

# THE BALLAD OF ALAN AND AUNTIE BEEB: ALAN LOMAX'S RADIO PROGRAMMES FOR THE BBC, 1943–1960

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*The prominent US folk music field collector Alan Lomax (1915–2002) had a prolific but overlooked career in radio, including a close working relationship with the BBC during the 1940s and 1950s. Over the course of more than 100 episodes of radio programming, Lomax introduced the British listening public to American as well as English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh and other European folk music styles popular music traditions associated primarily with the lower classes, and which had previously received little airplay on the BBC. This article argues that Lomax's radio programmes were part of a concerted transnational cultural effort – both during the Second World War and into the post war period – that sought to create a sense of shared culture between the US and the UK, with particular appeal for middle and lower class audiences. Furthermore, this article suggests that Lomax's radio productions had a lasting effect on British media and culture, influencing both the British folk music revival of the 1950s–1960s and the popular 'radio ballad' form.*

In September 1950, Alan Lomax, the United States' most famous folk music collector, boarded the RMS *Mauretania* in New York City, en route to Europe.<sup>1</sup> He had been contracted by Columbia Records to compile a 30 LP record series that would cover the folk songs of all the world's peoples, to be titled *The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*.<sup>2</sup> Lomax believed the project would take him about one year to complete. He did not return home to the USA until July

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1958. While overseas for the better part of a decade, Lomax spent most of his time living and working in the UK. There, he continued to go about his old 'song collector' ways, travelling throughout the more remote parts of the British Isles with his portable tape recorder to document the traditional folk songs of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.<sup>3</sup> He made excursions to Continental Europe, most notably spending a couple years field collecting in Spain and Italy. However, he also embarked on an unexpected and highly prolific career with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Between 1951 and 1958, Lomax wrote, produced or appeared in over 100 episodes of radio programming for the BBC, many of them for the Third Programme. Lomax was hardly a stranger to radio or even to the BBC before setting foot in the UK. He had been writing, producing and hosting radio since the late 1930s, including a number of wartime programmes made for the BBC during the mid 1940s.

Yet, Lomax's radio work has been the subject of little scholarly study on the whole, and in particular his work for the BBC has received minimal attention. An exception here is David Gregory's research on the impact of Lomax's BBC broadcasts on the British folk music revival.<sup>4</sup> Gregory provides a comprehensive chronological survey of the radio programmes Lomax made for the BBC between 1951 and 1957 (excluding his earlier wartime broadcasts). Like most of the scholarship that touches upon Lomax's life and career, though, Gregory's primary focus is on Lomax's importance to popular music culture and the history of traditional folk music.<sup>5</sup> Even when Lomax's radio work is studied, the medium of radio itself is placed, at best, in a secondary position. This article builds on the research of Gregory and other popular music historians, while also shifting the discussion in the existing scholarly literature by centrally locating radio broadcasting history and form. Moreover, this article redirects the emphasis from the national – the dominant framework that folk music studies tend to adopt – to the transnational, highlighting the presence of international elements within the British national radio culture of the 1940s and 1950s. This includes Lomax's participation in historically significant British-US transnational flows of both cultural and political influence.

In this article, I analyse Alan Lomax's radio work with the BBC as a transnational cultural phenomenon. In particular, I examine why the BBC sought to incorporate both Lomax and folk music – especially American or US inspired folk music styles, such as the blues and country – into its radio programming during the 1940s and 1950s. That is, why would the BBC, then still a strongly nationalistic bastion of high culture (though popularizing forces were at work), dedicate so much airtime and resources to an American producer and to vernacular folk music? After all, folk music was a genre associated with the lower and working classes, and much of the music that Lomax broadcast was American in origin.<sup>6</sup> As I will show through a piecing together of various historical accounts and primary sources, as well as with textual analysis of some of the radio shows themselves, these programmes functioned as a transnational cultural space where the USA and the UK entered into a cross-cultural exchange and dialogue.<sup>7</sup>

During the Second World War, especially, these transnational productions – the BBC/CBS co-produced series *Transatlantic Call: People to People* (1943-1944) and the 'ballad operas' *The Man Who Went to War* (1944), *The Martins and The Coys* (1944) and *The Chisholm Trail* (1944), which were produced in the USA with

American songs and performers but broadcast for British audiences were designed for propaganda purposes as much as they were intended for entertainment. That is, they foregrounded American music and culture as a means of creating cultural understanding and goodwill between the Allied countries. They also deviated from standard BBC programming practice to incorporate 'low culture' forms like folk music and serialized drama as a means of appealing to middle and lower class audiences, who needed to be drawn into supporting the war effort. Following the war, Lomax's BBC programmes *Adventure in Folk Song* (1951), *Patterns in American Folk Song* (1951), *The Art of the Negro* (1951) and *Ballads and Blues* (1953), to name a few brought British audiences up to speed on the US folk music revival, which was growing in popularity in the UK during the 1940s and 1950s. These shows also emphasized the lineage between American and English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh musical traditions. In both cases, Lomax and his collaborators used the medium of radio as a forum in which to create a sense of shared culture between the USA and the UK.

### **Alan Lomax: 'saga of a folksong hunter'**

Alan Lomax was only 35 years old when he boarded the European bound RMS *Mauretania* in 1950, and yet his legacy as the best known, if not also the most influential and esteemed, authority on American folk music had already been cemented for more than a decade.<sup>8</sup> A native Texan but long time resident of New York and Washington, DC, Lomax was a folklorist and ethnomusicologist, as well as a writer, film maker, archivist, talent manager and promoter, and even a musician in his own right. His reputation was initially built as a field collector who travelled the rural USA, making recordings of traditional vernacular music, particularly of poor whites and blacks in Appalachia and the South. He followed in the footsteps of his father, John A. Lomax, who was also a famed folklorist and field collector. Indeed, early on, Alan worked closely with his father, venturing out on extended field expeditions when he was just 17 years old. The Lomaxes' most prominent work as field collectors was done together in the South in the 1930s and early 1940s, during and shortly after the Great Depression.

For much of this time, they were collecting songs and interviews for the US Government under the auspices of the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress. John was the Curator of the Archive from 1934 until his death in 1948 and Alan was the Assistant in Charge from 1937 to 1942. Their most lasting contributions were in the areas of what were then called 'race' music and 'hillbilly' or 'old time' music or what today is known as blues, folk and country. They 'discovered', or at least popularized, some of the most storied American folk musicians of the twentieth century: Lead Belly (né Huddie Ledbetter), Muddy Waters (né McKinley Morganfield), Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives, Josh White and Pete Seeger. Alan had a long and fruitful, albeit controversial, career until his death in 2002.

While the Lomaxes' contributions to American folk music and culture are widely acknowledged, they have not been thoroughly examined by scholars and historians.<sup>9</sup> John and Alan receive recognition in nearly every book on modern

American folk music and the folk music revivals of the 1940s to the 1970s indeed, it would be nearly impossible to exclude them. Typically, though, their contributions are confined to a few passages and a handful of repeated stories and analytical interpretations. To date, only one book length account of each man's life has been written.<sup>10</sup> In addition to these biographies and a smattering of journal articles in musicology and American studies, a few other recent studies of American folk music, such as Stephen Wade's *The Beautiful Music All Around Us* and Ronald D. Cohen's *Rainbow Quest*, examine in some depth the Lomaxes' contributions to field recording and the folk music revival, respectively.<sup>11</sup> Still, the literature is lacking, and the research on Alan Lomax's radio work, especially, is almost non-existent. In *Romancing the Folk*, Benjamin Filene assesses a small section of Lomax's radio work done in the 1940s in conjunction with the US federal government for the war effort. Nevertheless, there exists no comprehensive study of Alan Lomax's plentiful and highly varied radio work. As Dave Samuelson points out in his liner notes to the Rounder Records CD reissue of *The Martins and The Coys* ballad opera, Lomax's radio broadcasts are among his least known activities today, despite the fact that they were heard by millions and were tremendously influential in their time.<sup>12</sup> John Szwed's biography of Alan, *The Man Who Recorded the World*, places considerably more emphasis on Lomax's song collecting activities than on his radio productions (only a handful of Lomax's radio programmes are even mentioned by name). Even Lomax himself gave his radio work short shrift, making only a few brief mentions to radio in his 1960 autobiographical essay, 'Saga of a Folksong Hunter'.

