



# "Questions and discussions, part 3" in "Music librarianship in America, Part 3: Music librarians and American music"

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## Questions and Discussion, Part 3

*Oscar Handlin, Chair*

Q: Regarding the divide between American vernacular music and that of the European immigrants, does Mr. Crawford think there is a connection between the sources from Europe and what has become the American vernacular?

CRAWFORD: For this paper, I stopped my consideration at national boundaries because someone else would be dealing with immigrant music. But certainly various immigrant musics have had a great impact on American vernacular music. Don Krummel mentioned the discography by Richard Spottswood that took many years of preparation and LC's *Ethnic Recordings in America*, a discography of all commercial recordings made by the various immigrant groups starting in the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> American music business executives discovered in the 1920s that recording the music of a given community gave them a powerful economic tool within that community—doing so was simply a good way to sell music. Our knowledge of the sources for many of these musics has until now been extremely sketchy. Spottswood's discography will be enormously helpful, and the LC publication allows us to see how rich this field is. But serious research requires a strong bibliographic-discographic base: that is another divide we have to cross. There is no question that this music is part of the larger picture, but studying it presents a serious challenge.

Oscar Handlin is Carl M. Loeb University Professor, *Emeritus*, and former Director of the University Library, Harvard University. Among his many books is *Liberty in America, 1600 to the Present*, written with Lilian Handlin.

Q: Over the past few years I have been particularly engaged in performing music of John Knowles Paine, in whose memory this hall is named. In looking for performance material, however, I was first appalled and then angered at its scarcity and its condition. A collected Paine edition supporting the American musical heritage would be of far more value than an edition of Johannes Ockeghem's works. On the subject of reservation life, my experience and knowledge are unfortunately limited to what I have gained from the novels of Tony Hillerman, but I am curious, especially in light of the Christopher Columbus song, to know whether Don Roberts thinks that white-faced, popular genres have indeed invaded the reservations. I am also curious about the extent to which songs in the traditional modes are still being created.

ROBERTS: The imported popular genres form a major component of Native American music today. This should not be surprising, because in addition to all the

<sup>1</sup> Richard Keith Spottswood, *Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1894 to 1942* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990);

*Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1982).

traditional forms, nearly every tribal unit has always had music for relaxation. Indeed, some of the ceremonies go on for four to six days and at their conclusion, the participants often hold round dances, which are purely social events and which serve to bring the practitioners and the active spectators back to the real world. So it is not unusual that in the realm of popular music Native Americans ventured from their own non-sacred music into some of the idioms that were around them. Some of the finest country-western groups in the country today are Navaho Indian groups. They perform in a completely secular context, portraying the old “boy meets girl” situation at the Saturday night dance. The performers are simply expressing the non-sacred aspects of their lives.

Q: What did Don Krummel mean when he spoke about immigrant music being too important for the libraries?

KRUMMEL: Just that all music must come to life, and it doesn't come to life in the library, it comes to life as sound.

Q: Can we assume any crack in the wall that the American musicological establishment has put up to keep out American and vernacular musics? We have seen years of confrontation between that establishment and scholars studying jazz, popular music, and other non-Western-classical genres. Do the musicologists here today represent a voice in the wilderness or is their view the prevailing one?

CRAWFORD: The American Musicological Society consists, like most other American scholarly groups today, of a diverse group of people displaying an extremely wide range of tastes and interests. A good part of the difficulty that American music has had in making its way into that framework has occurred simply through ignorance about, and lack of access to, many American things. There has been a divide—there is no question about that—but in the last ten or fifteen years the American Musicological Society has supported American projects, just as it continues to support projects of various other kinds. There is also another group, the Sonneck Society, that specializes entirely in American music, and many musicologists belong to both organizations. Our society is well represented, as are our interests as Americanists. There is no monolithic view of American music—at least not anymore.