They Like to Sing the Old Songs: The A.L. Phipps Family & Its Music

David Taylor
Western Kentucky University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses
Part of the Musicology Commons, and the Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/theses/2917

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses & Specialist Projects by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
Taylor,

David Lewis

1978
THEY LIKE TO SING THE OLD SONGS:
THE A. L. PHIPPS FAMILY AND ITS MUSIC

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Center for Intercultural
and Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
David Lewis Taylor
May, 1978
AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF THESIS

Permission is hereby

☑ granted to the Western Kentucky University Library to
  make, or allow to be made photocopies, microfilm or other
  copies of this thesis for appropriate research or scholarly
  purposes.

☐ reserved to the author for the making of any copies of this
  thesis except for brief sections for research or scholarly
  purposes.

Signed __________________________

Date ________

Please place an "X" in the appropriate box.

This form will be filed with the original of the thesis and will control
future use of the thesis.
THEY LIKE TO SING THE OLD SONGS:

THE A.L. PHIPPS FAMILY AND ITS MUSIC

Recommended August 17, 1971
(Date)

Director of Thesis

Lynwood Yontz

Approved May 18, 1978

Dean of the Graduate College
An ethnographic study of the musical traditions of the A. L. Phipps Family, of Barbourville, Kentucky, reveals various social forces which have affected the family's repertoire and performance career. A life history of the family, compiled from extensive fieldwork, is presented along with analyses of the Phippses' secular music, sacred songs, and their performance career. The family is clearly representative of the musical traditions of the upland South, drawing its music from sources common to most white Appalachian singers. A discography of the Phipps Family's recordings is included along with a selection of photographs highlighting their life and performance career.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is the direct result of many enjoyable hours spent with members of the A.L. Phipps Family. Without their continued interest and assistance the entire project could not have been realized. The open sharing of the family's deep musical traditions and of their gracious hospitality made the study a labor of love, for which my deep appreciation is extended. I also wish to thank the members of my thesis committee, Drs. Lynwood Montell and Archie Green. A very special thanks is due to the director of the thesis, Dr. Burt Feintuch, who has been a continuing source of guidance and encouragement, but more important, a very special friend.

Special thanks go to all who contributed in one way or another to the successful completion of the study: Charles Wolfe, Richard Hulan, Bruce Kaplan, Janette Carter Kelley, Leo Fernandez and his Hot Tamales, Freeman Kitchens, Camilla Collins, Mary Helen Weldy, and Ruth Hardesty; to my parents, unflinching providers of encouragement and love; to George P. Mercer, who, in many ways, started it all; and especially to Linda Sims Taylor, who makes it all worthwhile.
The tradition of family singing has long appealed to many members of the diverse subcultures in the eastern United States. In many cases, it has been the result of a conscious self-isolation, wherein the family withdraws into its own music. The close ties that are thus created and maintained through this practice are perhaps only part of the compelling force behind this musical tradition. In other instances, the singing family--often encouraged by the image of a family functioning as a visible unit--has found itself before an audience the size of which it never imagined.

The singing family has occupied a place in the American country music tradition for many years and has received the attention of folklorists interested in the open manifestation of such a strong tradition. Sound recordings of singing families are almost as old as the commercial recordings of country music itself. Bill Malone, writing in his *Country Music U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History*, reveals that the family of blind fiddler-preacher Andrew Jenkins was "probably the first country music family to be recorded," having had its beginnings in the early 1920s. From the Jenkins Family came songs such as "The Death of Floyd Collins" and "Kinnie Wagner"

---

(both of which have passed into tradition) and many sacred songs. Jean Ritchie, from Viper, Perry County, Kentucky, has told the story of her own family, perhaps one of the best-known of all traditional singing families, in her Singing Family of the Cumberlands. More recent scholarship can be found in Kenneth S. Goldstein's study of some of the music of the family of the late Robert "Fiddler" Beers from the upstate New York Berkshire region, "Robert 'Fiddler' Beers and His Songs: A Study in the Revival of a Family Tradition. One of the more current treatments of a family as a singing unit is found in Leonard Roberts' Sang Branch Settlers, an eclectic compendium of the traditions of the Couch Family from Harlan and Leslie Counties, Kentucky. Undoubtedly, considering American folklorists' present recognition of the need for treatment of folkloric items (songs, for example) in their natural context, other investigations of singing families can be anticipated.

In recent years, the practice of family singing and music-making has seen an incredible growth. It cannot be denied that the folksong revival has played an integral part in the kindling of interest in singing as a family group. Largely through the medium of the

---

2 Ibid.


commercial folk music festival, many traditional musicians and singers have been drawn into the spotlight.

Firmly entrenched in the practice of family singing as well as in the folksong revival is the A. L. Phipps Family, of Barbourville, Knox County, Kentucky. Phipps, his wife, Kathleen, and usually two of their twelve children have been deeply involved with traditional music for many years. The study which follows is an investigation of the Phipps Family and of its repertoire, viewing the family as conscious preservers of a conservative brand of music.

The research methodology involved in the preparation of the study followed two approaches. First, extensive library research was undertaken, resulting in a thorough understanding of the life-style and world view prevalent in the life of much of the population of the southern mountains. This research also dealt with the rise of the country music industry in general and with the recording career of some early singing families in particular. In the course of this stage of the research, correspondence was initiated with various scholars and music promoters familiar with the family and with its career. Second, probing fieldwork was begun with members of the Phipps Family in order to establish a well-constructed life history of the family. Interviews with the Phippses and with others associated with their music took place in Barbourville, Kentucky, on the following dates: October 18 and November 1, 1975, March 20, June 23, and June 30, 1976. Also the family's musical performance was documented on two occasions: at a concert given at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, on January 28, 1976, and at the 1976 Brandywine Mountain Music Convention in Concordville, Pennsyl-
vania, where the Phippses participated in a "gospel sing" and in a Carter-Family workshop. Thus, the following discussion and analysis are the result of the study of published material as well as field interviews and observation.

I will discuss the Phippses as singers and will present a clear picture of their heritage, establishing the family as active bearers of a living tradition. After presenting them in an historical context, Chapters Two and Three proceed in analyzing the musical repertoire of the family, understanding the music as a constant reflection of the family's life-style and world view. The fourth and final chapter highlights the Phipps Family in its varied performance contexts. The special situations where the family performs are, again, manifestations of its conservative modus vivendi. Since one of the contexts of the Phippses' performance career involves recorded music, a discography will follow Chapter Four. Finally, in view of the fact that this study is concerned with the family from an historical as well as from a performance standpoint, a group of photographs will be included, reflective of the life and performance career of these singers of "old songs."

7All tapes, field notes and a video tape of the Phipps Family in concert, accumulated in the course of the research for this thesis, will be deposited in the Folklore, Folklife, and Oral History Archive at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
CHAPTER I

THE A. L. PHIPPS FAMILY: A FAMILY LIFE HISTORY

Barbourville, the home of A. L. Phipps and his family, was established as the seat of one-year-old Knox County on October 27, 1800.1 James Barbour offered to give the county two acres for a public square and thirty-six acres for a town if the court would place the county seat at the mouth of Richland Creek. . . . At the meeting of the court on January 26, 1801, the plan of the town was submitted and approved. . . . The Knox County court ordered that the town be called Barbourville in honor of its benefactor, James Barbour.2

Over a century later, when song collectors Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles arrived in Knox County in 1917,3 the family of A. L. Phipps had been in that county for almost ninety years.4 A. L.'s great-grandfather, Jacob Phipps, had emigrated from Wytheville, Virginia, between Bristol and Roanoke about 1830 and had built a log house on the banks of Stone Coal Branch. This area has come to be almost exclusively populated by his descendents. A. L. Phipps' father, James Phipps, was a singing school teacher and Baptist minister, who spent

2Ibid., pp. 7-8.
4Unless otherwise noted, the information about and quotations from the A. L. Phipps Family are the result of the various interviews with A. L. and Kathleen Phipps which were discussed in the Introduction.
thirty years in the coal mines, and, as will be seen, it was he who was primarily responsible for the development of A. L.'s love of music. The Phippses came from the Shenandoah Valley, an area which George Pullen Jackson recognized as being rich in the tradition of the singing school, and James Phipps may have been influenced by his immediate ancestors in his mastery of the shape-note system of singing.

The marriage of James Phipps to Ida Hughes in 1905 resulted in eight children, five of whom survived infancy: Loyal, Earl, Ethel, Arthur Lee, and Gladys. A. L.'s mother, whose family had come to Knox County from Tennessee, seems to have played only a marginal role in his formative years unlike the powerful influence exerted on him by his strict, disciplinarian father. In addition to these behavioral qualities, A. L. remembers his father and grandfather as being physically very tall men, a characteristic which he attributes to all his male ancestors. "They weren't giants, but they were the next thing to it."

James Phipps, true to his vocation as a singing-school teacher, insisted that his family be familiar with the shape-note system. In order to guarantee this, he wrote in chalk the shapes and names of all the notes below the mantle on the family's fireplace. A. L. remembers,

My father, back when I was just a small child, . . . after World War I, . . . he put those shape-notes up on the arch of the fireplace . . . all the way across. I learned those notes just from the shape, just looking at them, and the rest of the family did the same.

As with much of his music, A. L. attributes his ability to some innate

---

sense, over which he has little control. "It just came inside of me. Nobody said, 'This is how you pitch it,' at all . . . . This scale came in my mind."

It is hardly surprising that many of the same musical and religious forces were at work with members of another family who one day would be the mentors of the A. L. Phipps Family, the Carters.

Music was an important part of . . . those Baptist sects, and a number of Carters were preachers, singing school instructors, and choir members . . . . Flanders Bays [A. P. Carter's uncle] . . . was a music teacher and taught A. P. a good deal about singing as well as how to sing the shape notes. 6

Today the Phipps Family is able to continue as active bearer of the shape-note tradition. Kathleen Phipps was also taught by her father-in-law following her marriage to A. L. since, "them being a singing family, if you'd sing at all, you'd get at it."

Members of Kathleen Helton Phipps' family emigrated from Lee County, Virginia, and have been in the Barbourville area almost as long as have been the Phippses. Her father, Maynard Helton, had settled in the Emmanuel community of Knox County, was married in 1922, and worked as a miner in the Blue Gem Mine. Kathleen was the only child born to her parents. While she does not consider her childhood to have been unhappy, she does feel somewhat cheated to have missed the companionship and accompanying rivalry of siblings. "That was the worst of it all. . . . I couldn't even raise a scrap."

She recalls her father as having been more a whistler than a singer and feels that her early appreciation of music came chiefly

---

from her mother and from her maternal grandmother. Kathleen's mother, Ella Matlock, also a native of the Emmanuel area, was an organist and singer of some local renown. Kathleen remembers that on many occasions neighbors, out of loneliness, would call her mother on the telephone to ask her to play and sing for them songs such as "Babes in the Woods," "When You and I were Young, Maggie," "The Dream of a Miner's Child," and "When the Roll is Called up Yonder." As is apparent by these songs, the repertoire of Ella Matlock included parlor songs, sacred music, and the music coming from the mining experience of the early twentieth century. The organ was her primary instrument, and although she eventually learned to "chord" a guitar, the organ remained her primary accompanying tool.

Kathleen's earliest musical recollection is of a ukelele passed on to her by a relative.

I had a little old ukelele . . . and I didn't know how to chord it, but I'd strum around on that thing. Our neighbor would give me a nickel to sing. . . . Dad said I had a fiddle when I was younger but [that] I tore it up.

She was given her first guitar when she was ten, and the significance of this incident to the youngster is vivid in her memory many years later. Her father finally was able to save enough money from his miner's wages, and after receiving the guitar, Kathleen recalls,

Oh, I thought I was rich. I couldn't tune it. I couldn't do a thing with it, but I'd beat and bang around on it. My cousin would come along and tune it up and I'd keep going to those [music] parties until I learned to play.

As her self-confidence grew, she began to provide entertainment at the school which she attended.

When I went to school, that was the first entertainment that I did. Friday evening our teacher let us have off for some special program, and that was the first public singing I did,
... taking my guitar to school to play for the school kids. Many years later, musical beginnings of much the same character, that of school performances, occurred in the lives of some of Kathleen's children.

This period of time, the early 1930s, spanned the rise of the commercial recording industry, and since Maynard Helton had a victrola, Kathleen was influenced early by the music which she would one day emulate. In addition to learning the Carter Family's songs, she also learned to yodel, largely by listening to the recordings of Jimmie Rodgers and to the Carters' "Foggy Mountain Top" and "Sweet Fern." Her early repertoire also included "Starving to Death on a Government Claim," "An Empty Cot in the Bunkhouse Tonight," and "Mansion on a Hill," some of which continue in her active repertoire more than forty years later.

The meeting of A. L. Phipps and Kathleen Helton was the direct result of a custom often encountered in discussions of the singing traditions of the upland South: the music, or singing, party. In the Knox County area, this was a living tradition which, according to A. L. Phipps, flourished from the early days of the county's settlement until the 1940s. In A. L.'s opinion, World War II dealt a "fatal blow" not only to music parties in particular but to "people getting together and being close to one another."

Briefly stated, these music parties were weekly affairs held on Saturday nights in the home of residents of the area. As A. L. remembers,

Musicianers would meet together and they'd bring all their instruments together, and they'd play, sometimes all night, sometimes half of a night... They liked to do it, they
didn't go there for a quick buck. . . . They'd meet at one place this week, maybe next weekend at another place.

Kathleen attributes the popularity of the singing parties to the influence of ministers' families, such as the James Phipps Family. In addition to singing in a quartet with his father and a sister and brother, A. L. Phipps himself often played with a local minister's family, the Goldens, accomplished musicians who regularly supported the music parties.

These gatherings are memorable to the Phippses because they offered a recreation relatively free from musical competition or anyone's attempts to claim the floor for too long a time. The parties were rich with musicians and singers. Kenneth S. Goldstein recognizes that

. . . in a community or family in which specific songs are identified with a particular tradition bearer, other singers may shy away from performing those items out of respect for . . . the 'owner' of the songs.7

Such a feeling of ownership was evident at the music parties since certain songs were not sung if the "owners" were not present. This practice stands out in Kathleen's memory, especially with reference to two girls who always sang "The Little Mohee." If they were absent from the gathering, "The Little Mohee" would go unsung.

The music party where Kathleen Helton met A. L. Phipps took place in 1936 at Kathleen's grandmother's home across Paint Hill, four miles from Barbourville. As a boy, A. L. had regularly

attended music parties. Today he admits to occasional ulterior motives:

Maybe you might be a-looking at one of these girls, too, now and then, [and] at about thirteen or fourteen years old, you're bigger than you are at any other time, naturally.

Thus their meeting and courtship were as much the result of the social aspect of the music parties as of their mutual involvement in the music. A.L. remembers,

Although we'd lived in the same valley, apparently we were a little distant from one another in the valley, but we weren't distant from one another when we got over to the music parties. We got to be a bit better neighbors.

As seen above, both Arthur Lee Phipps' and Kathleen Helton's musical experiences were primarily family-bound through their early years. James Phipps and his family were, for the most part, singers and not musicians; A.L. considers himself to be an exception to the family mold.

My family wasn't so much musically inclined as it was vocally inclined. I think in my standing that it is just actually a gift, natural-born. I can pick up any instrument. Why I can keep time on a lid.

It should be noted at this time that the ability to improvise musical instruments is not unfamiliar to traditional musicians and further that the use of a lard bucket lid or a pie pan as a percussion instrument has been documented elsewhere. Such spontaneously-contrived musical instruments were helpful to A.L. on those nights when musicians were scarce at the music parties. Once

---

8 The phenomenon of using items such as these for percussion was noted in the repertoire of an Ohio singer in my "Carl Harney: A Traditional Singer from Muskingum County," Journal of the Ohio Folklore Society, 4 (Fall 1977): 34-49.
when an old banjo player was the only musician in attendance, the call was put out for anyone "who could do anything." A. L. responded with a lard bucket lid, and "me and that banjo player really made it!!" He played the lid so much at times that "I used to have corns almost on my knuckles." The demand for his lid-accompaniment grew so quickly that, out of embarrassment, he stopped attending parties until the fervor subsided.

