



Sailor song: the shanties and ballads of the high seas; Boxing the compass: a century and a half of discourse about sailor's chanties

by Gerry Smyth, Illustrated by Jonny Hannah, Seattle, Washington, University of Washington Press co-published with the British Library, 2020, 160 pp., \$19.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-295-74728-6; Boxing the compass: a century and a half of discourse about sailor's chanties, by Gibb Schreffler, Lansdale, Pennsylvania, Loomis House Press and CAMSCO Music, Occasional Papers in Folklore No. 6, 2018, 106 pp., \$9.95 (softbound), ISBN 978-1-935243-81-6

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dancers should “accompany the music as closely as possible”, although this direction differs from the present-day belief that the musician should follow the Highland dancer’s lead’ (144). Regulation has a profound effect on improvisational music and dance when they are either ‘preserved’ or become competitive disciplines.

Ballantyne’s book is a wealth of research and food for thought. There is much material here, and the book almost feels as if it wants to be two, with as much detail in Part 2 as in Part 1. I would enjoy seeing more development of the ethnographic part of the book, to fill out still more of the ideas that she outlines. How do dancers and musicians outside Scotland perceive issues like ‘Scottishness’ in the roots of the dancing (historically accurate, or invented tradition?), gender considerations, opportunities for pipers to train to play for dancing? Non-regulated dancing (ceilidh, contra, step dance) may encourage wider participation, more creativity, and continue the evolutionary process of dance.

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Boxing the compass: a century and a half of discourse about sailor’s chanties, by Gibb Schreffler, Lansdale, Pennsylvania, Loomis House Press and CAMSCO Music, Occasional Papers in Folklore No. 6, 2018, 106 pp., \$9.95 (softbound), ISBN 978-1-935243-81-6

Despite its University Press and British Library imprint, Gerry Smyth’s attractive little collection of maritime music does not claim to be a work of scholarship. Instead, in the author’s own words, ‘[. . .] my purpose here [. . .] is to provide singable versions of some of the shanties and sea songs that have survived into the present’ (20). ‘Singable’ is, of course, an arbitrary standard and Smyth is clear about his approach: ‘For present purposes I have followed my own singing/arranging practice (developed over a number of years) in compiling a composite lyric which I believe makes each song a successful event in and of itself’ (20). It would be churlish indeed to judge this book as a work of scholarship: that is not its aim. However, for readers of this journal it will be useful to consider Smyth’s work through the lens of another recent publication, Gibb Schreffler’s *Boxing the Compass*. Both authors are involved in the ongoing performance of shanties and related repertoire and both have academic credentials: Smyth is a professor at Liverpool John Moores University with research emphasis in Irish culture and Schreffler (who also researches South Asian music) teaches music and ethnomusicology at Pomona College in California.

Sailor Song contains notations and lyrics for 50 songs, 40 listed as shanties and 10 ‘Ballads and Songs’. In addition to illustrations by Jonny Hannah there are abundant and delightful

images, many from the collections of the British Library. Further, there are notes about each song, typically about a page in length, a fourteen-page introduction, a two-page 'Note on the material', nine two-page discussions of topics such as 'Themes and Dreams' and '(Rock 'n') Roll and Go', plus a Glossary, Further Reading and Listening, Notes, Picture Credits and Acknowledgements. These materials comprise just the sort of 'discourse' about shanties that interests Schreffler.

In contrast, *Boxing the Compass* is neither a collection of songs nor a history of the shanty tradition. Instead, it is a detailed examination of the layers of storytelling that comprise the published record of the genre – including most of the works mentioned by Smyth. Schreffler asks 'How do we know what we know about chanties?' (1) and seeks to answer that question by examining, in roughly chronological order, the published evidence of writing *about* shanties. In what is essentially a review of shanty literature, he documents what was written about the songs, their character, use and speculations about their genesis. Dividing the history of shanty discourse into six sometimes overlapping periods Schreffler reveals relationships and patterns in the literature that have heretofore gone unremarked. He begins with a detailed look at some of the earliest writings about shanties then uses that in-depth review to show how large portions of the shanty section of Laura A. Smith's *Music of the Waters* (1888 – an important early collection) were taken – with and without credit – from earlier works. He subsequently demonstrates that this practice was often repeated in later shanty literature in which the words of previous authors were reused or even plagiarised by subsequent writers.

