much small amount of money for the couple if they pay to dance. The dances were long. If you're familiar with the kind of time the Old Times Square dances that we do here and we do them now. You have a first ol' boy. So, he goes in the actually quarter of a square because in the old squares every ol' boy, four of them, would've have the chance to do before they be the leader. You imagine the fiddler, it looks like his arm would be droppin' off, but that's the kind of thing they did and I'm sure you've heard this before.... My dad being Church of Christ and going to dances as well and playing some when he was young for dances. They really thought the fiddle was—wherever there was a fiddle there was trouble, and to some extent that was true. Because they were—it was rowdier, could be much rowdier at times.

Alan: There was drinking going on.

Kay: There was drinking going on and, you know, drinking and good old boys and Fiddles don't always go together too good. I've heard lots of people say they were carrying. You know, they were bootleggers and there'd be people carrying whiskey in their and on their purses and in their wagons and stuff they go out and visit the wagon and but so you could have trouble at places like that and that's where the fiddle got kind of a bad reputation and that cleaned up over time but I think early on that was true that if you were a church-going family, you were you could go to play parties. You're familiar with play parties? And I've heard my dad talk about that they used to have play parties and it was a square dance but you just the calls to the song told you what to do. *One old man living at the mill, the wheel goes round with it's own free will, one hand in the hopper and the other in the sack, left foot forward and the right foot back*, but there's a whole sloosh of those and he had gone to many a play party and where they weren't doing those here. They were having music and pickings when I moved up here. We would re-enact them

sometimes and so I got to taste of what that was like but not what he did, when that was socially acceptable to go to those and not socially acceptable to go to the [places] where the fiddles were. I suppose in his youthful rebellion, he wanted to go where the fiddling was....

Kevin: If you hear another version of a song that you know, do any differences affect how you perform the song?

Kay: That's an interesting question. Used to, if someone taught you a song here, I remember Clyde Blair it was a song that...I was trying to learn from him and I said a different set of words on one because the words didn't make any sense to me and so the words that I inserted were ones that really—the “Mockingbird Hill,” there was a line that he learned from somebody else and he sang just what he'd learned. And he stopped me and said, “That's not the way I taught you that song,” and I said, “But don't you think this makes sense?” He said, “That's not how I taught you that song.” He said, “If I teach you a song I expect you to sing it the way you learned it.” Yeah that's a long time ago he was an old-timer and he expected you to sing that song his way. Now he was that's the way he was. So if you learned it from him you better sing it the way he said. I've usually—when I've learned the song—if it made no sense to me and I knew it was a—I'll tell you an example, that Johnny Horton song, “North to Alaska.” There was a line in there—it was a little girl, this is a long time ago this is back in '68 or '69 somewhere '70 and it was little girls that sang on the square when we'd do our Friday night musicals, and these little sisters, they would sing one of the lines, “*He crossed the 'magicjic' mountains to the valleys far below,*” and it's, *he crossed the majestic mountains to the valleys far below.* And I said that to them, you know, I said, “What's that word you're saying?” And they said, “magicjic,” and I said, “I think that line is: *across the majestic mountains to the valleys far below,*” they just quietly listened and next time they sang it, it was “magicjic.” They had learned it that way and I think you can hear that on Carter family sometimes and other things that are—there will be words that were—I've heard people talk about “Sweet Fern,” and “Sweet Bird.” Sometimes some people will have learned a different phrase. Now, they heard it that way, and just kept singing it that way. It's just typical of lots of folk music. There was a song—to answer your question—maybe better than

what I'm doing, on the our little CD, there is a kind of a John Riley song in there that I learned from Bob Blair. Then I heard about the time we did this [CD]. Kathy Sutterfield said to me, "Have you heard Tim O'Brien do this?" I listened to the Tim O'Brien version and really liked it a lot. And I do it the way I learned it from Bob on here, but I would have no objection to singing it the other way. It's a very it's close it's not even there's a minor or something in there that's really interesting and pretty now so I wouldn't have any terrible aversion to that and it occasionally You'll Play music with someone and especially if it's like fiddle tunes if I'm playing with somebody it's common for you to at least to accommodate each other. Sometimes I'll play it the way they did. And so we could do harmony or trade fiddles and sometimes they might say, "I'll just play it the way you do." It's not like that's a completely different tune. It's just that you might like the ending or something, or you like a bridge on it better, or they're playing—maybe it's the way they play it—2 and 2 or, you know, 2 and 1 for the bridge, or they've got a third part and you'll hear that third part and think, "Well, I really like that," and incorporate that in. You'd never heard that, and you'd put it into the version that you play. I think that's done a lot, kind of being swapped around playing.

Kevin: If you're going to teach a song, would you teach a version from someone that you heard and liked, the version that you learned a long time ago?

Kay: I would probably teach the one that I had learned and I would—that would be real apparent. I would say your grandfather or your great-grandfather sang this song and this is the way he sang it. These are his verses. There might be many more verses, but these are the ones that he used, so that they would know the difference. I would. It would mean enough to me that if I kind of like Clyde Blair. If I've learned something from Aunt Ollie Gilbert, I would sing it the way Ollie did—just to honor her. So, I feel a certain kind of loyalty to that. Now, if I were just going to—I might throw in a verse, some other kind of verse—if I was just doing it for fun....If I was making a point of passing it on, I would probably do that—much more pure.

Alan: Making a point of passing it on, that's important.

Kevin: Do you recall any specific methods that people have used to teach you their songs? Any methods that feel more like schooling than just learning songs from friends? You were talking about...Clyde Blair...who said do it the way I taught you. How particular was he in the way you learned or the way he taught?

Kay: Well, it wasn't that any particular way but if he . . . was somehow identified with that version of that song. So if you were going to say, "I learned this from Clyde Blair," you better sing it the way Clyde Blair sang it. He didn't he didn't sit you down and say all right I'm going to sing you this line or this line, there was no technique. He'd—if you said, "I'd like to learn that from you," then he wanted you to just to learn it—his set of words.

Alan: But would you say that? I'd like to learn that?

Kay: I would say if it was it was that song well I'd like to learn that. And so he'd repeat it for me and he'd sing it again and that's another thing—that so many times—at the time that I could have used a tape recorder and he was taped it would have been reel to reel but at that time, I was young enough, and it was more of the way people learned things a long time ago is you remembered. I know that sounds odd even to me saying it now because I barely remember anything. We are conditioned, it seems, to say, "let me whip out my phone." But a long time ago, and even in the 60s, we had access to records and things. You could learn that kind of music that way. But if you were still learning things firsthand from someone, you were more apt to remember it, or to jot it down if there was something—long hand. I've got some long hand notes And it amazes me that at 18 to 20 I could learn things a lot faster and easier.

Alan: But you probably thought that was important and that was the right way to do it.

Kay: At the time, there certainly was less technology to learn [with].

Alan: You would have had to find a tape player and plug it in.

Kay: It's kind of amazing to me that the people older generation and my father was another one for whom recitation was part of his schooling. I always thought that was interesting . . . I'm so glad to have that in my background [a father who had her read and recite poetry]. It wasn't because of school necessarily but it was because of him. And him telling me about how they would do that in school. And he just-through the poems that he selected, he taught me so many things. I realized a set of values and he never said don't do this, do this. Well, he did say that, but that wasn't what . . . I don't know if he knew how effective and how smart he was or it didn't seem like that he just seemed to want to transfer information that he had learned . . . because it was lovely and it was of value. He used to say things like that. Their descent would have been Scotch-Irish and they are wordsmiths . . . I don't know how much of that was just—he had uncles that were fiddlers, so he had . . . that music and love for language that he kept but I remember him telling me—it's almost like he was talking to himself—but when he would read he would say the poems, you know. There was one that was called, “The Last Walk in Autumn,” see and I think of it every year. There's a line in there about the geese and the *honk and bell* . . . geese go over here all the time. They never go over that I can't, and I can hear him say—they use this beautiful language and it makes you visualize. You can see it and you can hear it. So, he wasn't a literature professor, but he loved the words and the language and he realized how valuable they were. It's him I think thank for so many things. He died in 1990. He was 85. And, on his tombstone I put a line out of a Whittier poem that says, *The best is that a which we dream*. That was a line from one of his favorite poems.

Kevin: Did you ever learn songs while doing work?

Kay: Like when we'd chop cotton or anything like that? I came along, thank goodness, too late for that. I do remember my dad drove a truck for a while. I was really young and I remember him pulling to the side of the road somewhere in Arkansas. And there were people picking cotton and he said, he looked at me and he said, “You've never done that have you?” And, I said, “No, I

haven't," and he said, "You should have to." I know what you're saying. Let me think. I would say, not like that kind of chore, but you often sang as you did dishes or housework. That was really common. I don't know if that's the kind [you mean, or] if you're just—cooking—housework, you know, and just kind of mindless whatever it's something that you were doing, sure you'd sing. I could imagine that if it was something like chopping cotton that you'd do anything you could to make the time go faster.

Kevin: How long does it take to learn a song?

Kay: Today? I can really see a difference in—as time goes on it is harder to learn and harder to keep. I can remember words from things that I learned as a girl much easier it's like those songs and poems that I learned when I was in my 20s—I could probably do better on that than something that I learned not long ago. If it's something that I really want to learn, and it has three verses, maybe not 2 terribly long. But I also don't seem to keep it as long. I have to—like I told you—I still sing and play with some of these ladies that I grew up with at the Folk Center and we're pulling stuff out of the hat from years and years ago but there are some that songs that you hear sometimes they're songs that you did harmony to or chords to and then you have to learn or maybe, you know, you're the one that has to do the verses so you learn the verse or if you're doing the lead . . . And that's not terribly long. A week, if I keep doing them over and over, and now when I'm driving, if I'm trying to learn something. I'll just keep singing that on the way to town and back—singing the verses. And, I might get the verses mixed up, but I'll be glad just to get 3 verses if I have to do the lead part.

Kevin: If you forget parts or all of a song, how do you regain memory?

Kay: What I've done—there's some marvelous resources now that you can that you can go to online. And, they are collections from, like, if it was a song from Ollie Gilbert, she's got a lot of stuff online at the Wolf collection in Batesville, I think, and . . . Max Hunter at Springfield and I think he might have helped some at the Eureka Springs Festival . . . Max Hunter, his collection.

So there are collections that you can go to. And if it was some person that I knew, I would try to find Stella Palmer in some of their collections. I'd try to find Ollie and I'd try to find . . . So that I could remember how they did the songs. I have a box under the bed back there of old songs that I've written out from years and years ago. I'd go through that. If I'm looking for something, oh, Pam, the lady that—we sing together a lot. Pam's 10 years younger, but she knew all of the songs really well. So, Pam sings some Ollie Gilbert songs, and I would call some somebody like Pam about Ollie's songs, or I'd call or ask them and say did you remember? Maybe I'd have one line of it, but between us, like, her people that knew her, you might, oh, it might get pieced back together for you by doing that. I would try that. And I'd go to this to the Vance Randolph collection and I will go to that. I would [do that] because a lot of times they may not be the exact same song that you knew, but they would be enough words collected in southern Missouri, but it would still be a verse, and you would think oh yeah that's the verse I'm forgetting. And, then when you started the words would come to you.

Kevin: What do you think is the cause of song preservation/degradation over time?

Kay: I think it's what Ollie said. I think the stories are, you know, if it's "The Brown Girl" or if it's some of those murder ballads, before Geraldo Rivera was on TV so it was all these things. You still [have] in almost every community, you probably have heard about, you know, some guy who murdered his sweetheart. So even though it was the "Knoxville Girl" or . . . we were talking about this just the other Saturday night when we were on the show we were talking a little bit about this and I said, "*He left Pretty Polly in the grave so forlorn with only the wild blooms to weep into morn . . .*" It just, they just evoke those pictures, you know, and you live that story, and you feel for the—in this case—the loneliness, the isolation. No one ever finds her. So, you, whatever that story is, whether it's the orphan child, and she's there at the Richmond store, and they'll be the orphans there. All those stories still—you're able to identify with the sorrows of those people in the past. We have those horrors today. We could maybe write the same songs everyone remembers there was some child that was beaten to death by some parent who was on drugs. So you've got the same kind of emotion that runs today. They just didn't have the

technology, you know, to see it on TV. You've got a different kind of visual, but that stayed because of those—the strength of the story. To me, that's what's important.

Kathy Sutterfield

Fayetteville, Arkansas

6/20/19

Kevin Tharp: primary investigator

Alan: Spurgeon: secondary investigator

Kevin: What is your level of education?

Kathy: I have one degree, a B. S., and then I went back. My original degree was in home economics, which didn't really thrill me, so I went back and got my language arts reading, and I taught K through 12. But, I taught mostly K through 6—the remedial. At that time it was Chapter 9. I don't know what it is now. And, that was rewarding because many times, probably the same way where you were teaching, you get kids who didn't get a lot of attention when they were at home, and they just love the attention. And so, they would do anything for you, and they needed help. Some of their parents weren't too encouraging, and they didn't know how to read, so “Why should Johnny know how to read?”

Kevin: Tell me about your family history, where they came from, and how long they've lived in the area.

Kathy: Well, my family, we always said we wished we had some interesting ethnicity, you know, you meet these Italian families or whatever and I feel we're just like hillbillies and rednecks—my husband and my family both. My mother was from South Arkansas and a large family. They were never hungry, but they didn't have a lot of money. She was the only one in her family to go to college, and she was able to go to college by joining the Navy after high school. In fact, I had her in for some dental work this week she was up here, and she said, “You know the last time I had a tooth pulled, I had my four wisdom teeth pulled it was the day FDR died.” But she was a medic or a nurse's assistant or something. She was at Bethesda, Maryland during the war, and

you know that great picture where the guy kisses the nurse? She was there, and she had her head through the fence so nobody could kiss her because those sailors were drunk. But it was a very poor family, but my grandmother somehow had an organ, a pump organ, and she played by ear and sang. And mother said she played guitar, but I never heard her play guitar. But I did hear her play her pump organ and sing...not a great voice, but she could sing. And my father's family was from just south of Mountain View kind of around the lake in that area around Clinton. And they were probably a little bit higher up echelon, but not really. They were a very strong work ethic family, like my family is. You wouldn't get a degree in music or anything because that's not going to pay the bills. You get a practical job, and you get a job and you keep it. But I had an idyllic growing up. My family listened to music. We listened to Perry Como, Kate Smith, Nat King Cole, all those things all the time. That was what was on our stereo and we didn't listen to country music. We didn't listen to Old-time music or anything like that. I have three brothers and I think that's probably why—my husband says—sometimes I'm a little too tough, but you know when you have three brothers you have to learn to stand up for yourself. But music was—I got my guitar when I was in the sixth grade. I learned the guitar because I loved Peter, Paul, and Mary and so they gave me a guitar, but I didn't know anything about it. And I got a book and I learned to play those Peter, Paul, and Mary songs. I still love Peter Paul and Mary. And it took me a while—before, it wasn't long before I got a capo. I didn't know it was called a capo, but if I moved it up the guitar neck I could sing at a different, you know I could sing higher or I could sing lower. I could find the notes to fit my voice. I started piano lessons when I was in the third grade, and the teacher wanted me to play stuff like The Clown, The Bicycle, and I'm like, you know, I want to play real music like Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass. I want to play that kind of stuff. So, of course I quit and then I just learned to play on my own. Which isn't—I'm not that good, but I can play things. But when I was in the seventh grade I started an all-girls band and there were six of us. I played guitar and we sang at everything that happened in the town we grew up in. You know the Rotary Club banquet, the mayor's meeting, or whatever, and we sang Peter, Paul, and Mary, and things like that.

Alan: What town was that?

