Revival in Retrospect
The Folk Music and Folk Dance Revival

BY OWE RONSTRÖM

1. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, in many European countries a new interest in folk music and folk dance was born. In this article, I will reflect on and discuss some of the causes and preconditions behind this development. The ideas and perspectives are informed on the one hand by long-term ethnomusicological fieldwork, my own and that of other colleagues, and on the other by my personal experiences as a folk musician since the beginning of the seventies.

Let's start with some of the basic preconditions behind the folk music and folk dance revival. One is definitely the rapid growth of population after the second world war. In the late 1940's and early 1950's the birth-rates increased by 10-15%, in some places by well over 20%. All through their lives, this generation has had special experiences, due to their large numbers. Another is of course economics. After suffering many years from the effects of the wars, in the 50's the world economy began to expand rapidly. Finding a job became easier, even for young and uneducated people. Lot's of young people therefore left agriculture in the countryside, and went to factory work in the fast growing cities, where they soon settled, married and raised children. These children became the first generation without own experiences of war, poverty, worries over the future, as well as of country-life, farming, looking after animals - the life many of them later came to idealise.

Together with urbanisation went centralisation. Bureaucracies grew rapidly to meet the growing ambitions of politicians and administrators at local, regional and state level. It was during this period, immediately after the war, that the "new man" was to be created. Whatever label was put on him, this "new man" was of course modelled on the upper classes, and was implanted among the lower classes through intervention from above, mostly state bureaucracies of different kinds. This created a need for centralisation at all levels, so that the same lessons were taught to everyone, everywhere, whether how to raise children, how to improve hygiene, or how to spend your free-time.

It was also a period of modernisation. In the cities people encountered new technology, which gave them other totally new experiences, which even more came to divorce this generation from the preceding ones. New radio programs, TV, vinyl records, the Single, the EP and later on the LP-records, which were the foundation of a entire revolution in the field of music. All this new technology made it possible for the first time to cultivate music that earlier had not been available.

In short, all this led to a growing gap between the old and the new, between what has become known as "tradition" and "modernity". Let's not go further into these very problematic concepts here, suffice it to say that a growing number of people in the 50's began to lead lives that were fundamentally different from the lives of their grandparents. But, what is important here, is that before they were abandoned, the old ways had been fairly well documented and transformed into a cultural heritage, which was the duty of museums and experts to preserve. Two lines of thinking guided the preservation: art and difference. What was picked out as especially valuable were things that could be presented as art in the terms of the established art world, and things that were in some way or another different from the modern. In short, there were rich sources for "tradition", and this "tradition" was constructed of things that were both valuable and different.

It was also important that certain geographic areas were assigned special value and difference. Notions of a cultural cradle, a remote part of the country where things had been preserved true, authentic, untouched by modernity, had existed already for many hundreds of years, but as a response to the rapid changes in society, they were evoked again with new intensity.

A third factor of importance was the existence of different versions of this true and authentic past. One was the version preserved and presented by, let's call them the "knowers"- the academic experts, in scientific literature and museums. Another was preserved and presented by the "doers" - such as amateur folk dancers, folk musicians. During this century the gap between these two versions had grown. While the "knowers" dwelled in their archives, safeguarding sanctified remnants of "national tradition", the "doers" went on to transform this same "tradition" to suit their present needs. Large state supported folk dance and folk music ensembles were formed, modelled upon chamber orchestras and ballet companies.

The peasant's music was treated as "interesting melodies" and dressed up either in semi-classical or popular music clothes and presented on stage as a show under the name of "folklore". In the 60's the gap between these versions of "tradition" had become so wide, that most ordinary people knew only one, the staged version. A growing notion that there was something wrong with this, paved the way to the first revivalists.

2. The second half of the 1960's was a period of tremendous economic growth. A new period of urbanisation reached its peak. The middle class grew considerably. Since money seemed not to be the problem, the ambitions of the state to interfere with the everyday life of ordinary man became greater than ever. This led to increased centralisation. The capital became the indisputable economic, political and cultural centre, and the rest was treated, at most, as a mere supplier of goods, ideas and manpower.

In the late 1960's, large numbers of young people flooded the universities and colleges in the capital and other big cities. These young boys and girls soon acquired relatively large incomes, over which they had control. They became well educated, not least in music and dance, they had access to musical instruments, and they had plenty of time - which they were to a large extent prepared to use on music-making and dancing.

By and large the slogan of the time was: Be active! Don't listen to what others - that is the elder generations - tell you to do! Think for yourself! Do it yourself! Begin now! This was something going on all over the Western world. It was in this climate that the mental, spatial, and temporal distance to the "old tradition", changed from alienation to a source of new and positive identification.