Today, A. L. Phipps is first and foremost a guitar player although he professes to be able to play a little on the banjo. He expresses no desire to expand his instrumental prowess because "if I get to playing a lot of instruments, I just might lose the flavor of what I'm a-doing." The beginning of his guitar playing resulted from a friend's being in an accident, leaving the victim's instrument available. A. L. says that in his early guitar development he had only to know the fingering since he "had the rhythm, had the time, [and] knew where every one of them [notes] was. All I had to do was practice it."

After meeting in the winter of 1936, A. L. Phipps and Kathleen Helton courted less than a year before they were married on Labor Day, September 6, 1937. The Phipses recall their wedding as having been "simple," with only four guests in attendance. The ceremony itself holds special memory for both A. L. and Kathleen for two reasons. First, they were wed in the home of Kathleen's parents, and secondly, as Kathleen remembers, "Nathan Barnett, the same minister who married my dad and mother . . . performed our marriage."

Except for one year (1942) when they were in neighboring Harlan County, the Phipses have lived all their married life in Knox County.
For many years they made their home in Emmanuel, on Stone Coal Branch, where Jacob Phipps had settled more than a century before. Understandably, nowadays, Stone Coal Branch is known as Phipps Branch. In recent years the Phippses have lived in a stone house located between Emmanuel and the county seat of Barbourville.

Less than two years after their marriage, their first child, Arthur Codeell, was born (June 29, 1939). Over the next twenty-three years, they became the parents of twelve more children: Mary Mae (born November 30, 1940, and the victim of crib death at the age of two months), James Minor (March 29, 1942), Leemon (January 2, 1944), Ray Maynard (November 15, 1945), Trulene (January 20, 1948), Bolin (July 26, 1949), Roman (March 29, 1951), John Wayne (January 28, 1953), Louella (September 18, 1954), William Roger (July 11, 1956), Donna Ann (July 17, 1961), and Melinda (December 2, 1962). All but the two youngest children were born at home.

In the case of the Phippses, the development of such a large family can be understood from within two contexts: that of a personal nature and of a group situation. The personal frame is evidenced by Kathleen Phipps' regretting that she herself was an only child, resulting in the feeling that her own children should have adequate sibling companionship. Group identity is strengthened in the southern mountains in general by a large family which is "considered a blessing; for many years past, the more children there were, the more help there was in making a living. Eight or more children are not at all uncommon." 9

---

Faced with a growing family, A. L. Phipps found work with the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, a job which he held until his retirement in 1966. While in the service of the L & N, his duties included general labor and maintenance. In the late 1950s, he was promoted to the rank of assistant foreman. Toward the end of his involvement with the railroad, he occasionally drew foreman's pay although officially he stayed at the assistant foreman level until his retirement.

Two sources have supplemented the income of the Phippses through the years. First, they maintained an active farm, raising both stock and vegetables. From the time of their childhood, all family members played a central role in the upkeep of the farm while A. L. continued to work for the L & N. Their second source of supplementary income was realized from the performance of their music, an undertaking that will be analyzed more fully in Chapter III. For the moment, it will be recognized that from the time of their marriage until the present, A. L., Kathleen, and their family have been deeply involved with the performance of music in public contexts as well as within the confines of their home. Through music, they have been able to travel far from Knox County to many parts of the northeastern United States that otherwise they might never have visited.

Often functioning in conjunction with their musical performances, especially with reference to their gospel music repertoire, church-related activity is the strongest motivating factor in their lives. Jack Weller, writing in *Yesterday's People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia*, notes that the religious tradition prevalent in the southern mountains
has been pictured as "leftwing Protestantism." Its characteristics include puritanical behavior patterns, religious individualism, fundamentalism in attitudes toward the Bible and Christian doctrine, . . . revivalism, . . . and opposition to central authority of state or church.10

These patterns are most evident in the lives of A. L. and his family. On the other hand, if an observation made by Kentucky lawyer Harry Caudill, a frequent contributor to the sociological literature of the upland South, that the populace of the mountains is "remarkably irreligious,"11 is valid, then the Phippses would emerge as exceptions to the norm, since religion plays such a central role in their total existence.

Although the children's schoolwork has always been encouraged, the Baptist Church consistently has occupied the foremost position in the social life of the family. Remembering her childhood, Trulene Phipps Barton, the oldest daughter of A. L. and Kathleen Phipps, recalls that "my mother didn't drive and my dad worked, and we didn't go anywhere (except to school) but church." Much of the normal week's activities were occupied by church services held Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday nights, and on Sunday morning. Also, a yearly revival, a traditional occurrence in eight out of ten Appalachian rural churches,12 played a central role in the Phippses' summer activities.

10Ibid., 121.


Formal education seems to have functioned in a secondary position to church-related activity although most of the twelve surviving children have completed high school. Four attended college (Codell, Trulene, William, and Bolin); the youngest daughters, Donna and Melinda, are still in high school.

A. L. and Kathleen apparently inherited from James Phipps the feeling that strict discipline is the best policy in rearing children. As noted above, church attendance was a foregone conclusion. Also, the elder Phippeses, especially A. L., were extremely cautious about the company that their children kept, as Trulene Barton notes. "Where we lived, there weren't too many people that you could keep company with that'd meet his standards. So we pretty much grew up alone."

Such family pressure is a relatively common practice in the southern mountains, where

... free choice of mates tends to be restricted, especially in those rural areas where there has been longtime residential stability. ... There is a great deal of pressure on the individual to choose a mate whom kinfolk will accept.\(^{13}\)

Apparently there was something of a double standard applied since Trulene remembers the rules as being less strict for the boys although they, too, had to abide by a curfew. Such a double standard is also consistent in many parts of the Appalachian South, as Weller suggests. "Girls have far less freedom, partly because they have more home chores and partly because families are more protective toward them."\(^{14}\)

---


\(^{14}\)Weller, p. 69.
Needless to say, activities such as smoking have been strongly discouraged by A. L. and Kathleen. Although some of the children do smoke, Trulene remembers that "when we were growing up, no way! You keep your cigarettes hidden out in the old oak tree; don't bring them in the house." Drinking was not even a subject for discussion; it is not tolerated inside or outside the family unit. Trulene recollects an instance when this feeling was demonstrated by her father with regard to "the musicians who drank (socially or otherwise). 'Have nothing to do with them,' [he said.] 'They're no good. I don't care if they do sing religious music, they're no good.'"

In short, then, A. L. and Kathleen Phipps have preferred for their children a life style which conforms to the ideals important to them and to their generation--a life style that is deeply and uncompromisingly involved with the church, offering none of the unfavorable outside influences of twentieth century living. Although they feel that a better living could have been earned by making what has been termed "the desperate choice,"15 to migrate to an urban area, at no time did they wish to rear their children in such an environment. A. L. explains,

If you've got children, you know you've got to raise them, and you've got to plan out what's the best surroundings to bring them up in; [to] take them to Nashville where we could've made money, . . . or keep them here in the mountains, away from a lot of exposure, drugs and alcohol.

Since they chose to remain in Barbourville, the 1950s passed with their life remaining basically the same as it had been with music, the church, the farm, and the L & N monopolizing most of their time. As with other families who lived during the period from the

15 Weatherford and Brewer, p. 54.
New Deal to the Eisenhower Administration, their lives were touched by the growing commercial recording industry. Of the many groups who were active during the early days of the radio and recording business, one of the most important was the Carter Family whose musical style and repertoire the Phippses have emulated for many years. Since the direct, personal interaction of the Carters and the Phippses began in the early 1950s, this very important aspect of the Phippses' life will be discussed at this time.

The recording career of A. P., Sara, and Maybelle Carter came to an end in 1941 after a fourteen-year period that "presaged new developments in Southern rural musical taste and performance "16 and saw permanent alterations in the form and style of American country music as a whole. Although A. L. and Kathleen Phipps were aware of the music of performers such as Uncle Dave Macon, the Delmore Brothers, and Jimmie Rodgers, no style and repertoire had a greater effect on them than that of the Carter Family. According to A. L., they have experimented with other styles but always return to that of the Carters'. Today, after almost forty years of singing together, A. L. states that, "we're the only people that do this thing identically," noting that the only group that approaches the Phippses' mastery of the Carter Family style is a Ukrainian-Canadian family, the Romaniuks.17 A. L. feels that while the Romaniuk Family is instrumentally proficient, the family's vocal renditions of the Carter material are not

16 Malone, p. 67.

17 The Romaniuk Family's recordings can be heard on Point Records, distributed by MCA Records (Canada), Willowdale, Ontario.
as close to the originals as are the Phippses'. He and Kathleen agree that this disparity is due to the dialect differences between the Southern Appalachians and the Canadian plains where the Romaniuks make their home.

Several coincidences emerge in considering the relationship between the Carters and the Phippses. A. L.'s use of his initials is most obvious. His given name is Arthur Lee Phipps; he claims that he began using his initials while working for the railroad and continued the practice partially because "The Arthur L. Phipps Family" would occupy too much space on a record cover as would reference to Alvin Pleasant Delaney Carter. Ironically, there are exactly the same number of letters in "A. P. Carter" as there are in "A. L. Phipps."

Sherman Oxendine, director of Union College's Appalachian Semester, and the brother-in-law of A. L.'s brother Earl, remembers Arthur Phipps as being known by the initials after the advent of the family's recording-personal appearance career in the late 1950s.18 However, a promotional card from the personal files of the Phipps Family suggests that he was known as "A. L." at least as early as the late 1940s.

Continuing the discussion of the similarities between the Phippses and their mentors, their three-part vocalization (usually with A. L. and son Leemon singing bass and Kathleen and Trulene adding tenor and soprano, respectively) is obvious as is the instrumental style of their music and the instruments which they employ.

18Interview with Sherman Oxendine, Barbourville, Kentucky, 23 June, 1976.
They use at least one autoharp, an instrument which has been described as "truly one of America's folk instruments."\(^{19}\) A. L. purchased their particular instrument for Kathleen shortly after they were married. In the notes to some of their albums, it is mentioned as "exactly the same kind of instrument that Sara Carter used on the Carter Family recordings,"\(^{20}\) further reinforcing their identity with the Carters. They may use two guitars, depending on the number of children performing with them on any given occasion, but invariably A. L. plays the carved-top Gibson L-5 guitar that is tuned well below concert pitch, not dissimilar in sound and design to the instrument which Maybelle Carter used. Occasionally, but by no means frequently, a string bass is added. Both A. L. and Kathleen have absorbed much of the guitar-playing technique of Maybelle Carter, and the stylistic device known variously as the "church lick"\(^{21}\) or the "Carter Family lick"\(^{22}\) is an indispensable characteristic of their instrumental style.

The Phippses did not admire and emulate the Carters from afar. A. L. initiated an acquaintance with A. P. Carter by correspondence, and after several letters back and forth, he and his son Leemon


\(^{20}\)Liner notes from "Most Requested Sacred Songs of the Carter Family," (Starday SLP 139/Pine Mountain PMR 139), and "Old Time Mountain Pickin' and Singin'," (Starday SLP 195/Pine Mountain PMR 195).


\(^{22}\)This distinctive style of guitar playing is discussed and analyzed in Alan Lomax's Folk Songs of North America (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960), p. 603.
travelled to Virginia to meet A. P. Carter in 1953. While there, Carter invited Phipps to play with him on stage in Kingsport, Tennessee, where A. L. remembers that "we did about as good as any other groups there." Thus the friendship began between A. L. and A. P. Carter, a relationship that was to last until the latter's death in 1960. Over the years the two families visited and sang together. Although the entire group never performed in a concert setting, the Phippses did assist A. P. Carter in some programs.

The reaction of the Carters to the Phippses is difficult to assess although it should be discussed in order to fully understand the interplay of the two families. As far as can be known, A. L. and Carter were rather good friends, including each other in their various concerts. Janette Carter Kelly, A. P. and Sara's daughter, maintains that she is "a friend of the A. L. Phipps family. Daddy was their friend, [too] and he worked some with them before his death or was on the same program with them."23 She goes on to say that she does not know "why they sing in this style. They imitate the Carters a great deal, but that still don't make them Carters--they are the Phipps Family.... It doesn't bother me, one way or the other."24 Regarding the Janette Carter Kelly-Phipps Family relationship, folklorist Charles Wolfe asked her "what she thought about the Phippses, and her answer was rather strange--acknowledging that they were ripping off Carter Family stuff, but not really caring."25

23 Correspondence from Janette Carter Kelly, Hiltons, Virginia, July, 1976.

24 Janette Carter Kelly letter.

Although no outright animosity toward the Phippses has been reported on the part of the Carters, Freeman Kitchens, president of the Carter Family Fan Club, reports rumors of some unpleasantness at a recent Carter Family reunion. A.L. Phipps feels that "they've always been very friendly and nice to us but very shy about joining in with us." As noted above, they all played together at A.P.'s home, but, according to A.L., "As far as stage work, they've never showed any sign that they'd like to do that type of thing." The only cause that the Phippses can see for any resentment, if there is any, might arise from the Phippses' use of superior recording equipment with which to record Carter Family originals. In the final analysis, A.L. can see no deep-set reason for any bad feelings from the Carters, comparing the situation to that of Bill Monroe and the current popularity of bluegrass music.

If Bill Monroe had said, "No, ain't nobody gonna play my bluegrass music," that would be stupid. And I think that it'd be stupid for the Carter Family to resent us for playing their music, 'cause they're always gonna be the bottom and the top.

An identical sentiment was expressed by folklorist Richard Spottswood of the Library of Congress in a published review of two Phipps Family records.

The A.L. Phipps Family has been taken to task more than they deserve for their dependence on the Carter Family's singing and instrumental style—which makes about as much sense as knocking a bluegrass band for playing like Bill Monroe. . . . They have maintained the integrity of an older time, keeping it alive for us as an alternative to music which has

---

26 Interview with Freeman Kitchens, Drake, Kentucky, 19 November, 1976.
both advanced and repressed since the Carters' days.\textsuperscript{27}

In addition to the fact that the Phipps Family has been undeniably influenced by the music of the Carter Family, they feel that theirs has also been an influential role with respect to the Carters' music. It is their strong belief that their own recording and performance of the Carter Family's music in a style so reminiscent of that of the original artists has been a direct cause of the rekindling of interest in the Carter Family and in its music. They interpret this stance from tangible evidence, namely the many albums reissued recently from the original Carter Family masters. According to Hal Bruno, there have been at least twenty-three long-playing albums released which contain music performed by the original Carter Family.\textsuperscript{28} It is, of course, impossible to assess the precise effect of the Phippses on the popularity of the music originally recorded by their mentors. Bruno notes that the first album devoted exclusively to reissued Carter Family material was released in 1956,\textsuperscript{29} well before the Phipps Family began to record. Freeman Kitchens, long involved with the Carter Family and its music, does feel that the career of the Phipps Family has had some effect on the popularity of the Carters' music but is unable to suggest the possible parameters of such an influence.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{27}Richard K. Spottswood, review of Just a Few More Days and In the Sweet Bye and Bye, by the Phipps Family, in Bluegrass Unlimited, August 1971, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{28}Bruno, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30}Kitchens interview.
A. L. Phipps holds that following the release of his family's long-playing album, "Most Requested Sacred Songs of the Carter Family," (Starday SLP-139) record promoters saw

... that there was a market [for Carter Family material], and here came Decca, Columbia, RCA, and they began to release the old Carter Family [records] ... We absolutely got them back in the record business.

