

# FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

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#### EDITOR'S NOTES

Teachers who use John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* in the classroom will be particularly interested in the Center's new online presentation "Voices from the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940-1941." There are many parallels between the collection material and the novel, and students may find that pictures and music greatly en-

*continued on page 15*

#### FOLKLIFE CENTER NEWS

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Cover: Mr. and Mrs. Frank Pipkin being recorded by Charles Todd (left) at the Shafter Migratory Labor Camp, Shafter, California, 1940. Todd wrote that Mrs. Pipkin was a gold mine of old English ballads, and that many thought of her as the prototype for "Ma Joad" in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Photo by Robert Hemmig, Ventura, California

# Voices from the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Collection



Baseball game, Tulare Migratory Labor Camp, Visalia, California, March 1940. (LC-USF34-24123-D) Prints and Photographs Division. Photo by Arthur Rothstein

By Robin Fanslow

The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, documentary materials gathered in California in the 1940s at Farm Security Administration workers communities, is now available online. Called "Voices from the Dust Bowl," it is the second American Folklife Center col-

lection in the Library's ongoing National Digital Library Program.

A complex set of interacting forces, both economic and ecological, brought the migrant workers documented in this ethnographic collection to California. During the recession that followed World War I, the drop in the market prices for farm crops led Great Plains farmers to compensate for lost rev-

enues by increasing productivity—which they accomplished through greater mechanization and by cultivating more land. But these methods were dependent upon increased borrowing and spending, and many farmers found themselves financially overextended.

The stock market crash in 1929 exacerbated an already tenuous



A man has his shoes shined at a social hour in Shafter Camp. This is Charles Todd's favorite picture of an "Okie Family." Photo by Robert Hemmig, Ventura, California

economic situation. Many independent farmers lost their farms when banks came to collect on their notes; and tenant farmers were put off the land by large landholders shifting to more efficient means of production. There was a 30 percent unemployment rate at the time, and the attempts of displaced agricultural workers to find other work often met with frustration.

Furthermore, increased cultivation placed a greater strain on the land—the grasslands of the southern Great Plains. The rich soil lost its ability to retain moisture and nutrients and began to erode. Soil conservation practices were not widely employed by farmers during this era, and a seven-year drought began in 1931. In the dust storms of the following years,

many of the farms literally dried up and blew away, creating what became known as the "Dust Bowl."

For many refugees of the Dust Bowl, people whose lives had revolved around farming, California seemed like an ideal place to look for work. California's mild climate allowed for a long growing season and a diversity of crops with staggered planting and harvesting cycles. Popular songs and stories, circulating for decades in oral tradition, exaggerated these attributes, depicting California as a veritable Promised Land. And flyers advertising a need for farm workers in the Southwest were distributed in areas hard hit by unemployment.

The country's major east-west thoroughfare, U.S. Highway 66—

also known as "Route 66," "The Mother Road," "The Main Street of America," and "Will Rogers Highway"—abetted the westward flight of the migrants. A trip of such length was not undertaken lightly in this pre-interstate era, and Highway 66 provided a direct route from the Dust Bowl region to an area just south of the Central Valley of California. Although the Dust Bowl included many Great Plains states, the migrants were known generically as "Okies," referring to the approximately 20 percent who were from Oklahoma.

California was emphatically not the promised land of the migrants' dreams. Although the weather was comparatively mild and farmers' fields were bountiful with produce, California also felt

The migrant people, scuttling for work, scrabbling to live, looked always for pleasure, dug for pleasure, manufactured pleasure, and they were hungry for amusement. Sometimes amusement lay in speech, and they climbed up their lives with jokes. And it came about in the camps along the roads, on the ditch bands beside the streams, under the sycamores, that the story teller grew into being, so that the people gathered in the low firelight to hear the gifted ones. And they listened while the tales were told, and their participation made the stories great. (John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*)



Charles Todd at the recording machine, surrounded by Mexican men and boys, El Rio Camp, 1941. Photo by Robert Hemmig, Ventura, California

the effects of the Depression. Local and state infrastructures were already overburdened, and the steady stream of newly arriving migrants was more than the system could bear. After struggling to make it to the state, many found themselves turned away at its borders.

Migrants who did cross over found that the available labor pool was vastly disproportionate to the number of job openings that could be filled. And those who found employment soon learned that this surfeit of workers caused a reduction in the going wage rate. Even with an entire family working, migrants could not support themselves on these low wages. Many set up camps along irrigation ditches in the farmers' fields. These "ditchbank" camps fostered poor sanitary conditions and created a public health problem.

Migrants were drawn to California's agricultural centers, but arrival in the state did not put

an end to the migrants' travels. In an attempt to maintain a steady income, workers had to follow the harvests. When potatoes were ready to be picked, the migrants traveled to where the potatoes were—or the cotton, lemons, oranges, or peas.

**T**he ethnographic collection created by Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin provides a glimpse of the everyday life and cultural expression of people living through the Great Depression and Dust Bowl era. The migrants represented in the online presentation of the collection, "Voices from the Dust Bowl," came primarily from Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. Most were of Anglo-American descent with family and cultural roots in the rural South. In the homes they left, few had been accustomed to living with modern conveniences such as electricity and indoor plumbing.