Lomax possessed a uniquely populist but also frequently contradictory perspective about folk music and his mission as a folklorist. Filene describes Lomax as having been driven by a 'two sided mission' to preserve and popularize folk music.<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, he viewed himself as a caretaker of an endangered folk music heritage, whose job it was to document those songs and related oral histories before they disappeared. On the other hand, he also saw himself as someone who needed to protect those traditions by bringing them to as large an audience as possible, where the music and musicians might find an appreciative audience and continue on through widespread cultural dissemination. According to Szwed, it was Lomax's belief that 'folklorists should be interpreters to the world outside the folk communities, but they should also champion these peoples who are subject to the control of the modern world'.<sup>14</sup> This championing took the form of publicity through the press, commercial recordings, concerts and perhaps most importantly, radio. Particularly during the 1930s and 1940s, Lomax aggressively promoted the folk music and history that he recorded, and sincerely wanted to bring it to as wide an audience as possible. In fact, he and his father not only recorded musicians like Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie, they actively promoted and even managed their careers. Alan also produced folk music recordings for commercial record companies like Decca and Columbia Records. He promoted large scale concerts of folk music in places like New York's Carnegie Hall, in a deliberate effort to bring the traditional music of poor, rural whites and blacks to an urban, upper middle class, white audience.

While all accounts depict Lomax as a man deeply committed to social equality, his championing of racial and ethnic minority cultures sometimes took on

problematic overtones. In order to make this music and these musicians palatable for a new audience, the Lomaxes have been accused of manipulating performers to preserve their 'authenticity'. They did this, on the one hand, by avoiding any hint of commercial influences while, on the other hand, making their singing more accessible by diluting the harsher 'folk' elements, including any impenetrable native dialect.<sup>15</sup> They also problematically emphasized the Otherness of African American performers, especially, in order to play into existing racial stereotypes and garner media attention. For instance, Lead Belly's convict past was focused upon heavily, and he was often depicted by the Lomaxes as animalistic, motivated only by a primitive drive for sex and violence.<sup>16</sup> Some of their ideas about other cultures were simply naïve in the way they romantically glorified the past and innate qualities of race and ethnicity. Nevertheless, for better or worse, Alan Lomax forcefully asserted his personal vision of American folk music, and with it his reading of America's history and culture, onto an increasingly receptive mass audience.<sup>17</sup>

It was not only a very particular vision that Lomax promoted but also a highly politicized one, informed by left wing ideals of pluralist democracy and cultural diversity. Not surprising for a folkie in the post war period, Lomax was long suspected of being a communist by the FBI and, later while living in the UK, by MI5.<sup>18</sup> While his exact political views remain uncertain, he was most certainly a liberal progressive and an unabashed populist who believed in the dignity of the common individual and the need for all people to be treated with respect, regardless of race, gender or class. 'When are we going to realize that the world's richest resource is mankind itself, and that all of his creations, his culture is the most valuable?' Lomax wrote in 1960. 'And by this I do not mean culture with a capital "C" that body of art which the critics have selected out of the literate traditions of Western Europe but rather the total accumulation of man's fantasy and wisdom'.<sup>19</sup> In particular, Lomax saw folk music as a means through which cultural diversity could be exposed and the voices of the oppressed could find a much needed platform to be heard. Folk song provided a window into the experience of the common people, and through listening to and appreciating it, he believed the rest of society would develop respect and understanding for those social groups. It was an Enlightenment inspired perspective that focused on embracing multiculturalism as a way of transcending barriers of race and class, rather than dismantling them politically or economically.

Lomax believed in what he called an 'international "vox humana"'<sup>20</sup> or common voice through which everyone could hear the rest of the world singing. He believed that music was 'pan human' and that by encountering difference through musical performance, people would develop mutual understanding, trust and respect.<sup>21</sup> Notably, it was the recording technology, records and broadcasting that enabled this voice to be captured and shared. These ideas culminated in the project that dominated the later years of his life: the Global Jukebox, a freely accessible, interactive, multimedia online archive of the world's musical, dance and speech styles.<sup>22</sup> Lomax's interest in bringing together an international range of cultural material presaged the now widespread utopian conceptions of 'world music' by decades.

Lomax was an academic but it would be most accurate to refer to him as a public intellectual, in that he directed most of his work towards a popular rather

than scholarly audience and he spent the majority of his career working either for government or commercial institutions. He studied at the University of Texas Austin, Harvard University, Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania, and later in life his archives, under the banner of the Association for Cultural Equity (ACE), became housed at Hunter College of the City University of New York. He regularly lectured at prominent anthropology and folklore conferences like the Modern Language Association, and he received support from some of the luminaries in these fields, including Margaret Mead and Benjamin Botkin. However, Lomax was something of a vagabond, at least professionally, and he eschewed a traditional academic career. He had little interest in a slow and studied scholarly life. And the feeling was mutual: many academics nurtured a distaste for Lomax and, among other things, accused him of using questionable methods and violating academic standards.<sup>23</sup> For instance, his collecting methods were criticized as being sloppy: he often failed to properly specify sources; he took creative license with materials, combining lyrics from different renditions of folk songs; he sometimes recorded only a few verses of a song rather than the entire performance; and so on. More gravely, he and his father were accused of being unduly manipulative and even aggressive in their song collecting, by pushing performers to record specific songs in a particular way, goading them to play multiple takes and for long periods of time, recreating artificial settings in order to secure the recordings they wanted and even getting armed guards to force prisoners to sing on command.<sup>24</sup> Suffice it to say that Lomax was criticized by the scholarly community for being too much of an interventionist, a characteristic that extended to his own unusually high profile public persona and activities in the mass media.

Particularly from the 1930s to the 1960s, Lomax's tireless crusading for folk music turned him into a celebrity in his own right. Szwed hails him as the 'poet laureate of the folk'.<sup>25</sup> In addition to producing concerts and commercial recordings for other artists, he himself was a musician who regularly appeared in concert and on the radio alongside the likes of Guthrie and Seeger. Despite never achieving significant personal success as a balladeer, he released numerous records under his own name and with his skiffle group, The Ramblers. His early field collecting work for the LOC alone cemented his reputation with many musicians, intellectuals and folk music aficionados. Indeed, those recordings were released and re-released in the USA and abroad in various formats throughout the 1930s-1960s, and today remain among the most treasured of American roots music recordings. He also co-authored, along with his father, a series of influential songbooks, including *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (1934) and *Folk Song: USA* (1947), which were crucial resources for the folk music revivals of the 1940s-1970s and helped establish the canon of American folk song.<sup>26</sup> In addition, he published *Mister Jelly Roll* in 1950, a biography of the New Orleans composer, pianist and jazz legend Jelly Roll Morton that was pioneering in its use of an oral history approach, and which received near universal critical acclaim.<sup>27</sup> He made some appearances on television over the years, but his greatest reach and impact was without a doubt through the medium of radio.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Lomax wrote, produced or hosted hundreds of hours of radio programming that aired on each of the major US national networks: Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), National Broadcasting Company