In fairness to all concerned, A. L.'s feelings on the matter seem to be somewhat overstated. This in no way detracts from the Phipps Family's significance as perpetuators and interpreters of the Carter Family style and repertoire, but, as Archie Green notes,

The Carter Family legend began to grow with initial recordings and continues to grow. ... This legend would have been strong whether or not the Phipps Family existed. The Phipps Family paid tribute to, honored, or complemented the Carter Family.\footnote{Correspondence from Archie Green.}

Green's statement is especially cogent in view of the folk music revival which transpired concurrently with the Phippses' emergence into the commercial country music arena. It is undeniable that the popularity of the Carter Family would have received significant impetus from the urban folksong movement irrespective of the Phipps Family's role in the process. Whatever the actual place of the Phipps Family in the situation, the importance of the question lies in the fact that they see themselves in an active position to the Carters' current popularity and are proud that they have been able to help the family whose music has played such a central role in their lives.

The late 1950s saw the Phippses finally engaging in an activity that they had planned for almost twenty years: the issue of record-
ings of their music. Throughout their marriage, A. L. and Kathleen had continued to sing, but every year ended with the postponement of their entrance into the field of commercial country music.

We had the desire to get out into the music business [and] do a lot of shows, but we'd say we'd do that next year. So next year didn't come. We were still right back to the same old thing, farming and working on the railroad.

The recording, public performance, and radio career of the Phipps Family will be probed in depth in Chapter III. For now, let us note that they had an active radio schedule throughout the 1950s and that their first record, a 45-r.p.m. single, was released in 1959. The success of this single led to a recording contract with Starday Records, a company that eventually released three albums and one four-song extended play disc devoted to the Phippses. Eventually, however, their recordings were deleted from Starday's catalog, leaving the family without a commercial outlet for their music. In response to this action and in order to develop a free hand in the selection, recording, and marketing of their material, in 1966 they formed the Pine Mountain Recording Company. To date they have recorded more than twenty discs, including long-playing and extended-play records as well as 45-r.p.m. singles.

Also during this time, the Phippses were travelling a great deal in concert in various areas of the upland South and the Northeast.

The folk music revival was underway by the early 'sixties, and folkies [a name sometimes ascribed to those interested in the rekindling of interest in folk music] who previously had scorned Nashville and country music discovered the rich tradition that had begun with the original Carter Family.32

32Bruno, p. 56.
As active participants in this tradition, the Phipps Family played an active role in some of the major folk music festivals of the 1960s, including the Newport Folk Festival, the University of Chicago Folk Festival, and other smaller local festivals.

For the Phipps children, these years were characterized by more activity and, for some of the children, by more travel than they had ever experienced. Most of the older children were in school at this time, and in the cases of Trulene and Leemon (who sang regularly with their parents), their travelling and recording accorded to them a certain degree of interest in their classmates' minds. Trulene remembers that...

. . . they [their classmates] felt you were something special. I was always doing some kind of entertainment for them. . . . It wasn't good in a way. They did feel that we were somewhat of a celebrity [sic]. I was always doing assembly programs in high school. My brothers helped me, but I had to do all the talking.

She feels that although her brothers sang with the family, they fit better than she into the mold of the conventional high school student, being involved actively with sports and other extracurricular activities.

Trulene's musical activity began early in her school years. "Before I was in school, I remember going to sing, and when I went to first grade, I remember my teacher wanting me to sing." When she reached high school age, this activity carried her over into the school choir, variety shows, and even encompassed the social high point of the high school year. "I even sang at my own junior-senior prom. That nearly killed me, but I did it. I sang some Carter love
Although their performances did set them apart from their peers to a certain extent, Trulene Barton does not feel that she or her siblings were ever the subjects of any unpleasant feelings or ridicule on the part of their school friends, even though "they might not have liked that type of music" which they performed. Some resentment could have been easily kindled since the Phipps children missed an unusual amount of school in order to take part in their family's musical travels. Trulene remembers with regret some of the activities which she missed during her years as a teenager. "We were going to Chicago [in 1965] and I missed out on some things at school. I resented it a lot. Of course I always had fun when I got there [to the music festivals]."

Within the context of this life history of the A. L. Phipps Family, it is important to understand the love of music which A. L. and Kathleen have tried to instill in their offspring. From their early youth, the children were encouraged to sing. Trulene remembers that "when we were younger, we used to sing into Dad's tape recorder. We could really sing, and we enjoyed it, too." There was never any doubt in the children's minds as to what their parents wanted. A. L., always the demanding father, "never did make us sing, . . . but he sure showed us that he wanted us to."

Today, in reflecting on the future of the music that they love, A. L. and Kathleen feel that the outlook is blurred at best. "After we pass on, [I'm not sure] as to whether we have anybody else that'll come along and be interested in this type of thing in the first place or even can do it if they're interested." Four of the Phipps
children play instruments as well as sing, and two more are only singers. Their two youngest daughters made their debut in 1975 at the Renfro Valley Barn Dance in Renfro Valley, Kentucky, an early forum for old-time country music. A. L. and Kathleen have twenty-one grandchildren; only one, so far, plays the guitar. They have great hopes for their grandchildren's musical career since, as Kathleen admits, "are more inclined to pickin' and singin' than our own children [who] don't have the interest they ought to have." Naturally the greatest encouragement for the grandchildren comes from their grandparents. In A. L.'s view, "I would think that me and Kathleen as their grandparents are encouraging them more [than their parents]. Some of them will really be musicians, no questions about it."

The fact that all but two of the Phippses' children are grown and have left home is, of course, a grave deterrent to the continued reinforcement of the tradition from within the family frame. In Kathleen's estimation, part of the reason that none of the children selected this music as a full-time career was due to their parents' decision to stay in Barbourville, in a comparatively isolated environment.

A. L. and I settled down in this area where there's no demand for the music, there's no income from it, and I think that we did them [the children] wrong in that line because if we'd had an occupation for them in that field, I believe they'd have picked it up. But they had to work for a living at other things, and naturally they've just not picked it up.

A. L. echoes this appraisal of the situation and, in addition, alludes to the fact that he feels that a career in music would not allow the children to keep pace with the status quo: "They just
didn't have time to do this kind of music and still live like the Joneses. And that hurt, no question about it."

In 1978, the Phippses are as active as they have been for many years. A. L. spends some of his time in the role of a self-styled environmentalist, trying to keep strip mining away from his land holdings around the family home. Although they no longer have a regular radio program of their own, the Phippses do continue to appear in various concerts and to record regularly. In this activity they promote the interests of their own music and those of the artists featured on the Pine Mountain label. Finally, the church still plays as great a role in their daily lives as does sacred music in their performing repertoire.

The preceding life history of the Phipps Family will serve as a frame for the remainder of the study. The paper now proceeds to an examination of the sacred music which comprises a large proportion of the group's repertoire.
CHAPTER II

NO HOME IN THIS WORLD:
THE SACRED MUSIC OF THE PHIPPS FAMILY

The effect of religious beliefs on American traditional music is profound. With particular reference to the Appalachian South, it has been said that "religion, at its core, concerns itself with ultimate things—programs of death and destiny, sickness and sorrow, happiness and heaven, morality and meaning." The same statement can be applied to the musical manifestation of such religious thinking prevalent throughout this geographic region for more than one hundred fifty years. Much of the religious music that became traditional in the rural South grew from the efforts of radical Protestant leaders of the mid-eighteenth century. Such songs

... flourished in the rural United States and grew in the great revivals of the early nineteenth century. With the emergence of urban culture, the great popularity of the songs became restricted to the rural South.

It has been suggested further that the religious doctrine which has functioned in the upland South has been the foremost influence on country music throughout its fifty-year history. "Religious pieces appeared on wax cylinders when the pioneer recording industry was

1Weatherford and Brewer, p. 90.


3Malone, p. 16.
still producing novelties for the saloon and the slot-machine parlor."\textsuperscript{4} From the early days of commercial country music in the 1920s "sacred music," the name by which traditional music with religious overtones is commonly known, has comprised a large proportion of the whole of this far-reaching musical form. At least two record companies, Angelophone and Rainbow, were formed for the exclusive recording of religious songs.\textsuperscript{5}

Before focusing on the religious music of one particular folk group, it will be instructive to discuss briefly the overall phenomenon of American traditional religious music and to cite some of the seminal treatments of this sub-genre of folk music. Although a considerable amount of study has focused on religious music,\textsuperscript{6} the most widely-recognized scholar who dealt with traditional American religious music was George Pullen Jackson. His contributions included five books dealing exclusively with traditional American hymnody, the best-known of which was *White Spirituals in the Southern Uplands: The Story of the Fasola Folk, Their Singing and "Buckwheat Notes."*\textsuperscript{7} This was followed by four more book-length discussions of sacred folk music, establishing him as "the key interpreter of the Anglo-American religious folksong within the United States."\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{4}Archie Green, "Hear These Beautiful Sacred Selections," 1970 Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{6}See, for example, Kenneth R. Hartley, Bibliography of Theses and Dissertations in Sacred Music (Detroit Studies in Music Bibliography, Number 9, 1967).

\textsuperscript{7}Jackson, White Spirituals.

\textsuperscript{8}Green, p. 29.
Another outstanding contributor to the interpretation of American traditional religious music is internationally-recognized folklife scholar, Don Yoder. While Yoder's *Pennsylvania Spirituals* deals specifically with the gospel hymnody of the Pennsylvania Germans, he does focus an insightful introductory overview on the general spiritual tradition in America. For Yoder, "the spiritual--the folk hymn produced in America through the interaction of revivalism and the frontier--is America's primary contribution to religious folksong."  

The evolution of traditional American hymnody is generally assumed to have been influenced by three distinct religious movements: "(1) the Colonial or Great Awakening, (2) the Second Awakening around 1800, and (3) the City Revival of 1857-1858." Out of the third of these movements grew the musical form commonly known as the "gospel song." Clearly the sacred music of the Phipps Family is a reflection of this type of song which, like the spiritual itself, relies on Biblical references and allusions to a sort of conversion experience for its effect. In contrast with the spiritual, however, the language of the gospel song borders on the sentimental, dealing in comparatively ornate images with the overall product being 'more 'literary' than the spirituals. In fact, they were 'popular' songs rather than folksongs. They were, according to the most important American hymnologist, 'music-hall songs' applied to religious work."  

---


10 Ibid., p. 1.

11 Ibid., p. 4.

12 Ibid., p. 5.
Running parallel to and often in conjunction with the tradition of sacred music in the rural South is the practice of family singing. One of the earliest ensembles associated with commercial country music was the family of the Reverend Andrew Jenkins. This blind Georgia revivalist composed more than eight hundred songs, most of which are sacred in nature and many of which he and his family popularized. They began performing on Atlanta's Radio Station WSB in 1922.\textsuperscript{13} The tradition of family singing has experienced a healthy existence within the realm of country music from that time until the present. One needs only to look at any collection of recorded country music to find proof of this statement. Husband-and-wife duets such as Lulu Belle and the late Scotty Wiseman, brother acts such as the Delmores, and large extended families exemplified by the six-member Stoneman family have realized a degree of success in the field of commercial country music. Also, all have depended on sacred songs as an integral part of their repertoire.

As noted in Chapter One, the Phipps Family draws much of its music from sources and experiences of a religious nature. Through the more than thirty years of performance together, A. L., Kathleen, and their children have felt the need to perform sacred music as a part of their role as "witnesses" to their religious beliefs. Having discussed the life history of the Phippses, it is now necessary to peruse a representative sample of their sacred repertoire which reflects and functions within the frame of their religious conservatism in general. This chapter includes significant references to

\textsuperscript{13}Green, p. 35.
their conservatism and concludes with a thematic study of their religious songs. The treatment of the themes of their music is the result of having listened to their complete recorded repertoire and is also based on observation of the family in several public concert situations. In understanding this major portion of their repertoire, the five-part typology which Howard Wight Marshall postulated for bluegrass sacred music is applied to the religious songs of the A. L. Phipps Family. This typology, developed from Marshall’s study of a large number of bluegrass gospel songs, is very comfortably adaptable to the sacred repertoire of the Phippses and could probably serve equally well in the analysis of the religious repertoire of other traditional singers.

Sacred music forms a large proportion of the recorded repertoire of the Phipps Family, with their own musical renditions of the music of the Carter Family comprising the second largest part. Malone notes that "the Carter Family's strong preference for religious songs was evident in their repertory." Hence, the Phippses' assimilation of the style of the Carters was complemented by their affinity for much of the overall content matter of the Carters' repertoire. Like the sacred music of their mentors, the Phippses' religious music

... originating in the fundamentalist tradition, stressed the importance of holiness, emphasized the sadness and wickedness of life, and related the joys of the heavenly home.

---


15 Malone, p. 66.
Of the two hundred thirteen songs recorded by the Phipps Family and listed in their Pine Mountain Record Company Catalog, one hundred sixty-four, or seventy-seven percent, have titles suggesting religious orientation.¹⁷

It is hardly an accident that the active repertoire of this family involves so many religious pieces. As has been seen, A. L.'s earliest introduction to music came from his father, James Phipps, an eastern Kentucky singing school teacher. Singing schools have existed in Kentucky from at least 1797.¹⁸ In teaching from the shape note hymnals, James Phipps was perpetuating a tradition which began in Barbourville in the early nineteenth century. As far as A.L. can remember, his first public performance came during the late 1920s with his father, his mother, and his brother Earl. This was a quartet that was well-known in the area for its a capella renditions of sacred music.¹⁹ The contemporary Phipps Family continues the singing of what A. L. Calls "quartet songs." He sings lead while Kathleen, Trulene Phipps Barton, and Leemon sing baritone, tenor, and bass, respectively. These old hymns are the only songs which they sing a capella, reasoning that these pieces should be offered in a "plain natural voice."

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Pine Mountain Record Company Catalog (Barbourville, Kentucky: The Pine Mountain Record Company, n.d.).


¹⁹This fact is substantiated by Sherman Oxendine, A. L.'s brother-in-law.
The regional popularity of the earlier Phipps Family is well-demonstrated in a story which A. L. tells regarding their singing for a funeral in the early 1930s. A mourner was so moved by their rendition of "Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?" that after the funeral he extracted from A. L. the promise that, if A. L. was still living when this man died, he would sing "Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone" at the funeral. An almost unbelievable coincidence occurred in that upon the man's death in 1975, his family, without knowing of the forty-year old agreement, asked the Phipps Family to sing for the funeral. They agreed, and the promise was fulfilled.

A more complete treatment of the performance contexts of the Phippses' music is presented in Chapter Four. For the present, three settings for the performance of their sacred repertoire can be recognized: the funeral; the public, secular concert and radio broadcast; and the formal religious service or revival. In restricting their performance to these situations, they are demonstrating their belief that this music is suited for only a limited number of performance contexts. Further, in their minds a religious gathering should feature music that has developed from traditional models and is performed in a traditional manner.

For approximately the first thirty years of their performing career, the Phippses found their beliefs and their sacred music to be generally within the bounds of most of the religious doctrine accepted in southeastern Kentucky. Moving out of the 1950s, however, they observed changes in religious emphasis and in sacred music itself--changes by which they no doubt felt threatened. As representatives of their Appalachian society, with its "stress upon cultural
repetitiveness and continuity rather than on change and innovation, they felt--and continue to feel--a real antagonism toward musical trends which A. L. places under the heading of "modernism." Such modernism is typified by what they take to be a pronounced leaning toward contemporary popular music styles--instrumental and vocal--as the avenue through which gospel music is now channeled. A. L. compares contemporary gospel musicians to "Hollywood showpeople" whose outpourings of sentiment and piety are contrived since they "get up there and put on. They can cry one minute, and they can get out there and do a lot of other things the next... it's an artificial type of thing." The new music "doesn't have anything in it... There's nobody can feel anything... You may hear the racket, [but] nothing comes into your ears that would make you feel anything."