The Arvin Migratory Labor Camp, which opened in 1937 near Arvin, California, was the first Farm Security Administration (FSA) camp. It was also the starting point of the Todd/Sonkin expedition. The FSA camps were intended to resolve poor sanitation and public health problems, as well as to help relieve the burden placed on state and local infrastructures by the influx of workers. The camps also furnished the migrants with a safe space in which to escape from discrimination and rekindle a sense of community.

Although each camp had a small staff of administrators, much of the responsibility for daily operations and governance devolved to the campers themselves. Civil activities were carried out through camp councils and camp courts.

The motivation for Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin to document life in the migrant camps of California arose from a combina-

tion of circumstances. Todd held a longstanding interest in balladry, acquired during his undergraduate studies of English literature. He also had a more general interest in folk music. Todd held firmly to the premise that folksong was a form of journalism carried out orally. Ultimately, however, it was John Steinbeck's portrayal of the San Joaquin Valley migrant camps in a pamphlet entitled "Their Blood is Strong" that inspired him to investigate the camps firsthand.

In 1938, Charles Todd planned a trip to visit his mother and stepfather, an avocado rancher, at their home in California. Todd was a graduate student in the Department of Public Speaking at the City College of New York at the time, and he decided to do a little work to underwrite the expenses of his summer vacation. He procured a freelance assignment to write an article for the magazine

*Common Sense* (precursor of *The New Republic*). His subsequent article gives an overview of the historical, economic, and social context in which this collection was created ("Trampling Out the Vintage: Farm Security Administration Camps Provide the Imperial Valley Migrants with a Home and a Hoe," *Common Sense*, July 1939).

It was also during this period that Charles Todd met Robert Sonkin, while they were both working in CCNY's Department of Public Speaking. Sonkin approached the project from a different perspective. According to Todd, "[Sonkin] had this passion for Americana. He was a great linguistics man, fascinated by American speech."

To facilitate their documentary project, Todd contacted Alan Lomax, then assistant in charge of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress,

to arrange support for a recording expedition to the camps. The two had met earlier in New York City at the Village Vanguard, a Greenwich Village nightclub frequented by such notables of the folk revival movement as Woody Guthrie, Huddie Ledbetter, Burl Ives, John Jacob Niles, and Frank Warner.

In 1940 and 1941, the Archive provided Todd and Sonkin with a Presto disc recording machine, recording discs, and batteries. In return the researchers agreed to place their collection at the Library of Congress. At first the team used acetate-on-aluminum recording discs, but as the war effort got underway and aluminum became scarce, they were forced to switch to heavier, more fragile acetate-on-glass discs. The recording equipment used by Todd and Sonkin was the latest technology at the time, yet at a weight of approximately eighty pounds, the Presto



The King Family Singers, with Syd Thompson playing the fiddle. Location and date unknown. The King family came to California from Arkansas as migratory farm workers. They brought their instruments and songs with them, and entertained their fellow "Okies" as they traveled from farm to farm, following the crops. Photo by Robert Hemmig, Ventura, California



Dance at the Arvin Camp. Date unknown. Photograph by Robert Hemmig, Ventura, California, courtesy of Charles Todd

disc recorder was hardly what we would consider portable today. The recorder worked by engraving tracks into the acetate coating of the discs with a stylus. Due to the fragility of the glass discs, some of the recordings did not survive.

Along with the equipment, the Archive provided the team with instructions on how to document ethnographic material. In a letter

dated July 20, 1940, Alan Lomax outlined a methodology. In addition, Todd and Sonkin received the "W.P.A. Folksong Questionnaire" and training by the Library's chief engineer, Jerome Wiesner, in the use of the recording equipment. Thus armed with equipment and trained in collecting techniques, Todd and Sonkin set off on the first leg of their expedition. In July and August of 1940, they visited the

Arvin, Shafter, Visalia, Firebaugh, Westley, Thornton, and Yuba City Farm Security Administration camps.

Due to the constraints of the school calendar, Todd and Sonkin were forced to return to New York at summer's end to resume their duties at the City College of New York. In August and September of 1941, the pair returned to California to visit the Shafter, Arvin,

And perhaps a man brought out his guitar to the front of his tent. And he sat on a box to play, and everyone in the camp moved slowly in toward him, drawn in toward him. Many men can chord a guitar, but perhaps this man was a picker. There you have something—the deep chords beating, beating, while the melody runs on the strings like little foot-steps. Heavy hard fingers marching on the frets. The man played and the people moved slowly in on him until the circle was closed and tight, and then he sang "Ten-Cent Cotton and Forty-Cent Meat." And the circle sang softly with him. And he sang "Why Do You Cut Your Hair, Girls?" And the circle sang. He wailed the song, "I'm Leaving Old Texas," that eerie song that was sung before the Spaniards came, only the words were Indian then. (John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*)

These three in the evening, harmonica and fiddle and guitar. Playing a reel and tapping out the tune, and the big deep strings of the guitar beating like a heart, and the harmonica's sharp chords and the skirl and squeal of the fiddle. People have to move close. They can't help it. "Chicken Reel" now, and the feet tap and a young lean buck takes three quick steps, and his arms hand limp. The square closes up and the dancing starts, feet on the bare ground, beating dull, strike with your heels. Hands 'round and swing. Hair falls down, and panting breaths. Lean to the side now. (John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*)

Visalia, Porterville, and El Rio FSA Camps. Their first stop, the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp, is notable both as the first camp of its kind in California and as the camp where John Steinbeck did research for *The Grapes of Wrath*.