(NBC), American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and Mutual Broadcasting System (Mutual or MBS). In addition, he produced broadcasts for the Library of Congress' Radio Research Project in the early 1940s, as well as for the Office of War Information (OWI) and the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) during the Second World War. Lomax's career in radio began early: he was commissioned by CBS in 1939, when he was just 24 years old, to write and direct 25 weekly episodes about American folk music for the network's *American School of the Air* series. It was a lavish production, co produced with the Board of Education of New York City and distributed to 120,000 classrooms across the country. Lomax hosted and sang songs, backed by a large cast of actors, commentators, singers and a symphony orchestra conducted by Bernard Herrmann with compositions written by composers including Aaron Copland.<sup>28</sup> Lomax claimed to have little control in the development of the series and hated the 'folk symphonic' result, calling it an out of date, elitist 'colossal failure'.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the experience opened his eyes to the potential of radio and, more importantly, exposed him to a nation of listeners, as well as radio producers who seemingly lined up to work with him. Some of the programmes he would go on to produce, such as *Back Where I Come From* (CBS, 1940-1941; written and co produced with Nicholas Ray, later famous as a film director) and *Hootenanny of the Air* (CBS, 1947), were fairly straightforward musical revue type entertainment shows. Generally speaking, though, Lomax was leery of commercialism and preferred programming that included an educational component. A number of his American network radio productions were disc jockey style broadcasts, such as *Your Ballad Man* (Mutual, 1948-1949), where Lomax spun records interspersed with his thoughts on the US musical traditions and cultural history. Others, including *The Land is Bright* (CBS, 1944), were radio dramas that wove together patriotic stories about America's cultural heritage with studio performances of folk music.<sup>30</sup> As Szwed explains, Lomax genuinely believed 'that he could write in the voices of ordinary people [in a way] that would capture their intelligence and the artfulness of their speech without condescension'.<sup>31</sup> He wrote countless dramatic scripts for radio that were seemingly guided by this belief that he was giving voice to the voiceless, and in the process educating society at large about the plight of the common man.

Indeed, Lomax had a special talent for combining the educational and the entertaining. David Gregory describes Lomax the radio producer as a master of packaging serious explorations of folk music and vernacular culture as entertainment.<sup>32</sup> Lomax's narratives routinely took the form of a journey, inviting listeners along on an exciting adventure through exotic lands populated by unusual characters. For example, the 'Dancing Around the World' episode of *Your Ballad Man* (Mutual, 1948) begins with a harmonica and guitar mimicking the sound of a railroad train, quickly followed by Lomax, as host, issuing a call to action in his folksy accent. 'Get on board, little children, and ride with me', he proclaims. 'This is Alan Lomax, your ballad man, inviting you for a ride on the folk song train. The train that runs wherever the people sing, wherever the people make their music'. Lomax is anything but a stuffy intellectual; speaking in a warm Southern drawl, he is energetic and charismatic, calling on his audience to get up and dance. The format is fast paced, mixing snippets of a variety of pre recorded folk songs with

Lomax's narration, sound effects and a few stray lines of local dialogue for comic or dramatic effect. The programme proceeds through songs from 20 countries in 20 languages, and Lomax manages to provide an impressive amount of information about the different cultures he visits. However, this eclectic, breezy, whimsical style led to criticisms of oversimplification and distortion.<sup>33</sup> In his attempts to communicate with a mass public, Lomax would often make sweeping generalizations that ignored the complexities offered by more subtle analyses. He was also criticized for being careless of the distinction between source and revival singers, often having more polished revivalists like Burl Ives, Pete Seeger, his sister Bess Lomax Hawes or even himself perform in studio in the place of actual source singers or field recordings. Lomax's attempts to sugar coat the educational content, so it would go down easier, succeeded in getting it heard by a sizable audience, but it did not sit well with many scholars and folk music purists. This tension is perhaps one of the reasons why Alan and his father have been under recognized in the academic literature.

### **Interpreting America for the British Allies: Lomax and the BBC in the 1940s**

It has long been said that politics makes strange bedfellows, and certainly war does too. The Second World War brought many of America's most prominent cultural workers, including Lomax and numerous radical Leftists from the folk movement, into the service of the US Government. There, they were tasked to produce patriotic and anti fascist propaganda thinly veiled as entertainment, both to build up public support for the war and to sustain the morale of the troops fighting abroad.<sup>34</sup> The war effort also opened up unprecedented collaborations between foreign media producers, most notably the British public service broadcaster, the BBC, and the American commercial broadcasting networks, such as CBS and NBC. Michele Hilmes has highlighted how these wartime transnational co productions emerged in large part out of the unique circumstances of the joint war effort between these two Allied nations. It was an otherwise unlikely convergence between two mass media systems – British public service broadcasting and American commercial broadcasting – that are usually positioned as opposites.<sup>35</sup> These wartime productions, Hilmes argues, developed many innovations in radio form and practice, particularly in terms of the radio feature format and the use of news reporting and dramatic documentary content. They also led to continued transnational collaborations between radio professionals after the war. Indeed, it was through these co productions that Lomax was first brought to the attention of the BBC and influential radio producers like D.G. Bridson.<sup>36</sup> These programmes also stand as some of the first instances of popular music forms and the voices and culture of 'the people', including the working class and racial and ethnic minorities, being represented on the BBC. Following the war, these perspectives would gradually find more space on British airwaves, in particular through Lomax's 1950s' radio programmes. So, what were some of these wartime radio programmes that Lomax was involved in and how might they be seen to operate as a form of transnational public sphere?



Lomax's radio work for the US Government, and in particular his experimentation with documentary style audio techniques, actually precedes his official duties with the OWI and AFRS. He was, of course, no stranger to government service, having been employed by the Library of Congress in the late 1930s and early 1940s. While still at the LOC in 1941, he was involved in the Radio Research Project, an experiment in popular education that was spearheaded by Librarian of Congress Archibald MacLeish and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>37</sup> The goal was to create programming that would support the war effort by celebrating the history and traditions of local American communities and their place in the nation. It had a secondary purpose of publicizing the LOC's resources to the American population. In a little over a year, 50 programmes were produced and aired, free of charge, over local and national networks.<sup>38</sup> Also involved in the Radio Research Project were Philip H. Cohen and Charles T. Harrell, both of whom had recently trained at the BBC in its documentary unit.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, during the 1930s, the British had begun experimenting with new techniques for news reporting and documentary radio, including the use of actuality sound (i.e. sound recorded on location) and interviews that let ordinary people speak for themselves.<sup>40</sup> This was in advance of the American commercial networks, which only really ventured into regular news programming and the interview/discussion and documentary formats during and after the war.<sup>41</sup> While it is unclear exactly how much influence Cohen's and Harrell's BBC training had on the resulting programmes, Lomax himself claimed that documentary radio 'is one of the ways in which the British Broadcasting Corporation has helped to keep the attention of the British people focused sharply and passionately on the war effort. We might well follow their example'.<sup>42</sup> In the least, a transnational exchange of production knowledge and skill had been established even prior to the full on co productions that were soon to develop.

