

american folk music history

American Folk Music History: Tracing the Soul of a Nation

american folk music history is a rich tapestry that weaves together the stories, struggles, and spirit of the diverse peoples who have called America home. From the haunting ballads sung by early settlers to the lively bluegrass tunes of Appalachia, the evolution of folk music in the United States offers a unique window into the country's cultural and social development. If you've ever found yourself tapping your foot to a simple acoustic guitar or moved by a song that tells a story, chances are you're connecting with the deep roots of American folk traditions.

The Origins of American Folk Music History

American folk music didn't spring up overnight; it's the product of centuries of blending and borrowing from various cultural groups. The earliest roots stem from European settlers—primarily from England, Ireland, Scotland, and Germany—who brought with them ballads, reels, and dance tunes. These songs often told stories of love, hardship, and historical events, passed down orally through generations.

But it wasn't just European influence that shaped folk music. Indigenous peoples contributed their own rich musical traditions, characterized by unique rhythms, chants, and instruments like drums and flutes. Meanwhile, African slaves brought over from West Africa introduced complex rhythms, call-and-response singing, and spirituals that would heavily influence genres like blues and gospel, both closely tied to American folk.

The Melting Pot of Musical Traditions

The blending of these diverse influences created a distinctly American sound. For example, the fiddle

became a staple instrument, inherited from European settlers but played alongside African rhythms in the South. The banjo, originally an African instrument, was adapted and became central to folk and country music.

Communities used folk songs as a way to preserve their heritage and document everyday life. These songs served as oral histories, recounting everything from local legends to political protests. This storytelling aspect is what makes folk music so endearing and timeless.

Key Figures in American Folk Music History

Throughout the 20th century, certain artists and collectors played pivotal roles in popularizing and preserving American folk music. Their work ensured that these traditional songs were not lost to time.

John Lomax and Alan Lomax: The Folk Music Archivists

John Lomax and his son Alan were folklorists who traveled extensively across the United States, recording and cataloging thousands of folk songs from rural communities. Their dedication to documenting the music of African-Americans, Native Americans, and Appalachian populations helped preserve a vast array of songs that might otherwise have been forgotten.

Woody Guthrie: The Voice of the People

No discussion of American folk music history is complete without mentioning Woody Guthrie. Known for his iconic song “This Land Is Your Land,” Guthrie’s music reflected the struggles of the working class during the Great Depression. His simple yet powerful lyrics spoke directly to everyday people, making him a beloved figure in folk circles.

Pete Seeger and the Folk Revival

Building on the foundation laid by Guthrie and others, Pete Seeger was instrumental in the folk revival movement of the 1940s through the 1960s. Using music as a tool for social change, Seeger popularized songs advocating for civil rights, environmentalism, and peace. His banjo playing and charismatic performances inspired a new generation to embrace folk music.

The Folk Revival Movement and Its Impact

The mid-20th century saw a resurgence of interest in folk music, often referred to as the folk revival. This movement was fueled by young urban audiences who sought authenticity and a connection to America's roots amidst the rapid modernization post-World War II.

From Coffeehouses to Concert Halls

Folk music found new life in coffeehouses and small venues across cities like New York and San Francisco. Artists like Joan Baez and Bob Dylan brought folk music to mainstream audiences, blending traditional sounds with contemporary issues like civil rights and anti-war protests. Their success demonstrated folk music's ability to evolve while retaining its core storytelling essence.

Influence on Other Genres

The folk revival didn't just bring traditional songs back into the spotlight; it also influenced the development of other genres. Folk-rock, country-folk, and Americana all owe much to the foundations laid by folk artists. The melding of electric instruments with folk sensibilities during the 1960s created new sounds that appealed to wider audiences.

Instruments Central to American Folk Music History

Understanding the instruments commonly used in folk music helps appreciate its unique sound and cultural context.