According to the Phippeses, a crime far greater than that of aural blight is committed by most contemporary gospel singers: a lack of sincerity. Says A. L., "They can get up there and clap their hands and jump all over the stage and do all these things, but it doesn't have anything in it." For the Phippeses, modern religious music is by no means the genuine reflection of the feelings of the singers. Rather, such music is performed by "sophisticated groups that couldn't sing a spiritual song that would touch somebody or cause them maybe to cry a little bit."

Having observed the disdain with which the Phippeses view modern gospel music and musicians, it is obvious that for the Phipps Family the music and its performance are "sincere" mirrors of spiritual

---

20 Marshall, p. 3.
feeling rather than the mere products of gross commercialization. In the discussion which follows, special reference is made to the religious music that is adapted by the Phippses as well as that which has been composed from within the family frame.

Although both A. L. and Kathleen admit to writing songs, a large part of their own material comes from Kathleen's pen with some minor revision contributed by A. L. For them both, there is an aura of the supernatural strongly tied to the actual birth of a song. Says A. L., "First thing, I've almost got to have an inspiration" that can come almost anytime. Such feelings can arise when one of them is reading the Bible, or "out when you're drivin' . . . the song almost appears to you . . . it's no problem at all to write a song like that."

According to Kathleen, such inspiration might occur merely in the form of a title about which they will want to write. "Maybe the first thought you had was the title you were gonna give that song, but then you've got to work it out . . . you've got to do a real lot of thinking and sometimes you're a long time coming up with it."

Regarding the specific subject matter of the songs, they are adamant that the lyrics conform to what they recognize as Biblical truth. Such firmness of intent can create problems, as A. L. describes.

When I write a song, I always write it out, and then I'll go back over it, and if something sounds to me like it's not Bible [sic] or if it doesn't correspond, I'll take it out of there.

Expurgation of non-Biblical ideas may result in a loss of rhythm or rhyme, but this is not as crucial to the Phippses as is the doctrinal soundness of their tests. "I don't care if it does rhyme good, if it
matches up, if each stanza rhymes with the other, I still won't accept it if it's not according to the Bible. I'm very peculiar with a gospel song. It's gotta be just right."

The Phippases are far less specific—and particular—about the tunes to which they set the lyrics of their religious songs. "Occasionally we'll get into a standard tune part of the way, and then we'll have something new in part of the way, . . . maybe a related tune." Such is the case with their "We Shall Meet Beyond the River," whose tune is extremely close to that of the Carter Family's "We Shall March Through the Streets of the City." A. L. characterizes their music as "simple" and recognizes the difficulty inherent in trying to create completely original tunes. "There are so many simple songs that it is hard if you write a simple song [not to] get into a related tune."

According to A. L. and Kathleen Phipps, the singing style of their sacred music does not differ markedly from that of their other music. As noted earlier, their greatest concern is that a "sincere" rendition of the piece be offered at all times. Says A. L., "For myself, I don't change at all [from secular songs to sacred] . . . I'm sincere with a love song if I tell a story about it, just as sincere as I would [be] with telling a story in the Gospel." The stylistic similarity between their secular material and their religious music is amply demonstrated in a Christmas album which they recorded, "Old-Time Christmas Songs" (PMR 128). This includes "Silent Night," "Joy to the World," and, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." The songs themselves are far from those generally associated with the term "old-time." The Phippases' instrumental
style and vocal qualities, rather than the songs themselves, set their performance of these pieces apart from performance of the same material by popular artists. The vocalization and instrumentation which are employed here are the same as those which emerge in their singing of secular songs from the repertoire of the Carter Family or from their own composed secular numbers such as "The Yellow Tomb," (PMR-195; B-6)\(^\text{21}\) or "The Kentucky Mine Explosion" (PMR-195; A-7).

Like most gospel music groups, the Phippses see themselves as duty-bound to carry their message to a wide audience, and in such a context their function is similar to that of a minister. Such a role may arise in the introduction which A. L. offers to a particular sacred song, when he presents a religious message apparently inspired by the song that he is about to sing. This phenomenon was present at the 1976 Brandywine Mountain Music Convention held in Concordville, Pennsylvania, in A. L.'s comments preceding their singing of "Blessed Jesus Loves You, Too." Inherent in this particular selection is the idea that even the most hardened transgressor can hope to find salvation. He proceeded in this manner:

I'd like to say, though, this is a sincere number we're gonna sing for you, "Blessed Jesus Loves You, Too." And really He does. He loves us all, doesn't He? He's merciful to us today. Look how He blessed us with health and strength to be here and enjoying this wonderful Sabbath day. You are all there, listening, well and healthy. . . . We could be many places; we could be in the hospital or in pain, but the Lord has been merciful to us all. He loves us all.

---

\(^\text{21}\)This form of reference and those which follow refer to the various records released by the Phipps Family, keying each selection to the record number, side, and cut, respectively. Thus, "PMR-195; B-6" refers to Pine Mountain Record number 195, side B, the sixth cut.
In addition to its obvious function as a proselytizing agent, the sacred music of the Phipps Family parallels that of other fundamentalist songwriters in its covert (and sometimes overt) disapproval of "secularization, urbanization, and political liberalism." 22 Viewing this religious music as a rhetorical tool, it is apparent that it "argues for adherence to the normal course, the middle way already tested by past usage . . . by providing charter for action, by legislating, by justifying, by educating, [and] by applying social pressure." 23

Apart from the rhetorical role of the family's sacred music, there exist several other functional situations directly related to this important portion of its repertoire, situations which are accepted to be among the functions of folklore in general. The Phipps Family's sacred music and its accompanying functions are clearly adaptable within the framework of William Bascom's functions of folklore 24 since, in the first place, the music "reveals the affectual elements of culture such as attitudes, values, and cultural goals. 25 Also, the material obviously reinforces the lifestyle of the family, "justifying its rituals and institutions to


25 Ibid.
those who perform and observe them."26 Third, their sacred music acts to maintain conforming behavior for the family and for those to whom the family sings. This point is amply demonstrated by the above-cited introduction to the song, "Blessed Jesus Loves You, Too."

To elaborate on the role of the family's sacred repertoire as a behavior-conforming force, using terms originally applied by folklorist William Hugh Jansen,27 it becomes clear that this music functions in an esoteric manner by reinforcing religious beliefs for the family and as an exoteric force by which members of the family seek to influence the behavior of those around them.

The preceding paragraphs have established a contextual and functional frame from which to understand the religious songs of the A. L. Phipps Family. At this time, the study will move to the songs themselves, offering an analysis of the various themes inherent in the family's sacred repertoire.

In an article published in the New York Folklore Quarterly, Howard Wight Marshall postulated five predominant themes in bluegrass gospel music.28 Predictably, the Phipps Family's religious music manifests itself within each of these five areas, which Marshall interprets as being "basic to all sacred Protestant music."29 Since the task at hand is the study of the Phippses' sacred repertoire in its entirety, Marshall's typology will be applied to those songs which

26 Ibid.
28 Marshall, pp. 24-25.
have been composed by the Phipps Family as well as to those which they have adapted for their own use.

A theme which dominates in their repertoire and which finds its way into almost all of the Phippse's sacred music is that of individual salvation. Implicit here is the Wesleyan doctrine that a personal salvation in the afterlife is waiting for all who serve God in an exemplary manner while here on earth. Typical of their songs which convey this message is "I'm Waiting My Call" (PMR 133; A-5) which embodies the belief that mortal existence is only an interim to be endured until one receives his/her "call to heaven"

I'm waiting my call, I'm ready to go
To be with my Lord on heaven's bright shore.
I'll never turn back, I'm headed for home.
I soon will be there, no, never to roam.

I'm waiting my call to enter my home
With all the redeemed around the great throne.
So happy I'll be, I'll sing a new song,
I'll be with my Lord while the ages roll on.

My Savior is now preparing for me
A mansion of rest beyond the blue sea,
No sorrow and pain up there will be known,
While singing His praise around the wide throne.

The theme of individual salvation is also seen in "Blessed Jesus Loves You, Too " (PMR-131; B-2) which was discussed above with reference to A. L.'s impassioned introduction of some of their sacred pieces. This song re-states the Christian proposition that salvation is available to anyone, even to the most inveterate transgressor.

On the rugged cross of Calvary
Jesus gave his life for you.
Though the vilest sinner you may be
Blessed Jesus loves you too.
Blessed Jesus dearly loves you,
He's a friend so kind and true;
Though the vilest sinner you may be,
Blessed Jesus loves you too.

When the burdens press on every hand,
And you know not what to do,
Just remember Christ will understand,
Blessed Jesus loves you too.

Chorus

Come and seek his precious tender care,
He will save and pardon you.
Every sorrow he will gladly share,
Blessed Jesus loves you too.

The song which the Phippeses consider to be their best composition also depends on this theme for its thrust. "We Shall Meet Beyond the River" (PMR-129; B-5) was on their first 45-r.p.m. release in the late 1950s and continues within their active repertoire. Its composition was obviously heavily influenced by A. P. Carter's "We Shall March Through the Streets of the City" in text as well as tune.

Some sweet day when life is over,
We shall meet beyond the sky;
And we'll sit on the banks of the river,
Where there'll be no sad good-byes.

We shall meet beyond the river,
With our loved ones gone before;
And we'll sit on the banks of the river,
Where we'll meet to part no more.

We shall meet beyond the river,
We shall meet again some day,
And we'll march through the streets of that city,
Where all tears are wiped away.

Chorus

May the gracious Lord be with you
As our parting words we say;
Fill your heart with joy and gladness
'Till we meet again some day.
Chorus

A second theme encountered in the Phippes' sacred music is focused on life's rocky road. Herein are found those songs which dwell primarily on the wickedness and transgression of mortal humanity, bemoaning the fact that weak humankind has strayed far from the path of goodness. Generally some thinly-veiled threat is included, suggesting that conditions will become a lot worse if people do not change their erring habits. The implication is that

... our earthly path is fraught with perils; and we must be strong in our belief that God will lead us triumphantly through this "vale of tears" and these "wicked paths of sin." A pilgrim's progress is not pleasant or easy; the goal is far away but worth the trip.30

Perhaps the best example of such sentiment from the Phippes' repertoire carries a title which leaves little thematic speculation to the imagination: "God Is Gettin' Worried With Your Wicked Ways" (PMR-127; A-2).

You better repent for your ways to reform,
For there's coming a greater storm.
It won't rain nor snow nor sleet,
But there'll be more mangled [sic] all under your feet,

God is gettin' worried with your wicked ways,
God is gettin' worried with your wicked ways,
God is gettin' worried with your wicked ways,
God's a-gettin' worried with your wicked ways.

If one who don't come isn't rose from the dead,
Just like the parable of Jesus said,
You say, 'That ain't me, Preacher, and I can't go today,
God is worried with your wicked ways.

Like the days of yore your fathers are doin'
Leading your children down to learn.
You teach them to sin and not to pray,
God is worried with your wicked ways.

30Ibid., p. 25.
And you got to quit your smokin' and you got to quit your chewin'.
God's a-gettin' worried with your wicked way of doin'.
God is worried with your wicked ways.
God is worried with your wicked ways.

Although less explicit in its approach, the following song, "This World is Not My Home," (PMR-129; A-6) also paints a picture of life's rocky road, drawing on the tribulations which the individual must endure before being called to his/her next "home." The Phipps Family adapted the number from the Carters, who recorded it in 1931 under the title, "Can't Feel At Home." The Phippses' rendition reflects some minor changes in the wording of the verses.

This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through,
My treasures and my hopes are far beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

Oh, Lord, you know, I have no friend like you,
If heaven's not my home, oh Lord, what will I do?
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

Heaven's expecting me, that's one thing I know.
I fixed it up with Jesus a long time ago;
He will take me through, though I am weak and low,
And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

Chorus

Just over in the gloryland, there is no dying there,
The saints all shouting, "Victory!" and singing everywhere;
I hear the voice of those that's gone on before,
And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

Many of the sacred songs of the Phipps Family are sentimental remembrances of "the good old days " when life was less complicated, (and, at least by inference, more religion-oriented) and a mother figure poured out her love and devotion to offspring and to husband. Noting this type of music, Marshall labels his third theme "the
maternal hearth." Country gospel music and the Phipps Family's repertoire in particular often combine this with Marshall's fourth theme, that of grief for the deceased. This manifestation seems to be in direct contradiction to the theme of salvation (which, of course, can be accomplished only through death), but intense feelings of personal, physical loss have apparently transcended religious doctrine. Such is the following which depends on dialogue between a widowed father and his daughter, observed by a third party, for its effectiveness. "Daddy, Is Mama Coming Home Some Day?" (PMR-129; A-4) is an appropriate example of those songs which rely on pleasant memories of the maternal hearth in order to convey their message of loss and sorrow.

Daddy, is Mama coming home some day?

One morning, as I walked along the way
I heard a little girl softly say,
"I wonder if my mommy's gone away."
And as I turned around, I heard her say,

"Daddy, O Daddy, where is Mama dear?
She don't come to call me and wipe away my tears;
I like to hear her singing when I am out at play.
O Daddy, is Mama coming home some day?"

I heard her daddy as he softly said,
"O darling, your dear mother, she is dead." [spoken]
We will go and be with her someday,
No children there will ever cry and say,

"Daddy, O Daddy, where is Mama dear?
She don't come to call me and wipe away my tears;
I like to hear her singing when I am out at play,
O Daddy, is Mama coming home someday?"

Devotion to the maternal hearth is also found in those songs which refer to those times when one was still on the literal threshold of the hearth within the confines of the protective mountain cabin of one's birth. Kathleen Phipps' composition, "Little
Country Home Among the Hills," (FMR-195; A-6) is representative of this branch of the "maternal hearth songs," and according to the author, was written using her own home as a reference. In writing this piece, Kathleen borrowed liberally from the repertoire of her mentors. The tune to which she set the verses is very close to the Carters' "My Country Home." Both the tune and the lyrics of the chorus bear striking resemblance to "The Little Log Hut in the Lane."

Where is now my father's family that was here so long ago?
In our little country home among the hills;
There we gathered round the fireside, right beside the rugged glow
In our little country home among the hills.

I'm a-going from my country home,
I'm a-going far away;
I'm a-going from that little log hut
That stands down in the lane.

Some have gone from us forever, for they have gone far away,
In our little country home among the hills;
Lord has taken them to heaven for with us they could not stay
In our little country home among the hills.

Chorus

The final theme which figures in the repertoire of the Phipps Family portrays the practicing Christian in the business of accomplishing healthy activities undertaken as the will of his/her God. In his discussion of holiness sects, Benton Johnson notes that "this will can be realized in almost any kind of activity, but it demands constant output and effort, a denial of distracting pleasures, and a focus of achievement." 31 This theme of action orientation is dependent on the basic tenet of some Christian faiths that salvation is attainable only after one has spent a lifetime doing

good works. Such sentiment is clearly exemplified in "A Soul Winner for Jesus" (PFR-195; B-6).

I want to be a soul winner for Jesus every day,
He done [sic] so much for me;
I want to aid the lost sinner to leave his erring way
And be from bondage freed.

A soul winner for Jesus Christ the Lord,
A soul winner for Jesus Christ the Lord,
O let me be each day.
A soul winner for Jesus Christ the Lord,
A soul winner for Jesus Christ the Lord,
He done so much for me.

I want to be a soul winner and bring the lost to Christ,
That they his grace may know;
I want to live for Christ ever and do His blessed will
Because he loves me so.

I want to be a soul winner "till Jesus calls for me
To lay my burdens down;
I want to hear Him say, "Servant, you gathered many sheep,
Receive a starry crown."

Action-orientation also plays a role in "Gonna Row My Boat."

This song was recorded by the Delmore Brothers in the 1940s and later was
featured on the Phippses' Folkways recording (Folkways FA 2375). It
is regularly sung by them in concert.

Gonna row my boat at the Lord's command,
While I trust my soul to his guiding hand.
Gonna drift along on the sacred breeze,
Gonna row my boat any time I please.