Kathy: Morrilton, it's on I-40. And after high school, I put my instruments away totally. I didn't see them, hear them, you know, play with them. When I went to college and my husband was in college, and I was working and one day we were at—he was at the med school at the University at Little Rock. And they would have little musicians coming through, and reading theater, or whatever. And a guy—I was looking for something to do—and John McCutcheon came through. I've never heard of John McCutcheon. At the little theater there, he had a little concert of old-time music—a cappella, or just him on guitar or banjo, and I just fell in love with it. He had a little reception at one of the doctor's houses. I think I sat there until 2 o'clock with him talking and asking him about music and all this kind of stuff. And of course, then I bought every album that he had made. And, that was my introduction to old-time music. Which I think was a good one, really. And then I followed him through the years. Then a few years back, I played at Winfield in a group with the Long Valley festival, the big one in Kansas. Which it's an honor to be there, and it was great. We had a great time, but John McCutcheon was usually there or often there, and I was there, and I went up to him and said you don't remember me but—I'm sure he didn't remember me—but, I told him how much I appreciated him talking, you know. A lot of times you go to these people—I can name a few that I've met and I was real disappointed because you, I've gone to and they're like that. . . . And John was just so, you know, he was just so gracious, you know, and [he said], "I'm so glad that affected you that way," and you know, it was so pleasant. I think for him to hear that people really do follow what he does. And, then I started playing, and I got a fiddle when my husband was in med school. And I was terrible because—have you ever heard a fiddle being learned? As you know [fiddle bow screeching sounds], I can't stand this anymore. . . . Then I just kind of picked at the banjo and just you know.

Kevin: What style of banjo do you play?

Kathy: Clawhammer, Frailing clawhammer, and that was one thing—at Mountain View, when we moved there in '87, but we started going before that, and I started playing at The Folk Center and that was when a lot of the old guys were still there. They were so good—Bookmiller

Shannon and of course Bob Blair and Mary Gillihan, and all those guys, Monte Avery, and I was young and female or whatever but they were very receptive to teaching me yes. Bookmiller Shannon was the frailing banjo person. He was a gruff old man and everything, but he would play for me and let me listen, and I would play his stuff—try to play it. And his fingers [were] about this big around, and you know I couldn't imagine how he did all that. But I was fortunate enough to play with those guys, and hear their music as they played it. And, I think that Kay [Thomas] and I've talked about that a lot because you know Kay came to Mountain View before I did and so she learned from a great lot of the same people. Did you by any chance—I don't remember a time frame—the CD that we made the of ballads?

Alan: She gave it to me. Yeah, I didn't know you had made it. But, yeah, we've got it.

Kathy: We could have done like four of those CDs full of things. So, we were trying to do songs or things that we learned from people there. And, the older people were just wonderful. Most of them have died off now, you know. We would go to their houses and they would dig under the bed and find a fiddle. And, I don't know if you remember Sam Younger. He was on staff for a long, long time.

Alan: I'm sure I heard of him.

Kathy: He dug under his bed found his fiddle and get it out—and his fingers were about this big around—and play these tunes for us, and so, it was nice. We learned a lot from him and the people there.

Kevin: You were talking about the banjo player that taught you a lot. Would you say that that was like what you would think of as having a piano lesson but on Banjo? How involved was he or others that you learned from in your progress and the process?

Kathy: He enjoyed it when I would learn something he would say oh yeah that's good or whatever but he would—sort of like a piano lesson but totally unstructured. He would be like, "What do you want to hear today?" and you might say, "Oh, maybe your favorite tune today" or he might hit off one and I would try it. Of course, the way I learn tunes, you have to get the tune of the melody in your head. If I don't have the melody in my head, I can't play it. I don't care if I have the notes or not. I just have to. And he would play it and it would get in my head. And then, the lessons were very unplanned, very impromptu, so not as much as you would get from a piano lesson. [They were] not as structured, but he would play, and listen to me play and, you know, [He would say] "Work on this little part right here." They enjoyed when you learned. And, that's the same way a fiddle player that I played with was, Monte Avery. He also taught me to play backup to fiddle. He said, "A bad back up can screw up any good fiddle player, so you need to be able to back people up as well as to play fiddle." So, he would play fiddle and he would stop and he would say, "No!" or whatever and so they didn't mind correcting you.

Alan: You're getting feedback.

Kathy: Yeah, you got a lot of feedback.

Kevin: Would they show you, or slow down and place your fingers?

Kathy: They would slow down and show me the pull offs and the hammer-ons, and they were very patient. But, yes, they would slow the tune down. And they were all extremely pleasant to work with. But they loved sharing their craft, or their skills and their talent. They brought songs that were a lot of times—I haven't heard anywhere else. I mean you know they weren't common. They'd say, "This songs never been recorded..." So they would pull out some of their songs. Did you know Judy Klinkhammer?

Alan: Mm-hmm, sure did.

Kathy: I played with Judy some too. She played banjo and dulcimer a whole lot over the years. But she had played with Bookmiller Shannon, the banjo player that I did, you know, sometimes the guys we're crusty—and you know it was funny—but they were very patient. Most of it was just by repetition. They play it and I'd get it in my head, then I try to play it and they say, "Ahh, that doesn't sound like it. Oh that's terrible!" They didn't mind saying "Aww that's terrible." You know but they were very encouraging.

Kevin: Could you compare that experience to the melodies and lyrics that you know? And, the people that you learned those from? (folksong learning)

Alan: Yeah, how'd you learn those?

Kathy: Well, it's not that—I don't feel like I'm super talented. And so, you know a lot of us have our own thing. Like, I cannot color. If you give me a coloring book, I can't color. I can't draw. I have no artistic anything. But this, you know, my brain sticks to music and tunes, so if I hear a song that I like, the melody, the words, it just sticks in my brain. And, it goes over and over. So, if I were someplace and a little lady sang "Three Little Babes," well, by the time I went home I had gone over that melody so many times in my head that I would have the melody. And then I would start looking for versions of it to find words or whatever. And, you know, people back then didn't have newspapers and TV and internet and they weren't bombarded by all these horrible stories that we have to listen to all the time. So, they loved the stories that tell about women running off with other men, you know, things like that. They love those things because that was news. The "Three Little Babes," where the mother gives them away or whatever, and they cry. So, I would listen to—if there was a song that I liked I would just get it in my brain, and find versions—and not necessarily Joan Baez—though I do like Joan Baez. She was here, I think in April, and she was almost 80–78 or so. Oh man, she was like the Mick Jagger you know how Mick Jagger is still—she did all her guitar work she was sharp . . . I did listen to her, but I also did all the Vance Randolph books as far as lyrics.

Alan: And you were in Arkansas, so you knew about those.

Kathy: Yes, but, such a good reference is at the Folk Center there they had the little library there. When Bill McNeil was still there, and, you know whatever, if you had a song that you wanted to learn or something, he would help you find written versions. And if there were 10 recorded version of Almeda Riddle and whoever else, he would, you know, make you a tape or whatever. And that's the one thing I do. I would listen to different versions of the original.

Alan: You actually studied it didn't you?

Kathy: Yes.

Kevin: Would you choose a version that you liked better or that the story was a little different?

Kathy: Yeah. Yes.

Kevin: So, you chose a favorite, and then learned that one?

Kathy: Yes.

Kevin: Did you ever mix the versions?

Kathy: Yes, I did a lot of times. By the time you get through reading and listening and everything, they just kind of mix up in your head. So, I'm not sure if I ever did one purely like someone else. And, "House Carpenter" is such a great example, because there's so many versions of that. And recently, Tim O'Brien, if you're familiar with Tim O'Brien—Tim O'Brien and his sister, Molly, they started out doing old time ,and now they branched out, you know, singer-songwriter and everything, but they do some old time stuff. And he did a version of "House Carpenter" much more modern, but nice. And also, there was a version on—Who were those three? That young group, a young bluegrass group, a girl, her brother and—Nickel Creek. And

they did a version of “House Carpenter,” you know, and of course, by the time they did it—it’s probably a bit different. But yes, I usually—what story I liked.

Kevin: What do you think about the value of tradition and passing down songs through generations and families in regions?

Kathy: Well, I think I've tried to do some of that, you know. Some of it was, some of the music, the grammar was incorrect. Okay—grammar’s a big thing—okay, now my thing is, where we were, the Stone County grammar was not a big thing with most people. They didn't really care. But a few songs I would say, “some of this grammar,” before we’d do it at the Folk Center I would say, “some of this grammar is not correct as far as standards are but I'm going to do it like I learned it.” You know, it's like the “Blackest Crow,” *I wish my heart was made of glass*, anyway there's something in there some verb or something that’s totally off. And I always cringed when I did it, but that's how I learned it. But I would try to say, “I know this is not correct . . .” I think there was something to keeping the old tradition you know the people up there still said things like “I recollect the day I lost my jumper.” Well, I remember the day I lost my jacket, you know. Jumper is an Irish word for a jacket. In fact, my grandfather still said jumper. Back to my family, my family, both sides are Scotch-Irish. So, I can tell you a little, you know, Arkansas you know.

Kevin: Part of my family is Scots-Irish too.

Alan: Mine too.

Kathy: Okay and they came and then they all split, but they're all the same thing. Looks like when we go to South Carolina, we toured some of these homes, and saw the China, and the silver that the families had since whenever, you know. I'm like ours must've lived in caves without utensils. . . . But I think that quite a bit, some of the beauty of some of these songs really were, the beauty, was in some of the language that was used. And if that word was not *majestic*, well that's the way they learned it.

Kevin: About how long does it take you to learn a song?

Kathy: Longer than it used to. It used to be that I could just listen to it and concentrate, and I would have it. Now, I have to do more like listen to it, listen to it in my head, and sing it in my head. Last night I couldn't sleep, which that's an old person problem, but anyway, that's when I go over songs that I'm learning. Because, I'm still learning for my different groups, but it used to be that I could just sing over a song a time or two and have it. But now I have to kind of learn it verse by verse. I learned this verse, then I learned this verse, and I can like put it together. Much of its in my head, but I still have to sing it out loud, you know, to get it to where I feel comfortable to do it. Now, how long does it take? I can still do it in a day, but it used to be that I could do it in a matter of a few minutes. You don't know about that but it'll get like that one day.

Kevin: How often do you have to sing a song to keep it secure in your memory?

Kathy: Well, it's funny because the songs, the newer songs that I learned and some of the Irish songs—I think we were talking about Wind and Rain you know—I haven't done that one since then, I don't think I've done it since I did it that time. But there's an Irish song much like that and so some of those goes kind of same story. The “Four Marys” is a song that I can probably, I might not get the verses in the exact same order, but I did it so much that I can pull some of them out, like “The Fox” and “The Four Marys,” even the “House Carpenter” and “Black Jack Davey.” Some of them I would have to just refresh my memory. Songs that I'm learning now, I usually need to really refresh my memory, you know this, it's like you remember your childhood memories much more than you remember what you had for breakfast. But it's amazing at how some stick in your brain.

Kevin: Did you ever notice that you had accidentally memorized the song?

Kathy: Well, yeah, you just kind of listen to it a few times and then you're singing along with it and next thing you know you're singing it, yeah . . . There was a rock station, well you wouldn't call it rock now, but plays the songs and I would remember a lot of those songs from when I was

in high school and you know . . . It's funny what, you know, I don't know. I don't really know how the brain works with all this. It's amazing what the brain does retain.

Kevin: How many folksongs would you say you know?

Kathy: I have no idea. Different genres, I have notebooks in this little armoire in the other room from different bands and different groups: Irish, Old-time, Bluegrass, Singer-songwriter, that I've done before, and sometimes I do have to read over the words. And then, it's like, okay I've got it and then sometimes it's just getting into a verse I don't know, I would say it's not like tons of them. Hundreds, yes, and sometimes something will pop up in my brain about—that song—I heard it and haven't done it in a long time, and it's just back there somewhere. And this light comes out of my old computer—pops up—so, that's my thing. I really enjoyed collecting Old-time songs. I've enjoyed collecting the Irish songs. I just enjoy the verbal part of music I guess.

Kevin: If you remember of a song that you had forgotten you used to sing, or that you had forgotten existed, and you knew you had some lyrics written down, is that where you would go to remember the song? You wouldn't go back to the archives to listen?

Kathy: I'm able to remember how the melody went and the nuances of the melody, and so, if I'm refreshing those words that melody comes back. I really am able to remember melodies. You know and just I can hear those little old ladies singing these songs and you know, "*there once was a bride and beautiful bride* [in a thick southern drawl]." I remember these, you know, they would be singing a lot of times, sort of, in their falsetto voice, you know, how they'd hang onto their words or slur them. That's just—I wish that other things would stick in my brain is well as the words, but I very seldom go back to the archives.

Kevin: What is authenticity in folk music?

Kathy: Well, you know, I think there's so much of the music there was aural, and it was passed down, and it's like you said, different words. It's like, for instance, when I was learning "Silent Night" when I was very young and in preschool "*radiant beans*" because I didn't know what a *beam* was. I said "*radiant beans, beans,*" instead of *beams* for years before I realized it was *radiant beams*. It's like those little girls [Kay Thomas' story of *magicjic*]. Sometimes those words come and they're not the right words or whatever but I always tried to keep it, and I know they did too, authentic to the oldest version that I could find. And I think that's a big part of it now the fact that some of these groups have made successful recordings, and you know, that's how they sell their records and everything. I think that's okay, because that has introduced people to Old-time music. Like you know when somebody says they heard this really weird interesting song and it was "Daemon Lover" is what Tim O'Brien has it labeled instead of "House Carpenter" because she sees his cloven foot. And when I start telling them are showing them how that was an old-time folk song that was passed down and we get into the child ballads, and that they don't really understand that because they're thinking of kid ballads. But, still it exposes people to this type of music that perhaps they would have never heard before. Now, if you're doing it someplace and you're doing an old folk ballad. I try to do it authentic, but for instance my "Black Jack Davey" is nowhere near authentic, but I like to do it that way. And, I've done it that way for 40 or 50 years. I don't know how long. But, I think we should strive to keep all of that or else we're losing the essence of it. And that's why—the Folk Center—something that I really didn't agree with. They no longer keep the old. If you write a song and you want to do it, that's okay we'll call it a ballad, but that's not keeping with the old Ozark traditions.

Alan: We were there in October....We went to the show that night, and a guy . . . he was doing [inauthentic music]. We were surprised it was there.

Kathy: Well, they, really wasn't their fault they felt they needed to be more economically viable.

Alan: Yeah, make some money.

Kathy: And my thing was, if people want to hear this kind of music then go down the road to the other theaters. I don't have any problem with them. That's the kind of music they do. They're not doing Old-time music, and I think that they lost so much because—the Folk Center—it was so important to keep it authentic, and to keep it like it was done. And that was what was so wonderful about Bill McNeill. He didn't mind telling you, “Don't you ever do that song again, that was not appropriate,” or it was wrong or whatever. When I heard him say that many times, and always checked my songs. I didn't want Bill McNeil chewing me out.

Alan: And he's long gone, and there's nobody policing.

Kathy: I hated that it went that way, because I really feel that the songs need to be preserved as they were. Now these modern versions do expose people to songs they would have never heard, or a different type of music, and I can't say that's bad.

Kevin: What would you say to those who say that preserving songs in that way kills the living folksong?

Kathy: Well, I would disagree because I feel like these folk songs are passed down, and there is certainly a place for the traditional, the original as you can find it version, and if they using correct grammar and they're saying words incorrectly that's okay. That's one of the, sort of the charm of it all. So, I think I would disagree with that. I think that it doesn't kill the living song. But they are changed, if I teach you a song right now, and you get home—and Kay and I would do this a lot of times—we would both of us listen to somebody, to do this song, and then we would go, “Okay, we're going to work on this . . .” We'd get back together we wouldn't have learned the same song, even though we both heard this woman or this man sing it right here. So, it does change every time you hear it, unless I'm listening to a recording where I go over every word, and get every little nuance. So it does change.

