

Evolution of American Folk Music

Traditional folk music lies at the roots of many of the different strains that make up American popular music. But, the connection between "down home" music and the professional music which evolved from it is often hidden or lost. This year's program, the Evolution of American Folk Music, presents four traditions of folk music and several styles of more popular music which have descended from the older forms. Two of the traditions are familiar to many people who visit folk festivals—Black music and white country music. The two other traditions are ones we have never presented with the same attention—the music of the French-speaking Cajuns of Louisiana, and the music of Spanish-speaking Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexican-Americans from New York and Texas. In these presentations we feature the music that people make at home for their own enjoyment, and the music that developed as these people and their students began making music outside their homes for the entertainment of the public.

Most of us are familiar, for example, with today's Country music—music of mass appeal created in Nashville and Bakersfield, and heard on radios, phonographs, and television. Folk festival regulars are also familiar with some of the older forms of traditional Anglo-American folk music from which today's country music is descended—either the ballads of the Appalachians, or the fiddle tunes which are found in every part of the country. Ballads and fiddle tunes were performed on a frontporch, or at a barn-dance. After the turn of the century, people started to get together in schoolhouses and theaters instead of their porches and barns. Skilled folk-musicians began to travel from town to town, like the traveling preachers of an earlier time. They learned from the

townspeople they performed for, and they began to spread their music throughout the country. They started to take advantage of the possibilities offered by radio and records—the chance to be heard regularly by many thousands of people. And, as technology developed, it offered improvements in the instruments themselves and a corresponding change in the music—a dobro or steel guitar could replace a wood guitar; an electric guitar or pedal steel could replace an acoustic guitar. Country music not only incorporated technological improvements, it began incorporating many of the other styles of music with which it shared the stage and the air-waves, and began competing with other music for the attention of the public. In the West, bands became larger and added horns and the sound of swing music, creating the music known as Western Swing. In the East, Nashville became the center of a recording and publishing industry like Tin Pan Alley, which developed the sound of modern Country music. And, in the border states and industrial areas of the North, bluegrass developed a third style of music. Today's country music includes not only the latest thing, it includes the older forms as well.

One further example: there are about one and a half million French-speaking people in Louisiana. Two hundred years ago, several thousand French colonists in Acadia (later Nova Scotia) were forced to emigrate. They settled in the bayous and farmland of south-western Louisiana, and have preserved not only the French language, but folk music that is very strongly tied to French folk music. The unaccompanied ballads and twin-fiddle and accordion music performed even today represent the oldest known forms of Cajun music. As Cajun music began to be featured on phono-

graph records, the fiddles and accordion were supplemented by guitars, and later by electric guitars, pedal steels, drums, and string or electric bass. From time to time throughout the years, Cajun music has been interjected into country music; it has borrowed from country music and rockabilly. Zydeco, the music of the many Black Cajuns, is a mixture of blues and traditional Cajun songs. There are many strains of Cajun music today, but, through melody and language, they are united by close ties to the traditional French songs.

There are many differences between Jimmie Rodgers and Merle Haggard, and between the Balfa Brothers and Clifton Chenier. There are also many differences between them and the people from whom they learned; but, there are strong connections within each style of music. That connection—in Cajun, Black, country, and Spanish-language music—is the theme of this program.



Participants

Barry Ancelet	<i>M.C., Cajun program</i>
Ardoin Family	<i>Cajun musicians</i>
Bata Players	<i>Afro-Cuban drummers</i>
Balfa Brothers	<i>Cajun musicians</i>
Inéz Catalán	<i>Cajun ballad singer</i>
Sam Chatmon	<i>Blues guitarist</i>
Clifton Chenier	<i>Cajun blues band</i>
Wilma Lee and Stony Cooper & the Clinch Mtn. Clan	<i>Grand Ole Opry country musicians</i>
Corozo Group	<i>Puerto Rican popular musicians</i>
Dorina Gonzalez	<i>Mexican/American singer</i>
Josh Graves	<i>Dobro instrumentalist</i>
El Grupo Afro Folklorico	
Nuevo Yorquino	<i>Latin folklore group</i>
Esteban Jordán	<i>Chicano folklore group</i>
Key West Junknoos	<i>Junknoos band</i>
Manuel Liscano	<i>Mexican/American Cantina singer</i>
Tex Logan	<i>Country fiddler</i>
René Lopez	<i>M.C., Cuban/Puerto Rican program</i>
Jimmy C. Newman	<i>Cajun country singer</i>
La Patato	<i>Cuban street musicians</i>
Rev. Leon Pinson	<i>Gospel singer and guitarist</i>
Lonnie Lee Pitchford	<i>One-string player and guitarist</i>
Christine Rainey and the Ensemble	
Sacred Singers	<i>Holiness singers</i>
José Reyna	<i>M.C., Mexican/ American program</i>
James Talley	<i>Southwest country singer</i>
Joe Townsend, Jesse Mays	<i>Gospel singer and guitarist</i>
Lupe Valenti	<i>Mexican/American Mariachi singer</i>
Speedy West Swing Band	<i>Western Swing band</i>