Gonna row my boat on the crystal sea,
And the Lord will row right along with me.
Gonna shout and sing, gonna rock and roll,
Gonna row my boat, just to please my soul.

Gonna row my boat on the gentle swell,
While the angels play on the golden bell.
Gonna anchor safe on the golden shore,
Gonna rest awhile, gonna row some more.

The preceding analysis had as its goal an awareness of the
sacred music of the A. L. Phipps Family. This goal has been attained,
in one sense, through the discussion of the themes evident in the repertoire. Equally important, however, is the functional aspect of the music which emerged from the study. In making a departure from the family's sacred repertoire to their secular music, it can be concluded that their religious music is based on conservative, traditional models which are in turn addressed to patterned themes relative to the concerns of the white rural Protestants of the upland South.
CHAPTER THREE

"I ALWAYS DID LIKE A SAD SONG"

Chapters One and Two establish an historical frame from which to understand the Phipps Family and contain a discussion of the sacred music which comprises the bulk of their repertoire, respectively. Understandably, the remainder of their songs to be investigated, their secular pieces, account for a much smaller proportion of their overall repertoire. In analyzing their secular music, the goals of Chapter Three will be threefold: once again to understand the Phippses as interpreters of the secular material of the Carter Family; to assess the role in which the Phippses view themselves as composers and performers of their own songs; and, based upon this understanding of their self-concept and their proclivity for adapting the Carters' songs, to discuss individual items in the family’s self-composed secular repertoire.

Secular songs can be understood to be the musical manifestation of the sentiments of six days of the singer's week: sacred music is the reflection of the seventh. In the case of many traditional performers, their active repertoire is comprised of more of the songs reflecting the first six days than the seventh. As we have seen, however, with reference to the A. L. Phipps Family, the majority of their songs reflect their feelings centered around the seventh day--feelings which inextricably pervade the first six days of their
week.

The Phipps Family attained a certain degree of prominence through their adaptations of the music—sacred and secular alike—of the Carter Family. John Atkins, a biographer of the Carters, observes that the Carters' music was "aimed to sell exclusively to Southern people whose tastes demanded songs of mother and home, death and tragedy, love and religion, and the other ingredients of country music through the ages."¹ As in the discussion of the life history and sacred repertoire of the Phippses, similarities between the family and their mentors continue to emerge since Atkins' six items could comfortably comprise something of a typology of the music of the Phipps Family.

The Phippses have recorded no less than two hundred thirteen songs. After extensive fieldwork with the family and after having observed various secular concert situations, it can be stated that these two hundred-odd songs comprise their recorded repertoire and are fully representative of their active repertoire. Of the two hundred thirteen songs recorded and listed in the Pine Mountain catalog, only thirty-three, or roughly fifteen percent, can be categorized as secular pieces. Further, of these fifty-three, fifteen (about forty-five percent) have been borrowed directly from the Carters. In their continual pervasive use of the Carter Family's material, the Phippses see themselves as careful interpreters of these songs, which, of course, were

solidly based upon a variety of earlier song materials

As we have demonstrated, the Phippses' adaptation of the Carters' music is the "mingling" of one more tradition. It has been documented that the repertoire of the Carters was directly derived from various parallel sources of Appalachian music including British ballads, nineteenth- and twentieth-century sentimental parlour songs, traditional hymnody, and some original compositions. The Phippses have garnered their repertoire from many of the same sources.

While A. L. unfailingly lauds A. P. Carter as a composer, he does realize that Carter's chief role was in many cases that of arranger.

You know, those songs, they go right on back. A. P. Carter was a wonderful man, and he was good on rearranging those numbers, extra good. And he was a good collector. It's all right for him to say they're his songs and put his name on them, but if you go back to those numbers, they go right on back, even to England, and a lot were given to him that were written by other people. He'd arrange the songs, but really he had nothing to do with writing it. Some person wrote it, fifty, maybe a hundred years before he [Carter] got a hold of it.

The similarity between the repertoires of the two families is clearly recognized by the Phippses. As we noted in Chapter One, they feel a deep sense of pride in this situation, to the point that A. L. expresses the opinion--and justifiably--that a complete treatment of the Carter Family is incomplete without mention of the Phippses as their outstanding interpreters. "It's pretty hard for any kind of a magazine or write-up . . . to write anything about the Carter Family without somewhere winding up with the Phipps Family."

---

3 Ibid., p. 4.
Finally, while it is certainly within the scope of the Phippses' ability to play in a style different from that of the Carters, it is no exaggeration to state that the entirety of their secular repertoire as well as their accompanied sacred songs are rendered in the Carter Family instrumental and vocal manner, complete with three-part harmony and the predictable combination of instruments discussed earlier, in Chapter One. Says A. L.,

We can play different styles of music. We can do vocals without instruments, but when we do this type of thing [perform secular pieces], we're almost identical [to the Carters].

The reaction which the Phipps Family themselves have for their secular songs is one of pride since they feel that they are composing and performing material which appeals to the common people of the United States. This fact notwithstanding, A. L. and Kathleen agree that if the proper inspiration comes, a song does not necessarily have to appeal to others in order to be written, sung, or recorded by them. Says A. L.,

When I get the vision of it, I write it whether it'll ever be sold or not. If it sells, okay, if it doesn't [then] the story's there, and the truth is there, and money-wise, I don't think about it when I write a song, [although] we'd all like for our songs to be accepted by the general public.

The Phippses categorize all of the songs which they compose as "folk songs" and, in turn, refer to the written texts of their songs as "ballets," a term often applied by residents of this particular geographic area to song texts on paper. It is probable (although not empirically verifiable) that the family's use of the term "folk song" is attributable to their exposure to folklorists and folk music enthusiasts in the early 1960s. In any case, this designation can be understood to be part of the family's "native taxonomy" with which
they refer to their music. Dan Ben-Amos, in a discussion of ana-
lytic and ethnic genres of folkloric material, notes that the former
originate from outside a specific group, whereas the latter are
initiated by the group for its own use.

Analytical categories of genres have been developed in the
context of scholarship and serve its varied research purpose.
Native taxonomy [ethnic genres] on the other hand, has no
external objective. . . . It is a self-contained system by
which society [in this case, the family] defines its experi-
ences, creative imagination, and social commentary.4

In discussing the overall context of any folkloric item, it is
necessary to understand the native taxonomy of the folkloric item or
act. For the Phippases, the ethnic genre of "folk songs" corresponds
to the analytical categories of ballads and lyric songs; they make no
distinction. "I like to write folk songs," says A. L., and Kathleen
adds, "I like a song that tells a story." They feel that the songs
which they compose need to create an image in the mind's eye of the
listener. A. L. insists that their songs contain some narrative ele-
ment "so that it's got a picture in it where you can listen to it,
and you can visualize the way it was." They feel that to some
extent their adherence to the imaginative telling of musical stories
has contributed to much of their success. Kathleen, writing under
the nom-de-plume, "Kae Norris," has expressed the opinion in the
liner notes to one of the family's albums that

Much of the Phipps Family's success is credited to their dedi-
cation to the poor people down close to the soil. Many songs
that they [the Phipps family] have written tell the stories
of tragedies of the poor common people such as school bus

4Dan Ben-Amos, "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres,"
wrecks, train wrecks, cyclones, mine explosions, and others. 5

In offering their musical accounts of these "tragedies of the poor common people," they once again see themselves aligned with their mentors. A. L. feels that

the Carter Family type of thing was something that got right down with the people. I say that's the real flavor of the Carter Family, . . . they got right down to the heart of the people, the common people. . . . They sang about what was happening to them that very day or what concerned the people in the 1930s. And today people want to hear [about] what's concerning them right now.

Implicit in the family's continuing references to the "poor common people" is the understanding that the audience for whom they sing is comprised of white, generally Protestant, and, if not exclusively working class Appalachian-rooted, then at least working class people in general.

Functioning as they do, at the fringe of contemporary journalism, the Phippses are placed in a role not dissimilar to the earlier broadside balladist who, according to G. Malcom Laws, is

rarely open-minded, intuitive, or perceptive. His judgments, with which he is rather liberal, are conventional reactions to outward events. He makes no effort to understand or sympathize with those whose activities fall outside his preconceived notions of what is proper. In telling stories that could be truly poignant or tragic, he relies heavily on sensationalism and sentimentality. 6

Laws continues his remarks by stating that these sentiments refer to "the broadsides as printed literature rather than folksong." 7

5 Kathleen Phipps [Kae Norris], liner notes to "Give Me the Roses While I Live," Pine Mountain Records, PMR 129.


7 Ibid., p. 83.
understanding the above characterization of the broadside ballad writer, we can draw the same conclusions in treating the Phippses' recorded secular music as contemporary, electronic broadsides and view these writers themselves as balladists not unlike New Mexican trovador Próspero Baca, about whom T. M. Pearce has written. In his summation, Pearce advances the following conclusions about Baca in particular and about the individual whom Pearce labels "the folk poet" in general:

He writes often of community events and personalities associated with them and of manifestations of natural forces and effects upon society. He writes of the experiences of individuals. . . . His poetic idiom is stamped with expressions describing group feelings and thought.9

This description of the folk poet is completely applicable to the Phipps Family, as we will soon see in examining some of the family's secular songs. More importantly, however, the family sees its role as one of advocacy of the "poor common people" whose needs and feelings have generally been ignored, especially by contemporary singers, songwriters, and record producers. In this instance, they recognize their function on two planes: first, that of writing tragedy-related songs which deal with events which they perceive as being of interest to residents of southeastern Kentucky in particular and to members of the lower socioeconomic classes in general, presenting the material in a form familiar to their intended audience. They hold that outsiders cannot properly gauge their audience's sentiments, and therefore they, as the common people's advog...
cates and voice, need to write these songs. Their second perceived function is that of advocacy of older forms of music in general. This will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four when we treat the specific contexts of their performance.

In striving to communicate with their audience, they take great care in calling attention to the scope of their repertoire in the liner notes to their records as well as in their Pine Mountain Record Catalog. All of the catalog descriptions and all liner notes but those on the Starday originals and the one Folkways album were written by members of the family, usually by Kathleen writing as "Kae Norris." Hence, the notes and descriptions accurately convey the sentiments which the family has for its music. The catalog description of their Folkways album (FA 2375), "Faith, Love and Tragedy," is headed "OLD TIME MOUNTAIN AND GOSPEL SONGS" and reads

Here is a brand new album of Old Time Mountain Gospel and Folk Songs, recorded on Folkways Records by the PHIPPS FAMILY. This Album is a very interesting record, and has 3 themes: Faith, Love and Tragedy. It has 13 songs recorded on the record and some of the Old Time True Mountain Folk Songs such as Sinking of Ships, Mine Explosions, and a song of the Murder of President James A. Garfield. . .

Similar sentiments surface in the catalog notes to their "Old Time Pickin' and Singing," (SLP-195; PMR-195), described as

A notable collection of Southern Folk Songs. These songs tell a great story of actual happenings across the country, such as: Mine Explosions, School Bus Wrecks, the Death of Abraham Lincoln, and the Wreck on the L & N Railroad.

---

10 Pine Mountain Record Company Catalog (Barbourville, Kentucky, Pine Mountain Records, n.d.).

11 Ibid., p. 2.

12 Ibid.
Recent folklore scholarship has tended to emphasize the need for study of the total context within which the folkloric material functions. Dan Ben-Amos recognizes that in the past, folklorists, in explaining their material,

resorted to enumerative, intuitive, and operational definitions; yet, while all these certainly contributed to the clarification of the nature of the material, at the same time they circumvented the main issue.13

The main issue for Ben-Amos is the situation wherein folklore—the process and the item—occurs and the significance which it holds for the participants in the folkloric process. In referring to the term "context" here, the analysis will develop two interrelated subcontexts which comprise the context in its entirety: the setting which will be fully discussed in Chapter Four and what might be termed the "emotional context," by which the underlying significance of the act to the specific performer is clarified. An analysis of the secular music of the Phipps family reveals that the music's emotional context is manifest in a reflection of pride in the family's heritage which they exhibit—however morbidly—in the composition and performance of musical accounts of various tragedies and laments for an earlier, less complex lifestyle. For them, these are the "old songs" for, although composed during the second half of the twentieth century, their themes and forms have antecedents in the eighteenth and nineteenth.

Before examining some of the songs which the family has composed, it is necessary to discuss briefly the process of composition

---

as understood by A. L. and Kathleen. Says Kathleen,

I can't just sit down and have somebody say, "Write a song." I couldn't do it to save my neck. I get a vision of the thing. Sometimes it seems like I could hear something just roaring off somewhere . . . . Sometimes it leaves me if I don't go write down what I was thinking or what I was hearing in the back of my mind. There's just times I can write, and times that I can't.

For A. L., as for his wife, the entire experience has about it an ineffable quality which neither of them can clearly describe.

The way I get a song in my mind is that certain events come along . . . . It has got to be an inspiration, plus it has got to make good sense.

These sentiments hold true for their secular as well as for their sacred pieces, although, as noted in Chapter Two, they are additionally adamant that "if it's a gospel song, it certainly has to be in harmony with the Bible."

For the Phipps Family, the whole composition process can be thought of as an "integrative" process in a manner described by Eleanor R. Long. She indicates four types of ballad singers: the preservating singer who requires faultless reproduction of his/her text, even to the point of retaining unintelligible words or phrases; the confabulator, who may from time to time improvise for the sake of improvising on an earlier text; the rationalizer, whose improvisations are based upon some specific principle; and the integrative singer or composer, to which class the Phipps Family belong.14

The integrative folk artist is as aware of tradition as the preservator, as innovative as the confabulator, and as conscious for the need for organization as the rationalizer.

He [the integrator] goes beyond all three, however, by creating texts that are unique and often as not memorable. He makes use of traditional verbal formulae and narrative themes but he is not enslaved by them; his value-system is that of the poet or "maker," not that of the craftsman.\(^{15}\)

A. L. speaks to his awareness of tradition as well as to the rhetorical function\(^ {16}\) of the music in maintaining,

I'm looking at this music as true American, traditional American, the kind of music that our forefathers came in here and developed in this country, and I don't want to see it die out. I'd rather see it still be around and keep people in the American way of life than to see something that's not American crowd it out.

Of course, one of the major questions confronted in every aspect of the study of folklore is that of change. How do materials change, and why do performers change their material? For the Phippses, although to a lesser degree than for the preservating singer, it is important to retain with a high rate of accuracy the texts of the older songs. Their verbalized desire for accuracy of rendition notwithstanding, it must be realized that each performance of a given item is distinct in some way from all previous and subsequent performances; virtually all singers--preservators and integrators alike--do alter their songs in some manner. Over the years, through dozens of performances in a variety of contexts, some changes have inevitably occurred in their individual songs, even in those as ingrained into their lives as the Carters' songs and items traditional to their own repertoire. Gordon Hall Gerould substantiates the above statements in _The Ballad of Tradition_, postulating that

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 233.

\(^{16}\)Abrahams.
... the singers of ballads are quite unconscious of changing them, and yet never sing them, line by line and musical phrase by musical phrase, quite like their neighbors. There is evidence, indeed, that many singers... have introduced variants of their own making.\(^{17}\)

The deep appreciation that the Phippses have for their own music is obvious in their expression of feelings toward alterations in the material. Questions similar to those suggested by John Quincy Wolf\(^ {18}\) were posed to Kathleen and A. L. who responded along the same lines predicted by Wolf, feeling that ideally, no changes should be made in the "old songs." In verbalizing this conviction, A. L. provides illuminating insight into the transmission of traditional music as he sees it.

I'm inclined to believe that the people that wrote these songs, they didn't write them commercially; they wrote them for us people several generations down... I believe they'd want us to sing them just exactly like they'd give them the songs to us... If I'm going to sing "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," I want to sing it just about as I would think my great grandfather would've sung it.

