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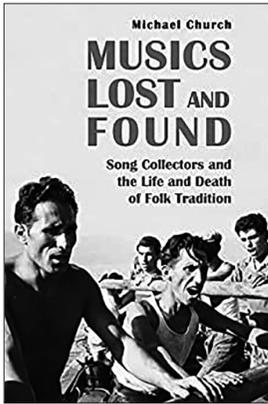
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## **Musics Lost and Found: Song Collectors and the Life and Death of Folk Tradition**

Michael Church. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2021. xv + 294 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Discography. Index. ISBN: 978-1-783-27607-3 (hbk).

The act of song collecting has been practised in various forms, with differing motivations, across many times and cultures. This work does not claim to be a formal history of global song collecting, but it serves as an informal one. Church chronicles the trajectory of folk song collecting through vignettes of extraordinary individuals and musical contexts. These ostensibly portray close-ups of particular cases, but also deliver an overview of changing trends in the practice as a whole. Church's main drive is in line with that of many of the collectors he portrays – to recognize the value of folk song, as a dying form of village expression at risk of extinction due to the triple pressures of 'globalisation, urbanisation and Westernisation'. In Church's view, we are 'seeing folk music's end of history' (inside flap). Church is more widely known as a literary and arts editor for *The Times* and *The Independent*, though he has a long history of researching world music for the BBC, with Topic Records releasing his field recordings. He wrote *The Other Classical Musics*, which foregrounds art musics of non-Western traditions. For someone describing himself as a 'part-time bit-player' (p. 1) he seems eminently qualified to produce this work and presents a huge amount of information with rigour and alacrity.

The work is chronologically arranged in four sections, each with an ever-increasing number of short chapters. In all, twenty-seven case studies are presented that illuminate the key issues in their era and geographical region. Some curiosities arise in the labelling, including the Lomaxes along with European activity, whereas the chapter mostly focuses on their work with cowboys and black Americans. And the chapter on 'Britain's folk song revivals' is exclusively English in scope. Towards the end, more instrumental contexts than purely folk song appear – for example, gamelan and taiko drumming ensembles. Theoretical approaches are broad, including folkloristics, ethnomusicology, and cultural industries, including discussion on copyright issues and the role of record companies. There are some references to theoretical musicology; however, readers are encouraged not to feel guilty about skipping them. This sums up the tone – Church is not afraid to go into detail, but grappling with all the elements is not essential to follow the overall arguments. The book is generously adorned with prints and the writing style is immensely readable. Church draws most of his information from other sources, though he is not shy of challenging established opinions and presenting his own, synthesizing them to generate colourful narratives of collectors' characters

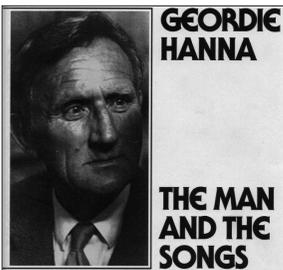
as well as the work they undertook. For example, two pages are dedicated to Grainger's sexual tendencies (which I cannot now unread), before moving on to his approach to collecting. The weighted coverage of Sharp is perhaps predictable, but it is unfortunate that Karpeles is largely ignored, relegating her to a couple of lines, whereas their relationship would have been interesting to explore in the spirit of this book.

Presented as 'extended pieces of journalism', the book occupies a position between coffee-table curiosity and academic text. There are no citations, although sources appear at the end of each chapter. The treatment of folk song collecting is tantalizingly close to moving definitions forward, yet this is evaded. I would have enjoyed, and given credence to, Church's more critical thoughts. As it stands, there are definitions, such as treating folk songs as specimens in the botanical sense, but then there is a clear preference for certain contexts – 'any village where communal life goes on' – and rejection of other performances of the same specimens. Folk singing in England is portrayed as dead – he says Topic no longer release records (p. 180). There is no acknowledgement of the folk club scene or contemporary artists. This omission makes me wonder what I'm missing from contexts I am less familiar with.

Church ultimately draws a depressing conclusion. In his view, changes in industry removed the need for songs and the music is dead or dying. Despite exploring the role of UNESCO and other interventions, he does not see a viable future for folk song. This is nevertheless an important book. It creates a meeting of academic fields rarely attempted. Much of the literature around British folk and traditional musics is narrowly geographically situated and tends to follow historical folkloristic ideologies; ethnomusicology tends to include only scant reference to British folk song. This book feels fresh to both disciplines. It is an important reminder to read British song collecting history within its wider European and global context.

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## **Geordie Hanna: The Man and the Songs**

Martin J. McGuinness. Derrytresk: Geordie Hanna Traditional Singing Society, 2021. 256 pp. Bibliography. Illustrations. Index of songs. ISBN: 978-1-527-28673-3 (hbk). With complimentary CD. [www.geordiehanna.com](http://www.geordiehanna.com)

*Geordie Hanna: The Man and the Songs* is a fondly written account of the life and song journey of one of Ireland's most remarkable traditional singers, Geordie Hanna (1925–87) from Derrytresk in Co. Tyrone. Compiled by his nephew Martin J. McGuinness, the book weaves together the voices of Geordie's family, neighbours, friends, and