- **Banjo:** With African origins, the banjo's bright, percussive sound is synonymous with Appalachian and bluegrass music.
- **Fiddle:** Derived from the violin, the fiddle is essential in dance tunes and ballads, especially in Appalachian and Cajun traditions.
- **Acoustic Guitar:** The backbone of modern folk music, the guitar provides rhythm and harmony, supporting vocal storytelling.
- **Harmonica:** Often used in blues and folk, the harmonica adds expressive, soulful melodies.
- **Mandolin:** With its bright, ringing tone, the mandolin is prominent in bluegrass and folk ensembles.

Each instrument brings a distinctive texture, helping to convey the emotional depth and cultural heritage embedded in folk songs.

The Role of Folk Music in Social and Cultural Movements

American folk music history is deeply intertwined with the nation's social and political changes. Unlike purely entertainment-focused genres, folk music often serves as a voice for marginalized communities and a catalyst for activism.

Folk Music and the Civil Rights Movement

During the 1950s and 1960s, folk songs became anthems for civil rights activists. Songs like “We Shall Overcome” galvanized crowds and expressed hope and resilience. Musicians used their platforms to raise awareness and encourage peaceful protest, highlighting folk music’s power beyond simple storytelling.

Anti-War and Environmental Activism

Folk artists also played a significant role in the anti-Vietnam War movement and early environmental campaigns. By addressing these issues through music, they connected with listeners on a personal level, inspiring empathy and action.

Preservation and Evolution of Folk Traditions Today

While the golden age of folk music might have been decades ago, its influence and vitality persist. Contemporary artists continue to draw inspiration from traditional folk while infusing their own modern sensibilities.

Modern Folk Artists and Festivals

Musicians like Gillian Welch, The Avett Brothers, and Rhiannon Giddens keep folk traditions alive by blending storytelling with innovative musical arrangements. Additionally, folk festivals such as the Newport Folk Festival and MerleFest provide platforms where new and old folk music meet, fostering a sense of community and continuity.

Digital Age and Folk Music Accessibility

Thanks to the internet, recordings of traditional folk songs and performances are more accessible than ever. Online archives, streaming services, and social media allow enthusiasts and newcomers alike to explore the vast landscape of American folk music history. This democratization helps preserve the genre's legacy and encourages fresh interpretations.

American folk music history is more than just melodies and lyrics; it's a reflection of the American experience itself. From the early ballads that crossed oceans to the protest songs that shaped movements, folk music tells the stories that define a nation's identity. Whether you're a seasoned fan or just beginning to explore, diving into folk music is like opening a living history book—one strummed on a guitar, plucked on a banjo, and sung from the heart.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the origins of American folk music?

American folk music originated from a blend of various cultural traditions, including Native American, European (especially British and Irish), and African influences, evolving through oral transmission among rural and working-class communities in the United States.

How did the Great Depression impact American folk music?

The Great Depression brought widespread hardship, inspiring folk musicians to write songs about social struggles, poverty, and political activism. This era saw a resurgence of folk music as a voice for the common people, popularized by artists like Woody Guthrie.

Who is considered the 'Father of American Folk Music'?

John Lomax is often referred to as the 'Father of American Folk Music' due to his extensive work in collecting and preserving folk songs across the United States during the early 20th century.

What role did American folk music play in the Civil Rights Movement?

American folk music served as a powerful tool for the Civil Rights Movement, with songs conveying messages of freedom, equality, and resistance. Artists like Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan used folk music to inspire and unite activists.

How has American folk music influenced contemporary music genres?

American folk music has deeply influenced contemporary genres such as country, bluegrass, rock, and indie music by contributing storytelling techniques, acoustic instrumentation, and socially conscious themes that continue to resonate with modern audiences.

Additional Resources

American Folk Music History: An Analytical Exploration of Tradition and Transformation

American folk music history traces a rich and complex tapestry that reflects the diverse cultural, social, and political currents shaping the United States over centuries. Often considered the voice of the common people, American folk music has evolved from its roots in indigenous melodies, European ballads, African rhythms, and immigrant influences, becoming a vital expression of identity, resistance, and community. This article delves into the historical development of American folk music, examining its origins, significant movements, key figures, and enduring impact on the nation's musical landscape.