Alan: But you got the essence of it.

Kathy: Yes, I just feel like, you know, once this is gone it's gone. If we don't do preservation of it, it's gone.

Kevin: so would you say that preserving tradition is more of a thing in itself rather than an affect of the need to fulfill the wants of an audience?

Kathy: Yes, because—I think it does. Because you do some of the songs for an audience and they're not interested so you vary them, or change them up, or you Jazz them up, or you do whatever. And so, you're pleasing the audience more than keeping it. And there's a time and place for that, but I think that keeping it authentic is, for me, really the most important thing. Now, if I wanted to Jazz it up and do it for somebody else, and say, "This is my version. It's my new version of the song." But, you know, it's just, I just hate to lose the authentic, the real old songs, and I think a lot of times people do totally play to the audience and I can understand that. I've played for audiences that do not care to hear all 75 verses of "Barbara Allen." [They're] just like, "Get to the point and get over it . . ." There are a lot of people, in fact, some in my family, you know, somebody will come up with my parents and they would be like, "Oh, this is great," and you could tell they weren't enthralled. And they would rather the drum set in the drum come out, and make it more modern. It's really important to keep these songs as they were, because when they're gone, they're gone. These older people are gone, you know. Now I'm the older people. But, you hate to see that go by the wayside. So many of the ballads were a cappella, which is wonderful, and then people started adding instruments to them to give them their own little boost so they're not so dreary, or whatever. You know, I'm not opposed to that. Some people have trouble staying on pitch anyway, so that helps.

Alan: About authenticity, how do you feel about the difference between something you learn from your grandmother or from Almeda Riddle, or what you call an "authentic folk singer," or from a record from Joan Baez or Peter, Paul, and Mary, or somebody? Do you think there's a difference there? Is one more authentic than the other?

Kathy: Definitely, I think my grandmother, in fact, I did learn “When You and I Were Young . . .” She learned it from her grandmother, or her aunt, or her mother ,and I think by the time it gets to the recording process it's been commercialized somewhat and jazzed-up. It's still the song, but it's not the same song, you know. Nickel Creek also did a version of “The Fox,” which is a great Child ballad, and it was still the same song, it just wasn't the same song. As far as authenticity, I have to go back to the guys that I learned it from sitting in their house where they weren't even singing on key, but they were doing the song as they learned it and it hadn't been cleaned up. You know, when you play music for people, and so many times they want to hear the glitzy version, they want to hear lots of instruments in perfect harmony and all that, but they don't want to hear just that plain stuff that just goes on and on and on. And so, people, I'm sure, are tempted to change it up to make more money, to sell records, and I'm not criticizing them for that, it's just that.

Alan: It's still the song. It's still the story, it's just not, it's not the original version.

Kevin: Would you say the desire for a particular experience makes a difference in folk song performance in this area?

Kathy: For the audience? Yeah, I think so...when they have an idea of who they want to see, what they want to see, I think that sometimes people were sort of disappointed when they would talk to you after. I always like to go talk to people after, and you know the audience assumed that. I can understand. I wasn't from right there. I had been to college. I had, even if I learned the songs from the people there, I wasn't one of them. And so, I think the experience of that, they loved—which I did too—the little old ladies. They'd have their apron on that they had made biscuits in that morning. They enjoyed, if they enjoyed the music at all, they enjoyed that. And the guys with the overalls on, that were real. They didn't dress for the park, but then it's kind of, when the younger ones come and they'd tied a kerchief on, and they get all prettied up, I think that changes, I think then it becomes a commercial performance.

Alan: So you think people were disappointed with you...once they found out you went to college or you were not from Stone County?

Kathy: I think that happened some. Now, sometimes they didn't. Sometimes they thought it was interesting that I was there doing that but . . .

[Alan tells of hearing that Sheryl Irvine had passed on.]

Kathy: Sheryl and her mother were a wealth of music. Georgia and Sheryl did a lot of hers from Georgia, and she also did it from recordings so she had the authentic plus the not-so-authentic. Sheryl was a very large woman, never married, and music was her—and that she made baskets.

Kevin: How do you think it affects the tradition and the future of the tradition for a transplant to come and learn these traditions and then pass them on? Does it make any difference that you didn't wash your clothes on a rock in the creek?

Kathy: I think that while I'm not the authentic real deal, and I'm not the original, I like to think that I help keep all of this going. And if we only had the original old people well they died so then what happens? So, that was one of the things that we tried to do. I played some Old-time with did Deanne Gillespie, the fiddler. She was from California. So, she was a recovering violinist. But we did a lot of Old-time, but some of it we learned from the oldest recordings we could, and some of it we learned from newer recordings. We didn't worry about keeping that totally traditional. We took some from the newer recording, the Old-time groups, and the older, and kind of mishmashes them together. But I think it's different with the ballads for some reason it's like these need to be kept as they were. And if somebody learned some ballad through me well, it wasn't maybe my experience that I had learning it from some people but I think that that's okay. You know, if you have a real northern accent and you come in and do some of these southern ballads, it comes out as kind of, sounds funny, but who's to say they're not sincere about learning them and passing on and sharing them. And that was one thing that people would come, at the Folk Center, and they would say, "You know my grandmother . . ." or "great-

grandmother . . . ” or “I remember hearing that song. I haven't heard it in years,” and it was “Barbara Allen” or whatever, because everybody knew “Barbara Allen.” Maybe they weren't learning it they would never sing it but it brought back some nice memories and they didn't seem to mind at all that it was me doing it.

Kevin: Speaking of ballads and the long centuries-old tradition, transmission after transmission after generation after generation, you mentioned that if it weren't for purposeful preservation of this tradition that it would end. What do you think caused the preservation of these songs for such a long time?

Kathy: In the beginning?

Kevin: From the beginning until now.

Kathy: That's how people told stories and that's how-they would get together and sing songs and that was kind of like their news. Again, it was like they didn't have to hear about all the people we have to hear, or read about it on the news, and their affairs, and they're running off with other people, so they got to hear some juicy tidbits of women leaving their men and sometimes it turned out good like “Black Jack Davey.” That turned out good, or the “House Carpenter”—not so good. That was not what she deserved, you know, or someone's children dying. They sort of needed that emotional connection because they didn't hear all these things. And I think that they—families up in the hills—would get together, and sing and tell the stories, and I think that was one reason that they [ballads] lasted.

Kevin: Why do you think the tradition is faded and these songs have degraded in some areas?

Kathy: I'll sound the old here, but I'll tell you I think so much of it is the all of the media that we have the exposure the kids have not many of them are going to be terribly excited hearing an old woman sing “House Carpenter.” As they are hearing their music that they have—and I have nephews and nieces so—it's not exciting. It's not sensory overload like they get now with the

music and the videos and everything. I think that's part of it. And they're bombarded with bad things happening and all this stuff all the time they can't avoid it. It's kind of scary how callous kids are to death, because they see it on TV. Because how many times do they see it on TV? I mean it's like they get calloused to it, and I think that it's not as exciting and just think how movies changed, how simple movies were. They didn't have all the effects and everything . . . I think for kids, younger generations, is just so boring compared to real life now . . . I think the old time music . . . I think that has exposed a lot of the younger generation to this sort of hillbilly music, you might say. And so the ballads work their way into that, that's better than nothing. That's better than totally forgetting them.

Alan: Do you think that is the right term, hillbilly music?

Kathy: Yes.

Lyle Sparkman

Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, Springdale, Arkansas

6/20/2019

Kevin Tharp-primary investigator

Alan Spurgeon-secondary investigator

Lyle: (Speaking unprompted) I'm a senior in high school and come to the realization that all the stuff that I've acquired unconsciously—you know because it's just family—was seen by the outside world as something different. And that was when I took English 4L, I opened the book, and it said “Ancient Ballads.” And that was exactly what it said, ballads. The very first one is “Barbara Allen,” and I went, “We sing Barbara Allen.” That was the epiphany moment. Of course, I started digging in, and trying to do—you know this is my own family kind of thing. And, it's various songs, so for instance, I get family members to write. In this case it transfers into being a song ballad. You know, they're written out, but it's only because I'm getting them to write it, you know. But this song, for instance, my uncle James and my dad's handwriting, both of their versions of “Peg and Awl,” which by the way, is a song that sings about 1801, 1802, 1803, the Industrial Revolution impact on the economy, but it's not recorded in any of the major digital collections, none at Lyons Club with Wolf, not at MSU with Hunter, not with Parlors there [at the University of Arkansas]. It's a song that isn't in any of their collections. Well, I knew it existed. Obviously, we sang it. [We've] got two different versions and things like that, but I'd be out there and sitting in a house with Joe Tilden. Joe Tilden lived in a house that had his grandfather built—a log cabin that was sided over. So, we were in the log cabin part with William Keen, a friend of his, and William had a father-in-law that had died on the sofa—that Joe was sitting in—standing up in the sofa fiddling “Love No One,” then just dropped dead. At any rate, there's William Keen on the chair, and he lets Joe keep the sofa for reasons that may be plainer to him than me, but at any rate, he's sitting there and Joe says, “I'm digging for old songs,” you know, so he comes up with “The Texas Rangers,” “Along the Rio Grande,” and stuff

like that just handwriting stuff in the spur of the moment. And then I asked Joe to write down a song for me which is indecipherable.

Alan: Boy, it really is. This other one is your handwriting which is decipherable.

Lyle: Barely... (presents a family picture)

Alan: That's you as a little boy.

Lyle: Yeah, so at any rate, now you've got the basic idea that I come from deep stock. I have acquired an education since then. So, the question to you is how do you want this interview to go?

Kevin says: Well, you've talked a good bit about your background, maybe you could go into some more detail just for the video.

Lyle: I can. I'd be glad to. The balladry, the really old stuff, songs like "Peg and Awl" and "Willity Wallity," and the English origin stuff primarily is from my father's side. And my father, by the way, is still alive. [He's] 95 years old. So I have the older songs. They weren't very instrumental on that side. Now, my dad did hang a guitar over my crib when I was born which fell down in the middle of the night. They heard this terrible crash, and went to see if I still had a head in one shape, you know. It broke the back of the guitar—an old concert. I still have the guitar with those original strings. I keep it up in the attic just as a keepsake. They've said that's explained a lot of things since then! I guess to get my attention or whatever it was, but in any rate, the older stuff comes from that side of the family like my grandmother Sparkman would sing in the kitchen. She's singing "The Lass of Roch Royal" (Child 76), and she would sing with a refrain that I've never heard recorded in any version. She would sing, you know, the regular verses like, "*Who's going to shoe your pretty little feet? Who's going to glove your hand?*" as you'd expect. But then she would give a very lonely sounding "*who, who, who?*" That's just

working in the kitchen, so you pick up that stuff incidentally. And, by the way, you couldn't run into the house at Grandmother Sparkman's house there, because she'd make you sit down before you ran back outside—just one of those things. We had Grandpa Sparkman—is a source for “Barbara Allen,” for instance. And so at any rate, they got a number of those songs, and so my father was the very first one I started picking to get information on once I started understanding that this was not an ordinary thing. Because when I was young, when I was really young, both my mom and dad would come in to bed, and then they would sing me songs to sleep. Then we'd be in the car riding around, like going to the Johnson Farm. And we'd be singing in the car. We weren't commercial singers, but we were singers, and that's how that stuff became acquired. This is all unconscious acquisition. There wasn't a single lick, note, or word written down for the first 18 years of my life. It wasn't until I saw that textbook that said “Ancient Ballads,” and there's “Barbara Allen,” that I realized that something was different and started digging at it. I had a very deep love of my folks. My Grandpa Johnson had one horse named Nub that we'd plow with. We didn't have a tractor. In fact, I thought those FFA boys with tractors were cheaters! Real farmers plowed with a horse. He had one cow—name of Phoebe—a Jersey cow for milk. If the cow died, we'd would get another Jersey cow, and she'd be named Phoebe, and if the horse got too old to work we get another one and name him Nub. So, Nub and Phoebe were always the names of the horse and cow. And we did our own sorghum, and I remember helping with that chore. I have stood behind that plow, but I'm the last generation of my family to do that. With my daughter, the charm is broken. My daughter is a lawyer that will never know that lifestyle. She doesn't go down in the deep well to pull that water out. She doesn't use a common dipper in the house by the sink to drink from. She doesn't have a wood stove to cook on, you know. And so, the traditional lifestyle came from my maternal side. The deeper ballads came from my paternal side. However, they have music for sure, and when I was digging into that I tried my great grandma Ruby Mae, maiden name, Dunn. She would sing little songs like “The Fox Went Out.” You know, there were some songs and the like in there, but she liked peppy songs. Most of that branch of the family, the Johnsons, liked peppy songs. So, even though my Grandpa Sparkman liked “Soldiers Joy” it was his favorite jig tune, you know. That wasn't his domain. He liked the long slow old stuff, as did Grandma. But on that side they wanted the peppy stuff. Nonetheless,

my great grandma, she had gone through a few husbands by outliving them. They got to the point where I tracked down after her passing I tracked down the last great-grandfather, James E. Hughes. And at that point, he was in a nursing home playing mandolin for the people who were there—playing and, you know, singing gospel songs. And I'd say, you know, I talked to him about it, and he talked about having a singing master there when he was young, things like that. And I said, "Do you remember any of that old stuff, besides the gospel?" You know, and he said, started out in a little pipey voice and said, "*My name is Charles Guiteau my name I'll never deny for the murder of James A. Garfield I am condemned to die.*" I said, "That's what I want." So, I kept trying to pick the fruit from the tree before the tree disappeared, you know. But then again, it came back. I always had a love for that, but life goes on, and I had a deal going were I finally fell in with another bunch that were like the old-timers. I knew Joe Tilden. Joe Blunk would be another. He's an old ballad singer that knows some others. They all lived in a very isolated region there in Stone County Missouri, south of Galena on the south side of the James River. But they had property there since the 1850s, you know, and they married into our family. So, there was a lot of tradition there. So, the great music parties, they are the things that I remember doing as a kid. I got to do it again as a young man, both before and after I was in the Army. So I had a window before I got to relive the old lifestyle with people I could get along with in native terms. Well, at any rate, things rolled along. I get a teaching degree, I start teaching at little school on the Missouri-Arkansas line. And I get a contact from Dr. Russell Gerlach up at SMSU, and it was Anthropology. They decided that they were going to get a National Endowment for Humanities Grant and I was their educated hillbilly. I was the person they were going to pull out because I could speak both sides of the fence. I knew both sides of the fence, and consequently, they called me up and we did get the N. E. H. grant, because it was Carter Administration. They were into that kind of thing. So, we ended up having a good time, and that allowed me to take their money and run back down there with to Joe Blunk and Joe Tilden with a tape recorder and put those people on tape. So, consequently, we do have recordings of those fellows.

Alan: Are they at SMSU? Missouri State, now?

Lyle: Yes, they should be. It was made into a—current for the time, mind you, is 1980-81—a film strip that you run like this in the cassette [gestures the action of a microfiche viewer], but I also have original slides for that that I have not had duplicated. But I do have copies of the recordings as well as original reel to reel—at least one of the sets. SMS had that, but at any rate, it was it was a Halcyon moment, you know. But ages passed, you know, and the old timers go, and I find myself becoming an old timer. And I finally retired out of education—no longer teaching in a classroom, but I’m still in the business. I come in here to Allyn Lord because here at Shiloh [museum], because she and I used to work on Odyssey of the Mind together. A competition you know I started out as a coach back in the mid-80s, and ended up being a site coordinator, you know, for the Northwest Arkansas region. And I was doing that for 16 years, and we knew each other quite well—that, and she knew my father. So, at any rate, I come in and I said, “Well, I’ve done this, this, and this, you know. I think that I could volunteer that way,” and she said, “I didn’t know any of this about you. I just knew you as a school principal.” [I said], “Well, that’s true too.” So she took the balladry part, and Judy Costello, educational director, scared up some kids, and we started off. And, I ended up teaching nine students here over a period of four years. And, two of those students excelled. Well, several of them excelled, but some of them to the point where—include somebody from West Plains, Missouri named Meredith Sisco, who said, “I’m from June Apple records, and I want to record those two kids.” Well, she has. But she hired a part-time engineer that’s a professional musician, so consequently, getting the final versions of those songs with instrumentation is taking very long time.