The territory Todd and Sonkin covered during their field project ranged as far south as El Rio, just north of Oxnard, and as far north as Yuba City, north of Sacramento. Much of the documentation work was concentrated in the San Joaquin Valley.

**W**hile visiting the camps, Todd became aware of the important possession the migrants had brought with them: their cultural heritage and, in particular, the ballads and other folksongs they performed and enjoyed. When they were not working, looking for work, or tending to the civil and domestic operations of the camp, the migrants engaged in recreational activities including singing and other music making, which took place both in private living quarters and in public spaces.

The music performed by the migrants derives from a number of sources. The majority of songs belong to the Anglo-Celtic ballad tradition, such as "Barbara Allen," "The Brown Girl," "Nine Little Devils," "Father Rumble," "Lloyd Bateman," "Pretty Molly," and "Little Mohee." But other sources were evident as well: gospel and popular music, the minstrel stage, tin pan alley, early country music, and cowboy music. The works of the Carter Family, Jimmy Rodgers, and Gene Autry appear to have been particular favorites of the migrants.

Also included in the online presentation are square dance calls, such as "Soldier's Joy" and "Sally

Goodin," and play-party rhymes such as "Skip to My Lou" and "Old Joe Clark." Some songs reflect the migrant experience, including Jack Bryant's "Sunny Cal" and Mary Sullivan's ballads "A Traveler's Line" and "Sunny California." These songs all speak of hardship, disappointment, and a deeply cherished wish to return home.

One difficulty Todd and Sonkin encountered was that of oral communication. Although both worked in the City College Speech Clinic at the time, they were frequently perplexed by turns of phrase employed by the migrants. For example, the performers referred to the songs they had created to tell the stories of their displacement and subsequent experiences as "migracious" songs. Charles Todd relates that he thought the performers were identifying these numbers as "My gracious!" songs, but he later realized that they were referring to their migratory, or "migracious," experiences.

The recordings were made at various events, including "literary" evenings at Visalia; social gatherings in people's homes; Saturday night dances; camp council meetings; camp court proceedings; and two "folk festivals," multi-camp events arranged for the benefit of the researchers. Throughout the recordings we hear children playing, doors slamming, trains passing by, and the hum of "desert coolers"—described by Sonkin as electric fans covered with wet burlap—that operated at public gatherings for the comfort of participants and spectators.

Todd and Sonkin were not the only ones drawn to document the plight of the Dust Bowl refugees. According to Todd, the camps were "full of Ph.D. scholars and do-gooders studying the real

people." Much to his dismay, he learned that some of the songs they recorded that chronicled the plight of the Dust Bowl migrants had been composed by an unidentified "Ph.D. from Vassar."

"Voices from the Dust Bowl" illustrates certain themes common to human experience: the trauma resulting from dislocation; the tenacity of a community's shared culture; and the solidarity within and friction among groups. Intergroup tension is further illustrated in this presentation by contemporaneous urban journalists' portrayals of rural life, California farmers' attitudes toward both Mexican and "Okie" workers, and discriminatory attitudes toward migrant workers in general.

Todd and Sonkin also held recording sessions with a few Mexican migrants living in the El Rio Farm Security Administration camp. Unfortunately, the glass-based acetate discs on which the Spanish-language musical performances were recorded did not survive. However, photos from El Rio and interviews with José Flores and Augustus Martinez provide at least a glimpse into the lives and culture of non-Anglo farm workers, who represented the majority of migrant farm laborers in California.

**W**e know that the Todd/Sonkin collecting expedition achieved a degree of notoriety because the researchers were invited to the White House to play some of their recordings for President and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt in September 1941. From the correspondence we may surmise that Robert Sonkin returned to his teaching post at the City College of New York. We know that Charles L. Todd returned to California in 1942, and

worked as associate manager of the Tulare Migrant Camp in Visalia.

As World War II wore on, Todd, Sonkin, Alan Lomax, and many of the migrant workers were subsumed by the war effort, either through conscription or through work in the defense industry. The state of the economy, both in California and across the nation, improved dramatically as the defense industry geared up to meet the needs of the war effort. Many of the migrants went off to fight in the war. Those who were left behind took advantage of the job opportunities that had become available in West Coast shipyards and defense plants. As a result of this more stable life, numerous Dust Bowl refugees put down new roots in California soil, where their descendants reside to this day.

Folklorist Robin Fanslow is working at the American Folklife Center, digitizing collections for the Library's National Digital Library Program.