What is most significant here is that the Radio Research Project team focused on recording the actual voices and opinions of ordinary citizens, and developed new field recording and editing techniques to present these voices in an unadulterated fashion. These programmes wove together unscripted interviews, actuality sound, folk songs recorded in the field and voice over narration to create some of the earliest examples of contemporary documentary radio in the USA. In particular, the programmes in the *America in the Summer of 1941* series, which was developed by Lomax (with some scripts written by Lomax and others by a young Arthur Miller), explored topics such as rural music festivals, shipbuilding, mine safety, migrant worker camps, African American labour strikes and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) project. In the episode 'Mister Ledford and the TVA', for instance, rural farmers were allowed to freely voice their criticisms of the TVA, the federal government and urban elites.<sup>43</sup> These programmes hint at new conceptions of the public interest, including a focus on regional culture, ordinary citizens and actual events. They also introduced American radio of the 1940s to new documentary production techniques, as well as inclusion of the actual voices of the lower classes and racial and ethnic minorities (and even hints of radical politics). And they did so by borrowing at least a little bit of inspiration and technique from the British.

The Archive of American Folk Song was effectively shut down in 1942 following a political battle in the US Congress over funding, and Lomax moved to the Office of War Information (OWI). MacLeish had left the LOC to become an assistant director of what was essentially the US Government's official propaganda agency during the Second World War.<sup>44</sup> The agency was staffed with a who's who list of American writers, actors and directors, including Norman Corwin, Arthur Miller, Richard Widmark, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., John Houseman and Nicholas Ray – many of them New Deal progressives or Leftists. Lomax signed on as a radio producer for the Armed Forces Radio Service. Among his first assignments was producing and directing *People Speak to the President*, a co production between the Office of Emergency Management and the Radio Research Project. Aired in January 1942, the half hour programme compiled 'man on the street' interviews with ordinary citizens that were conducted immediately following the 7 December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor and the USA's entry into the Second World War.<sup>45</sup> It is presented as an audio letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, narrated by Jay Jostyn and featuring the actual voices of farmers, cab drivers, children and many other 'real McCoys' from across the country. Here, Lomax clearly continues the documentary format that the Radio Research Project had developed, allowing the diverse voices and opinions of ordinary citizens to stand on their own.

In 1942, the American populace was still not convinced that the USA should be involved in the war, and it was the task of the OWI to produce radio programming and other media that built support by communicating what the war was about and promoting unabashed patriotism. In addition, the OWI coordinated with the Allies, especially the UK, to produce radio shows that would help strengthen camaraderie between the former enemies. This included British produced programming that informed American audiences about British culture and confirmed Britain's commitment to war, as well as American produced programming that reflected American life to British audiences.<sup>46</sup> It was this latter set of programmes that Lomax became most involved in. Importantly, the American commercial broadcasting networks were sympathetic to the war effort and coordinated closely with the OWI and the BBC, contributing considerable airtime and resources to pro war, anti fascist programming.

One particularly elaborate co production was the series *Transatlantic Call: People to People*, which aired simultaneously on BBC and CBS from 1943 to 1945. The networks traded off episodes with the BBC producing an episode about British life and culture one week and CBS producing an episode about American life and culture the next week. In the USA, production of the series moved to a different city every other week. The famed Norman Corwin wrote, produced and hosted the first few American episodes of the series, but after he fell ill, CBS hired Alan Lomax, who had already been brought on as a writer and editor, to replace him.<sup>47</sup> Not unlike the Radio Research Project productions, the series sought to document the voices and experiences of ordinary Americans and Britons, facilitating something of a multinational, multicultural discussion among the people of these two nations. *Transatlantic Call* let ordinary citizens 'step up to the microphone and speak out', as *Time* magazine proclaimed.<sup>48</sup> However, as Hilmes describes, the production actually employed a slightly more controlled 'performed actuality' technique.<sup>49</sup> The writers would interview locals, shape their comments into a script

and then have the locals (or, sometimes, actors impersonating the locals) perform their dialogue during a live broadcast. There was tremendous oversight, and each script needed to be 'cleared by about 8 or 9 agencies'.<sup>50</sup> Lomax only worked on a handful of episodes from cities like Savannah, Georgia; Spokane, Washington; and the Lower East Side of New York City before resigning in late 1943 after a script he wrote about the TVA was censored.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Lomax much impressed the series' BBC producer, D.G. Bridson. He wrote in his memoir about Lomax:

In the first of his Transatlantic Call productions, American actuality came alive: he spoke the same language and sang the same song as Americans everywhere. More to the point, he was able to help speak that language into a microphone, and to get the full flavour of their characters across. The shows that he handled came over with the same American impress as the prose of Thomas Wolfe or the poetry of Whitman. He could interpret America because he was so American himself.<sup>52</sup>

Again, this notion arises that Lomax could write in the voices of common people albeit with a level of skill and artistry that was exceptional. Lomax's relationship with Bridson would open doors for him at the BBC in the years to come, and it also introduced the Englishman to American folk music and performers like Josh White.

Interestingly, following *Transatlantic Call*, this more open documentary style approach would disappear from much of Lomax's radio work and he would fluctuate between more didactic and theatrical productions. This is perhaps a result of the extra supervision present during the war years, as well as possibly the added time and expense of actuality sound work. Whatever the case, in 1944, Lomax embarked on a series of radio plays that were dubbed 'ballad operas': *The Man Who Went to War*, *The Martins and Coys* and *The Chisholm Trail*. These were recorded in New York City featuring American stories, songs and performers, but they were produced for the BBC and broadcast only in the UK via the Home Service. While they were staged productions that featured all star casts of actors and musicians, each of the ballad operas documented the experiences of a marginalized or overlooked segment of American society: African Americans in *The Man Who Went to War*, Appalachian mountain families in *The Martins and the Coys* (based on the Hatfield McCoy feud) and Old West cowboys in *The Chisholm Trail*.

The original idea for the ballad opera format traces back to the British radio producer Bridson, who in his memoir claims that, following *Transatlantic Call*, he wanted to move away from actuality and instead tell 'a simple sort of folk tale' composed of vernacular music and spoken dialogue.<sup>53</sup> Bridson stated that he patterned them on the eighteenth century 'ballad opera' stage genre. Lomax was only brought in to choose the music for *The Man Who Went to War*, which was written by Langston Hughes and produced by Bridson. However, Lomax and his wife, Elizabeth, took a much more active role in writing and producing the second two without Bridson. Interestingly, Lomax stated that following the failed *American School of the Air* 'folk symphonic' experiment in the 1930s, he still desired to produce a successful 'American folk opera'.<sup>54</sup> It seems that with *The Martins and the Coys* and *The Chisholm Trail*, he got that chance.<sup>55</sup> The two programmes pull folk legends from the nation's recent past (late nineteenth century) mixing traditional

folk songs, topical ballads and comic and dramatic sketches to capture the spirit of American freedom and equality. In *The Martins and The Coys*, the two feuding families put aside their differences to join the war effort and defeat Hitler. Although distinctly American stories, through a focus on themes of hardship, perseverance and sacrifice, they serve as a gesture of friendship and support for the British people then suffering through the adversity of war.

### **The ballad hunter comes to Britain: Lomax and the BBC in the 1950s**

When Alan Lomax arrived in the UK in 1950, one of his first stops was at Broadcasting House, the headquarters of the BBC. In fact, prior to his arrival, an internal BBC memo had announced Lomax's impending visit, describing him as an 'authority on American folk music, both of Negro origin and of the English settlers' and also a 'collector of folk songs, writer, singer, lecturer and archivist to the Library of Congress'. The memo further advised programme producers that he would be 'fully competent to undertake a feature programme or illustrated talk, possibly for the Third Programme'.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, within a few months, Lomax was on the air, and over the next seven years, he would contribute to over 100 episodes of radio programming for the BBC, many of them for the Third Programme. In addition to his professional credentials, Lomax's connections with BBC personnel like producer D.G. Bridson and reporter Alistair Cooke (whom he had met many years before through Jelly Roll Morton) certainly would have warranted such a memo. But it does not quite explain why the BBC would suddenly welcome folk music and American folk music, at that after giving it scant attention over the years, even after the success of the wartime folk programmes.