Kathleen is in complete agreement with her husband on this point, adding, "You just take something away from an old song when you change it." Such a strong feeling about the necessity to avoid alteration in traditional songs has, of course, been documented elsewhere, including cultures such as Yugoslavia, where Albert Lord encountered an epic singer who insisted, "... by Allah, I would sing it just as I heard it... It isn't good to change or add."\(^ {19}\)


Having viewed the Phippses' secular repertoire by illuminating their feelings toward the music and their role in its composition, it is now necessary to examine the songs which have been composed by members of the family (essentially by A. L. and Kathleen) and which now function prominently in their active repertoire.

The secular repertoire of the Phippses, comprising only twenty-three percent of their recorded repertoire, does not consist of songs of a sufficient number to make practical a clear thematic typology of these songs, as Marshall's typology was applicable to their sacred pieces. Since their overall repertoire does rely so heavily on the Carter Family's songs, it is not surprising that the largest proportion of the Phippses' non-religious music is comprised of lyric love songs borrowed directly from the Carters. This large group includes songs such as "Wildwood Flower," "Foggy Mountain Top," "Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow," and "Sweet Fern." The family's repertoire includes only one British ballad, "The Merry Golden Tree," (Child 286). Perusal of a folksong finding list with A. L. and Kathleen isolated no other British ballads in their active or inactive repertoire. Tragedy songs, two murder ballads, and at least two pieces that might be described as "laments for days gone by" are prominent, with tragedy songs (including occupational ballads) comprising the bulk of their compositions. Only four items noted by G. Malcom Laws as native American ballads emerge from their repertoire: "Charles Guiteau" (Laws E-11), "Pearl Bryan" (classified as "Pearl Bryan I," Laws F-2), "The Great Titanic," (labeled "The Titanic I," Laws D-24), and "Only A Miner," (Laws G-33). These songs are hardly unique to the repertoire of the
Phippses and were probably learned (either by A. L. and Kathleen or by their immediate ancestors) from early commercial recordings.

Perhaps the best statement concerning the kinds of songs which they write is found in the liner notes cited earlier, referring to "... Mine Explosions, School Bus Wrecks, the Death of Abraham Lincoln, and the Wreck on the L & N Railroad."²⁰ Obvious from these subjects is the fact that the Phippses do not see themselves as composers of light-hearted material. To a limited degree this tendency may be complementary to the generally accepted, though somewhat romanticized, characterization of the Appalachian community as comprised of fatalistic individuals who are "never very optimistic about anything."²¹

Kathleen, in assessing the family's proclivity for singing tragic songs, says, "I always liked a sad song, from a child on up. . . . Maybe I had a sad life, growing up by myself." (As noted in Chapter One, Kathleen was an only child in a society where small families were never viewed in a positive light.) A. L. adds, "I didn't have any sad life, as far as that part's concerned, but I always did like a sad song."

In any case, whatever their motives, A. L. and Kathleen Phipps were drawn to write sad secular pieces. One of their earlier compositions, and the only one of their own songs that can be classified as a lyric song, is entitled "The Forsaken Lover." Kathleen wrote the text and, following a pattern used by her on various occasions,

²⁰Kathleen Phipps.

²¹Weller, p. 38.
set her words to the tune of one of the best-known of the Carter Family's "standard" pieces, "Wildwood Flower." While A. L. and Kathleen express a love for "good clean love songs," this piece is unique among the songs penned by any member of the family. While they do sing many lyric songs in any given secular performance, the overwhelming majority of these are Carter Family songs. "The Forsaken Lover" was recorded on the family's Folkways album in 1965. In preparing the booklet to accompany the album, old-time and bluegrass music enthusiast Bill Vernon, obviously overstating his case, maintained that this piece might even be considered to be a variant of "Wildwood Flower." Aside from the tune, "The Forsaken Lover" is only vaguely similar to "Wildwood Flower" in its use of the flower motif and borrowed cliches and commonplaces.

All the roses are blooming where we used to meet,
And the dew on the lilacs are still fresh and sweet.
I wonder if ever his face I will see,
Now he's gone away forever, another's love to be.

There we wandered together and talked of our love
As we strolled in the garden beneath the stars above.
Now he's gone and neglected the one that he loves,
No one e'er so lonely, not even a dove.

Through this cold world I'll wander, no lover for me.
He has taken another his lover to be.
How my heart is now breaking no one will ever know.
I'll wear a smile forever, wherever I go.

The rest of the Phippses' secular songs depart in form from the lyric song and move into the realm of the ballad. Another of their early compositions also comes from Kathleen's pen. This is a contemporary counterpart of those songs dealing with water and

rail tragedies. This song concerns a school bus wreck in March, 1958, in nearby Floyd County, between Prestonsburg and Pikeville, and is entitled "The Yellow Tomb."

Come all you good people, and listen to me,
And hear the saddest story, the worst in history,
Of fathers and mothers that's left here to grieve,
Their homes are so empty, no children there to see.

One cold Friday morning these children left their home
To have their daily lessons, they did not plan to roam;
They laughed and cheered each other as they went on their way,
They did not live to enter their school room that day.

The river called Big Sandy was deep and rollin' high,
'Twas there the school bus landed and there they had to die,
Twenty children drowned [sic], the driver met his doom,
For God seen best to call them in this tragic yellow tomb.

Then let us all take courage, we'll meet them by and by,
We'll join them in their mansion above the starry sky.
There'll be no sorrow in that land, the flowers are in bloom,
There'll be no children dying in a tragic yellow tomb.

From this one item in the Phippes' repertoire, it is not difficult to comprehend earlier references to their secular music as electronic broadsides. This piece is a twentieth-century example of the "come-all-ye" song which again serves to strengthen the Phippes' position as integrative ballad makers, aware of traditional themes and formulae, but not inextricably bound by them. Most of the information for "The Yellow Tomb" was gleaned from local media treatment of the incident, but the sentiment which Kathleen successfully developed through the text required no outside assistance.

Having children myself, I could imagine how those parents felt . . . it's too much grief to imagine at all. Every word of it is the facts from the news reports that came out. That's one of the hardest songs that I wrote, because I wanted to be sure that what I used was fact.

Not all of their songs are the result of media coverage of particular events. "The Hurricane Creek Mine Disaster" (Pine
Mountain PX-1888, released as a 45-r.p.m. single) chronicles a mine disaster which occurred near Hyden, in Letcher County, in 1970, killing thirty-eight miners.

(spoken introduction) This song we're about to sing is a story about a mine explosion that came to pass on the thirtieth day of December, nineteen and seventy, in Hurricane Creek Mines, near the little town of Hyden, Kentucky. This explosion took the lives of thirty-eight honest, hard-working miners.

In the Hurricane Creek Mines at the end of the year
An explosion so sudden caused sadness and fear;
Thirty-eight miners so young and so strong
Were hard-working miners when death came along.

I want to go to Heaven when this life is o'er,
I want to see my loved ones who's gone on before, (Chorus)
While they were working, God called them away,
I know we'll meet them again someday.

The explosion was sudden on a cold winter's day,
About twelve-twenty God called them away,
Smoke and dust began a-rolling, in fury it whirled,
Debris and rock dust from the mountains unfurled.

While the dust kept a-rollin', hope for life was all gone,
Soon the sad news was spreading to their loves ones at home.
People rushed to the mountain, they cried on their way,
Oh, the grief and the sorrow on that terrible day.

Chorus

Oh, let us all meet beyond the blue sky,
There'll be no more sadness and no more good-by,
There'll be no explosion to take them away,
We'll all be together and happy that day.

After Kathleen and A. L. met some individuals from the Hyden area who were familiar with the details of the disaster, Kathleen was able to write the song combining information from newspapers and from first-hand accounts. She remembers,

Some folks came here wanting records, from Manchester, and they knew about it [the explosion]. They went back and sent us newspapers, and we got all the news items we could. We put it together from "write-ups" . . . and I was able to talk to a few people about it.
As evidenced by the above text, it is difficult for the Phippses to compose without some references to things spiritual, a fact which they readily admit. Obviously, their deep involvement with sacred music coupled with the psychological need for assurance that all will indeed "meet beyond the blue sky" are responsible for this tendency. The emphasis on spiritual "rest" in this piece and in their other mining songs emerges as the result of still another factor: their continuing feeling of closeness to the "hard-working miner." Both A. L.'s and Kathleen's fathers as well as other relatives and friends had worked in the mines, providing the Phippses with a lifelong awareness of the myriad dangers implicit in that particular occupation. Speaking of the Hurricane Creek disaster, Kathleen remembers,

That was a sad thing, but I felt like I wanted the song to honor the men because they were working people (and we don't have a lot of working people any more). I think our miners are the hardest working people that there are, and they're brave, too, because they risk their lives so I wanted to honor the men.

As stated at the outset, while no typology as such can be set up for the Phippses' secular music, many of their non-sacred compositions do deal with the mining experience for reasons already apparent. "The Kentucky Mine Explosion," referred to by the family as "The Kettle Island Mine Explosion," is another of Kathleen's compositions lauding the miner and bemoaning his fate. In dealing with this song and with most of their others, it is significant to understand the Phippses' conceived role in the historical process as it relates to their compositions and performance. They feel that it is their duty to prepare and dissemi-
nate songs such as "The Kentucky Mine Explosion" in order to document for future generations particular incidents in the historical past, since "a few of the old timers remember them, but the younger generation doesn't."

"The Kentucky Mine Explosion" and "The Hurricane Creek Mine Explosion" feature a spoken introduction and falls within the realm of the contemporary broadside although the lyrical quality of "The Kentucky Mine Explosion" almost overshadows the narrative strand of the song.

(spoken introduction) This is the story of a mine explosion that happened on March the twenty-ninth, nineteen and thirty, in a little mining town in southeastern Kentucky.

You people gather 'round me,
A story I will tell
Of an awful mine explosion
And friends I loved so well.

It was on one Saturday evening
About the hour of three,
In a little mining town
Disaster we did see.

I heard a noise like thunder
The flames were rolling high,
And the men began to prayin',
"Oh, Lord, we're going to die."

The mortar was a-crumblin'
And men gave out a yell,
The feeling at that moment
No mortal tongue could tell.

I thought of their dear children,
They left to sleep in death,
And working for a living
To bring their daily bread.

They prayed to the Lord for mercy
And then began to cry,
Their dreaded fate was coming
And there they had to die.
The explosion referred to in this song occurred in neighboring Bell County, just east of Knox County, on Straight Creek, between Pineville and Harlan. Apparently the title, "The Kentucky Mine Explosion," was used because the Phippses were not sure which of the many area mines was involved since, as Kathleen says,

There's lots of mines up there, one mine after another, and I think that why we called it "The Kentucky Mine Explosion" was that we weren't sure which one it was until after we recorded it and got it out. Then people got to talkin' to us about it. They heard it on the radio, and then we learned.

A. L. remembers vividly the impression left on him as a thirteen-year-old youngster and vows that when they release it again (as they plan to), they will use the song's proper title.

As might be expected, when the Phippses recorded their Folkways album in 1965, they included one of their mining songs. Bill Vernon, writing in the descriptive booklet that accompanies the record, notes that "The Red Jacket Mine Explosion" is a piece

... written by A. L. Phipps which commemorates one actual explosion at the Red Jacket Mine on the night of Friday, April 22, 1938; the mine was located on Keen Mountain, in Hanger, Virginia. The force of the dust explosion was sufficient to blast several miners and a great deal of mining equipment and machinery from the depth of the mine all the way out its entrance, causing much of the machinery to roll down the side of the mountain. In all, 45 miners were killed in the blast making it one of the worst mining disasters in the country's history.23

Why did the camp seem so lonely,
And why were they feeling so strange?
It seems every person was restless.
But why had there come such a change?

That evening the men lingered longer
But at last they did start for the mine,
For they felt that their duty had summoned,
And their duty required them on time.

23 Vernon, p. 2.
It seemed every nerve was at tension,  
Such an unusual silence around.  
Then the silence was suddenly broken  
By a shock from in under the ground.

What could have brought such a disturbance?  
Oh, what could have caused such a fright?  
In terror they cried, "An explosion!"  
What a scene on that sad Friday night.

The machines had rolled down the mountain,  
There were screams and cries filled the air.  
In this terror all filled with excitement,  
Everyone seemed to whisper a prayer.

All the camp people rushed to the mountain  
To inquire for their loves ones and friends.  
Oh, how sad, for the smoke was a-rollin'  
And the mines was a-burnin' within.

Forty-five miners killed in a moment,  
Many burned in their beauty and prime.  
May we all be at peace with our maker  
We may answer our call any time.

Red Jacket camp's famous beauty  
Now looks not the same as before,  
You can see now that something is missing  
That can never return any more.

Remaining to be investigated is one last mining song in the active repertoire of the A. L. Phipps Family. This item, "Only a Miner" (Laws G-33), is an often-recorded piece whose understated, somewhat tongue-in-cheek title was used by folklorist and labor scholar Archie Green for the title of his significant book-length treatment of the mining experience and the commercial recording industry. Archie Green describes "Only A Miner" as the American miner's national anthem. It is known from California to Virginia and was collected in coal, gold, silver, copper and lead mining areas. It belonged to traditional singers at least from 1888 to 1961, and it seems

---

vital enough to live into the future. 25

The Phipps Family knows the song as "The Miner's Fate," under which title they recorded it in 1961. Green recognizes that the Phippses' variant, which follows, is "fully traditional in text, tune, and stylistic presentation." 26 Kathleen claims,

I remembered a little of that that my mother sang, and I had to write some verses to it because I didn't remember it all; and at that time, before Mother passed away, we didn't have any way of recording the stuff. So what I couldn't remember, I wrote.

In his discussion of "Only a Miner," Green notes a somewhat different explanation offered to him by the Phippses by way of correspondence that "Kathleen had obtained the song from her mother who had it on 'an old ballad, . . . faded and partly decayed.'" 27 He continues by corroborating statements made above, that "not only was it traditional to Mrs. Phipps, but A. L. and Kathleen had lost friends and relatives in Kentucky mine slate falls. Witnessing disaster made it a 'true song' for them." 28

The hard-working miner whose dangers are great,  
For many, while working, have met their sad fate.  
Doing their duty as all miners do,  
Shut out from the daylight and their loved ones, too.

He leaves his dear wife and little ones, too  
To earn a living as all miners do;  
While he is working for those he loves  
He met his sad fate from a boulder above.

---

25 Ibid., p. 64.  
26 Ibid., p. 100.  
27 Ibid., pp. 99-100.  
28 Ibid., p. 100.
Only a miner under the ground,
Only a miner, eternity-bound,
Killed by a boulder, there's no one can tell,
His mining is over, poor miner, farewell.

Death came to call him, so quick was the fall,
"Have mercy upon me," the poor miner called.
They came to help him, but no one could save.
They could only prepare him to rest in his grave.

His mining is over, poor miner, farewell,
His loved ones are mourning, their heartaches can tell;
His little children, so sad and alone,
Their home is so lonely, their daddy is gone.

Apparently, the last two verses were primarily from Kathleen's pen, as Green notes no parallels to them in the texts which he discusses. Verses one and two are substantially identical to the version recorded in 1928 by Paramount Records and released as Paramount 3071, "the song's earliest tangible form, aside from 'memory' reports."

Before completely departing from the Phipps Family's affinity for mining songs, it should be noted that the process of ballad composition continues in an active role for the family in the 1970s. Kathleen is currently involved in the writing of a song commemorating the recent widely-publicized disaster at the Scotia mine. While this piece is almost finished, its author says of the song, "I don't feel like it'd be fair to finish it all 'til the eleven bodies [still unrecovered] are removed."

