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# The Democratic Muse : Ailie Munro

*Reviewed by Stuart Eydmann*

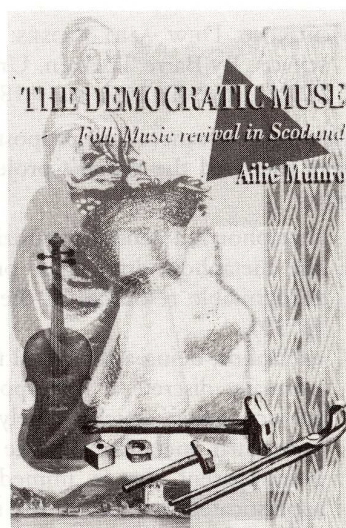
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Published in Chapbook

THE DEMOCRATIC MUSE: FOLK MUSIC REVIVAL IN SCOTLAND. By Ailie Munro. Aberdeen: Scottish Cultural Press. 1996. ISBN 1 898218 10 2. xiii + 248pp. Illus. Music. Bibliog. Gloss. Appendix. Song Index. Index. £15.95.

This book was first published as *The Folk Music Revival in Scotland* by Kahn & Averill in 1984. For this edition the author has updated the text and provided an entirely new chapter 'Signposts to the Millennium' which includes the following subheadings: song, storytelling, instrumental music, protest song, the influence of the revival, the Traditional Music and Song Association of Scotland (TMSA), world music and *Folk Roots*, art music, the School of Scottish Studies and concluding thoughts. As before, the core of the book is an extensive song collection with commentaries. There is also an excellent chapter on Gaelic song by Morag MacLeod (now updated) and a substantial chapter on 'the travelling people' (which contains surprisingly little on their songs). The revised title is explained by a desire to avoid the criticism of the first edition that it sought to be the definitive study of the revival.

As with the original edition, the book is essentially a 'collection of facts and opinions, of thoughts and memories, of story and song' (p. xii). It is an insider's view of the revival written (as we would expect from an author associated with the School of Scottish Studies for over fifteen years) from the starting point that traditional music and song is 'a good thing' which merits respect, nurturing and a wider recognition. As suggested by the new title, the writer adopts a 'folkloristic' perspective which sees traditional music primarily as the 'authentic' and too often unheard voice of 'the people'. Ailie Munro's story of the revival will be familiar to those who have heard or read Hamish Henderson (who provides an entertaining foreword) on the subject: post war neglect, links with the Scottish literary renaissance, the influence of the revival in the United States, attention to the tradition by visiting scholars, the foundation and work of the School of Scottish Studies, the Edinburgh People's Festival, the establishment of the TMSA and a late-twentieth-century blossoming. It is a linear, non-chaotic picture of the revival and, although such a perspective is understandably fundamental to the promotion and legitimization of the traditional, it lacks the current concern



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of ethnomusicology and cultural studies for revival as a process (or series of processes). The single-track approach diverts the reader from the complexities and contradictions which typify the history of all popular music in the twentieth century and as a consequence raises many questions unanswered by the first edition but even more pertinent now.

The new final chapter is very much a personal view, and although the writer has made an admirable attempt to provide a position statement on the revival and its future direction, it suffers from the difficulties inherent in any attempt to paint a broad picture of rapidly moving trends and fashions while adhering to a largely purist viewpoint. The writer's love for the music and personality of composer Ronald Stevenson finds expression in the chapter and, although the man and his outstanding musical output would not be viewed as central to the revival by many, it is an effective theme which I would hope the author will explore in more depth elsewhere. Her statement that 'Stevenson is one of the few composers from a working-class family' (p. 177) (what of Sweeney, McGuire and MacMillan?) is one of several opinions in the chapter with which I would take issue.

This book remains important for its collection of songs, the pioneering Gaelic song chapter and its record of a fascinating part of Scottish musical history. It was the first work of any length concerned with the subject and although there have now been a number of texts on the revival in Scotland it remains the area's principal text.

STUART EYDMANN, Edinburgh