Among the possible reasons that the BBC would have been so willing to turn its airwaves over to Lomax in the early 1950s is that foreign folk culture, particularly African American folk culture, was beginning to gain scholarly credibility. Even relatively popular American folk musicians were then still considered non-commercial, and precisely because it was foreign it was deemed educational.<sup>57</sup> That is, these were not the commercial pop hits of the day; the programmes were framed as ethnography rather than entertainment. Moreover, since many of Lomax's programmes were produced for the Third Programme the BBC's 'high brow' network it was presumed that listeners were relatively sophisticated and willing to be educated.<sup>58</sup> A majority of Lomax's programmes resembled the educational format of earlier Lomax shows like *Your Ballad Man*, albeit with a more serious tone. These featured Lomax as disc jockey/host, rounding up an assortment of recordings many of them field recordings that he himself had made from a specific country or region, while adding anecdotes about the local history and culture. Many of these shows were drawn directly from his ongoing archival and field collecting in Europe for *The Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music* series; broadcasts included *Folk Music of Yugoslavia* (1953), *The Folk Music of Spain* (1953-1954), *Spanish Folk Music* (1953), *The Folk Music of Canada* (1954) and *The Folk Music of Italy* (1955), to name a few.<sup>59</sup>

Interestingly, after an initial handful of shows about American and foreign folk music, the BBC allowed Lomax to turn the focus inward to English, Irish, Scottish

and Welsh folk music: *I Hear Scotland Sing* (1951), *The Gaelic West* (1952), *A Ballad Hunter Looks at Britain* (1957) and *As I Roved Out* (1953–1958). This was folk music of the working class variety, not aristocratic folk music, and it was a cultural heritage that had received scant attention prior to the American's arrival.<sup>60</sup> It seems as though Lomax's conception of folk spread quickly, however, and the BBC and British listeners responded appreciatively. Following Lomax's programmes on English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh folk music, the BBC commissioned other similar programmes on British folk music and working class culture. Also, all evidence suggests that Lomax's programmes were well received. In addition to being reviewed positively by the London newspapers and *Melody Maker*, the BBC and the local music press received a high volume of letters expressing support for Lomax's programmes or asking to identify specific songs he played and how to acquire them.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the BBC kept hiring him. And Lomax did not come cheap; there were a number of years where Lomax's contracts drained the budget, yet the broadcaster chose to hire him over other, cheaper English folk music scholars.<sup>62</sup>

The primary focus in this article is on the smaller segment of programmes that Lomax made for the BBC and which directly incorporated American folk music and culture. As I have suggested, these likely found acceptance within the BBC early on because their focus was foreign and, thus, educational. One particularly highly acclaimed three part series that Lomax produced was *The Art of the Negro* (1951). A documentary style oral history of black America, it combined Lomax's LOC field recordings (most of them unreleased in the UK at that time) with his narration and unscripted interviews (recorded a number of years prior) from Sonny Boy Williamson, Memphis Slim and Big Bill Broonzy speaking frankly about Southern black life. The programme had a strong social activism dimension to it; it was a forceful indictment of Southern racism and, apparently, was extraordinarily popular and influential in the UK. The final episode, 'Blues in the Mississippi Night', was particularly resonant.<sup>63</sup> Roberta Schwartz credits the 'Blues in the Mississippi Night' broadcast with establishing an entire generation of British blues fans' impressions of the American South and the environment that created the blues.<sup>64</sup>

Other programmes were simply designed to bring the UK audience up to speed on the US folk music revival, which listeners had begun to get exposed to during the war. Indeed, the first few of Lomax's programmes for the BBC – an episode in the *Traditional Ballads* series and the three part series *Adventure in Folk Song* (1951) – provided a broad survey of American folk music from the 1930s to the present. Notably, these programmes featured Lomax and friends performing the music themselves, live in the studio. This is a practice that Lomax had previously been criticized for – replacing source singers with revivalists – but here it served a particular purpose. Under pressure from the UK Musicians' Union and other performance rights organizations, the BBC had tight 'needle time' restrictions that limited the amount of recorded music that could be broadcast.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Lomax was somewhat uniquely positioned to provide the BBC with the type of folk music programming that he did: not only was he an authority on foreign folk songs and culture who could also provide engaging first person accounts about, say, Lead Belly or life in the American South, but he was a seasoned broadcaster who could himself perform the traditional songs he was discussing in order to get around the prohibitive needle time regulations.

A final grouping of programmes emphasized the transnational dimensions of folk music and culture, in particular the similarities between British and American folk song traditions. Folk music is often associated with local or national identities. Indeed, Lomax typically framed American folk music as a uniquely American national form during the early part of his career, and also during the war effort.<sup>66</sup> In series like *Patterns in American Folk Song* (1951) and *Ballads and Blues* (1953), though, folk music became almost cosmopolitan. Here, Lomax, joined by Robin Roberts in *Patterns* and Ewan MacColl in *Ballads and Blues*, sought to demonstrate the similarities and parallels between older British folk songs and contemporary American ones.<sup>67</sup> In this way, Lomax was indicating that the transnational elaboration of folk music that was occurring in the post war period – via the British folk music revival and his own presence as an American promoting foreign folk music in Britain – was actually a historical phenomenon that had been ongoing for centuries and transcended nation states. In other words, folk music was world music.

### **After Alan: the British folk music revival and the radio ballads**

Lomax's radio programmes had a lasting impact on British media and culture, directly influencing the British folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s and the development of new radio production practices.<sup>68</sup> In particular, this would include the skiffle movement, which was firmly rooted in the American blues, folk and jazz music that Lomax helped popularize. Along with collaborators like the BBC producer D.G. Bridson, Lomax also had a hand in developing innovative production practices that would anticipate radio feature and documentary forms that are still widely used today. These include the weaving together of actuality material, sound effects, scripted dialogue and traditional songs into radio programmes that were part documentary, part musical theatre. The widely acclaimed 'radio ballad' form that emerged in the late 1950s – associated with the production team of Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger – has direct links to Lomax's earlier 'ballad operas', both in aesthetic style and personnel. Yet, these connections have been almost entirely unacknowledged. I hope that this article begins to fill in those gaps in the existing popular music and radio studies scholarship.

There were a series of folk music revivals in the USA from the 1930s to the 1970s. The Great Depression and the subsequent New Deal era spurred the initial widespread interest in folk music, which turned the likes of Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly, Josh White, Burl Ives and Pete Seeger into stars during the late 1930s and 1940s. The Lomaxes, as I have discussed, were integral in both collecting and popularizing this 'people's music'.<sup>69</sup> Following the war, these developments continued, and in some ways, folk music gained even greater acceptance within the mainstream 'official culture' due to the role it played in building popular support for the war effort. The ensuing cold war and the anti communist political atmosphere, though, dampened some of the movement's more activist politics. The full blown 'folk revival' that most people refer to today – that of Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, the Weavers, Peter, Paul and Mary, and the anti Vietnam war movement – began in the late 1950s and peaked in the mid 1960s. Alan Lomax had his hand in this movement, too, particularly in supplying the raw materials (i.e. the recordings and

songbooks) that would inspire a new generation of singer songwriters. Much of the new music that emerged, however, did not reflect his more utopian beliefs about the political and historical meanings of folk music.

