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# The Folk Revival in Scotland : Ailie Munro

Reviewed by Stuart Eydmann

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Published in Chapbook

received attention in print (Adam McNaughtan in *The People's Past* for example) but here Ailie Munro delves deeper through this 'collection of facts and opinions, of thoughts and memories, of story and song'. As an American working in Scotland during the 1960's, Ms Munro was clearly impressed not only by the wealth of traditional music and song but also by its lively reworking and performance. A series of interviews with key figures involved in the revival led to more detailed study and, although she states in her preface that objectivity became more difficult as the project progressed, the result is a work which at last treats the tradition as a legitimate national cultural movement rather than the 'folk scene' pigeonhole preferred by the media.

Despite its title, the book concentrates on the song tradition at the expense of the related instrumental revival. The latter is only sketchily examined, and perhaps justifiably so, for to do it credit would require the same depth of analysis given to the song examples. It is unfortunate, therefore, that little attention is paid to the work of progressive folk groups, the attempts by ensembles to combine normally separate aspects of Scottish music-making and the accompaniment of traditional song. It is the emphasis on song, however, which makes the book of value to readers of *Chapman*. Over sixty examples transcribed from singers are discussed along with variants to illustrate the conscious and subconscious processes involved in transmission and performance. The songs are grouped under headings (love, sexual symbolism, etc.) for comparison and extensive notes and appendices complement the text. Most of the examples were recorded either in concerts or competitions and this raises the subject of the role of the audience in the revival. I would like more discussion of how post-war Scotland generated a public hungry for traditional entertainment when all pressure was towards international 'pop' culture.

Ms Munro identifies the seeds of the revival in the American protest song movement of the first half of this century in a fascinating chapter. In her consideration of the influences on the revival from within Scotland she looks only briefly at the literary renaissance. I would prefer more on the contribution of writers such as Soutar, Jacob and Corrie, whose verse so often works well to traditional tunes and must have foreshadowed many of the revival songs. In addition, the way in which the revival has in turn stimulated an interest in Scots should be recognised. A closer look at the popular music-making within Scotland during the period 1930-50 is crucial to such a study because of the way non radical groups such as the Boy Scouts, certain religious groups, the co-operative movement and the armed forces all played a significant role in continuing informal and relaxed music-making during a period of decline in traditional home entertainment prior to the formation of folk clubs and festivals.

**FOLK MUSIC - A NATIONAL CULTURE**  
*The Folk Music Revival in Scotland* by Ailie Munro, including *The Folk Revival in Gaelic Song* by Morag MacLeod, Kahn and Averin, London £7.50.

The folk music revival in Scotland has already

Praise must be given to the coverage of Highland as well as Lowland music through Morag MacLeod's brief but informative chapter on 20th century Gaelic song, although only one musical example is offered. The remaining facet of Scottish traditional arts, the tales, songs and music of the travelling people is also given due attention in a separate chapter.

The book is one person's view of a complex phenomenon and although the author has approached the subject with keen observance, readers are bound to detect omissions. This in no way detracts from the value of this important book which should be read by all concerned with Scottish culture. All we need now are cassettes or records of the sung examples to complement this fine work.

Stuart Eydmann

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Archive 2.2 Winter 2011