Alan: Yeah, because they have to work with it.

Lyle: Yeah, takes forever. So, the kids have going on, but they’re on tape now. And that’s the reason why I have the phone, because I do have a connection to play samples of that as it’s coming out. So, I had a chance to take it, and between them, I taught, officially 108 songs, and you have the list. Actually, I taught 110. There was a couple of hymns that I taught for one particular student. But, I forgot to throw that in the final report. So, I’ve got nine students and a 108 songs, but none of the repertoires are the same. My top student knows 91 traditional Ozark

songs and ballads. Now, how is this taught? Here's a guy that's going from picking this up country style just by listening, and singing, and has since acquired technical know-how, and scholarly know-how, you know. Once I started to get onto that academic side of it, like, for instance, my freshman honors project at Drury there in Springfield, was an annotated bibliography of Ozark Folk Music, you know.

Alan: You got into this early didn't you?

Lyle: Yeah, that's the spring of '66. So, there's a number of things that happened in '66 musically for me. One of which was I met an old guy from down in "Gorshen" as he pronounced it—Goshen here in Washington County—southwest—that played the banjo, and he was he was 70 years old at the time. He was born in 1894. He was half-blind and had been married for two weeks. Don't ask me any more about that. But, at any rate, his name was Ernest Abe Scott. He was kin to a very famous singing family in the area where Robert Cochran down at U of A wrote a book called *Singing in Zion*. He's on the cover.

Alan: Oh, that guy!

Lyle: He's one of them, right. I picked up some styling from him. Because I wanted to learn banjo. It was not—as you'll notice in the family tree—it was not something that we played. We had other instruments but not that. So I wanted to learn to play that so I picked up my styling from him. Now, he happened to pick up his styling from an old-timer whose great-great grandson is the one that makes those oak baskets, fourth Generation in his family to do so—that's in the store here at Shiloh, you know. But at any rate, old Lifus Gibson played that style and he passed it on to Ernest Abe Scott and I took it on. So, now if I'm playing for myself I use guitar in a modal tuning and use that styling that I picked up back in 1966. Now, there's a lot to all this, you know, because I keep picking up stuff as I go along. But, at any rate, that's a direct connection to that Phydella Hogan family, because Martha Estes, who's the daughter of Phydella, that's in the...

Alan: We're going to talk to Martha this afternoon.

Lyle: She loves that old time music, and was a big fan of the program here. Her son, JB Hogan, is a fine fellow, very smart, educated hillbilly, you know, he's got his PhD. But he didn't have any appreciation for the music. He's listened to it, and, you know, didn't remember any of it. And then, Martha is just scolds him, you know. "How can you not remember?" But, anyway, Martha Estes is the one that comes from that lineage that remembers the songs and music. So that'll be a good interview for you. So, at any rate, now you've got a little background. Ask your questions.

Kevin: What are your degrees in?

Lyle: My degrees? I've got a Bachelor's in English and Philosophy from Drury. I've got some additional hours from University of Colorado, and Southwest Baptist in statistics and Shakespeare. You go figure that. Then, I've got to grad. degrees from U of A in education—master's and a specialist's. I was greenlighted for the PhD, but chose not to do so, because I didn't have a job that required it. I wasn't at a university except as an adjunct at Lindenwood to teach master's-level stuff. But I have an Ed.S, and if I spent the money on my doctorate towards the tail end of my career, how am I going to pay for my daughter's law degree? So, the choice was made, and I made the right choice. My daughter currently is Deputy City Attorney here in Springdale. That's literally one block from where us, working right now. And she left college owing, literally, not one penny.

Alan: Where were you principal?

Lyle: I was principal first of all in a little town in the center of Arkansas, a Kentucky Township, which is the northwestern corner of White County, and that was 1984. And, the very first fellow that came up getting ready to register, he came up in a horse and buggy, parked in front of a...

Alan: Really?

Lyle: Yeah, when I say a Kentucky Township, that's not accidental. Technically we're inside the escarpment but not in the Ozarks geographically. We're still part of the river valley, but we're on the Highlands side of it, because the Kentucky townships are the highest part of the county. The people beyond the escarpment there, most of White County are from Georgia and the deep South. The people from Kentucky Township are from Kentucky. So, I can speak their lingo, and we can have music parties together and things like that. They may not be deep Ozarkers, but they're my kind of people. I know how to communicate with them. So, here I am. Here comes this wagon up here, horse drawn of course, the guy's got a bus seat or something in the back of the old wagon bed, and he comes in and he hands me a greasy pile of papers and says, "I need some help Mr. Man." And I knew, of course, he couldn't read or write just like that, because I'd witnessed signatures before, and I knew the breed. So, at any rate, I helped him as I did for a few years, and that was my introduction to Rosebud. That's where I was first principal. I stayed there four years then went up to Green Forest in Carroll County. That's eastern Carroll County. And, was there for 14 years, and then out of the clear blue, for a job I didn't even know existed, I get a phone call offering me assistant superintendency in Missouri for 30,000 more bucks than I was making. So, I crossed the border, and left my wife in Green Forest. My daughter is in the Arkansas School for Math and Science in Hot Springs. So, we end up being kind of spread out. But, at any rate, we get back together. And, Martha and I live up there, but technically, my daughter's never lived outside of Arkansas. We ended up coming back because this is, we—being the Ozarks—is our parts. And, she's got lots of kin down here. She's got at least three brothers down here within shouting distance. They're at Fayetteville, and I say shouting distance, John's up on the hill in Winslow, but...

Alan: Not very far.

Lyle: We can get there from here. And, I've got a dad that's still living in Rogers. So, we've got family here, and our daughter married up and settled in Fayetteville. So, this is home, you know.

And, it's nice that my daughter is the 8th generation in Washington County, because her fifth great-grandparents are buried down at the Higgs Community there at Middle Fork at White River.

Alan: 8th generation.

Lyle: Yeah, 8th generation, so, what was the question?

Kevin: How many songs do you know?

Lyle: I do not know. I don't. I literally don't. I can remember, maybe four years ago, writing some down in a little notebook. I was impressed with learning or somebody else had a lot of songs, so I was just writing along, but I since lost the notebook. I do not know. But, the ones that I have there [in a provided songlist] are cherry-picked. Now this is an important thing, because this is going to the question of authenticity—some of the questions that I was forwarded. Talking about, “Can you learn from books? Can you learn from recordings? How'd you come by the music?” I came by the music the traditional way, and there is no variance to that whatsoever. And, for that reason, even though I was talking one time with my dad about, you know, the world of academics—no offense [to Alan]. You [Kevin] haven't earned offense.

Alan: None taken.

Lyle: These experts going around passing judgment about this and that, and he sat there and said, “Son, I wouldn't worry a lick about those, because you lived it.” And with that core of confidence, that's why I'm in this interview, you know. So, I take—I assume that you are a serious student of music. So, that's why I come bearing gifts, and such as that, because I can just sense it. If you were somebody that was a superficial researcher that already had the answers they wanted, then you would never have seen the inside of that case.

Alan: We don't have any answers.

Lyle: At any rate, here we come to the crux of the point. I'm teaching students here. Well, I start teaching the traditional way, that is, in effect, you know, I sang to my daughter exactly like I was sung to at bedtime, and she has certain songs she knows. I could walk over across the street with you guys, knock on her law office, and ask her to sing "Wreck of Number Nine," and she'd have it all. There's certain ones she liked, and so she came by—made a point—she comes by it naturally. And, then she took a folklore class down after high school and got with that, and researched our "Barbara Allen," and found out that the closest similarity is in Black Mountain, North Carolina.

Alan: Oh, your version?

Lyle: Yeah, which happens to be where the Sparkmans come from—North Carolina to Tennessee, Williamson County. My third great-great-grandfather was the—brought the first Anglo American Family into southern Williamson County, and he was a hunter-trapper and he was befriended by the various tribes that were there. It's complicated trying to figure out which ones, which a lot of time, because they were all using the Natchez Trail. And, he lived right on the trail. In 1801, of course he'd been in Nashborough, which is now Nashville, since the 1790s, but he finally got his land warrant, out there on his own...the Williamson County area, right there, which is the Boston community several miles to the Southwest of Franklin now, back then that was all there was. It was just what they set up, and stories go with that, but that's not the purpose of why you here. Nonetheless, that was the springboard that brought the Sparkmans into Southwest Missouri. So, it's North Carolina [Sparkmans' familial journey], to Tennessee, to Missouri, to me sitting right here with you, here and now, with a version of "Barbara Allen," whose closest version is in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Now, I like thinking of songs in terms of lineage. I asked questions, and sometimes my dad, he would volunteer information. For instance, we have a version of "Old Blue," you know, *Had a little dog and his name was blue . . . green-eyed, just before dark hear ol' blue begin to bark, ol' blue, ol' blue, ol' blue*, etc. [clapping

the steady beat]. He heard that from his Herndon cousins in the rafters of a log house. So, I know that detail. I like knowing the history of where things came from, you know, and that's a family song, and so the Herndon's, my grandma Sparkman was a Herndon so, that's how come he was up there in the rafters with the Herndon's. So, I like having context. I don't like having songs that are just pulled straight from a book. For instance, that tells you very little. It leaves stuff out. But, at any rate, What do you do when you get students in? Well, I was teaching them traditionally. I started off the very first song, a Play Party called, "Willity wallity." *There was an old man, and he married in June. Hey, now, racketsy rasca quality, kissed his wife by the light of the moon, hey, now, racketsy willity wallity, knickety knackety, now, now, now, etc.* Those funny verses and they're just a skipping game that goes with it that one and "King William Was King James's Son" in the play party would do that one. So, at any rate, I was handed them straight from my family tradition, straight to these students. Okay, so, I have anointed them, culturally, 8th generation for that deal but we ended up with a problem and here's the problem we only had a class once a week on Tuesday mornings. Eight year olds have trouble, you know—I had four of those as well as all the way up and including adults, a couple of moms, who were involved with this—remembering the tune accurately. And, we'd get back, and we'd have to retrieve it. So, having kids on summer vacation, and they have erased a lot. So, we end up spending the first quarter bringing it back up to speed, and only have actually two quarters of school left, because the last quarter is now firmly dedicated to the test, you know. So, you end up the only having half a school year to teach. Here's the situation. There, I found myself facing the situation. I said, "I don't want to do that. Got to figure out a system." Well, these kids walk around with iPads, and I went, "Ah-ha! We do have these university recordings, you know." So, I would search out the songs I knew. I knew the songs, but for instance, I didn't teach my family version of "Barbry Allen" to them, because there's another version that has a more familiar tune. This one is actually more musical so I gave them that version, and things like that. So, it finally came down to where I'd have a line where they could plug into something on the internet to hear it, and I'd pick the best singers I knew, the best songs that I knew, and fortunately, because at this point decades of experience with the subject, I knew what the song should be. That's how that came to be. They ended up learning both traditionally and electronically. Now, the question is which one of their

versions is authentic and which one isn't? Well, here's the problem. Authenticity in oral tradition, is based on aural learning and the ability to replicate what you've heard—that's it in a nutshell. Well, what is the difference between having a living body in front of you and having a deceased person whose voice has been recorded? Is it inauthentic because Almeda Riddle has passed? Is it inauthentic because Ollie Gilbert is no longer with us? Or, if they orally replicate that accurately, is their performance inauthentic? Okay? Now that's the rub. And that's nuanced, because you have purists like I was associates with a collector named Max Hunter who was well-known up in Missouri, even here in Arkansas for that matter. I heard songs from Max directly and I heard songs recorded. Now, if I can say—if I've heard orally and on a recording is it inauthentic for me to remember anything off that recording to try to retrieve what I heard earlier? The nuances get to be very particular because most people have very stark definitions of what's authentic and inauthentic. But, I, having come through the ranks so to speak from totally traditional to sophisticated traditional, you know. I have a broader understanding. I have accessed other people's books and recordings in order to gain a breadth and depth that I would not have had if I had stayed entirely with my family tradition, because I love the old music, you know, and that was bred into me. Well, what are you going to do? I have a recording, for instance, a little—one girl, that's my most advanced student, that—she sings “Georgie to Fare Thee Well.” She feathers the note at certain points, certain lines at the correct time, and Susan Young, here at Shiloh says, “It just takes me back to 1870 to hear her do that.” Her performance is spot-on, but she had electronic augmentation. She had the ability to listen to the recording. Now, here is her advantage, and this is where the nuance pushes the other direction. I would listen to these kids when they come back, and say, “Here's what we work on, we'd work on it, and they come back with what they've got. But I would correct their styling, because I knew what was right or wrong. And, I would work with them personally—on getting this so that the performance piece is authentic. So, now, how do you define authenticity?

Alan: We don't know.

Kevin: I don't know. I'm trying to find out! [talks about blues industry and inauthentic authenticity for sale as an experience/audiences' expectation of an authentic experience]. There's another view of authenticity—the one of the audience's [perception].

Lyle: You're right, yes, my point is going to be this, if you're asking me to talk about process, I'm saying that there's more than one option available. But, the real question is how authentic is the actual singing of that particular student? And, the answer to that question is, that's the measure of authenticity. In her case, of course in some cases, she was taught purely traditionally, and in some cases it would be a question of where we listen to a recording. We had a system where we would work through the song, and then we would get to a certain point, and she could go home and work on it on her own and come back, and we'd work it out until it was, by my traditional ear, traditional. And, she would sing in that format, very well. So, it—and she gained skills along. She learned how to ferret out accurately the musicality of listening to an old crackly voice that may not stay on pitch and timbre very well. She learned how to really hone in on that because she's a very bright girl. She's 13 right now, turning 14, I guess yesterday. And, she's taking New Testament Greek at her house, you know. So, we're talking about somebody that has a good memory, and very carefully can polish something. I had other students who couldn't. I had one that I kind of released after 23 songs, and said, "Here's a certificate, well done." That was kind of a yeller, you know. And, I had a mother-daughter deal that was absolutely fascinated with the oldest ballads, and so I loaded them with Child ballads but neither one of them could carry a tune in a basket. So, you know you have various combinations, and they had a deep love for it. And, I had a deep love for them going up to 50 songs. So, we had one family of four—two twins, a teenager, and the mom who worked very hard to get up to 50 songs, and passed it as a matter of fact. And, the girl could sing "The Death of Queen Anne" as lovely as you'd ever want anybody to sing it. It's a song I picked up at a party game once upon a time. I heard somebody sing it, and I picked up on it. Well, the whole family has moved to Wyoming. So, they may have a musical tradition but it's transplanted now. Now, there are purists and Max Hunter, lord rest his soul, who I knew quite well, because I used to sing for him at his request for a Folk Festival here or folk event there—Springfield Art Museum and things like that, or Ozark Festival over in

Eureka Springs. He was trying to reinstitute authenticity instead of getting all the slick little Americana acts, which I appreciate. I like Americana just fine, but I do make a differentiation. But I do make a differentiation because somebody that does Americana may not really be able to understand truly the depth of the traditional music. Whereas, somebody in traditional music can get them, even though they think it's a little too rock and roll, you know in some presentations. But, at any rate, we had—it's interesting who passes judgement on who and for what reason. Most traditional singers kind of grow into it you start out a little defensive because you're wary of others that are not kith and kin, not cut out of the same cloth. And you have to kind of grow into a trust. And, to this day I'm not sure I've grown into a full trust—open trust, but I know people like Alan who are rare that are genuine students that really do have a feel for it even if they didn't plow behind a horse.