On another tack, Schreffler points out how the presentation of shanties in performance-ready editions including, for example, piano accompaniments prompted collectors and editors to amalgamate texts from multiple sources or even to write new lyrics to produce more coherent wholes, a process which obscures the improvisatory and frequently makeshift nature of shanties as they existed at sea. Another of Schreffler's angles is to consider the cultural perspectives and biases of shanty writers. His study is limited to English-language publications so the collections are exclusively the work of white men and a few white women (Laura Smith, Johanna Colcord and Cicely Fox Smith), some, like Cecil Sharp, with a distinctly nativist agenda. While Schreffler does not accuse these authors of deliberately obscuring the essential contributions of black workers both enslaved and free to shanty tradition, he none the less acknowledges that the resulting popular understanding stands at odds with the historical evidence provided by the earliest authors of shanty discourse. He writes,

Even if we leave aside the more fanciful ideas about jig-like sea shanties, pirates and jolly British tars, among those individuals more actively involved with chanty performance one may still note a strong bias towards White English culture as the sort of definitive source for chanties. (99)

Viewed through this lens we can see *Sailor Song* as a shanty collection very much in the pattern of those that went before. For example, the notes to various songs include well-worn stories some with attributions others without. Two of the sources Smyth frequently mentions are Stan Hugill and A.L. (Bert) Lloyd, men whose authority on the subject is far from simple. In fact, Schreffler devotes an entire chapter to the complexities of Stan Hugill as sailor, scholar and performer. Like Hugill, Lloyd also presented a mix of scholar and performer but his expertise with respect to shanties derived primarily from print sources (Dave Arthur, personal communication) – enacting once again the pattern of L.A. Smith and thus continued in Smyth's book. Like many of the collectors who produced works intended for performance, Smyth presents notations and lyrics compiled from various sources without citations reflecting the needs of performance and the tastes, one assumes, of the audiences

for whom he sings. Finally, it is probably not surprising that a scholar rooted in Irish studies would emphasise narratives that centre Irish culture in the history of the genre maintaining the pattern that grew, as Schreffler shows, only as the actual practice of shantying at sea was dwindling.

Sailor Song is compact and pretty but its value to this audience is more as an exemplar of a particular narrative history or as a tool to understand certain current shanty performance practices. That said, I cannot help but lament the lost opportunity to have the weight of a University Press and the august British Library to begin to correct the historic marginalisation of the voices of black workers who sang at their labours before the brief flourishing of deepwater shanties and who, both fishing for menhaden in the USA and whaling in the West Indies, continued to sing at maritime work long after the tall ships had gone.

Despite a title previously used by Roy Palmer for a 2001 collection of sea songs, imperfect editing, the lack of an index and unhelpful design, Schreffler's book makes an important contribution to shanty scholarship. We can hope that he continues his efforts, particularly in addressing the disconnect between popular narratives and historical evidence and thus piloting scholars and performers towards a more inclusive and informed shanty discourse.

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Audiovisual ethnomusicology: filming musical cultures, by Leonardo D'Amico, Bern, Peter Lang, 2020, 470 pp. (paperback), ISBN 978-3-0343-3609-3

As someone who was educated in the Finnish apparition of ethnomusicology in the 1990s, with its dubious association with all 'other' kinds of music than Euro-Western 'art' music, I have greeted the emergence, in the last decade, of audiovisual ethnomusicology as a field of research, with mixed emotions. On one hand I have felt that it has been long overdue; on the other, I continue to wonder whether it constitutes yet another form of re-inventing academic wheels. Much depends of course on how one conceptualises ethnomusicology, both overall and in relation to audiovisual media in particular; while the unabashed elitism of Finnish musicology in the 1990s has been a source of much professional anxiety personally, three decades later I am rather content to note how it pushed a number of 'failed musicologists' like myself over various disciplinary boundaries. In many cases, this meant musicologists acquainting themselves with sociology and media studies, particularly if one expressed interest towards music videos and other musical assortments of audiovisual media. While there is much to be said about the disciplinary trenches dug by (ethno)musicologists, sociologists and media scholars alike, to this day I fail to discern any meaningful difference between the fundamental conceptual points of departure in ethnomusicological ideas of