

WHAT IS FOLKLORE?

by
Richard M. Dorson
*Professor of History and Folklore
University of California
at Berkeley*

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Folklore is the culture of the people. It is the hidden submerged culture lying in the shadow of the official civilization about which historians write. Schools and churches, legislatures and courts, books and concerts represent the institutions of civilization. But surrounding them are other cultural systems based on tradition, systems that directly govern the ideas, beliefs, and behavior of most of the world's peoples. Official religion is found in ecclesiastical creeds and doctrines, but the religion of the folk lives in legends of saints, miracles wrought by the prophets, blessings and charms and rituals learned in the family as safeguards against demons. Political electioneering is the official process, but inherited political prejudices, biases, rumors, and suspicions that find daily utterance belong to the politics of the folk. Formal learning is thrust at the schoolboy in classroom and textbook, but his notions about sex and power and life's goals are molded by the age-old lore he drinks in from his peers. The written literature of classic authors stands in contrast to the subterranean oral expression and the lowly channels of print that permeate civilized as well as less literate societies. Medical doctors, drugstore prescriptions, and hospitals share the solution of health

problems with faith healers and home remedies. Judges may regulate divorce actions and property rights, but the practitioners of magic reveal and deal with illicit lovers, thieves, witches, and fortune hunters.

Early in the nineteenth cen-

ture, intellectuals in Germany and England stumbled on and began to study this hidden culture that lay all about them. Anthropologists would discover faraway cultures. Folklorists were discovering their own, and finding unsuspected revelations and rewards.



Throwing a pot. Photo: Ruri Sakai

FOLKLORE

by
Bruno Nettl
*Professor of Music and
Anthropology
University of Illinois*

Folklore is art—literary, musical, dramatic, and to an extent visual—that lives primarily in oral tradition, is used mainly by performers and listeners who are not sophisticated in the technical theory of the arts, and is regarded by large segments of population

as its own. Typically, folklore exists in those cultures in which traditions of technically more sophisticated art, accepted only by minorities, also exists. The methods and techniques of folklore research can also be used, however, for the study of arts not included under this definition, such as those of nonliterate cultures. The folklorist, scholar and researcher in the materials described here, is interested in the structure, history, psychology of folklore and its role in society and culture.