The Origins and Early Influences of American Folk Music

The genesis of American folk music is inseparable from the multicultural blend of peoples who settled and lived in North America. Native American music provided foundational sounds characterized by drums, flutes, and vocal chants, often tied to spiritual and ceremonial functions. However, the arrival of European settlers in the 17th and 18th centuries introduced a plethora of ballads, hymns, and dance tunes from England, Ireland, Scotland, and Germany. These melodies, carried across the Atlantic,

adapted to the new environment and merged with local traditions.

Concurrently, the forced migration of enslaved Africans brought profoundly influential musical elements, such as call-and-response patterns, syncopated rhythms, and blue notes. These African-derived components would later underpin genres like blues and spirituals, essential pillars of American folk traditions. The intermingling of these diverse roots, in rural Appalachia, the Deep South, and the Mississippi Delta, established the early American folk soundscape.

Role of Oral Tradition and Storytelling

Central to the preservation and evolution of American folk music was the oral tradition. Before widespread literacy and recording technology, songs were transmitted verbally from generation to generation. This mode of dissemination allowed narratives, histories, and shared experiences to be embedded within melodies and lyrics, often adapting over time to reflect contemporary realities.

Storytelling through folk songs served multiple social functions: preserving local histories, conveying moral lessons, and providing commentary on labor, migration, love, and hardship. Ballads, such as those cataloged in the Child Ballads and later American variants, exemplify this tradition. The fluidity of oral transmission also meant that regional variations emerged, creating a rich tapestry of subgenres within American folk music.

American Folk Music in the 20th Century: Revival and Political Expression

The 20th century marked a pivotal era for American folk music, characterized by revival movements and increased political engagement. The early decades witnessed folklorists and collectors like John Lomax and Alan Lomax traveling across the country, recording and archiving folk songs that might otherwise have been lost. Their work was instrumental in reintroducing traditional songs to urban

audiences and influencing emerging musicians.

The 1940s and 1950s: The Urban Folk Revival

Post-World War II America saw a surge of interest in folk music within urban centers, especially New York City's Greenwich Village. This "Urban Folk Revival" attracted college students, intellectuals, and activists seeking authentic cultural expressions distinct from commercial popular music. Artists such as Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and Lead Belly became emblematic figures, blending storytelling with social commentary.

Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" remains an iconic example of folk music's capacity to address issues of inequality, poverty, and national identity. The era's folk music often intersected with leftist politics, union struggles, and civil rights activism, positioning the genre as both artistic and ideological.

The 1960s: Folk Music and the Civil Rights Movement

The 1960s accelerated the political potency of American folk music as it intertwined with the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, and broader social upheaval. Artists like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Phil Ochs used folk music as a vehicle for protest and consciousness-raising, blending traditional melodies with contemporary lyrics on freedom and justice.

Bob Dylan's transition from purely acoustic folk to electric instrumentation in 1965 symbolized both the genre's adaptability and internal tensions between tradition and innovation. Nonetheless, folk music's emphasis on communal singing, accessible storytelling, and direct engagement with social issues cemented its role as a soundtrack for change.

Key Characteristics and Instruments of American Folk Music

Understanding American folk music history requires appreciation of its defining musical features and instrumentation. Traditionally, folk music emphasizes simplicity and accessibility, often featuring repetitive structures conducive to communal participation.

- **Melody and Harmony:** Typically modal or pentatonic scales, with straightforward harmonic progressions supporting narrative lyrics.
- **Lyrics:** Focus on storytelling, social issues, everyday life, and historical events, often with a didactic or emotive purpose.
- **Instrumentation:** Acoustic instruments dominate, including the guitar, banjo, fiddle, harmonica, mandolin, and dulcimer.

The banjo, with African origins, and the fiddle, brought by European settlers, exemplify the genre's syncretism. Their interplay creates the distinctive sound associated with Appalachian and country folk music. Additionally, group singing and call-and-response techniques enhance the communal feel central to folk traditions.

Comparative Perspectives: Folk Music Across Regions

American folk music is not monolithic; regional variations reflect distinct cultural histories. For example:

1. **Appalachian Folk:** Rooted in Scots-Irish ballads and characterized by fiddle and banjo instrumentation, often conveying themes of rural life and hardship.