The UK did not experience much of the initial American folk revival(s) first hand. Like jazz, before it in the 1920s and 1930s, the BBC was initially ambivalent towards the blues and rhythm and blues, especially, and gave them practically no airtime.<sup>70</sup> The existence of a single, centralized national broadcaster meant that if the BBC did not programme it, it was not widely heard. Exposure to American folk music (and, eventually, rock'n'roll) via Radio Luxembourg or the Armed Forces Network was a possibility, but such content was still relatively sporadic. In the immediate post war period, there was actually a tightening up against the US and other foreign influence at the BBC: all the US produced shows were dropped immediately after the war and programmers were instructed to 'restore [the BBC's] former decorum', as well as increase the coverage of British made music.<sup>71</sup> Pop music did begin to receive increased airtime during the late 1940s and 1950s, but the earliest 'pop radio' in the UK typically meant lighter fare like big band dance music, not folk, blues and the like. Only around 1957 did the BBC begin giving regular airtime to youth oriented pop music like skiffle though only in special interest programmes, such as *Saturday Club* (1957 1969) and *Easy Beat* (1960 1967), that were separated from the mainstream programming.<sup>72</sup> It was not until the mid 1960s, years after Lomax's tenure was over, that offshore commercial broadcasters, or 'pirates,' like Radio Caroline emerged, broadcasting heavily Americanized rock and pop music to the masses developments that would, in part, lead to the significant restructuring of the BBC in the late 1960s, which included a more liberal attitude towards pop music.<sup>73</sup>

It is notable that most of these changes happened only in the very late 1950s or 1960s, though. American folk music records were not widely available in the UK before the 1950s. For instance, none of Lead Belly's recordings were released in the UK until 1949 well over a decade after they had been issued in the USA to widespread acclaim and the singer never toured Britain.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, Josh White, who had also earned considerable success in the USA during the 1930s, did not find fame in the UK until a concert tour in 1950.<sup>75</sup> The label Topic Records, an offshoot of the communist Workers' Music Association, issued some American folk and blues records beginning in 1939.<sup>76</sup> Other independent record labels, such as Tempo, started up after the Second World War and specialized in blues, folk and jazz.<sup>77</sup> Most of these labels had extremely limited distribution networks, however, selling primarily in specialty shops to a small niche of collectors, and thus their reach was rather restricted.

This discrepancy is at least in part due to the fact that conceptions of 'folk' music and culture developed along very different lines in the USA and the UK. From the early 1900s up to the Second World War, the British folk revival, spear headed by folklorist Cecil Sharp and the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), focused on traditional dance music associated primarily with upper class gentility and eighteenth century Romanticism.<sup>78</sup> In other words, apart from the shared origins in rural locales, this was elitist, aristocratic culture, not the populist, lower class folk culture found in the USA. It was also a culture rooted in the distant past: folk music was viewed as pre modern, not something that existed in the

present. When Lomax arrived in the UK, he realized that there was no national sound archive of contemporary British folk music akin to that which he had helped build in the USA at the LOC.

Nevertheless, during the 1940s and early 1950s, a number of young UK folklorists and intellectuals were at work studying and collecting field recordings of working class folk music that fit more with the American conception of the term. This group included Peter Kennedy, Brian George, Seamus Ennis and Ewan MacColl (né Jimmie Miller).<sup>79</sup> Lomax was quick to collaborate with them, and their contributions were crucial to many of the BBC radio programmes that Lomax would make about English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh folk music in the years to come. In fact, Lomax discovered that the BBC had quietly been collecting field recordings of folk music for years and incorporating them into the BBC Permanent Recordings Library.<sup>80</sup> Yet, it took the American Lomax to get the BBC to produce radio programming centred around this folk music of Britain's own lower class citizens.

The folk music revival really took off in the UK during the early and mid 1950s, thanks at least partly to the promotional efforts of Lomax, along with Kennedy, MacColl and associates. It inspired a hybrid style, skiffle, which had its roots in an American style of music from the early 1900s, but here took on a uniquely British form: a lively guitar based style that merged New Orleans jazz and country blues. Although only popular for a few years in the mid to late 1950s, it inspired a generation of young musicians (John Lennon, Jimmy Page and Van Morrison, to name just a few) and set the stage for the mid 1960s wave of British rock'n'roll bands known as the British Invasion.<sup>81</sup> Skiffle was heavily indebted to American artists like Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie, who were practically unheard in Britain before Lomax's radio broadcasts.<sup>82</sup>

Lomax was hardly alone in facilitating the British folk revival. However, a number of authors have cited his 1950 arrival in the UK as a pivotal moment in the trajectory of the movement.<sup>83</sup> A central character with Lomax's zeal for popularizing folk music, combined with his reputation and professional connections, seems to have been missing from the British scene prior to his arrival. Lomax's storied work with the LOC, combined with his existing relationships with high ranking BBC staff like Bridson and his prior broadcasting experience, seemingly made him a safe and logical choice for the BBC in 1950. Outside of broadcasting, Lomax's connections in the USA helped get many of the first British folk revival recordings made: commercial British record companies were not interested in them, and so Lomax hooked up musicians like A.L. Lloyd and Ewan MacColl with American labels, which then exported the records back to the UK where they built a following that eventually led to domestic releases.<sup>84</sup> Even MacColl, who had been a successful actor and playwright since the 1930s and who is regularly cited as one of the pioneers, if not *the* leader, of the British folk song revival of the 1950s, gives credit to Lomax. MacColl's first meeting with Lomax 'produce[d] a major upheaval in my life', he wrote in his autobiography.<sup>85</sup> Lomax not only introduced MacColl to a wealth of American and world folk music, but also pushed him out of the confines of the avant garde theatre to become a popular singer songwriter. Whatever the case, Lomax was a uniquely transnational figure, in that he championed British folk music while also imposing a strong American influence on the English folk revival scene.



Lomax's influence is perceptible in another fabled realm of British culture from the mid century: the 'radio ballads' that the production team of MacColl, Charles Parker, and Peggy Seeger made for the BBC between 1958 and 1964. This series of eight programmes has been held up as among the most valuable product of the British folk music movement and a landmark in the development of the radio feature format.<sup>86</sup> Each episode focused on the experiences of ordinary, working class citizens in obscure and overlooked segments of British society: railroad workers (*The Ballad of John Axon*, 1957), road builders (*Song of a Road*, 1958), fishermen (*Singing the Fishing*, 1959), miners (*The Big Hewer*, 1960), polio sufferers (*The Body Blow*, 1961) teenagers (*On the Edge*, 1964), professional boxers (*The Fight Game*, 1963) and gypsies (*The Travelling People*, 1964). The programmes melded actuality sound – sound effects and interviews with ordinary people, all of which were entirely unscripted and recorded in the field – to folk songs that provided poignant musical commentary. While the actuality sound itself was not scripted, it was all intricately edited into a drama filled, poetic narrative held together by song – hence the 'ballad' moniker. These programmes certainly took actuality sound and documentary audio techniques to new heights. In particular, the last few episodes of the series featured innovative uses of audio montage, with collages of sounds cross cutting from speaker to speaker without fades.

Nevertheless, the basic marriage of the unscripted talk of ordinary people with traditional folk songs was something that Lomax and various colleagues had been doing on radio, in some form or another, since the early 1940s. *The Art of the Negro* would be a particularly strong example here of this actuality style. The ballad operas are perhaps the programmes closest to the radio ballads in overall structure. Even though the ballad operas were scripted radio plays and the radio ballads were documentaries, they both utilized a dramatic narrative structure that poetically wove together dialogue and song. And despite being scripted and performed by actors, the ballad operas covered similar subject matter – simple living and hard work – and strove to faithfully replicate 'authentic' speech. It is notable, too, that the radio ballads used folk music with a strong American bent – including even some American traditionals – in a series that otherwise embraced a distinct sense of British nationalism.

