Guest Editor's Column

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This issue of *Puls* is concerned with the relationship between the performance of traditional music and dance and the culture of a community, including both the traditional communities where the cultural expressions originated, and the communities where they are practiced today.

The call for contributions had its origin in my observations of two musical communities and their cultures in which I take part. There is no shortage of very skilled practitioners, repertoire, or knowledge about performing styles within either the world of Norwegian folk music, or on the American old-time music scene. Singers, instrumentalists and dancers get together and enjoy the music mostly as a pastime. They travel to festivals and learn and teach in a variety of settings. My concern was about what could happen when the music celebrated in these communities becomes so self-sufficient that its connection to the folk culture it originated from might fade into the background. The tradition could become an exclusively musical one. Usually folk music revivals are built not only on the forms of musical expression, but on a larger base which may include dances, storytelling, crafts (such as building of musical instruments), textiles, styles of clothing and even rites and religious festivals. In his feature article in this issue of *Puls*, Owe Ronström writes about nostalgia as an important element in folk music revivals, a modern form of nostalgia that criticizes present everyday culture and longs for an alternative. This nostalgia, he argues, can produce new and alternative aesthetic values.

However, this has not been in the foreground of my own experiences in these two forms of folk music. Nostalgia may have sparked revivals, but they have moved on since then. I would claim that the majority of their participants no longer take the music as a symbol for something lost. One could argue that by playing folk music they create an alternative to mainstream modern culture, but I have rarely heard this being verbalised. The musicians certainly cherish the musical culture of the past, but they make its music contemporary, not because of any kind of ideology, but because they practice and use it in a modern context.

Camping out at festivals could be seen as an alternative to mainstream consumerist culture, but audiences of more contemporary musics do that as well. In the Norwegian folk music community, hotel rooms

are just as popular as camp sites and the people are not any more frugal than those involved in any other pastime activity. Perhaps some idealize the simplicity of life in the past, but hardly anyone will long back to the hard work and poverty that were so prevalent in the musics' areas of origin, especially in the Appalachian Mountains of the eastern United States.

Without this kind of nostalgia, what is the relationship to the music's cultural background and which aspects are important for today's practitioners to know about? Cognitive anthropology, as it was formulated in the 1960s, defined culture as the knowledge necessary to live and function in a society.[1] Derived from linguistics it looked for a system of rules and meanings to describe the phenomenal world of a society's members. Does this knowledge have to include more than the musical structures and the contexts of performance? Behind the call for contributions was the question of how much of a connection to the original context the participants in the musical community needed to have in order to be credible as folk musicians, singers and dancers.

But this question immediately triggers the next one: Credible to whom? The answers can vary remarkably between fellow musicians, people who have grown up with the music in its original "habitat", judges at contests, students at music camps, audiences at concerts, or those far away and connected only through the Internet.

One part of knowledge essential to the music community is certainly that of the music's history, and especially of its source musicians and their repertoire. For many, this knowledge is important but the goal is not necessarily to recreate all the details on old recordings. Some performers do that in both countries, but most do not. More important than source recordings is the living tradition. Musicians learn their repertoire and develop their style in the present. Even if there is a lot of emphasis on the music's deep roots and the fact that it has been performed for a long time, your immediate teachers can be far more important than sources from several generations back. A single performer may synthesize a personal style from many sources and even include elements from other musical styles or traditions. For many of the younger players, recordings have become secondary as they enjoy the company of their peers, and learn from each other. In some cases they do not even have to reference the geographical origins of tunes. And as Karin Eriksson discusses in the case of Sweden, besides the informal learning at festivals and jam sessions, there are plenty of music camps with classes. Some of these are centred around individual source musicians or local styles, but others are not. In his article, Ronström describes how folk music in Sweden has become identified with ever-smaller areas. Tunes associated with a large region are now named after parishes. Norway has experienced the same process of localization since the 1970s. However, in American old-time music this has happened in reverse; today the older and newer sources flow together.

1. For a brief summary see Goodenough, Ward H. "In Pursuit of Culture." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 32, 2003, pp. xiv–12. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25064818.

In Norway the styles evolve, especially in the Hardanger fiddle tradition. Younger generations do not see themselves as revivalists. They carry on the tradition and the best musicians refine the old tunes and expand on them, but in utterly traditional ways. At the same time, alongside the tradition of solo playing, new styles of playing in pairs or groups are evolving.