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Will Neal playing fiddle for Robert Sonkin (behind microphone) and Charles Todd (right), Arvin Camp, 1940. Photograph by Robert Hemmig, Ventura, California

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## New Online: "Voices from the Dust Bowl"

"Voices from the Dust Bowl: The Charles T. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection" has just been made available online through the National Digital Library Program of the Library of Congress (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/afctshhtml/tshome.html>). The collection consists of approximately 18 hours of audio recordings (436 titles on 122 recording discs), 28 graphic images (prints and negatives), and 1.5 linear feet of print materials, including administrative correspondence, field notes, recording logs, song text transcriptions, dust jackets from the recording discs with handwritten notes, news clippings, publications, and ephemera. The online presentation provides access to 371 audio titles, 23 graphic images, a sampling of the dust jackets, and all the print material in the collection. Covering the period between 1940 and 1941, this collection documents the lives of Dust Bowl migrants living in Farm Security Administration camps in California.

# The Tradition of *Yüe Jü* Cantonese Opera



The Shing Ping Music Club ensemble, performing at the Library of Congress, November 3, 1997. Jennifer Lee sings the excerpt "Miao Rong," from the opera *Lady Flower Blossom*, which tells of the tragic feelings that followed the demise of the country Shu. This is the moment in the opera when Lady Flower Blossom visits her beloved husband, played here by James Peng (right), who exiled himself in order to lead a monastic life. Photo by James Hardin

By Nora Yeh

*This article is based on a lecture and Chinese opera demonstration, sponsored by the American Folklife Center and the Asian Division, presented by Nora Yeh at the Library of Congress, November 3, 1997, to celebrate the opening of the Asian Reading Room in the Library's newly renovated Jefferson Building.*

Chinese opera is the musical and theatrical culmination of many artistic elements: face painting, costume, implements, and recently, backdrops; melodic and percussive instruments, singing, monologue, dialogue, and numerous combinations of these; and

stylized movement, dancing, pantomime, acting, facial expressions, hand gestures, and acrobatics. As local operas evolved in different regions of China, some of these elements were emphasized over others. *Yüe jü*, the dominant tradition in Cantonese opera today, is only one of the 365 types of Chinese opera.

Cantonese opera originated in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.) under the reign of the emperor Jiajing (1522-64 A.D.). It derived from three main sources: (1) a very popular folk singing style known as *yi yang qiang*, from the interior mainland; (2) an elegant theatrical and classical genre enjoyed by the literati known as *kun*

*qü*, from the coastal area; and, (3) during the next 150 years, the development of standard repertoire and tunes, which combined *xi pi* melodic tunes from Hunan province with the *er huang* melodic tunes from Anhui province. Cantonese opera evolved from its infancy in the mid-1500s to its maturity in the 1720s.

Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism have all influenced Chinese opera. The social hierarchy and class distinction, as defined by Confucian morality, demanded segregation between the male and the female performers, making it necessary to present entire programs with either an all-male or all-female cast. Thus, men imper-

sonated female characters in the all-male casts and women impersonated men in the all-female casts. Although mixed companies are now acceptable, *fan chuan* or the "reversal of roles" still exists. Most Chinese theaters follow this custom, and *yüe jü* Cantonese opera is no exception.

Formerly the music of *yüe jü* Cantonese opera was almost identical to that used for older and more established operatic forms. But, since the beginning of this century, *yüe jü* has become a blend of conventional tunes and fragments from Cantonese folk melodies, popular songs, modern Cantonese instrumental compositions, and even Western tunes. Two extreme cases involve the use of jazz and experimentation with the tune of Strauss's famous "Merry Widow Waltz."

Often the opera melodies have changed so much from their prototypes that the only recognizable trace is in the first few words or syllables of the title of the original tune. The repertoire varies from two thousand to three thousand pieces. But all in all, the *yüe jü* opera music has developed into a style with unique *yüe jü* characteristics.

Unlike arias in Western opera, no musical pieces are composed specifically for a particular Chinese opera. The music is often borrowed and adapted, either in part or whole, from all kinds of music. Being essentially monophonic, the instrumental accompaniment follows the same principles in the orchestral arrangement. Thus, so long as the leading melodic instruments play the main tunes, secondary instruments can be varied in number, and become dispensable. The secondary instrumentalists can perform, even improvise, to provide variegated melodies for heterophonic textures according to the performer's ability and knowledge. Every instrumentalist uses the same notation, unlike the Western orchestra, in which each section reads from its own instrumental score.

After years of evolution, the singers have developed three types of vocal productions. The first is the trained natural voice,

used by males. The second is the high-pitched, "squeaky" falsetto voice, used only by refined female characters. The third, sung by young male characters only, is nasal and produced from the back of the mouth chamber. It does not sound high-pitched and is not a head tone. This range of stylized vocal textures matches the various characterizations for the many roles.

Because in the past performances took place outdoors, where it was necessary to attract the attention of the audience, singers were trained to use their diaphragms to enhance sound projection. Today, although most shows are indoors and microphones are used, singers are still trained to project their voices. Members of the audience who are unaccustomed to Chinese opera may find the sound surprisingly or even unpleasantly loud.