A starting factor was the media. Earlier, according to agreements between radio producers in state controlled public service radio companies, only versions of folk music adjusted to the popular music taste of the urban middle classes had been broadcast. But during the late 1960's this policy was abandoned. Now also "original recordings" were played and ordinary people could hear music that formerly only experts had access to.

To the young, this music, called "authentic folk music" in contrast to the staged folklore versions, was something entirely new. A strange, archaic sound, far from the stereotyped symphonic folklore versions, actually closer to much of the newest rock and roll in terms of expression and sound ideals. The impact of the music was strong. Some disliked and rejected it, others became fascinated and attracted. The discovery of this music led to important questions. If this is our folk music, why didn't anybody tell us about it before? And what is then that other music called "folk music"?

During these years the young started to cultivate music and dance of all kinds, styles and genres, as no generation before them. Many new styles and forms of music were introduced. Among them folk music was only one. Although presented as old, to many of the first folk music fans, the "original folk music" was as new and strange as any new rock or pop genre. And many surfed freely between the genres, from folk to pop, rock, country and back. Because it was new, very few knew much about folk music and folk dance. This paved the way to an informal and amateuristic approach, which by and large was characteristic of the lifestyle of the young urban students. Socialising, making friends, having a good time was more important than formalised rehearsals, stage performances, festivals, contests. To put it in academic language it could be said that among the first folk fans the focus was upon the process and not the product. The key words were active, living, participation. This is actually central to much of the music scene in the late 1960's: away from prescribed formalities, resistance against orders from above, whether it came from parents or other authorities; away from the big words, the stages, the flags and banners, towards doing something for oneself and ones friends.

Soon many folk fans also began to explore other facets of traditional peasant life than music and dance. Outside the established academic institutions, they undertook a kind of practical ethnological research. Around their findings a lifestyle began to develop, founded on the old, and contrasted with the present. The latter was by far the most important. Thus the images of the old became not only influenced by, but profoundly shaped by the present. The old, seen as true, original, natural, local, was contrasted to the modern world of global mass production and mass consumption. The staged folklore versions, seen as too formal, stiff and dull, were contrasted with informal playing and dancing, for its own sake.

Influential leaders soon started to stress the importance of having direct contacts with the sources themselves. Earlier the researchers and archivists controlled the keys to the first hand sources. But now some researchers opened the doors to the archives to the young revivalists, and gave them direct access to recordings, transcriptions etc., which they of course at once started to use for their own purposes. This created a conflict between the researchers. While some treated the young as a threat to their monopoly, others supported them. Some of the supporters soon became very important, as guides and advisors, both at a professional and a personal level, and not least, as a source of legitimisation.

The movement back to the sources was a radical step, because to the young the sources were not only archives, but also old people in remote places, where things were believed to be preserved in `living tradition'. The contact with real old people had a great impact, because the young soon discovered that music and dance, although at the centre of their interest, was only a part of a much larger context, where there were also many other expressive art forms to be studied and perhaps also cultivated.

Out of this developed a new understanding of folk culture. The aim now became to enter into the tradition as a creative process and continue it, rather than to merely reproduce the collected left-overs stored in museums and archives. But to do that, it was necessary to develop a better understanding of how this creative processes worked. Therefore, many young boys and girls started to do in practice what folklorists had been doing in theory for some years, to study folk creativity and formula improvisation. By learning not only the vocabulary of folk music and dance, but also its grammar and syntax, they believed it would be possible to create new music and dance in traditional and "authentic" style.

The stress on improvisation is, as I see it, the single most important factor that shaped the folk dance and folk music

revival movement. It made the participants concerned with what was happening here and now, instead of only looking back to remote places in past days. This in turn led to a change in how authenticity was to be perceived. Before `authentic' referred to the material, and was used to legitimise the exact reproduction of old recorded forms. Now, it could also refer to how this material was treated, that is, not to reproduce, but to produce a new according to the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of old traditional music. Thus, the stress on improvisation became in a way a stress on self-determination and re-establishment of the individual roles in the larger structures, in society at large.

So, here's where ends meet: reproduction, copying, which in fact was what many did, became equated with passivity, taking orders from above, centralisation, mass consumption. To improvise, or at least to try, became a way of taking command, acquiring power at least over yourself and your own actions. Thus dancing and music-making became a field where individuality could be developed and expressed, in a society which seemed to leave too little room for individual expressivity.