Alan: Which I did not plow behind a horse, but my grandpa did.

Lyle: Well, there you go. With us, the point is that you ended up being able to retain a connection. You have something of a context, and therefore, I'm much more likely to trust your insights and judgments than I am somebody that comes in slick polished and strictly a book lad. So, at any rate, we're talking about process. Process to me in authenticity has to do strictly with the ability to be able to reproduce what you've learned early from an original source. But, I no longer can differentiate between whether it's a human source or recorded source, because there's such a scarcity of human sources these days. I am a rarity. In fact, there was a question. I was teaching down at Southwest R5 and they demanded professional credit. Well, I couldn't get it over the summer because I was actually teaching at SMS in this a E. D. H. Grant and

Alan: You were teaching what they wanted you to get professional credit for.

Lyle: Yes, that's exactly right. So, I said, “Well, we need to look at that rule again. I need some help, so I told Russell, I said, “Can you write me a letter to the school board and explain all

this?" And, he wrote the letter and Gerlach in his letter to the school board, claimed me as being unique. I don't know if that's true.

Alan: I think it's true.

Lyle: But, the point is that it did make a statement, which is that I have a foot in both worlds, and they really are in both worlds, firmly planted. And, for this time period, that's rare.

Kevin: Do recall when you were young, ever seeking out learning sessions or corrections?

Lyle: No. Allow me to explain something that I haven't mentioned, because almost, well, this will be the first time it's ever come up, I suppose, in an interview. I had a prodigious memory as a youngster. I don't any longer. And, it wasn't eidetic. I didn't have a photographic memory, but I had a prodigious memory which allowed me to remember in great detail, when I was 2 years old. In fact, I was surprised to find out when somebody who was a neighbor said, "Well, I don't remember anything before the age of 6." And, I said, "Well, how can that be?" In effect, in junior high, both 7th and 8th grade, the very first assignment, that was just the way a teacher would give you some busywork she doesn't have to grade, and get to know the students. She said, "Write your biography. Write your life." I could never ever get past the age of 3 until I was tired of writing. I never could. I just wrote, and wrote, and wrote, and wrote, and wrote both years, and I didn't even turn it in, so it wasn't important to them. They didn't care one way or the other, but the reason why I didn't ask that was because I didn't need to ask that, and that's just an individual trait.

Alan: And, you had an aptitude for music.

Lyle: Turns out, I did. Yeah, oh, yeah.

Alan: Even at three or four or five or six.

Lyle: So, there was a bunch of stuff you'd expect from just country in general, in the Mid-South or wherever. My mom played church piano, you know, and we'd sing the old songs in the hymn book. My parents decided I needed to gain some sophistication, so I was going to take violin. So, at any rate, my Grandpa Johnson immediately tried to steer me into fiddling, and my great grandad—step great Grandad James Hughes', "Charles Guiteau," James A. Garfield song. He had big hands. He had made his own instruments. He had a guitar, and he had a mandolin, and he had a fiddle, and I would be, as a 5th grader at his house, trying to play on his fiddle. Well, the problem with his fiddle, just like most fiddlers did back in those days, was that they shaved the bridge down so that it almost automatically double stringed when you bowed. So, here I am trying to learn how to play violin. So, you have to master the single string, and I'm struggling mightily to get that nano measurement to where I can do just one, to get on that, but he—I've seen that with other fiddlers as well and I've played with other fiddlers and had fiddles myself. I sold my last fiddle...Sold it when I got out of the army because it was a nice Stainer. Stainers have a thicker body in the middle so that it can carry more. You don't hear it immediately, but you can hear it across the room. It's just an interesting acoustic trait of Stainers. Joe Tilden who had learned fiddle from his paw and his father-in-law is a fiddler, and so, he got jealous of me talking about what a fine fiddle this was—just jealous because I was bragging on this fiddle. He didn't have a fiddle like that. He had several fiddles, but he didn't have a Stainer. But, I did sell that back in '70, the fall of '71, early '72 somewhere in there, and that was the last fiddle I had. We used to have autoharps used to have mandolin, sold it. The only thing I keep besides the guitar that's in the attic, is a Gibson that I bought in '71 or '72 used from a fellow. There's a story with that. And, that's the one I keep modally tune and set up on the stand, and I just pick it up whenever I feel like it. I do fiddle tunes on it for the most part, but I can pick most anything I want to accompany myself. Then three banjos. I've got an 1890s Stainer. No, it's not a Stainer. It was a Strondheim...S-t-r-o-something, from Chicago. It came in by covered wagon, and was traded off for 5 gallons of sorghum. Because they were heading out, they took the sorghum and the fellows kept the banjo. He was an old clawhammer player, you know, thumping away. One day he comes in the store with this banjo, and I had actually heard the guy play, and he was an

old timer for sure. My sisters worked in the store. This was a country store, number of years ago, and he comes in. He wants to sell the banjo, wants everybody to know it because he wants to buy his wife a Christmas present. So, it was The Gift of the Magi story. At any rate, my sister looks at it, and she pays him for the banjo itself, and gives it to me as a gift. So, that's how I got that one. Stromberg! S-t-r-o-m-b-e-r-g, Stromberg! with a bird's-eye maple backing. And, I've got that banjo in its original case, and I've got a long neck Epiphone, which I got for \$75. It's good for hitting possums on the head. And, I've got a all walnut black fretless banjo, handmade, that a friend of mine made. The head's stretched over a stove pipe. You can hear the stove pipe if you rake across the back of it. So, I keep the three banjos and that guitar down in the office. That's my instrumental side these days. I don't pick up the banjo hardly ever anymore, because after hearing the modal tuning with the guitar, and I am using that old Lifus Gibson styling—I'm fine. The reason why I stuck with that is because it—you had that little tinny fifth string, you know, on a banjo, but I had a nice bass that I could play with that, and it adds depth and dimension to it, you know. I have a warm-up, and I've done this for a couple of people within the last year as they'd say, I'm really curious about your playing, because I don't perform anymore, and I sat there, and I'd say, "Well, okay, so I'll give you a one minute concert." A one minute concert consists of what I used to warm up on. It's my warm-up piece. I go in—it starts off with a little "Sally Goodin." A little of that, then it goes into "Molly Hare," and that one really starts to get it out, and then I'll throw in a little break down I made myself. I'll rename it every time differently for their sake—whoever it is that's wanting to hear it. And, they're going, "Oh, golly," and you know it's a smoker! Then I end with a harmonic, and I say, "One minute!" So, I do keep that up and I do play.

Alan: They're entertained appropriately.

Lyle: I've never met an unhappy person at the end of a one minute concert. What else you got on your menu?

Alan: I've got a question about instrumental. When you sing ballads or when your family sang ballads did they accompany, or were they unaccompanied?

Lyle: No, unaccompanied.

Alan: If I were to come back sometime in the next year or so, would you sing a bunch of ballads for me?

Lyle: I'd have to study on that. I might sing you the family version of "Barbara Allen," or a couple others.

Alan: You wouldn't have to sing 20!

Lyle: I appreciate that! Even though I guess I could. The point is that I like my students to sing for me. My voice peaked in '79!

Alan: Mine too, in about '80!

Lyle: If I could get you with my little student Kyla Cross, and we would probably even do a little duet, just for fun. But, you need to hear what is probably the best ballad singer of her generation is, right now while she's young, so that you'll know what to expect in the future. She's the type of person that, you know, they're not savvy enough at U of A. They've quit teaching folklore. They're, as there as they say, resting on their blessed assurances. So, they don't understand the value of little Kyla Cross, but we might be able to rope her in. She would be a genuine asset for you to know and you to know. She really doesn't, at this point, to my knowledge have any comparable singer of this tradition. The last time I heard a student sing a traditional song from her family was in the year 2000. A little 10 year old sang "The Farmer's Cursed Wife," and found out that I had a version. So, I have written my version and gave it to her mom so she could go off, and she was proud of the song, but that's the last time I heard a family-based traditional old

song. And, the fact that I was able to gift that to an exceptional young person to continue the tradition with that expectation. It would be worth your while to make acquaintances.

Alan: I would like to do that. I'll send you an email.

Lyle: But, she is, if anybody has ever been, my protege. If you want a pretty version of those songs, you'll need Kyla.

Alan: Well, you can sing too.

Lyle: Yeah, a little bit.

Alan: Yeah, I'd like to do that.

Lyle: Okay, here's a quick example of the type of singing I was raised with, and this is the "Barbry Allen," and the reason I don't teach it is because it doesn't quite have the musicality of the recorded versions you know. [Sings "Barbara Allen"] *In a Western town where I did dwell, there was a young maid dwellin.' She made every youth cry, well away, and her name was Barbara'ry Allen.* etc. That's what you'd get out of me. If you want to go full version, we could do that.

Alan: Yes, let's do. I'd like to hear your student too. That'd be fine!

Lyle: Okay. I can't say there's anything special to add to the pot, but at least I have context.

Alan: I think you're kind of modest. You do have context, and that's what I'm looking for.

Martha Estes and Jeanie Miller—first cousins

Goshen, Arkansas

6/20/2019

Kevin Tharp-primary investigator

Alan Spurgeon-secondary investigator

Kevin: Well, I'm interested in knowing a few main things, but maybe we should start with some background information. Where did your family come from? When did they move to this area? How long have they been here, the type of musical experience that they might have had? If you could just talk about that some.

Jeanie: Well, it's sort of hodgepodge American, because they came from separate places. I'd say mainly the late 1800s between the Civil War and—

Martha: They settled in Goshen. The first one of our ancestors got a land-grant here in Goshen in 1841. I just found that.

Jeanie: Okay, well I didn't know that.

Martha: They say the first white settlement in this area was probably 1830 to 1835. So, that's pretty early. He had waited—Jerry found it somewhere—a little article, and it said he had waited eight years to get it. So, that would put him in about that time frame.

Alan: Did they come from the British Isles maybe, or from Kentucky?

Martha: Yes, most of our family. Most of our family—I've even had the DNA test—most of our family, are British, Irish, Scotch, and the family names will tell it except her [Jeanie] daddy has a German name. So, my guess is that Uncle Bob's family, who was not my blood relative, is from Germanic countries somewhere—Poland, maybe, who knows? I think Uncle Bob has some

Indian blood, and there's a claim of Indian blood in our family, but they're not on the Dawes Rolls, so there's no proof.

Kevin: There's a story like that in my family . . . But, it wasn't legal for whites to marry Indians.

Martha: That seems to be the reason that the cousin of my dad's who applied for her Indian money. Of course, that's all it was about. She said that her grandfather, who was my grandmother's father, had passed as white. Well, to not be arrested and marry a white woman, he had to pass as white, and so they did things like that. But, we all do now—still do things like that.

Jeanie: But I imagine the musical heritage came through the Scotch-Irish. And, I like to say Scotch. That's what we said, and when we were growing up we didn't say Scots.

Martha: Yeah, we all said Scotch. I know from some of mother's work and some of the things she donated to the Mary Parlor collection, that many of hers are in—what's the big book that's the Bible of folklore [speaking of the Child ballads book]—where they trace it back to whatever country. I forgot the name of that book. I love being old. Because, you can't remember your own name. But mother's songs actually could be traced, lots of them, back to those old folk songs. What is the name of that book?

Kevin: Well, are you talking about the Child Ballads book, or the Bronson book—

Alan: The Vance Randolph?

Kevin: or, the Vance Randolph?

Martha: No, it's older than that. It's like an index of all the—Oh, good! Alan's forgotten it too.

Alan: Yeah there is an index, maybe Pepys.

Martha: A lot of them were in there. Maybe not identical, but very close.

Jeanie: We didn't know that when we were growing up—that these were old. They were just family songs.

Martha: And they sang all the time. I was never taught any of those songs, and never asked anybody.

Jeanie: Just by repetitive singing, that's how we learned them.

Martha: Yeah, and mother would sing all the time, and I thought that mother was always singing because I wanted to hear it. I thought she tuned that banjo up to a different key just for me. That was one of her favorite songs was one that she had to do that and she postponed until bedtime, because she didn't want to have to tune it back to normal tuning. Jeanie knows about music I don't know. But, then mother had to stop to retune that, I thought she was doing this just for me. It was a sign that my mother loved me better than she did the boys. Because she played “Little Bells” for me.

Jeanie: Oh, “Blue Bells of Scotland.”

Martha: Mother always said it was not the “Blue Bells of Scotland.”

Jeanie: I know. Yeah we found out later, but when we were growing up we always thought it was “Blue Bells of Scotland.”

Martha: Yeah, that's all we can figure out, because there was a version of “Blue Bells of Scotland” that was in a movie. I remember that. Of course. I'm older, lots older than Jeanie. What was I, seven? And, you were three when we—

Jeanie: Well, there's a four-year difference.

Alan: Your whole family played instruments and sang, your uncles and aunts and all that?

Jeanie: Not all of them.

Martha: Not that we know.

Jeanie: Our mothers [sisters, Phydella Hogan and Helen Morris] and most of the siblings did.

Martha: Our mothers lived together during World War II, and we were like she was my little sister. I mean I knew she was a cousin, but that wasn't the way the relationship was. We were all together. We used to call her mother or “udder mudder” to tease her, but that's what she was. If mother wasn't right there, all we had to do was ask Helen, or tell Helen and we got it. She took over. We were totally interchangeable.

Jeanie: Well, they—a lot of those old songs that they sang when Mary Parlor began interviewing them—a lot of those they hadn't sung for us. They had forgotten about them. Then that rekindled their interest when Mary Parlor came. So, they, with our aunt in California, started putting their minds together, and they wrote a bunch of these old songs out of their memory then. For instance, “Where the River Shannon Flows,” I never heard it until then, but she said they used to sing it all the time, and “Dear Charlie,” quite a few of those songs I had a—

Martha: There were some I've never heard of that they wrote down.

Jeanie: When we were kids it was, “sing ‘Froggy Went A-Courtin,’ ” “sing anything,” all those nonsense songs, that's what we wanted. They also knew those, well we called them those “Oh, my God” songs. That's what my granddad called them, but I didn't like them—“The Blind Girls” and “The Frozen Girls”

Alan: Sappy lyrics, and sad.

Jeanie: Not the love, not the sad love, that's okay. It was the little kids that starve to death and that.

Martha: "The Little Orphan" girl who froze to death on a rich father's doorstep, and the one that froze to death in a carriage, I think there were lots of those.

Jeanie: We didn't like those, but they sang them.

Martha: Dad hated them.

Alan: "The Babes in the Woods," that's a sad one, and the one where the kids go out to the woods they get lost in there.

Martha: There were so many of those.

Jeanie: I didn't learn them. I didn't like them. I never did learn those.

Martha: No, she learned all the ones where the lovers kill them. They won't marry them, she won't accept him as a suitor and so he kills her.

Jeanie: Well, that's kind of a joking thing. We started to get together all these old gory songs.

Martha: We collected a lot of them when our younger brothers—

Jeanie: Nathan [Jeanie's son], I like the old sentimental songs, and Nathan and I started to sing and play one day, and he said, [in a quivering voice] "Oh, Mom don't sing any of those old songs where you're away from home and you can't go back, "Cumberland Mountains," "Little Green Valley," "Sunny Home in Little—My Home In Sunny Tennessee," there's two or three of them Tennessee homes and Tennessee songs.

Martha: Jerry calls them "Jeanie's Log Cabin—the cabins that do not fall." I don't know exactly where that comes from.

Jeanie: There's one song that says that.

Martha: Yes, there is one.

Jeanie: *The land where the cabins won't fall.*

Martha: *Heaven is where the cabins won't fall anymore*, but. They did.

Kevin: What would you be doing when they would sing? You said your mom sang all the time.