2. **Blues and Delta Folk:** Emerging from African American communities in the Mississippi Delta, blending spirituals, work songs, and field hollers with guitar-driven melodies.
3. **Cajun and Zydeco:** Reflecting French Acadian and Creole influences in Louisiana, featuring accordion and washboard rhythms.
4. **Western and Cowboy Songs:** Narratives of frontier life, cattle drives, and the open range, often accompanied by guitar and harmonica.

This diversity underscores the adaptability of folk music as it absorbs local histories and identities.

Challenges and Contemporary Relevance of American Folk Music

Despite its rich heritage, American folk music faces challenges in the digital age. The commercial dominance of pop and hip-hop genres has marginalized traditional folk sounds in mainstream media. Additionally, the transition from oral tradition to recorded formats has altered the communal aspects that once defined folk music.

However, contemporary artists continue to draw on folk traditions, blending them with modern genres to create hybrid sounds that resonate with new audiences. Festivals, academic programs, and grassroots organizations contribute to the preservation and dissemination of folk music history.

Moreover, the genre's emphasis on storytelling and social consciousness remains relevant amid ongoing cultural and political debates. Folk music's capacity to give voice to marginalized communities and foster solidarity ensures its enduring place in American cultural life.

American folk music history thus represents an evolving narrative—one that weaves together memory,

identity, and artistry. Its study offers valuable insights into the nation's past and present, revealing how music functions as both a repository of tradition and a catalyst for change.

American Folk Music History

american folk music history: *American Folk Music and Left-wing Politics, 1927-1957* Richard A. Reuss, JoAnne C. Reuss, 2000 The 1930s and 1940s represented an era in United States history when large groups of citizens took political action in response to their social and economic circumstances. The vision, attitudes, beliefs and purposes of participants before, during, and after this time period played an important part of American cultural history. Richard and JoAnne Reuss expertly capture the personality of this era and the fascinating chronology of events in American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957, a historical analysis of singers, writers, union members and organizers and their connection to left-wing politics and folk music during this revolutionary time period. While scholarship on folk music, history, and politics is not unique in and of itself, Reuss' approach is noteworthy for its folklorist perspective and its long, encompassing assessment of a broad cross-section of participants and their interactions. An innovative and informative look into one of the most evocative and challenging eras in American history, American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957 stands as a historic milestone in this period's scholarship and evolution.

american folk music history: *The History of American Folk Music* Adam Woog, 2006 Learn the story of this American music form.

american folk music history: Which Side Are You On? Dick Weissman, 2005-01-01 A history, with a personal touch, of the American folk music revival is penned by a recording artist, songwriter, and former member of the Journeymen.

american folk music history: *Singing Out* David King Dunaway, Molly Beer, 2010-04-14 An oral history of North American folk music revivals that draws on more than 150 interviews to explore the musical, political, and social aspects of the folk revival movement.

american folk music history: *A Folk Song History of America* Samuel L. Forcucci, 1984 Describes the historical background of more than eighty American folk songs, and explains their musical structure and evolution.

american folk music history: *American Folk Song and Folk Lore* Alan Lomax, Sidney Robertson Cowell, 1942

american folk music history: A New History of American and Canadian Folk Music Dick Weissman, 2019-09-05 Building on his 2006 book, *Which Side Are You On?*, Dick Weissman's *A New History of American and Canadian Folk Music* presents a provocative discussion of the history, evolution, and current status of folk music in the United States and Canada. North American folk music achieved a high level of popular acceptance in the late 1950s. When it was replaced by various forms of rock music, it became a more specialized musical niche, fragmenting into a proliferation of musical styles. In the pop-folk revival of the 1960s, artists were celebrated or rejected for popularizing the music to a mass audience. In particular the music seemed to embrace a quest for authenticity, which has led to endless explorations of what is or is not faithful to the original concept of traditional music. This book examines the history of folk music into the 21st century and how it evolved from an agrarian style as it became increasingly urbanized. Scholar-performer Dick Weissman, himself a veteran of the popularization wars, is uniquely qualified to examine the many controversies and musical evolutions of the music, including a detailed discussion of the quest for authenticity, and how various musicians, critics, and fans have defined

that pursuit.