3. More than 25 years has now passed since the folk revival began to flourish. What has happened during these years. First of all, naturally the founding generation has become older, and a new generation has started to take over. These young folk fans of today have new and other experiences. Born with the folk music and folk dance movement as an existing reality, to them it's alt much more about music and dance than about ideology, resistance, struggle. They are often better trained in music-making and dancing, and also less purist, less fanatic, and less interested in looking backwards. Instead they are more willing to try out new things, which have led to new eclectic forms: bricolage, hybridisation, cross-over, "world music", call it what you like. Authenticity is still an important notion, but for many of the young it is not so much a question of origin, a reference to other persons, places, or times, but of being true to yourself, to your own experiences and expressivity. This is of course nothing else than the well-established romantic notion of "the artist", which has been taken over by many young folk musicians.

Secondly, the first generations of folk fans, after finishing their university studies, became professional musicians and dancers, teachers, radio producers, lawyers, journalists, ethnologists, musicologists etc. As a result of their ambitions and efforts, folk music and folk dance today have become a part of ordinary musical education at all levels. There are now festivals, magazines, radio shows, records and record companies, books.... In short, the folk music and folk dance movement has become institutionalised, for better and worse. What started as an attempt to create an alternative to the cultural life of the establishment, has now itself become a well established part of it..

In fact, the professionalisation already started many years ago, bringing the leading musicians and dancers to the stages as full time professionals. Thus the folk music movement as a whole has come a full circle. If the start was a feeling of discontent with the staged versions of folklore of the fifties and early sixties, leading to a stress on informality, socialising, having fun, being

active, what then happened was a massive return to the stage, adaptation to the needs of festivals, record companies, the global entertainment industry. So, in many respects the first generation of revivalists today are back where they once started, the main difference being that now it is they themselves who are m charge. They control the sources, the legitimation of what is to be considered as "authentic" and so on. Therefor it would not be surprising if again there will come new generations fighting for new ideas.

4. All through this presentation, I have been intentionally vague when it comes to concrete references and examples. The story I have been relating, is it about Sweden? 0r perhaps Hungary? 0r maybe both? Sweden, of course, since I am a Swede, and since I have been a part of the folk music movement in Sweden as a musician and a scholar for many years. But then it is in fact about Hungary too, using insights I have gained through many years of communication with the Hungarian Dance-house movement. The point I would like to stress is that any story of the Hungarian Dance-house movement is also a story of the Swedish folk music revival and vice versa. Partly this is due to the many contacts at a grassroots level between revivalists in Sweden and Hungary. From Hungary the Swedes borrowed the concept of a "dance-house", and from Sweden the Hungarians imported a form for informal playing, which we call "spelmansstämma", fiddlers' gathering. But a more important reason for treating the revival movements in Hungary and Sweden as one, is that neither can be understood if seen as fundamentally different phenomena.

Today there is a growing interest in folk revival movements, among scholars, as well as among folk revivalists themselves. Many of those involved from the very start, have now begun looking back to understand at least something of what actually happened. But much of what has been discussed up this day has been framed in too narrow a national or "folk" paradigm. This very powerful paradigm, still exerts a fundamental influence over the world of folk music and folk dance, and makes us believe that all nations are profoundly different, and that folk music and folk music are expressions of these differences. It is important to recognise that this is not at alt true. After all, few ideas are so international as nationalism! Folk music and folk dance, whatever we think they once were, today are international genres, as are the nationalisms that once gave birth to the idea of a "folk music" differing from nation to nation. Although it is obvious that folk music and folk dance are different from place to place, these differences have been greatly exaggerated and cast in a national mould, making it difficult to see that there are not only differences, but also fundamental similarities. The same goes for the folk music and dance revivals. The revival I have been a part of in Sweden, is only one part of an international, even global phenomenon, of which the Hungarian Dance-house movement is another, and indeed closely related part.

THESE ARTICLES WRITTEN BY SEBŐ AND RONSTRÖM ARE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING PUBLISHED BOOKS AND ARTICLES:

Bodor, Ferenc 1981. Nomád nemzedék. (Nomadic Generation) Budapest.

Folktradition och regional identitet i Norden (red. Aili Nenola-Kallio) Nordiska institutet för folkdiktning, Åbo 1982

Folklore och nationsbyggande i Norden (red. Lauri Honko) Nordiska institutet för folkdiktning, Åbo 1980

Grabócz, Márta 1959. Folk Music Developments in the Hungarian Radio. Journal of the International Folk Music Council XI:81-82.

Handler, Richard & Jocelyn Lirmekin 1984: Tradition, Genuine or Spurious. Journal of American Folklore 97: 273-290

Haskell, Harry 1988: The early music revival. A history. London: Thames and Hudson.