Thus, the culture of the community practicing the music would function perfectly fine without its members needing to know anything about harvesting and drying hay, watching over cattle in the Norwegian mountains or throwing a neighbourhood party when you make molasses together. Today it is possible to be a traditional musician and live in the capital of Norway and only leave the city to attend a festival or perform at a paid gig. Members of the American old-time community may live in a city suburb or even in other countries where they might not even have a shared language with the original practitioners of the music. Middle-class revivalists seldom know much about how to earn a livelihood in the countryside, and they have a compartmentalised life where folk music is mostly a hobby. Professional performers have studied the details of musical style and repertoire, but may have no other connection to the region where the music originated.

Even when some elements typical for a folk music revival are still present, they become less and less important. It seems like both cultures have reached a post-revival state, where things revolve around music, dance and community – almost exclusively.

Therefore it should not be surprising that the call for contributions did not attract any proposals to *Puls* from Norway, and the two Swedish articles approach the topic from different angles. In addition, two articles were contributed from entirely different regions, Portugal and India.

Karin Eriksson describes instrumental workshops, which are a non-traditional format within traditional music, as a novel and different social frame. She describes and analyses both the students' and teachers' points of view and finds that learning and socialising are equally important within this setting and is implicit in the musical culture per se. In these workshops it is up to the instructors to decide how much cultural background they want to transmit along with the music. This will become more challenging the more the distance increases between the students' lives and the old cultural contexts. There is also the question about the status or position of the teachers. Are they professional musicians that master a local music form, or are they local tradition bearers, or perhaps a combination of both? And what do the students see in them and seek from them? Do they attend because they want to learn from a performer they know from concerts and recordings, or is it more important for them to learn something local or presumably older? I certainly won't rule out that they are looking for historical information and a cultural context, as well.

These workshops are mostly for adult amateurs. Some students love to discuss sources and sometimes have more knowledge than musical skill. Karin Eriksson describes how important the social element has become. "It becomes a life in itself", as one of Eriksson's informants puts it. For the teachers – often fulltime musicians far away from the mainstream – these classes are also an essential source of income. Thus, these settings are an important aspect in the maintainance of the overall scene. Concerning the musical tradition, the older amateurs will hardly ever have any influence on the development of the musical style. The younger ones, on the other hand, can certainly have such influence, depending on how skilled they become as musicians. They may attend the workshops, but they have many other opportunities to learn as well.

Toivo Burlin describes two pieces of music that, after an interruption in the path transmission, once again transmitted. Their contexts are lost and one piece is reintroduced by the digitalisation of an analogue, and almost obsolete recording. As for the other one, the explicit political message is preserved, but something is missing there too. So these pieces exist outside of any cultural context, and the current starting point is that they came to the author via his family. In order to examine them, Burlin tries to create a new distance between himself and these songs. He wants to avoid the self-explanatory and asks how the two pieces have been understood at different times. He can only assume the songs' original functions. In order to help the readers (and perhaps himself as well) understand the songs better, he draws a picture of the proponents' lives. The life of his great-grandfather has been described, both within the family and by others, and Burlin reconstructs where the melody may have been learned.

Maria do Rosário Pestana and John Napier each discuss communities who seek to preserve their connection to their cultural heritage and to state their identity by practicing music. Pestana describes a situation in which music is consciously used to unify a community and to preserve and sustain its culture. In the Portugese village of Manhouce she calls cultural knowledge a "hidden common ballast" – not unlike the "know how" cognitive anthropology tried to describe. When recordings of song performances are made, the participants miss the context of the work, such as the churning of butter or ploughing with oxen, that they did when they sang in their youth. But even without this context, demonstrations for tourists work as shared experiences and maintain the villagers' common cultural knowledge. The music is a means to keep community alive and to strengthen it.

But the musical culture in this case is not identical to village culture in general either. It seems that the performing groups attain knowledge that the rest of the villagers do not share. In this article another dimension becomes part of the history of the music and its revival (if one choses to use the word revival), and that results from the

sponsorship of "folklore" contests by the state during the dictatorship of the 1930s which prized the cultural knowledge of the village – or a caricature thereof.

John Napier examines how practicing music at certain auspicious events reasserts links to an Indian community's original world and points out that changes in the context do not lessen the music's function and importance. The genre Kodawa is necessary at certain events, and is not seen as an artistic performance, but as an active reconstruction of relationships to the old world and to ancestral forces. Napier describes this in relation to Jeff Titon's concepts of cultural sustainability. Even if heritage management must necessarily rely on tourism and newly invented festivals, this does not force the music into a different role. The practitioners of the music do not see themselves as performers for an outside audience. Tourists are welcome to watch, but the music is not for them, as it serves the community. Napier then discusses how one can keep the essence of one's traditional experiences alive by keeping them closely connected to the rites or auspicious events.

So the topic of practicing traditional music in modern contexts has become much larger than the old question of whether white men can play the blues. Traditional music can and does serve many purposes, it can certainly be about the past, but it has to be about the present.