american folk music history: Folk City Stephen Petrus, Ronald D. Cohen, 2015-06-08 From Washington Square Park and Café Society to WNYC Radio and Folkways Records, New York City's cultural, artistic, and commercial assets helped to shape a distinctively urban breeding ground for the famous folk music revival of the 1950s and '60s. *Folk City*, by Stephen Petrus and Ronald Cohen, explores New York's central role in fueling the nationwide craze for folk music in postwar America.

american folk music history: Political Folk Music in America from Its Origins to Bob Dylan Lawrence J. Epstein, 2010-03-08 Many American folk singers have tried to leave their world a better place by writing songs of social protest. Musicians like Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez sang with fierce moral voices to transform what they saw as an uncaring society. But the personal tales of these guitar-toting idealists were often more tangled than the comparatively pure vision their art would suggest. Many singers produced work in the midst of personal failure and deeply troubled relationships, and under the influence of radical ideas and organizations. This provocative work examines both the long tradition of folk music in its American political context and the lives of those troubadours who wrote its most enduring songs.

american folk music history: A History of Folk Music Festivals in the United States Ronald D. Cohen, 2008 In *A History of Folk Music Festivals in the United States: Feasts of Musical Celebration*, Ronald D. Cohen presents a comprehensive narration of folk music festivals in America, providing details on events both large and small from the 19th century to the present. Cohen discusses events like the Newport, Philadelphia, University of Chicago, and National Folk Festivals, describing and analyzing long-running as well as short-lived festivals throughout the country and covering a dizzying array of musical styles, including blues, Cajun, Irish, klezmer, women's, bluegrass, gospel, country, singer-songwriters, and world. Cohen draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources to create a detailed description of these exciting 'feasts of musical celebration,' capturing the nature and variety of the festivals and fully expressing this vital part of the development of folk music. Studying these events brings a truly national perspective to our understanding of folk music and provides important insights into their social, cultural, musical, and even political contexts. This account of folk music festivals in America is vital to folklorists, ethnomusicologists, U.S. historians, and readers with an interest in folk music and its history--Publisher's website.

american folk music history: The North American Folk Music Revival: Nation and Identity in the United States and Canada, 1945-1980 Gillian Mitchell, 2016-02-17 This work represents the first comparative study of the folk revival movement in Anglophone Canada and the United States and combines this with discussion of the way folk music intersected with, and was structured by, conceptions of national affinity and national identity. Based on original archival research carried out principally in Toronto, Washington and Ottawa, it is a thematic, rather than general, study of the movement which has been influenced by various academic disciplines, including history, musicology and folklore. Dr Gillian Mitchell begins with an introduction that provides vital context for the subject by tracing the development of the idea of 'the folk', folklore and folk music since the nineteenth century, and how that idea has been applied in the North American context, before going on to examine links forged by folksong collectors, artists and musicians between folk music and national identity during the early twentieth century. With the 'boom' of the revival in the early sixties came the ways in which the movement in both countries proudly promoted a vision of nation that was inclusive, pluralistic and eclectic. It was a vision which proved compatible with both Canada and America, enabling both countries to explore a diversity of music without exclusiveness or narrowness of focus. It was also closely linked to the idealism of the grassroots political movements of the early 1960s, such as integrationist civil rights, and the early student movement. After 1965 this inclusive vision of nation in folk music began to wane. While the celebrations of the Centennial in Canada led to a re-emphasis on the 'Canadianness' of Canadian folk music, the turbulent events in the United States led many ex-revivalists to turn away from politics and embrace new identities as introspective singer-songwriters. Many of those who remained

interested in traditional folk music styles, such as Celtic or Klezmer music, tended to be very insular and conservative in their approach, rather than linking their chosen genre to a wider world of folk music; however, more recent attempts at 'fusion' or 'world' music suggest a return to the eclectic spirit of the 1960s folk revival. Thus, from 1945 to 1980, folk music in Canada and America experienced an evolving and complex relationship with the concepts of nation and national identity. Students will find the book useful as an introduction, not only to key themes in the folk revival, but also to concepts in the study of national identity and to topics in American and Canadian cultural history. Academic specialists will encounter an alternative perspective from the more general, broad approach offered by earlier histories of the folk revival movement.