Jeanie: Well, usually mom sang after supper, around the stove in the winter, and out on the porch in the summer, and by that time we were a little bit settled down. We'd gather around her and listen to the song. Sometimes she'd tell stories and sometimes she'd read to us. But that was the main time that we'd learn things, and we liked them, so we just sat around and listened. When she says they sang all the time, mom sang when she was cooking, she sang all the time, and we didn't necessarily gather around her at that time. We were just aware that she was singing, and you know it was part of home.

Martha: Mother always sang Jerry to sleep. My little brother—little brother, seventy-something years old—who was the baby of the family, when the two families lived together, and when her dad [Jeanie's father] was overseas, and they always sang at night—every night. They sat around the living room—little kids. They'd try to get them off to sleep, you know, and when we left there, when Uncle Bob came home from the service, of course, there was no room for the man of the house. So, we had to move. And, we got a little cabin down in the woods down the road from them. Jerry was maybe—he wasn't a year old. Mother would sing to him. She'd rock him, or she'd get the banjo, and he'd sit on her lap. So, she sang for the baby, and she would sing all the old nursery rhymes and little kid-like songs, you know, and made-up songs. She'd put his name in a song and things like that, but she did that every night. I thought most of the time it was for me. I wanted certain songs, and Jerry didn't care. That's all the life we had. We played outside if the weather was good. If it was raining, we were inside which meant you had to quieten down a little bit and get out of mama's way and that sort of thing. So, she would sing and try to get us to sing. And I never could sing.

Kevin: Would you join in and sing with your mother?

Martha: We did sometimes. Jeanie and her family did.

Jeanie: Well, I didn't myself until I didn't get interested in singing myself until I was like 12, and then I was interested in the popular country music. But I did like those old songs, and mama encouraged me to sing with her, so that I would do the lead and she could do the tenor. She loved to sing tenor. She didn't have anybody else to sing lead. I was the least talented of my family. [Martha gives a look of disagreement]. For instance, they could all sing parts, and I couldn't sing anything but soprano. But I kept the longest interest and more interest in the old songs than the rest of them. I'd probably play like it. I had to make it up, because I didn't have as much talent. I knew at the time, as a child, that I didn't have the talent and that good ear for music that Larry, Bobby, and Janice had. Janice didn't have any voice, because she had asthma. Janice learned to walk hanging onto a guitar not a guitar, a git-tar.

Martha: Larry learned to walk pushing an old guitar on the floor. That was the one first thing that's all because mother wouldn't let anybody touch an instrument early. I think it wasn't playable, but when we came to Arkansas, Larry was just toddling around, and he had this old guitar. He'd put his hands on it in the floor, and push the guitar around all over the floor to walk. He learned to walk that way, and that was just the cutest thing I've ever seen. He played a dobro. I don't know what else he played, but he did have a dobro.

Jeanie: He played guitar before that.

Martha: Janice was only one who didn't play an instrument. She had a beautiful voice except she didn't have enough wind to keep singing.

Jeanie: We had a trio for a while—Mom, Janice, and me. She sang alto, mom sang tenor, and I sang lead—old boring lead.

Martha: Not so, Jeanie.

Jeanie: We sang at the church, and just around home. It was still the same old—after supper mom says, "Let's sing!"

Alan: Before television and other diversions, right? Or, did you have television?

Jeanie: Well, I'm talking about a time after we were young women—older teenagers and into young women. We had actually more interest at that time. But that was more interesting than television. Yes, when we were younger there weren't any diversions—no cell phones, no TV. So, I think that's why kids nowadays don't have any family heritage, because they're so glued to [devices and TV] and even television began to destroy that. Neighbors visiting—it destroyed lots of old ways of doing things. Well, I just remember after the advent of the television, mom's cousin, Ruth, saying, “Well, nobody visits anymore they just turn on those old televisions.”

Martha: That was kind of true for us. Of course, I left home when I was 17, and we got a TV. We listened to all the country music we could get, but neither one of us sang—I didn't. I quit even trying to sing—never sang another song 'til Al and I started going to military reunions, and he always asked to sing “You Are My Sunshine” which is probably the only song I know. So, we've done that, and talent contests and won once and lost the rest of them.

Kevin: How many old songs would you say that you know?

Jeanie: We don't know how many we know.

Martha: How old do you consider old?

Jeanie: You probably know the quote of Mary Parlor. When Mom and them told them how many approximate songs, she said, “That's not possible! Nobody knows that many songs.”

Martha: When Rob [Dr. Robert Cochran of the University of Arkansas] was working on the *Singing in Zion*, they gave him a copy of these things that she said, “The Three Sisters,” you know—compilings. One of them would write—I think I still got the letters in mother's stuff. I think I do, my house is like a museum. I've got so much stuff... They would actually write letters. One of them would say, “Phydella, do you remember when we sang _____?” And she'd put a line, or maybe a verse, or maybe a whole song, and then mother would write something about “Yes, but...,” “was this right?” or “was that wrong?” or “did you sing it to the melody of this or

that?" Things like that, and then it got sent to Helen and they had some kind of pattern to how they sent it. That song would float back and forth from California to wherever mother was, because after us kids grew up—

Jeanie: When Mary Parler came out she was in Fayetteville.

Martha: She was still in Fayetteville when Jerry was still in school. Yeah after they went to California in Jerry's last years of high school.

Alan: Phydella went to California?

Martha: Yeah, and that's where aunt Bill's name was Al, not Bill [their aunt, Alma]. Anyway, they got this thing going it was after all us kids were grown, they would finally come up with the finished—the best they could do and they would tell sometimes stories. About the letters, I think I have them, because when I found them I took them to Aunt Helen. There was a cookbook and some of these songs, but Bob had already—mother had already given that to Bob. So, I'm not sure I've got it.

Alan: Jeanie, you and your mom used to have a music stand, and you had a notebook there. Was that the lyrics?

Jeanie: Yeah.

Jeanie: Well, probably at the time you [Alan] got acquainted with us, we had started singing with two neighbor ladies. She typed up all of this. This was a conglomeration. It wasn't all folk songs. That's the way it was when we were growing up you see that's how Mom learned her music, and we didn't know the difference between the really, really old songs, and say that she had learned in the thirties from Parson Robinson. She learned that "Wildwood Flower" from The Carter Family. It was just all hodgepodge of stuff.

Martha: When they sang it was like that. They might sing one of those ancient things, and then sing Roy Acuff's latest hit. You never knew what they were going to sing. Helen kept up with the

changes in music much longer than mother did. Mother got to the point where if she recorded something it was the same songs all the time, because that was—those were the ones she liked best, that she liked playing best, and that was what she would do.

Alan: Bob Cochran tells the story that your mom [Phydella] was in his folklore class, and he was talking about the Mary Parlor collection, and she came up to him and said, “I’m on that and my family’s on that,” and I don’t think he believed her at first. She said, “Well, just go look.”

Martha: I know. He also said—what was really funny, and I wasn’t here when this happened so I learned about it that—mother told him she had some songs, some folk songs he might be interested in and he said, “Okay.” He wasn’t just all excited about it, and here she came with this box. And, when he described it, it was like papers must have been hanging out of the box, and it was these things, the letters and the songs that the three of them were doing, and that’s what Bob made his song book from. I do have a copy of that, if I don’t have all the letters—in a box that I made. . . . But they’re really funny, some of them are old Irish or Scotch songs, you know. Some of them mention that the person—well, like one that Nathan did—was about the old woman—*In London she did dwell*—old “Holy Boly?” And we named them by the nonsense choruses mostly —“Old Boly.”

Jeanie: *The old woman in London she did dwell.*

Martha: “Devil and the Farmer’s Wife” was “High-o-Rattle-Ding-Day” and Jeanie’s mother used different nonsense words for that one, or they were different. They probably just made it up. The chorus, of course, the words, the rhythm so—

Jeanie: Well, some of them they were supposed to whistle on the chorus and mom and Phydella couldn’t whistle, so they just said whatever.

Martha: Mom always whistled through her teeth with a hissing sound.

Kevin: What do you think about the importance of passing on the folksong tradition?

Jeanie: Well, I think it's very important. I know for me, a sense of continuity, you know. I connect with my ancestors, and I—like I was glad when Nathan became interested in some of the old ones, and my older son has no interest at all. And, so, you know, and I can tell when Nathan sings it well he's not singing it right.

Martha: Nathan sort of jazzes it up, and he's good.

Jeanie: And, we had a cousin who's a lot older than us and he thought he knew the original songs all of them exactly right, and Mom and Phydella were wrong. We've got a little bitty record of his that his mom had. “That little bitty record of Ernest’s,” mother says

Jeanie: He would say, “This is 'Blue Bells of Scotland' in the *organal* ” version.

Martha: You’ll have to explain that Ernest was not stupid. He was very bright man. He was an illegitimate child, spoiled rotten by his mother and his grandmother, and he was blind, not totally, but to the point that he never went to school. He had a photographic memory. He knew everything if you read it to him, but someone who was not educated well enough to know that that word was original.

Alan: She got it wrong, so he got it wrong.

Martha: And, he was always like that. He might have used the word “original” because somewhere he heard it used properly, but for a song it was something like *origing* an *organel*.

Jeanie: He was a good musician.

Martha: He was. He was a great banjo picker.

Kevin: Do you think it hurts the tradition for instance, if I was your son, and you taught me a song, and I changed the song?

Jeanie: No, I don't because I read that that's how folk music evolves, and you forget maybe a verse and you'd I got one of them like myself. And, you hear the tune just a little bit different from what Mom sang it, and so that you know I see where Nathan is doing like I did. And, I'm like Ernest, that's not the *organal* way I learned them. Well, Nathan was supposed to be here.

Martha: Nathan's the only one of our children who's doing it isn't he? The only one of Granny and Helen's ancestors who carried it on.

Jeanie: No, not a child.

Martha: None of Janice's, none of mine.

Jeanie: No, Bill's don't do that kind of stuff.

Martha: We had other musicians, we had musicians.

Jeanie: He's [Nathan] interested and he wanted to be here, but this is his daughter's birthday, and he had promised her he would finish the treehouse that he started on. But he said he'd try to be here. He'll never make it now.

Kevin: About how long does it take you to learn a song? Do you learn new songs?

Jeanie: Oh, well, we all had—we're all pretty bright. We were all pretty bright. We could memorize easily and so if you want it—if I wanted to learn a song, I could learn it like in a day, you know, a few hours—sit down with it—not that long. But other things we've learned just by repetition. We had heard it, and we had heard it, and we had heard it.

Martha: I called it osmosis because I didn't sing, but we listened to country music. I remember when mother and dad split up we didn't have radio. Aunt Helen had a battery radio, kerosene lights, but she had this radio. They were so stingy with that radio that we got to listen only to good country music at certain intervals of the day. We'd never miss the Opry, and that was, and we're talkin about 1940s, and we heard Gabriel Heatter, with the news. We'd listen to Lonnie and

Thelma, out of Pittsburgh [Kansas], or was it Springfield [Missouri]? And, what else? Because there were just three or four, because battery would run down. Then you couldn't listen to the Grand Ole Opry!

Jeanie: I think it was with the battery radio it was mainly the Grand Ole Opry, and then we got electricity we started listening to the others like from Pittsburgh, Springfield.

Martha: Shreveport, even—I think.

Jeanie: But we liked it all.

Martha: Us kids liked it all.

Jeanie: But I always liked the old music. I hated Elvis Presley. He just ruined the country music. I hated him.

Martha: When my first son was born, Jeanie came to help me. She was 15 or 14, and I had a radio on the Louisiana Hayride, I think, and Elvis was on there. She said, "That man's not a country singer, what's he doing on there?" And, I said, "Well, he's singing the country songs." She said, "No, he's not. He's ruining that country song," because—it was so funny, because she detested him, and I felt the same way about it, though. I just didn't like what he did until he started doing old gospel, and I guess he'd done that before.

Jeanie: He actually had been a country singer, but we did know it. He sounds kind of country now.

Alan: A 14 year old girl was supposed to like Elvis!

Martha: She wanted me to turn that thing off. She was glad when I got out of that bed and started taking care of that baby.

Jeanie: Like Little Jimmy Dickens, he thought the Browns were not country. Do you know the Browns? They always sounded country to me, but Little Jimmy Dickens was a sort of—I don't know what.

Martha: He was a hillbilly.

Jeanie: He didn't like for them to be on the Grand Ole Opry. He said you guys are not country. That's the way I was, but I did like the Browns.

Martha: Jim, Ed, and Bonnie, and Patsy Brown. And they did a Little, Little Bill something Bells. . . .

Jeanie: I don't know of anybody who had better closer harmonies than the Browns, and that's because they were from one family. But that's because they're in one family, and that's the thing when you're singing, family can harmonize better than non-family, because your voices have sort of the same timbre.

Alan: Yeah, they do, that's right.

Kevin: Generally have the same inflection, talk the same way, sing the same way, and faces are usually shaped similarly.

Kevin: Does authenticity matter?

Jeanie: Yes, it mattered to me a whole lot at one time.

Martha: Oh, yeah.

Jeanie: For instance, the folk music craze and that faux folk stuff, I didn't like it either, because it was false. It wasn't true folk music. I didn't think they should call it folk music. They should have called it what it was, *Faux Folk*.

Martha: It's kind of like our Roots Celebration we have here [in Fayetteville] every year. When it started with local people that was the roots. Now they're bringing in professionals from around, from Canada, anywhere, and it's just another music festival—no authenticity at all.

Alan: We went to the Folk Center in October, and...[talks about hearing a guy who sang original music and drug songs that he wrote to sound like folk].

Jeanie: Well, that said it all. He was singing new music in his new overalls. He was singing faux folk music.

Martha: It's like the fake southern accent, you know. You get somebody like me, I've got a college degree and I still talk like I did when I was a kid. And, for the linguistics professor to explain to me that I wasn't stupid. That's the way I learned to talk, and I'm not ever going to quit no matter how hard I try. It can't be done. I mean, this stuff in the chimney is soot [/sAt/]. That's what my daddy said. It's still stuck to me, and I know that's not right.

Alan: Unless you have a fake accent.

Martha: They come in, and they say, “y'all,” meaning one person. They don't know that we used to say, “you'uns” either, but they'll use it in the wrong way, you know. That irritates me. We always loved—what was that line in Mama Maybelle's where she says, in the “Wildwood Flower” where she pronounces the word strangely? Jerry just waits for her to say it. I can't remember what it is, but she mispronounces the word.

Jeanie: And, her accent was more pronounced. Each generation an accent becomes more conformed.

Martha: Middle-America newscasters, that's what it is that's bastardized it.

Jeanie: My kids, their accents and their pronunciations, they're not like mine. And mine was more conformed than my parents. I've even I remembered some of the older words. For instance, daddy—Oh, my! It changes, and I would like to hear someone from, say, the 1880s in Arkansas. Peter Scott was not an Arkansawyer at that time.

Martha: Well, you know, I had someone ask the museum to suggest someone that they could interview for the folk language, someone who could speak Arkansas. And, Susan Young said, “Well, Martha can. You know she's always been here.” Well, I haven't always been here, but Susan doesn't know that, because she went to school with my kids. So, the girl called me, and she asked me if I ever lived anywhere else, or how long I've lived here. I told her and she said, “Oh, great!” And, then, had I ever lived anywhere else? Well, I spent my first seven years in Missouri. It's still in the Ozarks. And, then I went to Tulsa for about 3 or 4 years, and I went to Memphis for 5 years, and St. Louis for a year. Well, forget me! I can't speak Arkansas anymore. Susan also told me that we had at one time, a little convention of folk singers at Shiloh, because a group from Ireland was coming here to hear Irish folk songs. Because the dynamics of music had changed the folk songs in Ireland, and they wanted to hear the originals. And, they said that foreign countries, when they pick up your song they keep it in its original form longer than in the native country.

Alan: That's an interesting point, and it's probably true.