A second occupational experience has played a major role in the lives of A. L. Phipps and his family for many years and has, predictably, been chronicled by them in their music: the railroad. As Chapter One elucidated, A. L. worked for the L & N Railroad for

\[29\] Ibid., p. 66.
more than twenty years, holding a variety of positions. During the
1930s, before A. L. was employed by the railroad, a wreck occurred
between Livingston and London which inspired the writing of "The
Wreck on the L & N." The accident was the result of the classic
combination of an overdue train and a winding road bed. Continually
influenced by their mentors, the Carter Family, A. L. liberally
borrowed the tune and large parts of the text of the Carters'
"Engine 143" and adapted to them his tale of the death of engineer
David Elam. According to A. L., Elam was not known for maintaining
a strict timetable,

... so they [the owners] had been on him for quite some time
about running behind. ... The fireman was the only one who
escaped and he told the story. This train was going so fast
that it left the tracks on a curve ... on Crooked Hill (and
it was crooked). ... It stood the coaches right up on their
end.

Lynwood Montell, in the preface to his *Saga of Coe Ridge: A
Study in Oral History* notes that several approaches have been
taken to oral historical material in the past. One of these
approaches, that of folklore as an embellishment of history, does
seem to apply here with "the embellishment of bare historical facts
with universal motifs." Judging from the text of the song, a train
wreck occurred (which could be thought of as a motif), and around the
historical fact of David Elam's accident were woven the text and
tune of "Engine 143." In the case of the Phippes' story of David
Elam, it does seem that a certain degree of embellishment has taken

---


place, with the basic facts still intact.

(spoken introduction) This is a story about a wreck on the Louisville and Nashville Railroad.

Along came a passenger train, the fastest on the line,
Running o'er the L & N road, 'bout thirty minutes behind;
Running into Louisville, headquarters on the line,
Receiving her strict orders from the station just behind.

The fireman came to the engineer with a bucket on his arm,
Saying, "We're running late, be careful how you run,
For many a man has lost his life while trying to make lost time,
But if you run your engine right, we'll get there just on time."

Around the curve she darted, against the rocks she crashed,
Upside-down the engine turned, poor David's head was smashed.
His head was in the firebox door, the flames were rolling high,
And this is what I heard him say: "My time has come to die."

The doctor said to David, "My darling boy be still.
Your life may yet be saved, if it is God's blessed will."
"Oh, no," said Dave, "that will not do, I'm dying, don't you see?
Just tell my dear old mother to never weep for me."

The doctor said to David, "Your life cannot be saved,
Dying on the railroad and laid in a lonesome grave,"
His face was covered up with blood, his eyes you could not see,
The very last words I heard him say was, "Nearer my God to thee."

Two more of the Phippes' secular songs remain to be investigated specifically in this chapter. The first of these is another treatment of an event in American history although an event of more national significance than those already analyzed. "The Death of Abraham Lincoln" was written at the urging of John Small, a Connecticut country music disc jockey and booking agent who promoted the Phipps Family during their Newport Folk Festival trip in 1964. Small also visited the Phippes in their home, and A. L. remembers on this occasion that he

told us that a real old lady (over in the eastern United States . . . where most of the Yankees are) had told him the complete story. . . . We sat right down and wrote the song and put it together and put a melody to it . . . all in the same night.
In relating the development of this one piece, A. L. and Kathleen offered some useful insights into the criteria which they employ in the selection of tunes for their songs, secular as well as sacred. They agree that the melody ties the complete song together and consequently "had so much to do with the effect of the song."

You could take the most beautiful song in the world, but if your melody doesn't fit the result will be deficient. A. L. indicates that to a great extent the tune must be tailored to fit the specific theme of a particular text. "If you've got a spritefully song, you've got to have a spritefully tune to it, to make it link up. That was one thing we had to do with 'The Death of Abraham Lincoln'."

Abe Lincoln's lying cold and pale with a bullet in his head.  
A coward's deed has been fulfilled, our President is slain.  
Sound out the bugle once again from Kentucky up to Maine.

Our soldiers brave went through the night in search of treason's son,  
Who killed poor father Abraham with a bullet from his gun.  
(Chorus)  
Bring the traitors in, boys, bring the traitors in.  
Bring the traitors in, boys, bring the traitors in.

Search the city house to house, no mercy for the foe.  
They murdered our poor President, and laid poor Seward low.  
Ride out, ride out, for General Grant, and send for Sherman, too,  
Thomas Butler and the rest, there's a hanging job to do.

Chorus

Let church bells toll in every town throughout our saddened land,  
Then cry again, "To arms! To arms! To fight the rebel band."

Bring the traitors in, boys, bring the traitors in.  
(fade out)

The next song has not been discussed until now since it serves, better than any other comments or analysis, to describe the feeling which the Phippses have for their music and to elucidate their position relative to their repertoire. As might be predicted, the
text contains references to sacred themes, but to no greater degree than some of their other overtly secular pieces such as "My Old Cottage Home." Both Chapter Two and this chapter have treated the family's repertoire, citing their music as a functioning extension of the Phippses' generally conservative world view. "I Like To Sing the Old Songs" is their own statement directed toward all who experience their music.

I like to sing the old songs I heard long years ago,
Although my voice may fail me and the tears may flow,
For days gone by I'll live again with each familiar strain.
Oh, let me sing the old songs, join in the sweet refrain.

Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly;
While the nearer waters flow,
While the tempest still is high.

Let's all now sing the old songs while visions come again,
Of fancy days of childhood and manhood's toil and pain,
Perhaps when early fetters have set our spirits free,
We all will sing the old songs throughout eternity.

I'm a-goin' through, yes, I'm a-goin' through
I'll pay the price whatever others do;
I'll take the way, for the Lord,
I've started with Jesus, and I'm goin' through.

Peace, peace, wonderful peace, coming down from the father alone,
Creeps over my spirit forever, I pray, while the years of eternity roll.

The analysis of material is by no means sufficient to understand the Phippses and their music. The situations in which the music occurs should be investigated and their causes analyzed, supplementing the previous pages. Such an examination will be undertaken now in treating the performance contexts of the A. L. Phipps Family, contexts which, like the music itself, are also products of the family's reaction to contemporary society.
"TO KEEP THE OLD TRADITION ALIVE:"
THE A. L. PHIPPS FAMILY IN PERFORMANCE

The study of folkloric material without ancillary treatment of the situations wherein the material exists can lead only to ill-formed conclusions and misguided interpretations. Too often folklorists have limited their investigations to the items of folklore, seemingly ignoring the specific settings which surround and strongly influence the "doing" of the folkloric act. In order to understand fully the music of the A. L. Phipps Family, it is necessary to proceed beyond a mere analysis of the songs of the family to a discussion of the contexts in which its music occurs. Robert A. Georges, in speaking of the storytelling event, states that the "message of a storytelling event has no existence 'outside' the storytelling event itself. It is not some 'thing' that is merely used within differing contexts."¹

To paraphrase Georges, it can be said that the Phippses' music cannot be understood as some entity which functions in differing contexts. Rather, one must understand the contexts wherein the songs are performed and the reasons for their specific contextual being. In concluding this examination of the Phipps Family, the intention in this chapter is precisely that: to investigate the varied situations which witness the Phippses' performance of their music and, where possible,

to discuss the reasons for the singing of specific types of material in specific settings. In accomplishing this goal, five settings have been isolated for investigation: funerals; religious services; public, secular concerts; radio broadcasts; and commercially-distributed recordings.

It is hardly surprising that religious-oriented performance comprises a sizable portion of the settings for the Phippses' music. Chapter One demonstrated, from an historical frame, the deep ties which the family maintains with the church, and Chapters Two and Three substantiated the family's proclivity for the performance of sacred music. Performance at religious functions is the only area which the contemporary Phipps Family shares with the earlier quartet made up of James and Ida Hughes Phipps and their children, Earl and A. L.

Funerals around the Knox County area have provided ample opportunity for the family's performance of their religious music, and they are eager to be heard in such circumstances. A. L. sees funerals as his favorite outlet for their sacred music, arriving at this decision because he has seen organized religion turn away from traditional hymns in church, embracing contemporary gospel music. Although such a generalization is, of course, vastly overstated, A. L. does feel duty-bound to sing for people who appreciate his music. Thus, his preference has become fixed on funerals where he feels that people expect to hear more "natural" traditional music.

In discussing the family's singing at funerals, the intent is to encompass more than the graveside service. Indeed, within the overall funeral event, there are four distinct physical settings
which may be involved, and they may perform at any one or more of these within the context of any single given funeral. On occasion, they are asked to sing in the funeral home itself before or during the services. If memorial services are held in a church, their music might develop there. These first two situations are relatively predictable locations for contemporary funeral services. In the past, however, especially in tradition-oriented families, most funeral services were held in the home of the deceased. In fact, most of the Phippses' funeral singing has occurred in private homes, and both A. L. and Kathleen lament the rise of impersonal funerary practices discouraging home funerals. The fourth and final scene for their funeral performance is at the graveside. The preceding delineation of performance settings is not intended to suggest that singing in one context necessarily precludes singing in another; very often, singing will occur in two, three, or all of these situations within one single funeral. As Kathleen perceives their role, they will do "whatever the family delights in."

In any case, whenever the Phipps Family is asked to sing for funerals they generally consult the family of the deceased regarding the songs that they might wish to have sung. In most instances, they will choose three to six pieces to present. Even this practice differs from past experiences when eight songs at a funeral was not considered to be excessive, but, says A. L. "funerals are short any more, and that cuts down on a lot of singing."

The tone of the songs is set to match the occasion. According to A. L.,

Certain songs appeal to a funeral, and some of them may be a
little sad, but why not? It's a sad occasion; why try to make it something else?

In this context, the songs they usually perform are presented for their consoling effect, almost always with the emphasis on the hope for a brighter future which is implicit in the family's conservative religious precepts. Items of their repertoire which they feel are particularly well-suited to funerals include "Calling Me," "They Shall Live Again," "My Savior Will Take Me Home," and "We Shall Meet Beyond the River."

In the course of this study, there was no opportunity to observe the family performing at a funeral. However, in discussing these gatherings, Kathleen and A. L. have noted that in addition to the above-mentioned contemporary changes, their delivery of the music itself has also been altered. In the early days, it was practically unthinkable to sing with instrumental accompaniment at the funerals, given the widespread disapproval of musical instruments voiced by many churches. Thus, until fairly recently, funeral music for the Phippses consisted of unaccompanied "quartet songs" since, as A. L. observes,

That was the kind of thing that was done at funerals so many years ago. Although [today] we play instruments in churches and when we record, when it comes down to the funeral we'd always drop back to the old tradition.

They perceive their funerary appeal as transcending social class lines although this point is perhaps the hardest to substantiate of any from their self-analysis. A. L. holds that they are "called" to perform at funerals of people from the lower and middle classes, and, "occasionally you'll find some person [calling for our music] that's even higher than the higher class of people."

The second general situation conducive to the performance of
the Phippses' music is that of the public, secular concert. Their first public appearance after their marriage was in a gospel program at Highsplint High School in 1942, and they see as only natural that their concerts include a large proportion of gospel music. Since the beginning of its commercial career in the late 1950s, the Phipps Family has performed in many diverse concert situations, ranging from small gatherings such as the semi-annual traditional music workshops held in Barbourville at Union College to much larger functions typified by the urban folk festivals of the 'sixties and 'seventies. For Kathleen Phipps, these concert settings are her favorite approach to the singing of their music, particularly their sacred pieces. "I can get into it [the singing] better," she says, adding that unlike a church or funeral performance, when she sings to a concert audience, she knows that the people are there just to see them. A. L. sympathizes with these feelings, noting that, "your conscience tells you that these people have come there and paid to see me, ... and you don't have any problems." There is little doubt that a bolstered ego is a great advantage to a performer standing before an audience.

Although a Phipps Family concert is an aggregate of songs representative of all facets of their repertoire, the place of religious music in their presentations is obvious. In a 1976 concert held at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, for example, thirteen of the twenty-eight songs (forty-six percent) were sacred in theme. With respect to the large, urban, East-coast folk festivals at which they have appeared, their reputation often precedes them, as they are usually scheduled as a matter of course in "hymn sings" and gospel music concerts and workshops (in addition
to any Carter Family-related workshops that might be planned).

Their performance of the songs of the Carter Family and their overall clinging to the more conservative forms of traditional music provided the catalyst for the Phipps Family is becoming known to a much wider audience than they had ever reached. As will be noted below, their early recordings had provided some publicity for them, and, as a result, they were invited to appear at the 1964 edition of the Mecca of the folksong revival of the 1960s, the Newport Folk Festival. Their invitation to go to Newport occurred largely through the efforts of folksong enthusiast Ralph Rinzler, now with the Smithsonian Institution's Center for the Study of Man. Although this was not the family's first trip to the East (they had performed at radio station WWVA's Jamboree U.S.A. in Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1961), the Newport Folk Festival was of paramount importance to their career in that they were introduced to the urban folk music movement and to an audience that otherwise they probably would have never reached. A. L., Kathleen, Leemon, and Trulene journeyed to Rhode Island for the festival where they received a reception that staggered them. According to A. L., they were kept busy at concerts and workshops throughout the days and well into the nights. In addition to their festival exposure, their Newport experience afforded them the opportunity to record for a major non-country label, Folkways. Their album for this New York-based company, "Faith, Love and Tragedy" (FA 2375), presents a cross-section of their repertoire, including two murder ballads, one Child ballad, three sacred pieces, two Carter-related songs, and two tragedy-disaster ballads. Bill Vernon, writing in the booklet to accompany the disc, evaluates the family as presenting "a thoroughly personal perpetuation
of a fine old mountain style of singing and playing." 2 (Repeated attempts to contact Vernon for additional information on the Phippses' Newport performances and their Folkways recording session proved unsuccessful.)

Newport and New York were not the only cities which saw the Phipps Family in the mid-sixties. In January of 1965 they sang at the University of Chicago Folk Festival. Bruce Kaplan (currently operating Flying Fish Records) produced the University of Chicago Festival and remembers that they drew "good response from the audience . . . and received one encore at each performance." 3 Also in Chicago, they became acquainted with folklorist Archie Green who has maintained a loose relationship with them since their first meeting. In analyzing the reaction of the eastern urban audiences to the Phippses, Green feels that "[folksong] revival audiences saw and heard the Phipps Family in two lights--continuators of the Carter Family styles; [and] Kentucky traditionalists in their own right." 4

The late 1960s and the 1970s have seen the Phippses continuing in their active advocacy of their music. In 1973 they toured through Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and in 1972 and 1973 appeared at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D. C. Richard Hulan, an area coordinator for the 1973 Festival worked closely with them and feels that at the Festival they presented themselves as "a happy family with a pretty low-key stage manner." 5

---

3 Personal correspondence from Bruce Kaplan, 18 November, 1975.
4 Personal correspondence from Archie Green, 19 October, 1975.
5 Personal correspondence from Richard H. Hulan, 6 October, 1975.
Hulan does note that they "are not the archetypical 'folk'--unself-consciousness being one of the main stumbling blocks." It is obvious at this juncture that the Phippses are anything but unself-conscious.

A context adjunctive to that of the public concert involves the radio broadcasts which the Phippses made over a period of almost twenty-five years, putting them squarely in line with many other early country music performers of the same time. These were almost exclusively sacred music programs, and for the most part they were aired over local stations in the northeast Tennessee-southeast Kentucky area. In 1949 they began to play their music on radio station WCPM in Middlesboro, Kentucky, and eventually were given a regular program on WCTT in nearby Corbin. On the latter station they began their Sunday morning gospel music programs for those who were "sick and shut-in" and unable to attend church. In those days the ensemble included A. L. and Kathleen and A. L.'s niece, Hester. Their program on WCTT at first filled a fifteen-minute slot but was eventually expanded to a half an hour and was broadcast over the Corbin station for more than five years. During the ensuing years, they were featured on various radio stations in the Kentucky-Tennessee area, including appearances on Lowell Blanchard's "Midday Merry-Go-Round," on Knoxville's WNOX, and on their own hometown radio station, WYFY in Barbourville. Their programs on WYFY were eventually dropped, according to station manager Bill Carson, because the family's local popularity was not sufficient to merit the retention of the program. Carson attributes the family's apparent lack of local support to the failure of "prophets in their

---

Ibid.
Their radio broadcasts continued well into the 1950s. The majority of these programs were presented "live" in the studio. However, some were pre-recorded for use in the unlikely event that the family was unable to appear in person. Fortunately, some of these transcriptions, recorded on large discs, are still in the family's possession.