Yet, few scholars or critics have made connections between Lomax's radio work and the radio ballads.<sup>87</sup> And the connections are plentiful. Beyond the aesthetic similarities, Lomax worked with Parker, MacColl and Seeger separately before the trio collaborated together. As discussed, Lomax heavily influenced and promoted MacColl's folk singing career. The pair had also collaborated together on earlier BBC radio productions, such as *Ballads and Blues* (1953). Lomax brought MacColl into the production of *Sing Christmas and the Turn of the Year* (1957), where MacColl first met producer Charles Parker.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, it was Lomax who first introduced MacColl and Peggy Seeger (an American who is the half sister of musician, and close Lomax friend, Pete Seeger), when he brought Seeger to England to play banjo in a BBC television production of the play *Dark of the Moon*.<sup>89</sup> Seeger and MacColl later married. Thus, the radio ballads not only bore the imprint of Lomax's folk aesthetic and worldview, but he was also something of a matchmaker who brought the production team together. The radio ballads of

Parker, MacColl and Seeger remain a touchstone in the long form radio documentary/feature format that has flourished in recent decades.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

Lomax's radio work for the BBC – both that produced in the USA during the Second World War and in the UK during the post war period – contributed to the formation of a space of public, transnational discourse. In the case of the war time programmes, including *Transatlantic Call* and the ballad operas, it would be easy to write them off as nothing more than propaganda – produced as they were by national broadcasters in cahoots with governments pushing a pro war agenda. Yet, it cannot be ignored that these programmes were also informed, at least in subtle ways, by the political beliefs and practices of creative artists and folklorists like Lomax who were motivated by decidedly more populist notions of culture. The simple act of placing the voices, music, culture and experiences of ordinary people on the airwaves – in a celebratory manner, no less – was a remarkable change compared to the broadcasting status quo of the 1920s and 1930s, especially in Britain. Moreover, despite the strong patriotic themes of all these broadcasts, the emphasis was ultimately placed on transnational fellowship and mutual support, not xenophobia or isolationism. After all, the aim of radio programmes like *The Man Who Went to War*, *The Martins and Coys* and *The Chisholm Trail* was to encourage pro American understanding and camaraderie among the British public, especially once the USA officially entered the war and American troops (and the culture they brought with them, including Armed Forces radio) began arriving in Britain.<sup>91</sup> This emphasis on the 'folk' and on transatlantic cultural understanding was a significant shift away from the BBC's typical high culture, pro empire broadcasting. And even in the USA, the folk music movement and the culture of non urban, lower class and racial and ethnic minority peoples were still struggling to find a foothold in the mainstream media of the 1940s.

The documentary format programmes (e.g. *Transatlantic Call* and *The Art of the Negro*) quite literally pull together a plurality of voices from various strata of society, in some cases, even adopting a discussion like structure. Other programmes (e.g. *The Man Who Went to War*, *The Martins and the Coys* and *The Chisholm Trail*), while scripted and performed by actors, nonetheless aim to give voice to those in society who are typically underrepresented: the poor, the geographically isolated, women, racial and ethnic minorities. Lomax clung to the Enlightenment ideal that consensus, if not even true equality, could be achieved through encountering difference – that is, through making the views and experiences of these diverse social groups known. There are, of course, strong criticisms to be made here. Such idealized notions do not adequately account for exclusions and restrictions based on gender, race and ethnicity, and class. Access to mass media platforms like radio is still restricted to a relative elite of mostly upper middle class, educated, white males. The ventriloquial notion of someone like Lomax writing or speaking 'in the voices of ordinary people', as John Szwed has suggested that Lomax believed he could do, is more than a little problematic.<sup>92</sup> Even in the documentary programmes where speakers were unscripted, power and control – in terms of editing

and the final say over what was heard and how it was framed remained with a limited number of producers like Lomax. Even if he and his colleagues were operating under the best of intentions, as it appears they were, it would be naïve to view these radio programmes (or any others) as truly egalitarian. Yet, however imperfect they may have been, Lomax's BBC radio productions collectively stand out as a unique and bold attempt to represent the experiences of society's marginalized and overlooked, and to broaden the kinds of voices and views that were given expression in the 'official culture' of 1940s and 1950s' broadcasting.

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## Notes

1. 'Folk music' here refers broadly to a form of traditional music that encompasses a wide range of genres and styles, and not just the singer songwriter commercial music genre that has popularly been known as 'folk' since the 1960s. In the USA, this includes songs in the blues, gospel, country, cowboy, work and protest song styles. Ballads, or story songs written in a narrative form, are particularly central to folk music. It is music that is typically transmitted through an oral tradition, hence why it is often called 'traditional music'. In Western societies, it is also typically associated with the vernacular (or common) culture, especially the lower classes or racial and ethnic minorities. It is also often related to a particular locality or geographic region, such as the American South. See: Ronald D. Cohen, *Folk Music: The Basics* (New York, 2006), 1–4.
2. Lomax initially proposed that the series consists of 44–60 albums, gathered from the collections of expert musicologists the world over. Only 18 volumes in the series were completed, 6 of which were recorded by Lomax himself. These were released by Columbia Records' Masterworks between 1955 and 1964.
3. Andrew L. Kaye and Matthew Barton, 'Introduction: The 1950s: World Music', in *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings 1934–1997*, ed. Ronald D. Cohen (New York, 2003), 97.
4. E. David Gregory, 'Lomax in London: Alan Lomax, the BBC, and the Folk song Revival in England, 1950–1958', *Folk Music Journal* 8, no. 2 (2002): 136–54.
5. In addition to Gregory, some of the more notable publications exploring Lomax's career and legacy include: John Szwed, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World* (New York, 2010); Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The folk*

- Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (Amherst, MA, 2002); Benjamin Filene, 'Our Singing Country': John and Alan Lomax, 'Leadbelly, and the Construction of an American Past', *American Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1991): 602-24; Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory & American Roots* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000); and Roberta Freund Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom* (Burlington, VT, 2007).
6. The emphasis in this article is on those productions that directly incorporated US music and culture, although Lomax did also produce multiple programmes exclusively about British and other European folk music.
  7. This article is based on research done primarily in the USA; I plan to follow up in future research by exploring Lomax's work from the BBC's angle using documents from the BBC Written Archives.
  8. Alan Lomax's life and career has been documented in the following sources: Szwed; Alan Lomax, *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings 1934-1997*, ed. Ronald D. Cohen (New York, 2003); Alan Lomax, 'Saga of a Folksong Hunter: A Twenty-year Odyssey with Cylinder, Disc, and Tape', *HiFi/Stereo Review* 4, no. 5 (1960): 38-46.
  9. Ronald D. Cohen, 'General Introduction', in *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings 1934-1997*, ed. Ronald D. Cohen (New York, 2003), ix.
  10. Nolan Porterfield, *Last Cavalier: The Life and Times of John A. Lomax* (Urbana, IL, 1996); Szwed, *Alan Lomax*.
  11. Filene, 'Our Singing Country', 602-24; J.M. Mancini, "'Messin' with the Furniture Man': Early Country Music, Regional Culture, and the Search for an Anthological Modernism', *American Literary History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 208-37; Dale Carter, 'A Bridge too Far?: Cosmopolitanism and the Anglo American Folk Music Revival, 1945-65', *European Journal of American Culture* 29, no. 1 (2010): 35-52; Stephen Wade, *The Beautiful Music All Around Us: Field Recordings and the American Experience* (Urbana, IL, 2012); and Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*.
  12. 'The Martins and The Coys', Compact Disc, produced by Alan Lomax, written by Elizabeth Lyttleton, directed by Roy Lockwood (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1944). Rounder Records, 2000.
  13. Filene, 'Our Singing Country', 604.
  14. Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 218.
  15. Filene, 'Our Singing Country', 610-19; Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC, 2010), 241-74.
  16. Filene, 'Our Singing Country', 610.
  17. Filene insightfully examines how these types of promotional activities performed by Lomax and other cultural intermediaries from the 1930s to 1960s shaped the contemporary folk music canon and mainstream audiences' understanding of what is 'American', 'authentic' and 'folk' music. Their impact on the US identity and collective memory goes beyond the scope of this essay; however, key elements will be reflected in the analysis of some of the specific radio programmes found later in this article. See Filene, 'Our Singing Country'; Filene, *Romancing the Folk*.
  18. In his biography of Lomax, Szwed even suggests that Lomax's trip to Europe in 1950 was at least partly motivated by a desire to escape political persecution

and life on the Hollywood blacklist, on which his name had been placed in June 1950. See Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 250.

