

culture ; the European peasantry, say, or the cowboy of the American Middle West in the nineteenth century. Their music springs spontaneously from an unconscious need, and, because of this, must be completely genuine and sincere.

(2) Folk Music is limited by its function. Listening for its own sake was unknown to the folk singer. He declaimed his ballad, danced his ballet to a musical accompaniment. Hence form was bound by the structure of a stanza or dance figure and music did not exist outside these limits. Yet within them it attained a high standard. Most folk tunes lasted only eight bars, and for dance or ballad might have had thirty repeats. This presupposes a certain quality. A trivial melody would soon turn wearisome. The best folk tunes show their true quality after several repetitions.

(3) The folk song grows, develops, and survives by purely oral tradition. From our hypothesis, folk singers are unlettered, and cannot stereotype their songs in script or notation. This is crucial. It means that there is no "original," no authoritative version, but the one they are singing now. This allows limitless variation and improvement. The genuine folk song is fluid, always in solution, ever assuming a new character, never finished. This process may sound rambling or diffuse, but, in fact, it is highly disciplined. The folk singers add only what they need, discarding what is superfluous, and, therefore, at any given moment, the folk song is a perfect and sincere expression of their time. But this sincerity is fragile, and lasts only so long as the music is free and artless. With the invention of printing in the late fifteenth century, the folk song became commercial. The words were printed on "broadsheets" and hawked all over England and Europe. The artless becomes artful, the motive debased, and the rot begins.

(4) The folk song grows and develops in the communal mind. This brings up the vexed question of origin. Who composed it? One or many? An individual, or the community?

Neither is true alone ; together, they both are. A man sings a song, then others sing it after him, changing what they do not like, adding, improving, shaping, moulding. The tune is handed from mouth to mouth, father to son, passing through thousands of minds, through hundreds of years of evolution, representing the united imaginations of whole generations. But this is important only to the research worker. Neither age nor authorship matter to the folk-singer—only the beauty and freshness of the song he is singing now.

These will serve as criteria. How does swing stand the tests? This can best be shown by an historical approach.



The germ of modern swing took root on the cotton plantations of America in the early nineteenth century. The negro slave of the time was a complex of many only partly digested influences. The deep-seated rhythmical sense in his race was African, his language English, his home American. Further, he was a slave with little hope of liberation. This conditioned him to a profound melancholy. The soulless industrialism of Europe and America in the nineteenth century was also a slavery without hope of liberation, and this produced its own all-pervasive melancholy. The churches reflected it in a vein of unctuous sorrow ; a theme