american folk music history: The Cambridge History of American Music David Nicholls, 1998-11-19 The Cambridge History of American Music, first published in 1998, celebrates the richness of America's musical life. It was the first study of music in the United States to be written by a team of scholars. American music is an intricate tapestry of many cultures, and the History reveals this wide array of influences from Native, European, African, Asian, and other sources. The History begins with a survey of the music of Native Americans and then explores the social, historical, and cultural events of musical life in the period until 1900. Other contributors examine the growth and influence of popular musics, including film and stage music, jazz, rock, and immigrant, folk, and regional musics. The volume also includes valuable chapters on twentieth-century art music, including the experimental, serial, and tonal traditions.

american folk music history: "I Hear America Singing" Rachel Clare Donaldson, 2014-09-26 Folk music is more than an idealized reminder of a simpler past. It reveals a great deal about present-day understandings of community and belonging. It celebrates the shared traditions that define a group or nation. In America, folk music--from African American spirituals to English ballads and protest songs--renders the imagined community more tangible and comprises a critical component of our diverse national heritage. In *I Hear America Singing*, Rachel Donaldson traces the vibrant history of the twentieth-century folk music revival from its origins in the 1930s through its end in the late 1960s. She investigates the relationship between the revival and concepts of nationalism, showing how key figures in the revival--including Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax, Moses Asch, and Ralph Rinzler--used songs to influence the ways in which Americans understood the values, the culture, and the people of their own nation. As Donaldson chronicles how cultural norms were shaped over the course of the mid-twentieth century, she underscores how various groups within the revival and their views shifted over time. *I Hear America Singing* provides a stirring account of how and why the revivalists sustained their culturally pluralist and politically democratic Americanism over this tumultuous period in American history.

american folk music history: Folk Music in the United States Bruno Nettl, Helen Myers, 1976 An introduction to the study of folk music as a kind of music and as an aspect of human culture. *Folk Music in the United States* gives readers a broad overview of many kinds of folk music found in this country, from the songs of rural Appalachia and New England through the indigenous music of the American Indians and the African music brought by slaves, to the folk songs of European minorities. It traces the way folk music lives in the modern city, in the academic world, and in the contemporary music of American composers. The book introduces readers to the study of folk music as a kind of music and as an aspect of human culture. It uses music as an index to understanding American culture while it introduces readers to various concepts in the field of ethnomusicology.

american folk music history: Traditional American Folk Songs from the Anne and Frank Warner Collection Anne Warner, 2025-04-15 Starting in the late 1930s, writer Anne and her husband and musician Frank Warner traveled along the Eastern Seaboard, from the Adirondacks to the Outer Banks of North Carolina, collecting folk songs they would perform, document, research, and lecture on. This decade-spanning work led to the Warners' development of a nearly one-thousand-song archive, one of the defining collections of American folk music. From that treasured archive, *Traditional American Folk Songs from the Anne and Frank Warner Collection* brings together nearly 200 of the Warners' most beloved songs with a detailed history behind the

music and lyrics. The book is uniquely organized by region and singer, allowing each of the voices to speak to the places they called home and the songs that could be heard there. Now updated with new photos, *Traditional American Folk Songs* is the definitive collection from the preeminent collectors of East Coast American folk music.