Martha: I never heard such thing.

Alan: I'd bet that's true.

Martha: But that's why they wanted to come here, because we had, at Shiloh, not only a good collection of Irish music, but we had Irish musicians here. I mean, who played the original. They brought it from Ireland years ago. It makes sense if you leave your homeland, what better thing for you to take then the songs?

Alan: And, to preserve them.

Martha: And, that gave them that link to home, and that's probably why our family has that. Because of the same thing, you know, why we've got those old songs. I don't think any of us know—it's a guess. Probably don't even know where we—I never heard mother say where she learned any of them. Did you?

Jeanie: Well, grandmother sang them, and they came from the Scots. Their mother sang. She couldn't play an instrument, but she sang. Well, they said so.

Martha: I don't think Granddad played an instrument, but mother and Helen both mentioned that he sang when they were little. And, by the way, if any either one of us say, "dad" it's probably our grandfather we're talking about. We called our daddies, "daddy," but dad was—our mothers called their's "dad," and every grandchild he had called him "dad." None of them called him granddad.

Alan: What else, Kevin?

Kevin: What is the reason that some of these songs and ballads have been in existence for so long?

Jeanie: I haven't thought about it. We preserve them because we like them.

Martha: I think they sometimes have a more universal—what's the word I'm looking for? More people understand what it is than another. I don't know.

Jeanie: Before radio even and TV, that was the only entertainment. And, when Mom was growing up they didn't even have a radio. People would come in. That was a great grape growing [place] out in Zion [near Springdale, Arkansas] where she was raised. They would come through, migrant workers, and they always had their music with them. So, mom picked up music from them. That was the entertainment, and the neighborhood would come to mom's house, because they could. The majority of the neighbors didn't have this music, but Mom, Phydella, and the other siblings did. They came there and heard them sing.

Martha: Mother never mentioned that.

Jeanie: My mom would tell me, "I learned this from a boy that came in to cut grapes."

Martha: That's how she met dad my daddy.

Alan: Yeah, that makes sense that they would learn from those pickers.

Jeanie: They had to memorize something because there was no other way. They didn't have anything to tape them on, and a long time ago they probably didn't have very much paper even to write the songs down. It just had to be passed along like your folklore, you know, from one generation to the next. And, I know that could be so, because I remember growing up we didn't have much paper except for school paper

Martha: Or, a paper sack.

Alan: Yeah, that's right. You didn't have just reams and stacks of paper.

Jeanie: Right

Martha: In some of the correspondence between the three sisters, there were mentions—I remember—of, I wish I had them with me. But, there were mentions of some kind of magazine that they got that had words of songs, and often they would learn the words of the songs of a poem or something like that. Then they'd put it to music, whatever music it was And, mother did mention some of that. And, then they had the older brothers and sisters who were all musicians. They sang and played. I guess that's how mother learned to play was from a brother. He would let her play his guitar, and then when he got ready to leave home, he bought a new banjo. He left a banjo for her, and then she and Helen both learned to play it. I didn't know my aunt Helen played banjo until I was married and had moved away. I came back and Jeanie was playing guitar, which I knew she was learning. Aunt Helen was playing the banjo, and I said, "I didn't know you could play the banjo," and she said, "Why, I've always played the banjo."

Jeanie: I think she was about four.

Martha: And, I said, "Why did mother always play the banjo, and you played guitar?" and she said, "Because Phydella was better." But she wasn't. Mother was not a better banjo player, except a few songs that she did that were—I liked better than Helen's, but Helen was always

playing the guitar with her. And, I had no idea she could do that, and then the story came out that she wanted to play the same banjo that mother did.

Alan: Helen played for me a lot.

Martha: Oh, she was good!

Jeanie: She played it exclusively then, because I played the guitar and she wanted to play the banjo.

Martha: And, you kids finally bought her one after a long time without one.

Jeanie: But she never did like that banjo, but she played it for a long time. Well, it was hard to play. It didn't have a good tone, and we bought it. We were too young to know. We just bought it on looks.

Alan: You probably didn't have the money to buy a real nice one.

Jeanie: We had saved up money, and well, my brother was mowing the cemetery. What was I doing? I don't know. I guess I was working on a farm somewhere, and we saved up money and bought it. We went to a—I guess it was a flea market kind of place. It's kind of an old, like, they used to have them in an old shed-like place. But Mom first started playing the autoharp, because that's what we had. It wasn't a harp, but they didn't call it autoharp.

Martha: I think it was a zither. I don't think it had the bars on it.

Jeanie: I never did learn the differences between those instruments.

Martha: Well, autoharp for sure has to have—

Alan: Has the buttons you push.

Martha: Yeah, the little chord things. I remember mom bought one in Zion from Sears. All of us kids banged around on it. Nobody learned to play it except Helen, and I guess she already knew how. I think Aunt Thelma played the autoharp. Carl played—I only saw him play the guitar.

Jeanie: Did you read that little thing that Mom wrote just during her last, or right after daddy died? That little blue notebook?

Martha: I don't know.

Jeanie: When she was 3 she had trouble going to sleep, and all the kids were—her older brothers and sisters—were still home, so they came into the bedroom and sang to her. They sang church songs. Um, let's see, there was Carl, Thelma, Buck and Bill. She says she could remember when she was 3. She said that was the most beautiful thing she ever heard in her life was the harmony. They had all the parts, the bass, soprano, alto, and tenor. And who would be? Who would sing would Thelma? Would Thelma?

Martha: Well, Buck would've been tenor, for sure.

Jeanie: Yeah, and Thelma would've sang lead.

Martha: So, Uncle Carl must've been bass. Uncle Carl was a good singer.

Jeanie: You got other things you want to know?

Kevin: Is it authentic if I learn a child ballad from listening to a record of Joan Baez? Is that authentic

Jeanie: No

Kevin: What if I learn it from a recording of your mom?

Jeanie: Do you mean one that is actually an old folk song?

Kevin: Yeah.

Jeanie: Well, oh, yeah then. Yes, if she was singing an authentic version of it, it would be.

Alan: So it doesn't matter who you learn it from

Jeanie: No, it doesn't matter who you learned it from.

Kevin: So, it's the tradition of the song that matters, and not the way it's passed down?

Martha: I would think that's right.

Jeanie: Well, I would think if they sing it pretty close to the original—the original words and tune. Of course there would be a difference in your singers. It would be a personal difference in the performance, but—

Martha: I mentioned Lyle Sparkman to you.

Alan: He sang for us

Martha: And, Lyle has a little girl named, a student named, Kyla [Cross]. Kyla sang for me a song, and I can't remember which one it was. An old folk song that mother sang, and Lyle said, "Martha, I want you to come back here," back in the back room of the historical society, and Kyla—about this tall, beautiful little thing, started singing in the most gorgeous voice I've ever heard, this old song. Verse, after verse, after verse, and it was the song mother sang, but much prettier, because mother's voice was raspy even then. And, I said to Lyle, "Where did she learn that?" And he said, "Your mother taught her." Well, I get this chill, you know, mom has been dead fifteen years, and I said, "Mother taught her?" And he said they checked out mother's recording from the Mary Parlor collection, and the child learned that thing. I love that little girl. Have you met her? She's an angel. She's the sweetest! She knows hundreds of folk songs and, Oh, my gosh! You know who Connie Dover is don't you? Connie Dover is an Irish folk singer,

and I have an album of works she did with a bazooka player, *bouzouki* player. His name is Roger something [Roger Landes], and she sang “The Devil and the Farmer's Wife” almost verbatim the way mother sang it—the one we called “High-oh-Rattly-Thing,” but her voice is so fantastic. It's the most beautiful voice I've ever heard. Suddenly, this song that, to me, was just a funny song—it's a work of art—Connie Dover. This little Kyla, that little girl has that kind of voice. She is just, I never heard another kid with that kind of voice. She is, now, probably, she might be 13, 14, I don't know exactly.

Alan: Yeah, we're going to come back to hear her.

Martha: I don't know exactly what Lyle does, but that he's teaching children, and that he's quit doing it himself.

Alan: That's what he said.

Martha: Kyla's still his student.

Kevin: He said that she would be his protégé.

Alan: He did say that.

Martha: She is that. Mother would be proud of it. He and Judy there at Shiloh, the education—she teaches dance. I forgot what they call it, but they have a school that teaches them pre-Civil War manners and dress, and they do a pageant with dances and songs.

Kevin: They still do that in the Delta, etiquette and cotillion.

Martha: My dad's family is Irish and we've been trying to track it to when we came to the states. Because mother always swore that grandpa, the father-in-law, had a brogue. She said he had a brogue, and he had all these Irish songs—some of them pretty bawdy. She thought that they were probably famine Irish. But we found out that they were already in Shenandoah, Iowa before the famine ever hit. So, we don't know where he came from.

Kyla Cross & Lyle Sparkman

Shiloh Museum of Ozark History, Springdale, Arkansas

10/24/19

Alan Spurgeon: primary investigator

Kevin Tharp: secondary investigator

Kevin: I'm learning about how folk singers learn the music they know. I'm interested in things like lineage, how music is passed down from generation to generation, and I'm trying to get answers to questions about that.

Lyle: Well, I have adopted her [Kyla] as an eighth generation cultural Ozarker, because I passed my tradition to her. Okay, [Kyla] we're going to relax while you work!

Kyla: Okay!

Alan: Yeah, you're having to work. We're just sitting around!

Lyle: Dewey Dens?

Kyla: Awesome!

[Sings "The Dewey Dens of Yarrow" (Child 214)]

Alan: That's nice!

Kevin: Very good.

Alan: What a pretty voice you have. You're a good singer.

Kevin: Yes, you do.

Kyla: My voice is a little bit scratchy because the allergies have started to set in.

Alan: Yeah, I know about those allergies, they don't help you, but you sound good.

Kyla: Thank you.

Alan: Let me ask you something. When you sing a song with a lot of verses like that, do you think of the plot of the story while you're singing it, so that you know the next verse and what happens next in the action? Is that the way you do that?

Kyla: Yes, and depending on the song, some of them I could sing in my sleep because they're my favorites. Which, debatably I should or should not, but some of them just kind of come, and some of them I have to think about the plot. And for some of them, I've brought insurance [printed lyrics] to make for a smooth recording.

Alan: To be sure you got them right, yeah.

Kyla: Mostly, I think about the plot.

Lyle: What are you going to regale us with next?

Kyla: Let's see, I can do "Lord Randall" while I'm still getting warmed up.

[Sings "Lord Randall" Child 12]

Kyla: Did you want the version with the down [dun] rhyme scheme?

Lyle: We have some variations where |dun| would be the rhyme scheme, but it's |daʊn| now.
Okay, kiddo.

Kyla: Alright, let's see. I can do the Merrymac next.
[Sings "The Merrymac at Sea" MFH 414]

Alan: That's very nice. Let me ask you something about the process of learning these songs. You listen to recordings?

Kyla: Sometimes.

Alan: And sometimes he [Lyle] just teaches it to you.

Kyla: Yes.

Alan: What kind of recordings do you listen to? Do you get them from YouTube, or?

Kyla: There have been two or three maybe, YouTube ones, but those—the ones that we chose to go to YouTube for were ones that we were adapting a version. "Siúil a Rún" is one, and similar songs that there isn't necessarily a set folksong version. So, we go to those for tune basis though the lyrics and various other parts would be different since we were learning the folksongs and not the choral arrangements. We also used the Max Hunter collection quite a bit. They have a wide variety of songs, and also the Wolf song collection is a really wonderful one as well. Those were the main two. I'm trying to think if there were any exceptions. A handful of songs, or It may have just been "Lady Fair." There was no recording for, because they'd never been recorded, but were sung for years and years. So, I'd get a basis for the tune, and for "Lady Fair," I picked it out on the piano. Some of the lines were difficult to adapt the tune. I'd just practice.

Alan: So, let's say, you go to the Wolf collection of the Max Hunter collection and you're looking at "Barbara Allen" or some other one that you know there's a lot of recordings of, do you just listen to a bunch of them and select the one you like best? How do you decide which one to [learn]?

Lyle: Well, in this case, I decided for her. It's a version that's not in any university collection. It's a version that I got out in the field. We used a version from a fellow named Joe Blunk. It's never been written up.

Kevin: I'm glad you mentioned that name. I couldn't quite get what you said before on the recording [from a previous interview].

Lyle: B-l-u-n-k, he lived down on a farm on the James River. It had been in his family since the 1850s. He was the real deal, and I recorded him back in 1980.

Alan: So, you're getting the earliest version you can find and that you think is probably the most authentic.

Lyle: Yeah. Well, all of them are authentic because they come from oral tradition, as his did. But in this particular case, a significant percentage of what she sings have never been recorded in that version. That's because it comes from my family or people that I've known. But like she said, the University of Arkansas and Max Hunter and the Wolf collection at Lyon college were the ones we used. The only reason we went to that, by the way, was because when we first started the teaching it was strictly traditional. I would sing to her, she would pick it up, but we only got together once a week on Tuesday mornings. So, when the next Tuesday came she may have lost the tune. So, we figured out that we had technology to our advantage that wasn't always there. So, that way we could select things that she could listen to during the week to retain the tune. From that point on, I'm the one that chose the variants that she learned.

Kyla: There were some notes that we had to fight for. I couldn't quite get them. I was going flat or sharp, so the recordings helped with that too.

Lyle: As you well know, some of those recordings are very difficult to discern a tune at all. So, we would work with refining those—the raw material—in order to get one that she could sing.

Kevin: After you had refined that raw material and decided on a specific tune, would you say that by that time you had mostly memorized the song?

Kyla: It depends. Some tunes are easier to get than others.

Lyle: Well, first we had to fight our way to the preferred version of the tune. Then we could remember it.

Kyla: Yeah. Another exception to that was “Sweet Betsy from Pike.” That one, we got the tune from his [Lyle] family version. Then I got a version from my great-grandfather and I took it down by hand. The problem with that is that my handwriting is atrocious, so I really had to pick it out from that afterwards.

Lyle: So, her “Sweet Betsy from Pike” is her family version.

Alan: Which is good.

Lyle: Since you mentioned that “Lady Fair” has never been recorded, which is true, [Vance] Randolph simply transcribed [the text], give them “Lady Fair.” You want to give them an introduction?

Kyla: Sure. It's going to be a bit rougher than normal, but “Lady Fair” is a very old ballad taken from an origin that's called “The Holland Handkerchief.” It's a story about a girl whose father

disapproves of the man that she loves, and so she ran away to a house. While she's there, her father murders the person that she loves. Later, she's still there, sent away, she's brushing her hair and she hears something coming—a sound—from outside. She walks out and it's the person that she loves. She doesn't know that her father killed him, so she rides on home with him. Then her father asks her, when she turns up at his door, how on earth she got there. So she tells him, and he gets scared. The next morning they go to the grave and open it up—the coffin. During the ride she'd given him a handkerchief to tie around his head because he had a headache. Hence, the handkerchief was still on his head even though he'd been dead for four months.

Alan: Creepy!

Kyla: Yeah. It was called “The Holland Handkerchief” originally, but this version has been from multiple generations and made it to the Ozarks.

[Sings “Lady Fair” (“The Holland Handkerchief”) Child 272]

Alan: That's great. That's very good. I've never heard that.

Lyle: Well, nobody else has either.

Kevin: We were looking last night and couldn't find it.

Alan: It's not there.

Lyle: You now have the only recording.

Alan: Yeah, the only recorded version.

Kevin: Was that a hard one to remember?

Kyla: Not as much as some, no. “Lord Lochinvar” was probably the hardest one to remember because the verses are so long. It’s easier a lot of the time to remember a lot of shorter verses a couple longer verses. Which doesn’t make much sense because it’s just the way you break it up.

Lyle: Sing “Lord Lochinvar.”

Alan: I like what you just sang a lot.