19. Lomax, 'Saga', 46.
20. *Ibid.*, 43.
21. Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 324.
22. The Global Jukebox was never completed, despite considerable investment from the likes of the MacArthur Foundation, the National Science Foundation, Apple and Paul Allen of Microsoft (Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 384–5). A modified version of it, The Global Jukebox Song Tree, is expected to go online in 2015.
23. Filene, 'Our Singing Country,' 619; Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 162; Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 249.
24. Filene, 'Our Singing Country', 610–9.
25. Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 389.
26. Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 190; Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 60.
27. Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 244–5.
28. *Ibid.*, 152–6.
29. Lomax, 'Saga', 40.
30. Recordings of select episodes of *Back Where I Come From*, *Hootenanny of the Air*, *Your Ballad Man*, *The Land is Bright* and other radio programmes from this period are available through the Association for Cultural Equity, <http://research.cultural-equity.org/home-radio.jsp>.
31. Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 245.
32. Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 144.
33. *Ibid.*, 162.
34. Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq* (New York, 2009), 87–140; Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 28–38.
35. Michele Hilmes, *Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting* (New York, 2012), 1–25.
36. *Ibid.*, 145–6.
37. Filene, 'Our Singing Country'; Alan Gevinson, "What the Neighbors Say": The Radio Research Project of the Library of Congress', in *Performing Arts: Broadcasting*, ed. Iris Newson (Washington, DC, 2002); Hilmes, *Network Nations*, 128–32.
38. Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 145.
39. Hilmes, *Network Nations*, 129.
40. *Ibid.*, 55; Paddy Scannell, "The Stuff of Radio": Developments in Radio Features and Documentaries before the War', in *Documentary and the Mass Media*, ed. John Corner (London, 1986), 1–26.
41. Hilmes, *Network Nations*, 136–40.
42. Quoted in Filene, *Romancing the Folk*, 263.
43. Lomax's script for 'Mister Ledford and the TVA' was selected for *Radio Drama in Action*, a collection of the best radio programmes of the early 1940s that was compiled by Erik Barnouw. The script is reprinted there and again in Lomax, *Selected Writings 1934–1997*, 77–85. See: Erik Barnouw, ed., *Radio Drama in Action: Twenty-five Plays of a Changing World* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1945).
44. Holly Cowan Shulman, *The Voice of America: Propaganda and Democracy, 1941–45* (Madison, WI, 1990), 34–52.

45. The recording of *People Speak to the President* is available through the Association for Cultural Equity, [http://research.culturalequity.org/rc b2/get radio detailed show.do?showId=5](http://research.culturalequity.org/rc%20b2/get%20radio%20detailed%20show.do?showId=5).
46. Hilmes, *Network Nations*, 141–2.
47. Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 201–3.
48. 'Radio: People to People', *Time*, 22 March 1943.
49. Hilmes, *Network Nations*, 145.
50. Lomax quoted in Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 202.
51. Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 201–3.
52. D.G. Bridson, *Prospero and Ariel: The Rise and Fall of Radio, a Personal Recollection* (London, 1971), 101.
53. *Ibid.*, 111.
54. Lomax, 'Saga', 40.
55. *The Martins and The Coys* was subsequently issued by the BBC as a six LP vinyl record set, and was reissued on CD in 2000 by Rounder Records as part of 'The Alan Lomax Collection: The Concert & Radio Series'. The recording of *The Chisholm Trail* is available through the Association for Cultural Equity, [http://research.culturalequity.org/rc b2/get radio detailed show.do?showId=9](http://research.culturalequity.org/rc%20b2/get%20radio%20detailed%20show.do?showId=9).
56. Quoted in Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 137.
57. Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 45.
58. Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2002), 67–9.
59. Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 147–9.
60. *Ibid.*, 143–9.
61. Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 45–7.
62. Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 162.
63. *Ibid.*, 140; Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 46. The 'Blues in the Mississippi Night' episode was later released on LP record in the USA (United Artists, 1957) and the UK (Nixa, 1958).
64. Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 115.
65. Stephen Barnard, *Studying Radio* (London, 2000), 26; Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 45.
66. Filene, 'Our Singing Country,' 606.
67. Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 140, 145–7.
68. Lomax's influence on the British folk revival is discussed in Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 160–3; Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 45–6, 95–8.
69. Cohen, *Folk Music*, 66.
70. Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 45.
71. Stephen Barnard, *On the Radio: Music Radio in Britain* (Philadelphia, 1989), 25.
72. *Ibid.*, 38–9.
73. Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume V: Competition* (New York, 1995), 502–15; Adrian Johns, *Death of a Pirate: British Radio and the Making of the Information Age* (New York, 2011).
74. Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 34–5.
75. Schwartz credits White's inclusion in wartime radio programmes like *The Man Who Went to War* for making him well known to Britons in the 1940s. Yet, none of his recordings were issued in the UK until 1946 and they did not sell well until the 1950s, after he toured the country and appeared in a number of new

- BBC radio programmes, such as *The Glory Road* and *My Guitar is Old As Father Time*. See Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 35–9.
76. Cohen, *Folk Music*, 95.
  77. Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*, 29–34.
  78. Cohen, *Folk Music*, 47.
  79. Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival, 1944–2002* (Burlington, VT, 2003).
  80. Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 137–40.
  81. Cohen, *Folk Music*, 98–100.
  82. Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 160.
  83. See Brocken; Cohen, *Folk Music*; Gregory, 'Lomax in London'; Schwartz, *How Britain Got the Blues*.
  84. Gregory, 'Lomax in London', 154.
  85. Ewan MacColl, *Journeyman: An Autobiography*, ed. Peggy Seeger, 2nd ed. (Manchester, 2009), 261.
  86. See Peter Cox, *Set Into Song: Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker, Peggy Seeger and the Radio Ballads* (London, 2008); Paul Long, 'British Radio and the Politics of Culture in Post War Britain: The Work of Charles Parker', *The Radio Journal* 2, no. 3 (2004), 131–52; and Rob Young, *Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music* (New York, 2010), 113–55.
  87. In his book length study of Parker, MacColl and Seeger's radio ballads, Cox acknowledges that Lomax had experimented with actuality sound and that MacColl had even been influenced by, among other things, *The Martins and the Coys*. Nevertheless, Cox distances the final radio ballad product from these influences. See Cox, 44.
  88. MacColl, *Journeyman*.
  89. *Ibid.*
  90. Siobhan McHugh, 'Oral History and the Radio Documentary/Feature: Introducing the "COHRD" Form', *The Radio Journal* 10, no. 1 (2012): 35–51.
  91. Siân Nicholas, 'Brushing Up Your Empire': Dominion and Colonial Propaganda on the BBC's Home Services, 1939–1945', in *The British World: Diaspora, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (Portland, OR, 2003), 204–26.
  92. Szwed, *Alan Lomax*, 245.

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### Notes on contributor

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