(Left) Paul Hahn of the Regional and Cooperative Cataloging Division models the costume of a Chinese emperor's yellow hunting outfit. The tasseled baton he holds represents his riding crop, a sign that the character is riding a horse. (Right) Julia Leggett of the Asian Division models the traditional red wedding dress worn by an

The costumes of Cantonese opera provide socio-historical and even geographical resonance for the performances, and are designed for symbolic and aesthetic effect. Costumes (along with makeup and props) help to portray the status and personality of the different characters.

Six distinct roles make up the cast: (1) *wen wu sheng* or young fighting general; (2) *xiao sheng* or young scholar; (3) *hua dan* or young female; (4) *er hua* or supporting female; (5) *chou sheng* or clown; and (6) *wu sheng* or acrobatic performer.

If a man or woman wears long white "water sleeves" and carries a fan, he or she is from an imperial family, and, if a man, he would be a high official or scholar. The sleeves signify that the character belongs to a class that does not do manual work, and in perfor-



empress. The headdress, called *feng-guan* (phoenix crown), is decorated with designs representing the phoenix, butterflies, coins, wings, and pearls, all of which symbolize good fortune. On the wedding night, a red cloth covers the bride's head until the newlyweds enter their bedroom. Photos by James Hardin

mances the sleeves are used to magnify gestures and movements. Pheasant feathers, fur, and boots are usually worn by male or female military commanders. (Because most battles in history occurred in the north and west frontiers of China, one can logically assume that the dramas with such characters originate from northern or western China.)

A hard round belt (about the size of a hula hoop) worn around the waist shows a person of high rank in a civil court. Elevated shoes worn by a male character indicate moral stature and physically enhance his height. Elevated shoes worn by a female character, which are tiny and elaborately decorated, underscore the dainty walk of women from the upper class who have bound feet. Light-colored floor-length gowns with elaborate embroidery are usually worn by people of the leisure classes; whereas, black, blue, or brown, less highly decorated shirt-and-pants outfits are worn by servants.

Symbolism is prevalent in every aspect of *yüé jü*. Four soldiers onstage may symbolize an army of ten thousand. When a character enters and exits the stage several times, it may mean that he has traveled hundreds or thousands of miles and for many years. Pantomime involving a stylized "horse whip" conveys working a horse—exercising, mounting, riding, or dismounting it. A table may stand for a table, a bed, a mountain, the top of a castle wall, or a balcony. Manipulating an oar indicates rowing a boat or raft.

**T**he rich cultural and historical heritage, the vast geographical regions, the diverse ethnicities, and the eventful encounters of China with its neighbors offer a tremendous variety of material to Chinese opera dramatists. Stories are based on a wide range of subjects, including romantic encounters, historical events, ghost tales, patriotic episodes, moral teachings, famous classics, pseudo-religious tales, and heroic epics.

In addition to providing entertainment, the operas also serve to educate people about Chinese language, belief systems, society, arts,

history, and even etiquette. This function was especially true when most of the population was illiterate and the opera was probably one of the few means of transferring such information to certain social classes such as farmers, laborers, and merchants. Precisely because Chinese opera was a powerful tool for mass communication, rulers often carefully scrutinized the presenters and their presentations in order to prevent uprisings that might result from possible anti-government themes.

One typically Cantonese opera is based on a semi-fictitious story about the Lady Flower Blossom (Hua Ray Fu Ren), a beautiful consort to King Meng Chang:

In the year of 965 A.D., King Meng Chang of the Kingdom Hou Shu, located in today's Sichuan Province, was defeated by the first emperor of the Song Dynasty, Tai Zu. Barely escaping from the pursuit of the Song army, King Meng Chang left his beloved Lady Flower Blossom behind. Subsequently Lady Flower Blossom was captured by Tai Zu. Enchanted by her beauty and talents, the emperor kept her as his concubine.

Although many years passed, she could not forget King Meng Chang. Therefore, when she found out that Meng Chang had become a Buddhist monk and exiled himself to a remote Sichuan temple, she asked Tai Zu to grant her permission to go on a pilgrimage to her homeland's temple, with the hidden purpose of meeting her former husband. At the temple, the reunion between the former king and the lady was very emotional. To express her love for him, she drew his portrait. Then they parted in tears. Upon her return, she displayed the portrait on the palace wall, which eased the pain of her unending love.

One day Tai Zu saw the portrait and asked her who it was. She responded that this was a deity by the name of Zhang Xian, and that whoever wished a son could pray to him for one. Tai Zu prayed, and a son was born. Ever since then, Zhang Xian became a popular deity for anyone who wants a son.

This drama contains many typically Chinese cultural subjects. It involves history, romance, and patriotism; the trilogy of Taoism,

Confucianism, and Buddhism; a beautiful woman, royalty, political intrigue, and revenge; and folktales and folk belief.

The heyday for Chinese opera has passed and the tradition has declined rapidly. What used to be an outdoor event, performed at the temple yard, market place, at a wealthy clans' inner courtyard, or a tea house, is now performed mostly indoors at an auditorium. Chinese opera was once popular among all social classes. Although it was supported by the rich and upper classes, it was for the enjoyment of people from all walks of life. During the Communist takeover, especially at the time of the Cultural Revolution (about 1967 to 1977), this artistic product from the time of feudalism, together with many other classical performing traditions, was completely destroyed. The performers were put into exile and "brainwashed." Costumes, handbooks, artifacts, and stage props were burnt. The instrumentalists were retrained and reassigned to the state supported model operas, the *yang ban xi*.

