

# JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL FOLK MUSIC COUNCIL

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## EDITORIAL

### SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE VENICE FESTIVAL AND CONGRESS

THE Council held its first Festival in Venice from 7-11th September, 1949, thus initiating what will, it is hoped, be a biennial or triennial series. Articles which appear elsewhere in this *Journal* will show that the Festival was held in great splendour, and for this we owe our thanks to *Ente Nazionale Assistenza Lavoratori—Comitato Italiano Arti e Tradizioni Popolari*, who not only undertook the burden and responsibility of all local arrangements but acted with unsurpassed generosity as our hosts.

It seems fitting that the Council's first Festival should have been held in Italy, where the traditional arts of song and dance are deeply rooted in the lives of the people, for, as Professor Cherbuliez said in his address at the inaugural meeting, international activities in folk art have real meaning only when they are based on national and regional practice and development.

In conformity with the policy of the Council, a Congress was held in conjunction with the Festival, and the papers which were read to the Congress form the major contents of this *Journal*. The members of the Council also met in General Conference, a report of which is published in the Council's *Bulletin No. 2*.

Reference to this report will show that members of the Council are vigilant in maintaining the ideals which inspired the formation of the Council, and after two years' work with its magnificent culmination in the Venice meeting it is well to consider what progress has been made in implementing the Council's threefold object, which is to assist the preservation and practice of folk music, to further its comparative study and to promote understanding and friendship among nations.

To have gathered together some 700 dancers, singers and instrumentalists, comprising nearly 50 groups and representing 18 countries, and to have assembled the vast audiences that filled St. Mark's Square is, in itself, an achievement which cannot fail to have added to the interest and popularity of folk dance and folk song. There are, however, critics who consider that the Council should exercise greater discretion in its selection of material and that dances and songs of doubtful authenticity should not be presented at a Festival. This raises a fundamental problem which it is our duty to examine.

To some, "authenticity" means that the dances and songs must be performed by traditional exponents (i.e. by peasants). The Council has, in fact, always encouraged the presentation of folk music by traditional performers, not only in

order to foster the continuance of the tradition but on account of the greater scientific (and sometimes artistic) value of such presentations. Since, however, the Council includes "revival" as well as "survival" in its objectives, it would be inconsistent to exclude members of "folklore groups." It is, however, important to avoid confusion in the mind of the public and to this end it is proposed that in future the programme notes should distinguish between the two types of performances.

The question of authenticity as applied to the art itself as distinct from its presentation is a more difficult matter, particularly as regards the dances. In dances of a ritual nature, there is usually no grave risk of contamination from external influences, but the social dances which are seldom the exclusive prerogative of one particular section of the community, are often at the mercy of the dancing-master who will trim, modify and introduce innovations in the dances to make them fit for "polite" society. On the other hand, the folk will, of their own accord, often import ballroom elements into their own dances. This interchange is in the very nature of folk art, for, to quote R. R. Marett: "There never was a time when the interplay of old and new did not go on exactly as it does now—when survival and revival, degeneration and regeneration, were not pulsating together in the rhythm of social life."\* The folk, if left to themselves, will ultimately either discard what is alien to their nature or will transmute it into their own idiom, but nowadays the slow moulding process of tradition is impeded by many adjuncts of modern life: by improved transport, by the radio and even sometimes by well-meaning folklore organisations. It is for the expert to discover what lies within the traditional framework and to guide the activities of the Council concerning both survival and revival. In this respect, the Council certainly lost an opportunity through an insufficient integration of Festival and Congress. The proposal of the Executive Board that communications to the Congress should be related to the practical manifestations of dance and song, with special reference to dances of a ritual nature, was unfortunately carried out only by a few speakers.

In fact, the Congress suffered from an *embarras de richesses*. With so many papers on so many different subjects, there was little time for discussion and for the exchange of ideas which is so essential to the furtherance of comparative study. The General Conference, wishing to profit by experience, recommended that at future congresses papers and discussions should be related to certain given themes and should be limited in number.

A practical step in connection with the comparative study of folk music was the decision to instruct the Executive Board to consider in further details and to implement the plan for the setting up of regional committees. The thanks of the Council are due to Mr. Solon Michaelides, who not only initiated and elaborated the scheme but presented it to the Congress on behalf of the Executive Board (see page 28).

As regards our third aim, that of promoting international understanding, an overcrowded programme left little time for social intercourse, but the most was made of chance meetings on the Piazza or on the steamer in the daily journeys between the Lido and Venice, not to mention the impromptu gatherings of dance and song groups which seemed to take place at all hours of the day and night. The beauty of Venice, the kindness of our hosts and the magic of dance and song brought refreshment to the soul and, lifting for a while the veil of our separate interests, gave us a vision of the unity in diversity towards which we are all striving.

\* *Psychology and Folklore* (London, 1920).