Kyla: Thank you. It’s one of my favorites.

Lyle: It has an aura to it.

Alan: It does indeed. The melody is quite pretty.

Kevin: I think it’s because of the repeated pitch in the melody.

Alan: Is this “Lord Lochinvar?”

Kyla: Yes. I’m going to do this to make sure it’s smooth [set printed lyrics on the floor in front].

Kevin: Can you see that far?

Kyla: Just barely, but the first lines should be enough.

[Sings “Lord Lochinvar” Child 221]

Alan: That’s a hard one. That melody is hard. It’s complicated and it’s long. How do you remember all that? You just do.

Kyla: Well, with much difficulty.

Alan: Yeah. You have to keep the plot in mind so you know what comes next.

Kyla: Since there's more description in it, it doesn't move quite as quickly. Which I like, but it does make it slightly more difficult to remember.

Alan: Your voice is especially pretty on that. It's a little higher.

Kyla: Thank you [smiling proudly].

Alan: Do you want to sit down? Are you tired of standing?

Kyla: No, I should probably stand for "Georgie."

Alan: How do you [Lyle] know "Lord Lochinvar?"

Lyle: There's a single recording in the Max Hunter collection—a fellow singing it. So, you have the only female version of that song.

Alan: Do you remember who sang it?

Lyle: It's on the sheet. I always made notations because we attempt to be scholarly.

Alan: [Quoting from transcription], "As sung by George Lay, Fayetteville . . . 1959, Child 221." I don't know that. I've never heard that one. I don't know why, though, because it's an interesting plot—with the handkerchief and all that. That's a neat one. What are you going to sing next?

Kyla: Next is "Georgie." Again, one of the favorites.

[Sings "Georgie," Child 209]

Alan: That's great. That's a really nice version of that.

Kyla: Thank you.

Alan: You like it because of the ornamentation, I bet.

Kyla: Yeah, the feathering.

Alan: Me too. You've got that down.

Lyle: We call it *feathering*.

Alan: Yeah, feathering. I don't know what to call it, but that's appropriate.

Lyle: That's what we call it.

Alan: Sounds like when Almeda Riddle does that.

Lyle: She does. That's not from her version though.

Alan: What version is that?

Kyla: I don't remember off the top of my head. It's Rhonda Hayes.

Lyle: Just show them the sheet.

Kyla: You're welcome to look at all the sheets if you want to.

Alan: [Quoting from transcription], “Rhonda Hayes, originally of Bentonville, Arkansas, on October 18, 1969.” This is in the Max Hunter collection.

Lyle: Yep.

Kyla: I remember the recording had a train in the background, so I don’t know why—

Alan: A train?

Kyla: Yeah, I believe so. Sometimes there are strange background noises in the recordings when they take them.

Alan: Yeah [a coincidental train whistle blows outside the museum as we speak]. Speaking of trains! This [“Georgie”] is based on a story from 1554—quite a while ago.

Lyle: Well, Lord Huntly in the Gordon clan—4th Earl of Huntly—my wife’s folks.

Alan: Really?

Lyle: Yeah. Of course, Huntly castle is in ruins now, but you can still tour it.

Alan: Now here’s an Almeda—your “Merrymac at Sea” is an Almeda [Riddle].

Lyle: Yes, that’s an Almeda version. Well, do you [Kyla] want to add “Barbara Allen” to the fun-fest?

Kyla: I can do a verse of one of the original Scottish versions.

[Sings “Georgie” verse in Scottish accent]

Lyle: Take [[Tak]].

[Sings “Georgie” verse in Scottish accent]

I learned that directly from Jean Redpath [Scottish folk singer] back in 1970.

Alan: Oh, you did?

Lyle: Yeah.

Alan: How’d you meet her?

Lyle: Met her face-to-face.

Alan: She’s a significant influence.

Lyle: Yes. Okay, remind me where we are.

Alan: Oh, Look! Your “Lady Fair” is from Emma Dusenbury, recorded by Vance Randolph in 1930.

Lyle: Yeah, transcribed by him. He didn’t put down the music—no recording. You’ve got it [the only recording of that ballad].

Alan: That’s significant. Emma Dusenbury was—do you know her story? She was a very poor person who lived in Mena, [Polk County, Arkansas], down south, and she was blind and had a bunch of kids. They lived in the country. She was discovered when she was an older lady, around 70, I suppose. She went to Washington, D. C., and sang on the steps of the capital. Her’s is a moving story. She died in poverty. Bob Cochran at U of A found her grave and wrote an article about her. Neat story. What are you going to sing next?

Kyla: “Barbara Allen”

Lyle: And this is the Joe Blunk that was canonized—in the college collection.

Kyla:

[Sings “Barbara Allen” Child 84]

Lyle: Thanks! Let’s have some fun. Do you remember “Queen Jane?” Okay, now she learned this 5 years ago when she had just turned 9. So, let’s give it a try. We’re talking about something that’s not in any collections or recordings, and since you’re starved for ballads, let’s hear “Queen Jane.”

Kyla:

[Sings “The Death of Queen Jane” Child 170]

Lyle: Thank you! Let’s take a break.

Alan: That’s neat!

Lyle: Have you [Kyla] got it?

Kyla: Let me make sure. It’s an acre of land . . . muley cow’s horn . . . one grain of corn . . . pea rooster’s feather . . . thrash it . . . let one grain fall. I think I’ve got it.

Kevin: So, do you work by first lines of verses?

Kyla: Well, sometimes, it’s just the things—she tells him to go back and almost like a riddle—it’s full of possibilities, so if you just remember the one thing, just objects that she wants them to

build or get, you know. It's just like pictures to remember. Sometimes the first line helps, but with this, it's mostly the pictures.

[Sings "Cambric Shirt" ("The Elfin Knight") Child 2]

Lyle: Thank you! That's Child #2. Okay, "Cambric Shirt" also called "The Elfin Knight." Emma Medlin called it "The Impossibility Song" because all the tasks were impossible.

Kyla: Who learned "Lord Thomas" and "Fair Ellender?" Was that the Davises?

Lyle: Yeah, they loved the Child ballads. We had 8 others [students].

Alan: But she's [Kyla] the one that really took to it?

Lyle: Well, more than one took to it. We have a young man who lives over in Oklahoma. She's [Kyla] *right handy*, as we'd put it. She lives over near Cape Springs.

Alan: I know exactly where that is. We lived near there.

Kyla: Let's see. I could do "The Four Marys."

Lyle: Yes.

Alan: Oh! I love it. That's probably my favorite Child ballad.

Kyla:

[Sings "The Four Marys" Child 173]

Lyle: Thank you.

Alan: Sad story.

Lyle: “Andrew Batan?”

Kyla:

[Sings “Andrew Batan” Child 167]

Lyle: Do you [Kyla] have the master list? Okay, kiddo, some of these you did not learn, because of subject matter.

Alan: Some of them are not appropriate for people under 40.

Lyle: I’m going to gift you with one of those ballads that I did not teach anybody and that’s not on the list.

Alan: Are you going to sing it?

Lyle: I could sing part of it so you can get the tune. But, not in front of her. “Little Mattie Groves” is truly adult matter.

Alan: We’ll send you out of the room [jokingly]!

Lyle: She’s 14, and conventional. If it was my daughter I’d let her stay, but her family has to have a say, and they’re pretty conservative. So, nah, no, naw, naw.

Kyla: Well, it depends. How bad is it?

Alan: We don’t want to corrupt you.

Lyle: It's really bad. It involves adultery and graphic murder.

Kyla: Okay.

Alan: And you don't want to hear about that.

Kyla: Well, okay. It depends on how *bad* it is because there's some of that in the Bible, even.

Alan: He just doesn't want to do it.

Lyle: We always sang it after the kids went to bed. It was never sung with kids around. She's not a kid. She's a young lady, a very distinguished young lady, but I'm still not going to sing it around her! Okay, just for fun—"Bangum and the Boar."

Kyla:

[Sings "Bangum and the Boar" Child 18]

Lyle: Great! Good job. Look at the master list, in the blue letters, and see if there's anything else you'd want to sing.

Alan: Anything else you want to do. We've got plenty of time. Or, if you don't want to do any more, that's okay too.

Kyla: We could probably do the rest of them that I know actually.

Alan: Okay.

Kyla: But, next we could do "Slack Your Rope, Hangman."

[Sings "Slack Your Rope, Hangman" Child 95]

Lyle: Are you good for one more? See if you can find one.

Alan: Or you don't have to if you're tired. You've sung for over an hour.

Kyla: "The Twa Sisters?"

Lyle: Yeah. You want to try "The Twa Sisters" after you review it?

Alan: Oh! "Twa Sisters," that's great! I'd love to hear that.

Kyla:

[Sings "The Twa Sisters" Child 10]

Lyle: Okay, just for fun, this is a recording that Randolph put in the Library of Congress, but he never published. Give them some of "Robin Hood."

Kyla: Ooh!

Alan: It says, *The miller, he took her to be a swan*. I've never heard that line.

Kyla:

[Sings "Robin Hood"]

Lyle: Now give them the history.

Kyla: "Robin Hood" was an old English ballad that came from Cornwall, England. It was sung during the May Day festivities. The ending part, *With hay-lan-too . . .*, was an old dancing refrain, "heel and toe."

Lyle: Yep. Last recorded in 1954.

Alan: Is that a Child ballad?

Lyle: No. But it's contemporary.

Kevin: The melody implies a harmonization similar to Renaissance dance music.

Lyle: Yes. It's quite ancient.

[short break]

Lyle: Okay, I'm going to give you, just like I did last time, enough verses to get the tune of it. I'm not going to sing the whole thing. Here's an old one that we used to sing, but we'd always send the kids away to bed before we sang it. It's called, "Little Mattie Groves."

[Sings two verses of "Little Mattie Groves" Child 81]

And, that's why the kids had to go home.

Alan: And it doesn't get any cleaner, does it?

Lyle: No.

[Sings the last verse of "Little Mattie Groves" Child 81]

Alan: Well, sing something else while we've got you here.

Lyle: No, you aren't going to get much more out of me. I'll give you a one-liner, because it doesn't go with anything, but it's just something my daddy taught me. The tune is familiar, but I wish I had the rest of it.

[Sings, *My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here. My heart's in the Highlands 'a' chasin' the deer. 'A' chasin' the wild deer and 'a' chasin' the road. My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.*]

Alan: That's very nice.

Lyle: If you know the rest of the words, teach it to me.

Alan: No, I don't. You know of anything else you want to sing? We have the camera.

Lyle: Yeah, I know. That's why I don't want to sing!

Alan: You have a nice voice.

Kevin: Yeah, you do.

Lyle: I'll give you one that isn't a Child ballad, but I like singing it.

[Sings, "Pretty Polly," *At the foot of yon' mountain there flows a fair stream. There I once loved Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly, by name. So slim around the middle, so lovely to behold, and the rings of her fingers was 'a' bring shinin' gold.*]

I'm tired of singing.

Alan: I've heard "Pretty Polly." I like that.

Lyle: But, the plot isn't the same as "Pretty Polly" that's recorded. So, I don't know quite how to categorize it.

Alan: Was it a broadside, maybe?

Lyle:

[Sings another verse of “Pretty Polly” that ends *I lost my Pretty Polly by ‘a’ courtin’ too slow.*]

Alan: Let that be a lesson to you! *I took a wild ramblin’*, is that how that goes?

Lyle: A wild ramble.

Alan: Yeah.

Lyle: And I crossed o’er the Main.

Alan: That’s a cool text.

Lyle: Here’s another one that’s really an old one. It doesn’t qualify as a ballad, but it’s really, really old.

[Sings, “Lily Lee” *When I was young, nearly twenty-one, I started out this road of fun. I started out, this world to see, and I left behind my Lily Lee. For seven long years I rambled around. ’Til my heart got heavy for to settle down. ’Til my heart got heavy, my soul so alone, For seven long years, no word from home. Well, I went back, my friends to see. I went to the home of Lily Lee. But, the house was empty, the trees were bare. And the whisperin’ breeze said, “not here, not here.” I went to the church of my childhood days. With its old graveyards and its mounds of clay. And there, on a stone, how could it be? Was written the name of my Lily Lee. As I knelt down for to send a prayer, these words stared back from the headstone there, “She died for the love that could never be.” Yes, I’d murdered the heart of my Lily Lee.*]

Alan: She died because he’d left. That’s a sad song.

Lyle: That’s one we brought from England.

Alan: I've seen just the title, "Lily Lee," but I've never listened to it. I couple those two together, because they [the main character] go afield and then—you know one writes and then she's married, and the other one, she's died. One of the subtle, nuanced indicators that it's an older tune, is the fact that she died rather than write a letter. It's always dying for unrequited love in those older tunes.

VITA

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|---|--|----------------------|
| Education | University of Mississippi Ph.D. (Music Education) | May 2020 |
| | Delta State University M.A.L.S. (Philosophy) | 2014 |
| | Delta State University B.M.E. (Vocal Emphasis) | 2004 |
| Professional Teaching Experience | Delta State University, Adjunct Instructor Cleveland, MS <i>Directed Teaching Internship (student teaching)</i> <i>Experiencing Music</i> <i>Director, Delta Singers Men's Choir</i> <i>Musicianship/Aural Skills</i> <i>Music Education (history and methods)</i> <i>Music Methods for the Elementary School (elementary methods)</i> <i>Applied Voice</i> <i>Music in American Culture</i> | 2015-Present |
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Private Instruction

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National Association for Music Education (NAfME)

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Graduate Instructor

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Outstanding Graduate Music Education Award

Delta State University

Dr. William Arthur Pennington Award in Philosophy

**Graduate
Coursework
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Music and Education:

Foundations in Music Education

Seminar in Music Education (Music teacher education)

Experimental Research in Music Education

Observation Research in Music Education

Research in Music Education

Historical Research in Music Education

Historical Foundations of Educational Thought
and Curriculum Methods

Educational Research and Statistics

Music Psychology

Psychology of Learning

Advanced Choral Methods

Advanced Song Literature

Advanced Voice

Chorus

Interdisciplinary Studies and Philosophy:

History of Western Philosophy

Advanced Introduction to Philosophy

Ethics

Creative and Critical Thinking

Special Topics in Philosophy: Critical Thinking
Historical Theology and Spirituality
Individual Studies: Music and Philosophy

Publications

Paney, A. S. and Tharp, K. L. (2019). The effect of concurrent visual feedback on adult singing accuracy. *Psychology of Music*.

Research Presentations

Tharp, Kevin. "Informal Learning and Music Performance: How Does the Untrained Musician Learn?" 4th Annual Mid-South Music Education Research Symposium. University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS (February, 2016).

Paney, A. S., and Tharp, K. L. "The Effect of Concurrent Visual Feedback on Adult Singing Accuracy." 5th Annual Mid-South Music Education Research Symposium. University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS (February, 2017).

Research Poster Sessions

Tharp, Kevin. "British Ballads and American Folk Songs: A Study of Transmission and Degradation." 3rd Annual Mid-South Music Education Research Symposium. University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS (May, 2015).

Tharp, Kevin. "Graduate and Undergraduate Music Students' Perception of the Efficacy of Conductors: A Study of the Effects of Conductor Facial Expression on Students' Judgments." Missouri Music Educator's Conference. Poster Session. Tan-Tar-a Resort, Osage Beach, MO (January, 2015).

Tharp, Kevin. "Informal Learning and Music Performance: How Does the Untrained Musician Learn?" Missouri Music Educator's Conference. Poster Session. Tan-Tar-a Resort, Osage Beach, MO (January, 2016).

Tharp, Kevin. "Music Training and Memory: Music as a Distractor and Melody as Incidental Learning." Missouri Music Educator's Conference. Poster Session. Tan-Tar-a Resort, Osage Beach, MO (January, 2019).

**Certifications/
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IBMYP: Levels I, II, III

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