Today, few artists dedicate themselves to Cantonese opera. In China, there is still a school where some very talented children are being trained in this theatrical tradition. In the United States, there are Cantonese opera associations in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. Because of time and budget constraints, productions may consist of several highlights of one long opera or excerpts from several different operas.

In recent years there has been a revival of Chinese opera, but its comeback has been slow. Competing forms of entertainment, the time required to learn to perform or even appreciate this art, the disintegration of communities and clans, the lack of interest among the younger generations, limited funding, and an increase in Western-style education, all contribute to the diminishing social significance of the Chinese opera. Despite these social and cultural changes, *yüé jü* deserves to be preserved for its unique aesthetic and cultural values.

## Two New Library of Congress Folk Music Records Reissued on Compact Disc

The American Folklife Center and Rounder Records have released two new compact disc publications of American folk music, reissued from the legendary Library of Congress albums *Folk Music of the United States*. The series of reissues, produced by Bob Carlin, will number at least twenty over the next few years.

*Sacred Harp Singing* (Rounder CD 1503), which features a form of sacred group singing found in the American South, was originally recorded by Alan Lomax and George Pullen Jackson at the thirty-seventh annual session of the Alabama Sacred Harp Singing Convention at Birmingham, Alabama, August 1942.

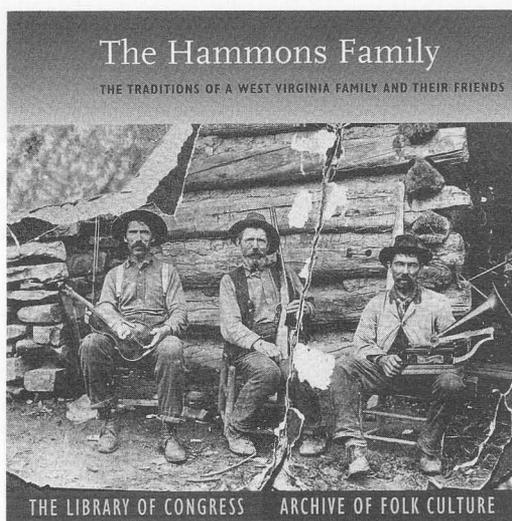
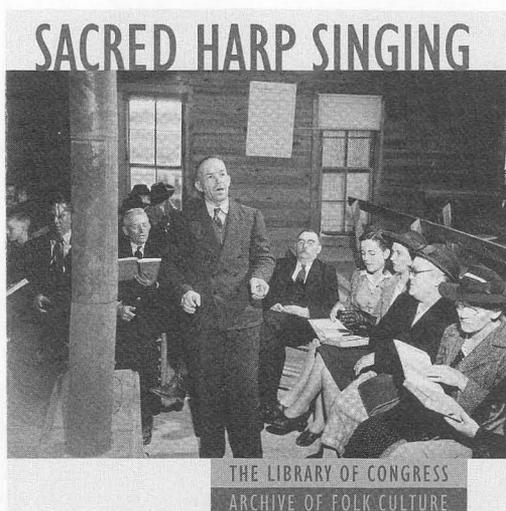
*The Sacred Harp* is the title of a collection of sacred songs compiled by B.F. White and E.J. King and published by J. L. White at Atlanta, Georgia, in 1844. The book has given its name to a particular network of singing gatherings, where one or another form or edition of the book is used. In the case of this documentary recording, the songs are from *Original Sacred Harp (Denson Revision)*, 1936. While the singing is sacred, it does not occur as part of a church service; rather, people gather especially for a Sacred Harp sing, often at all-day sessions. This album of Sacred Harp songs represents a cross section of the tradition, which was born centuries ago in the British Isles, crossed the Atlantic with the early colonists, took on the colors of the eighteenth-century singing school, and, after the Revolution, spread to the Southeast.

*The Hammons Family: The Traditions of a West Virginia Family and Their Friends* (Rounder CD 1504/05), a double-CD set, combines two recorded publications originally issued in 1973: *The Hammons Family: A Study of a West Virginia Family's*

*Traditions* (a two LP box set) and *Shaking Down the Acorns: Traditional Music and Stories from Pocahantas and Greenbrier Counties, West Virginia* (a single LP). Both Hammons family recordings were drawn from a docu-

mentary project conducted by Carl Fleischhauer and Alan Jabbour from 1970 to 1972. Both original Hammons family albums featured Burl Hammons, Maggie Hammons Parker, Sherman Hammons, and their family, but *Shaking Down the Acorns* also includes selections by two friends of the family, Lee Hammons (no known relation) and Mose Coffman. The ancestors of the Hammons family were among the pioneer settlers who made their homes in the woodlands of Eastern Kentucky and West Virginia, gaining their sustenance from hunting, gathering, and simple gardening and animal husbandry, and entering the cash economy only marginally through the occasional piecemeal sale of pelts, logs, and ginseng. Fleischhauer and Jabbour met the Hammonses in 1970 and set about a full-length study that brought together recordings, printed material, and photography, and combined music, lore, oral history, documentary research, and general cultural reflections, as a way of conveying publicly the interconnections between art and life in the traditions of a single family.