american folk music history: *Exploring American Folk Music* Kip Lornell, 2012-05-29 The perfect introduction to the many strains of American-made music

american folk music history: *Selling Folk Music* Ronald D. Cohen, David Bonner, 2017-11-29 *Selling Folk Music: An Illustrated History* highlights commercial sources that reveal how folk music has been packaged and sold to a broad, shifting audience in the United States. Folk music has a varied and complex scope and lineage, including the blues, minstrel tunes, Victorian parlor songs, spirituals and gospel tunes, country and western songs, sea shanties, labor and political songs, calypsos, pop folk, folk-rock, ethnic, bluegrass, and more. The genre is of major importance in the broader spectrum of American music, and it is easy to understand why folk music has been marketed as America's music. *Selling Folk Music* presents the public face of folk music in the United States via its commercial promotion and presentation throughout the twentieth century. Included are concert flyers; sheet music; book, songbook, magazine, and album covers; concert posters and flyers; and movie lobby cards and posters, all in their original colors. The 1964 hootenanny craze, for example, spawned such items as a candy bar, pinball machine, bath powder, paper dolls, Halloween costumes, and beach towels. The almost five hundred images in *Selling Folk Music* present a new way to catalog the history of folk music while highlighting the transformative nature of the genre. Following the detailed introduction on the history of folk music, illustrations from commercial products make up the bulk of the work, presenting a colorful, complex history.

american folk music history: *Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music* Ross Hair, Thomas Ruys Smith, 2016-12-08 Released in 1952, *The Anthology of American Folk Music* was the singular vision of the enigmatic artist, musicologist, and collector Harry Smith (1923–1991). A collection of eighty-four commercial recordings of American vernacular and folk music originally issued between 1927 and 1932, the *Anthology* featured an eclectic and idiosyncratic mixture of blues and hillbilly songs, ballads old and new, dance music, gospel, and numerous other performances less easy to classify. Where previous collections of folk music, both printed and recorded, had privileged field recordings and oral transmission, Smith purposefully shaped his collection from previously released commercial records, pointedly blurring established racial boundaries in his selection and organisation of performances. Indeed, more than just a ground-breaking collection of old recordings, the *Anthology* was itself a kind of performance on the part of its creator. Over the six decades of its existence, however, it has continued to exert considerable influence on generations of musicians, artists, and writers. It has been credited with inspiring the North American folk revival—The *Anthology* was our bible, asserted Dave Van Ronk in 1991, We all knew every word of every song on it—and with profoundly influencing Bob Dylan. After its 1997 release on CD by Smithsonian Folkways, it came to be closely associated with the so-called Americana and Alt-Country movements of the late 1990s and early 2000s. Following its sixtieth birthday, and now available as a digital download and rereleased on vinyl, it is once again a prominent icon in numerous musical currents and popular culture more generally. This is the first book devoted to such a vital piece of the large and complex story of American music and its enduring value in American life. Reflecting the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of Smith's original project, this collection contains a variety of new perspectives on all aspects of the *Anthology*.

american folk music history: *100 Books Every Folk Music Fan Should Own* Dick Weissman, 2014-01-30 In recent years an almost overwhelming number of books have appeared covering various aspects of American folk music and its history. Before 1970, most comprised collections of songs with a sprinkling of biographical information on noted performers. Over the past decade, however, scholars, journalists, and folk artists themselves have contributed biographies and autobiographies, instructional books and historical surveys, sociological studies and ethnographic analyses of this musical genre. In *100 Books Every Folk Music Fan Should Own*, performer and

historian Dick Weissman offers a reliable route through the growing sea of book-length studies, establishing for future scholars a foundation for their research. Beginning with early twentieth-century collections of folk songs, the author brings readers to the present by exploring modern studies of important events, critical collections of primary sources, the most significant musical instruction guides, and in-depth portraits of traditional and contemporary American folk musicians. For each title selected, Weissman provides his own brief summary of its contents and assessment of its significance for the reader—whether fan or scholar. Folk music fans, scholars, and students of the American folk music tradition—indeed, any reader seeking guidance on the best books in the field—will want a copy of this vital work.

american folk music history: The Early Years of Folk Music David Dicaire, 2010-03-30 This history of folk music looks at musicians, collectors and other figures from around the world. The book presents an overview of international folk roots and shows the contributions of the artists and the evolution of folk music as a force for political and social change. Profiles of Pete Seeger, Burl Ives, Woody Guthrie and others show how the stage was set for the American folk revival of the 1960s.

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