Hofer, Tamás 1984. The Perception of Tradition in European Ethnology. Journal of Folklore Research. 21, no 2/3: 133-147

Hofer, Tamás 1991: Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage' in Hungary and Rival Versions of National Identity. Ethnologia Europea 21:2, ss 145-170

Jánosi, Sándor 1980. Táncos krónika. (Dance Chronicle) Budapest

Löfgren, Orvar 1989: National Culture as Process. Ethnologia Europea 19:1, ss 5-24

Maácz, László, 1985: Folk Dancing and the Folk Dance Movement. I: The Art of Dance in Hungary. ss 57-65, 105-108. Budapest.

Ramsten, Märta 1992: Återklang. Svensk folkmusik i förändring 1950-1980. Skrifter från Musikvetenskapliga institutionen Göteborgs Universitet nr 27, Svenskt Visarkivs handlingar 4. Stockholm

Ronström, Owe 1989: Making Use of History. The Revival of the Bagpipe in Sweden in the 1980's. Yearbook for Traditional Music vol. 21:95-108

Ronström, Owe 1990: Danshusrörelsen i Ungern. I: Musik och kultur Red. Owe Ronström. Lund.

Ronström, Owe 1996: Revival Reconsidered. The World of Music. International Institute for Traditional Music, no 3:5- 20

Sárosi, Bálint 1986. Folk Music. Hungarian Musical Idiom. Budapest.

Striker, Sándor (no date). The Dance-house. Folklorism in Hungary in the 1970's. Unpublished manuscript.

Siklós, László 1977. A táncház. (The Dance-house) Budapest.

Széll, Jenő (ed.) 1984. Húzzad, húzzad muzsikásom. A hangszeres népzene feltámadása. (Play it Musician. The Resurrection of Intsrumental Folk Music) Budapest

Vitanyi, Iván 1972. The Musical and Social Influence of Beat Music in Hungary. I: Bontinck (ed.) New patterns of musical behaviour. ss 69-79. Wien.

ECTE BULLETIN

Number 4 1998

European Centre for Traditional Culture
Budapest

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR TRADITIONAL CULTURE (ECTC)

DIRECTOR: Mihály Hoppál

ECTC Bulletin No. 4 1998 Budapest

EDITOR: Mihály Hoppál
Guest Editor: László Felföldi
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Ildikó Sándor and Emese-Gyöngyvér Veres

ADVISORY BOARD:

Bertalan Andrásfalvy
Gábor Barna
Oskar Elschek (President)
Robin Gwyndaf
Éva Héra (Secretary)
Efi Karpodini-Dimitriadi
Jean Roche
Alexander Veigl
Sabina Cornelia Ispas
Lajos Vargyas
Vilmos Voigt

Contents

ECTC News

New Members of the International Advisory Board 3

New Officers in the European Centre for Traditional Culture 5

Report on the Second International Board Meeting of the European Centre for Traditional Culture, Budapest, March 8, 1997 6

Documents Made For the 18th General Conference of UNESCO Paris, 1997 7

Anniversary

70th Anniversary of the First International Conference of Folk Art, Prague, 1928 12

Tradicional Dance in Europe
Research

ANCA GIURCHESCU AND LISBET TORP: Theory and Methods in Dance Research: A European Approach to the Holistic Study of Dance 14

ERNŐ PESOVÁR: European Dance Culture–National Dance Cultures 21

GYÖRGY MARTIN: The Dance Culture of Peoples in the Carpathian Basin 23

EGIL BAKKA: The Computer As a Tool in Dance Research 27

Tradicional Dance in Europe
Reviv Activities

BÉLA HALMOS: Introduction 31

VILMOS VOIGT: The 25 Years Old Hungarian Dance-House Movement As a Phenomenon of Folklorism and Much More 31

COLIN QUIGLEY: Táncház: Networked Socio-aesthetic Communities in the Post-modern Global Cultural Environment 33

FERENC SEBŐ: The Revival Movements and the Dance-house in Hungary 35

OWE RONSTRÖM: Revival in Retrospect. The Folk Music and Folk Dance Revival 39

Tradicional Dance in Europe
Education

Introduction 43

Educational Programs on Folk Dance/Ethnochoreology in Europe 43

Institutions and Organizations

International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM)–Ethnochoreology Study Group 51

International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Art 53

Federation of Folk Music and Dance Societies 54

Folk Dance Archives at the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest 55

Reviews

ISTVÁN ZSEMBERY: Hyperkalevala–a National Epic on CD-ROM 57

© European Centre for Traditional Culture

Front cover and all inside photos have been taken by PÉTER KORNISS
Back cover Photo: National Dance-House Meeting in Budapest by PÉTER KORNISS

Design and print: WINTER FAIR KFT (winterfa@deltav.hu)

ISSN 1219-8315