Rounder Records, a company in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has specialized in American folk music recordings since the early 1970s. Over the years Rounder has released a number of LPs and CDs drawn from the collections of the Archive of Folk Culture, including recordings of Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Jelly Roll Morton, Aunt Molly Jackson, and many others. The present series represents a collaboration between Rounder and two Library of Congress divisions: the American Folklife Center, which includes the Archive of Folk Culture, and the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, which includes the Library's Recording Laboratory. The original recordings were released through the Recording Laboratory Revolving Fund.



mentary project conducted by Carl Fleischhauer and Alan Jabbour from 1970 to 1972.

Both original Hammons family albums featured Burl Hammons, Maggie Hammons Parker, Sherman

## Texaco Foundation Funds Internet Presentations of Traditional Music



Anne T. Dowling (right), president of the Texaco Foundation, presents a check to Jo Ann Jenkins, the Library's chief of staff, in the Librarian's Office. Also pictured are (from the left) Norma Baker and Susan Siegel, director and executive assistant of the Development Office, January 14, 1998. Photo by James Hardin

By Alan Jabbour

The Texaco Foundation, as part of its new focus on broadening the use of music in education, has presented the first installment of a \$300,000 pledge to the National Digital Library Program of the Library of Congress. The foundation's new signature program in music education explores the potential of music to improve academic achievement. The emphasis is on serious curricular reform, which will be aided by the Library's program to make origi-

nal music source material available for student and teacher use on the Internet.

The Texaco donation will be used for online presentations of four collections from the Archive of Folk Culture featuring rural Southern, African American, Hispanic, and American Indian musical traditions. They include sound recordings, photographs, and manuscript materials.

"The Texaco Foundation is proud to be part of the National Digital Library Program," said Anne T. Dowling, president of the

Texaco Foundation in White Plains, New York. "These collections from the American Folklife Center celebrate the many remarkable, unique voices that have shaped America. It is wonderful to support the Library's efforts to make them available to music educators and others."

The four collections proposed for online presentation are:

The John and Ruby Lomax Southern States Collection, 1939. Using the Library's sound recording apparatus, John Lomax and his wife, Ruby, documented Southern

traditional material on a three-month trip through nine states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. They recorded religious songs, spirituals, field hollers, blues, rags, Civil War songs, work songs, ballads, dance tunes, Spanish-language folk dramas, children's games, lullabies, prayers, narratives, and oral history interviews.

The Lomax/Hurston/Barnicle Expedition, 1935. Alan Lomax, John Lomax's son and the new assistant in charge of the Folk Archive, collaborated with Zora Neale Hurston and Mary Elizabeth Barnicle on an expedition to document African American music and lore from Georgia, Florida, and the Bahamas. The expedition included a visit to Eatonville, Florida, the black township where Hurston had grown up, and the recordings include not only members of her community but herself in the dual roles as collector and informant. Hurston has become almost legendary today as a pioneering African American woman whose novels, plays, and folkloristic writings are widely studied

and appreciated. The collection contains children's game songs, ring shouts, spirituals, dance tunes, ballads, and stories.

The Juan Rael Collection. The upper valley of the Rio Grande is home to descendants of early Spanish settlers who have conserved some of the oldest European traditions in America. In 1940, with support from the Library of Congress, Juan Rael traveled through the upper Rio Grande communities of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico recording their traditions. His field recordings include *coplas* (couplet songs), *decimas* (a sung verse form), *alabados* (religious songs), *valses de cadena* (traditional Spanish waltzes) and other dance tunes, marches, and religious folk drama.

Omaha Indian Music, Past and Present. A major collection of wax cylinder recordings made in 1896 by ethnologists Alice Fletcher and Francis LaFlesche (himself an Omaha) explores the traditions of the Omaha tribe of northeastern Nebraska and highlights the pioneering research done by one of the first Native Americans to

document his own tribal traditions as a scientific undertaking. A modern recording session by the American Folklife Center documents the encounter with these early recordings by a contemporary Omaha elder, John Turner. And the Center's extensive documentation of several annual Omaha powwows in the 1980s, in both recorded and photographic form, not only captures the cultural energy of the modern powwow movement but also features contemporary renditions of some songs found on the early cylinder recordings.

The four new collections from the Archive of Folk Culture will join "California Gold" and "Voices from the Dust Bowl," already online, as well as presentations in preparation on quilts and quilting and on Nevada ranching traditions. There are more than two dozen American history collections available from the Library of Congress, including "African American Perspectives," "Selected Civil War Photographs," early short films, and panoramic maps.

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#### EDITOR'S NOTES from page 2

hance their understanding of the period depicted.

Charles L. Todd, one of the creators of the Todd/Sonkin Collection, lives in Florida, and was happy to learn that his work of sixty years ago is having a new life on the Internet. He writes as follows:

"I have just spent an hour watching 'Voices from the Dust Bowl' on a friend's computer set up. It brought back many memories of those 'Okie' days out in California, and many of those old voices brought tears to these old eyes of mine. . . .

"When I remember that bulky old Presto recorder which young Jerry Wiesner taught me how to use, I am amazed at the quality of the sound after all these years. I could almost hear the toilets flushing as those tow-haired little Okies sailed little toothpick boats round and round in them—having never

seen such miracles before back in the Ozarks."

The Jerome Wiesner Todd mentions was the first chief engineer at the Library's newly created Recording Laboratory. Wiesner went on to become President Kennedy's science advisor and then president of M.I.T.

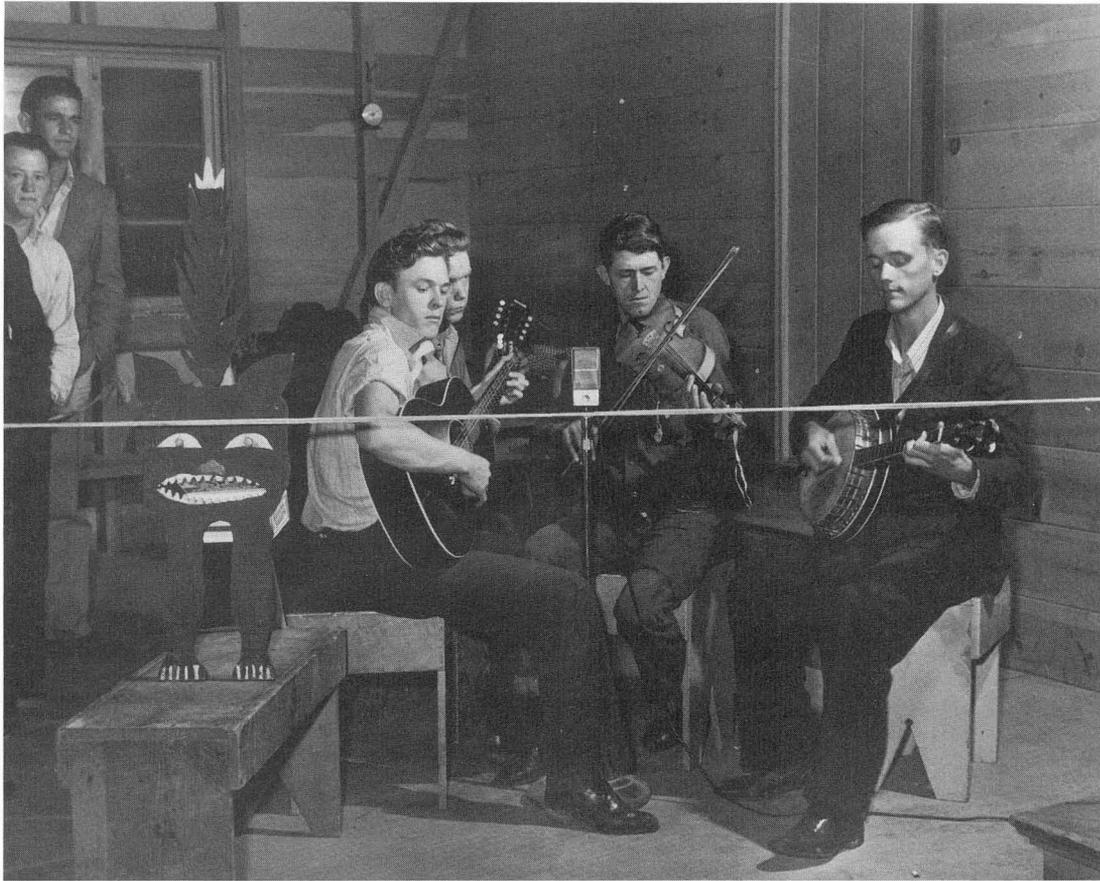
#### Senate Committee Hearings

On March 4, the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration met to hear testimony from the Librarian of Congress, James H. Billington; the Deputy Librarian, Thomas Scott; and the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the American Folklife Center, William L. Kinney, on a number of proposals involving the Library of Congress, including permanent authorization for the Center. Kinney made an eloquent statement on behalf of the Center, mentioning his own experience with grassroots cultural traditions as a news-

paper publisher in Bennettsville, South Carolina, and the many undertakings of the Center, including a favorite of his, the Federal Cylinder Project. Committee chairman John Warner (Virginia) praised Kinney for his testimony, and Sen. Thad Cochran (Mississippi) spoke in support of permanent authorization. Other members of the committee present were Sen. Wendell Ford (Kentucky) and Sen. Ted Stevens (Alaska).

#### Sonneck Society Bulletin

Belated acknowledgement to the Sonneck Society for American Music. An earlier version of Catherine Kerst's article "Outsinging the Gas Tank: Sidney Robertson and the California Folk Music Project" (*Folklife Center News*, Winter 1998) appeared in the *Sonneck Society Bulletin* (Fall 1994).



Band playing at a Saturday night dance, Farm Security Administration Tulare Migratory Labor Camp, Tulare, California, 1940s. Photo by Arthur Rothstein, courtesy of Charles Todd. A new online collection from the Archive of Folk Culture features "Voices from the Dust Bowl." See page 3.

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