Another occasion which features performance of their music is the religious service, including the conventional church-worship situation as well as the special revival. The role of music in the revival service is at least as strong as it is within a conventional church service, primarily due to "... a mystical power believed to be inherent in the text and music of a gospel song." The Phippses' religious conservatism has played a stronger role in this context than in any of the others cited here.

For many years the family had appeared at numerous religious gatherings, perceiving each activity as a direct function of their "calling." Their performance in this general setting was not limited to the worship service or revival alone; they took active roles in many fund drives for local churches, feeling proud to help people "get their church started a-going," since, as A. L. remembers,

We had a lot of poor churches. A lot of them were delapidated buildings. They actually needed to repair their old church, but they didn't want to build one.

---

7 Interview with Bill Carson, Barbourville, Kentucky, 31 October, 1975.

A. L. and his family attribute their success at these fund-raising ventures to the overall appeal of their music and to the fact that as a singing group they had gained something of a following from their local radio broadcasts and personal appearances. Kathleen opines,

"We were more fortunate than most singing groups in this country since we had radio broadcasts and we were much more known than other groups. So the preachers got onto this type of thing—that we'd draw a crowd of people—so if they wanted to build them a church or repair their old one, they would just hound us to death, you might say. ... So we always wanted to help, doing the thing we ought to do. ... We'd get out there and draw a crowd of people and we'd get their church started a-going ... and get some real nice buildings started.

On occasion they would visit as many as three churches on a weekend, in neighboring counties as well as in Tennessee and Virginia. They never had a set fee for performances such as these; instead, they were paid by "passing the hat" among those who had come to listen to their music and contribute to the church's building fund.

With the close of the 1950s, they began to see changes taking place in religious emphasis and in sacred music itself—changes by which they no doubt felt threatened. In a self-analysis of their role, A. L. compares the family to the apostle Paul, since they wanted to go back around and see how they the churches were doing. We started, but we didn't get around. We saw so many attitudes change, ... and their church worship was absolutely no good. We didn't enjoy worshiping there, ... so what's the use, it's more or less a Pharisee kind of religion. ... So we'll let this old boy the minister get his money the best way he can get it.

The Phippses felt—and continue to feel—a real antagonism toward trends which A. L. places under the heading of "modernism," best exemplified by their interpretation of a pronounced leaning in the direction of contemporary popular music styles, instrumental and
vocal, as the avenue through which gospel music is now channeled. A. L. compares contemporary gospel performers to "Hollywood showpeople" and holds that their outpourings of sentiment are contrived since "these people get up there and put on; they can cry one minute and they can get out there and do a lot of things the next . . . it's an artificial type of thing." The new music "doesn't have anything in it . . . You hear the racket, [but] nothing comes into your ears that would make you feel anything."

In any case, it is evident that the Phippses see their music as suited for only a limited number of performance contexts; for them a context such as a religious gathering should feature music developed from traditional models and rendered in a traditional manner.

The final context involved in the Phipps Family's performance of their music involves the commercial recording industry. The phenomenon of the commercially-produced record was not yet twenty years old when the Phippses—in those days Kathleen and A. L.—in the 1930s first decided to try to record their music. Unfortunately, the advent of World War Two postponed any hope for this venture, a hope that was not finally realized for almost another twenty years.

Following the war, they were not as anxious to record.

We weren't enthused. We wanted to do the music, but we weren't enthused like we are now to make records and to get them out to the whole world. We'd started a family, and we were gonna get rich quick at work.

As noted in Chapter One, faced with a growing family, A. L. began to work for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad and held that job until his retirement in the early 1960s. Primarily this move resulted from the need for a guaranteed income, a need which music
and the recording industry could not provide. This is not to imply that their interest in music waned during this period, but every year they postponed making an entrance into the field of recorded music. Says A. L.,

We had the desire to get out there into the music business, do a lot of shows, but we'd say we'd do that next year, so next year didn't come. We were still right back to the same old thing, farming and working on the railroad.

Their radio career occupied a large part of their performing life during the early and mid-1950s. Their long-held dream of releasing a record was finally realized in 1959 when they recorded two sides for Acme Records: "The Little Poplar Log House," and "We Shall Meet Beyond the River," the latter of which A. L. considers to be their best Phipps-composed song. These two songs were released as a 45-r.p.m. single in November of 1959. While they are unsure of the exact number of singles actually sold, they do know that the record was very well received on stations WLAC, Nashville, WWVA, Wheeling, West Virginia, and WKYC, Cincinnati. On the Cincinnati station its popularity was such that it was first on their local charts for three months. The favorable reception by these country music stations led in 1960 to the family's being offered a recording opportunity with Nashville-based Starday Records.

Their first release for Starday was a four-song, extended-play disc which A. L. feels was promoted well by Starday. The national response to the record was encouraging enough that the Starday management arranged for the Phippses to record a full-length long-playing album, eventually titled "The Most Requested Sacred Songs of the Carter Family" (Starday SLP 139, reissued by Pine Mountain
Records, PMR 139). This album contains fourteen Carter Family standards including "Diamonds in the Rough," "Keep On the Sunny Side," and "Lonesome Valley." The album cover depicts a two-story, presumably poplar, log house, over which the title of the album is printed, with "Carter Family" emblazoned in large yellow letters. On the lower right side, appearing almost as an afterthought, it is mentioned that the songs are performed by the A. L. Phipps Family. In spite of this seeming subordination of the Phippses role, Don Pierce, then manager of Starday, lauds the Phippses in the liner notes, writing that they are
dedicated to the mountain folk songs [sic] tradition and the sincerity of their style should bring real enjoyment, worldwide, to all who truly appreciate this wonderful American music.9

Within a rather short period of time the Phippses recorded two more albums for Starday, "Old Time Pickin' and Singin'" (SLP 195/PMR 195), recorded 11 April, 1961,10 and "Echoes of the Carter Family" (SLP 248/PMR 248). A. L. describes the former as consisting of "folk and gospel music."11 On this album are nine songs attributed to A. L. Phipps (although at least one, "The Yellow Tomb," was composed by Kathleen) and seven listed as having been arranged by

9Don Pierce, liner notes to "Most Requested Songs of the Carter Family, (Starday SLP 139/Pine Mountain PMR 139), and "Old Time Mountain Pickin' and Singin'" (Starday SLP 195/Pine Mountain PMR 195).

10Green, Only A Miner, p. 109.

11The interpretation which A. L. and Kathleen ascribe to the term "folk music" involves only those items which are normally classified as ballads, irrespective of their age and/or medium of transmission. They categorize any other type of music according to theme, e.g., love songs, gospel music, etc.
him. Most of the songs recorded on their various other albums are said to have been arranged by A. L. himself. "Old Time Mountain Pickin' and Singin'" contains representatives of many themes of country music from its birth to the present: songs dealing with occupational disasters, sentimental parlour songs, a lament for a wayward son, and several sacred pieces.

The latter album, "Echoes of the Carter Family," includes twelve songs generally associated with the Carters, plus two recently-composed items dealing with the Carters. "When Mother Maybelle Played the Autoharp," by Art Bishop, is a romanticized lament for days gone by when, it is implied, all things were better, and the Carter Family was still performing its music. "A. P. Carter" is an incomplete biographical treatment of A. P. by Bishop and Tommy Hill, sung to the tune of "The Great Speckle Bird"/"I'm Thinking Tonight of My Blue Eyes." "Echoes" is the last album that the Phippses recorded for Starday and is the only one that they ever recorded without a single gospel song included, a fact that A. L. darkly hints might explain why the Starday-Phipps Family relationship began to sour at this time.

While the Starday albums had apparently sold moderately well at the beginning, the sales had dropped off, and the family found their music deleted from the Starday catalog. It was a move both A. L. and Kathleen attribute to their desire to include a majority of sacred material in their albums.

Their being dropped by Starday, of course, was a real blow to the family, not only because they felt that their music was important but also because, through their concerts, they were their own best promoters and therefore could sell their records better than anyone
else, thus supplementing their income. Kathleen explains,

. . . In our work we had demand for it [their music], because we worked with people on our tours, and then people got to writing us. . . . We had a demand for it, and we had to manage some way to keep copies of it.

The "way" that the Phipps Family developed to cope with their serious dilemma was the inauguration of a completely new record company, Pine Mountain Records, which originally was to be nothing more than an outlet for the Phippses' own recordings. Largely, of course, they formed the company to guarantee themselves complete freedom in the selection of material to release, freedom which they could never enjoy with any label which they did not control.

At first glance, the birth of Pine Mountain might seem to be in direct contradiction to their otherwise conservative life-style. Indeed, the adjective "conservative" has been used repeatedly in describing the family and its existence. However, the needs met by their record company are equally conservative to those met by their strong religious conviction and A. L.'s ecological conservationalism. The idea of a record company--progressive and contemporary though it may be--serves not as an end but as the means to preserve the conservative, older musical forms and tastes. It is felt that other seemingly "progressive" measures would also be adopted by the family if they were faced with having to protect their beloved homeland from being strip mined.

Returning to the subject of the record company itself, A. L. and Kathleen both express amazement at the success which Pine Mountain has enjoyed over its ten-year history. As the record business grew, they found themselves in a position beyond that of performers or recording artists. They were able to promote actively the older forms
of traditional music on a fairly wide scale, a function of theirs that will be examined at this point.

It is interesting that William Henry Koon's *JEMF Quarterly* article, "Grass Roots Commercialism," deals with Starday Records itself since close parallels can be drawn between Koon's characterization of Starday and Pine Mountain. Both "appealed to an audience for unsophisticated country material,"\(^{12}\) a factor obvious from a cursory examination of both companies' catalogs. Secondly, they "appealed to the vast market in the South and in other lands for both gospel and sacred music,"\(^{13}\) a point which A. L. corroborates in speaking of their overseas sales in Japan, Germany, and Great Britain. Finally both companies "recorded some performers whose styles were completely out of vogue,"\(^{14}\) which is perhaps the most illuminating similarity of all since the Phipps Family's recordings and musical style being so much out of vogue had caused the family's deletion from Starday's catalog, in turn leading to the birth of Pine Mountain Records.

Other parallels between Starday and Pine Mountain are easily explained by a secondary function of the Phippses in which they occupy the role of promoters. Of the fifty-four different titles listed in the current Pine Mountain catalog, only fourteen feature the Phipps Family as a group. The remainder present the work of other artists such as the Blue Sky Boys, Lulu Belle and Scotty


\(^{13}\)Ibid.

\(^{14}\)Ibid.
Wiseman, and J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers, some of whom had been recorded and listed by Starday, but who, like the Phippses, found their material cut from the Starday catalog. Their appearance in the Pine Mountain catalog is the result of the Phipps Family having leased the master tapes from the original recording company (such as Starday), obtaining copies of the masters, and then pressing and re-releasing the music on the Pine Mountain label, thus providing artists such as the late Charlie Monroe and Molly O'Day with an outlet for their music which they might not have otherwise enjoyed.

This practice is not one which the Phipps Family engages for strictly monetary gain, for the cost of record production is not minor. Rather, they are in the record business because they feel that the music is important and because they hold that "the major companies more or less go for the big dollar, ... they don't consider the artist at all." However, their concern for the individual artists is transcended by the real force behind the Phipps Family and behind the record company: a genuine love for the music, and a continual concern for its future. "I like to see the old tradition kept alive," says Kathleen, "... and I'm glad I could do a little to keep it going." As noted above, they feel that their music "goes along with the common people" and adamantly believe that "that kind of people should like this kind of music and should keep it going."

Their concern in this particular vein is that there are not enough of the "common people" left, and therefore they do their best to keep alive this style of music by winning new converts although A. L. is quick to add that the family really does enjoy what they are doing, or else they would not be doing it. He feels that the survival of
his music is important enough that he "would like to train somebody, to help somebody learn to be a more professional musician, maybe than myself in this field."

The pervasive conservatism of the Phipps Family is further demonstrated by the fact that A. L. considers contemporary music and the general trends current in country gospel music to be in direct opposition to the older forms since he is adamant that his willingness to train someone would apply only to the perpetuation of their music rather than the music embraced by "the other side," which he sees as "one thing that got us out of the American type of music."

From the early 1960s until the present, the Phippses have found themselves before a wide variety of audiences, standing in tangible advocacy of their older forms of music. It is significant that they have reacted to contemporary life in such a way as to strengthen their family musical bonds. In this very important way, they are most different from their mentors, who, according to Ed Kahn,

... broke up because of the changes that had taken place in society since they had begun their career. Throughout the 1930s the area from which they came was changed. ... Rural values were diluted.15

While there can be no doubt that this dilution of rural values has been present in the life of the Phipps Family, rather than forcing them away from their music, social changes in the 'fifties, 'sixties, and 'seventies have resulted in their tightening their hold on the older, conservative values, while visibly demonstrating their sentiments through their concerts and recordings. This attitude is in continual combination with their appeal to the "common people"--

15Kahn, xv.
understanding the term "appeal" to mean an attraction-like quality as well as a solicitation for support. This reaction is entirely predictable, as Jens Lund recognizes:

In the United States the rural and lower classes have traditionally been hotbeds of conservatism and reaction. Their music, both folk and commercial, has constantly reflected such themes. When not overtly expressed, . . . these traits have been manifested in the vocal and instrumental styles of their performance.16

As has been demonstrated in the preceding pages, precisely these conservative vocal and instrumental styles encompass the only music which the Phipps Family embraces. Influenced by their values and life-style, they continue to perform and compose songs which have meaning for them and for their target audience. Their performance occurs in a variety of situations and geographic situations resulting in their functioning at the periphery of the country music world and recording after hours in Nashville that music which is largely ignored by most people of the 1970s: the old songs.

CORRECTION

PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN REFILMED TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO CORRECT A POSSIBLE ERROR
CONCLUSION

There are as many possible methods for interpreting and analyzing traditional musicians and their musical forms as there are students of folk music. The preceding study has combined several possible interpretive approaches, resulting in an in-depth discussion of one particular group of tradition-bearers, the A. L. Phipps Family. After the application of an anthropological and historical tool, the life history, in Chapter One, the ensuing chapters developed basically as investigations of the obvious manifestations of the values and world view framed within the family's life history. As stated at the beginning of Chapter Four, any attempt to analyze folklore apart from its natural context is a study in futility. Thus, the preceding pages had as their goal an understanding of the Phipps Family's music as it exists in their daily lives.

The importance of music for the Phippses is profound in an esoteric as well as an exoteric sense. This study has effectively demonstrated that the Phippses' music fulfills a variety of their needs and that they use their music subtly--and sometimes not so subtly--to promote their own conservative cultural values.

As Archie Green noted in correspondence cited earlier, the Phipps Family should be seen in two distinct lights: as interpreters of the musical repertoire of the Carter Family and as traditional singers in a more individual sense. This investigation has further
demonstrated that in addition to these two categorizations, the Phippses are also composers who are cognizant and appreciative of traditional musical forms and who regularly draw from this knowledge in their composition.

These pages offer a useful introduction to the A.L. Phipps Family, a singing group which now occupies a unique position in the field of commercial country music, by having carefully adapted the musical repertoire of the Carter Family to its own needs. Members of the family have been profoundly influenced by the musical taste, life style, and worldview of their immediate ancestors and by the rise of the commercial country music industry. Finally, the Phippses are now in a position of active advocacy of their music, acting as influencing agents and promoters of other musicians' interpretations of the traditional musical forms which have played such a major role in their lives.
APPENDIX 1

PHIPPS FAMILY DISCOGRAPHY

Note: In the preparation of discographies, it is customary to include master recording numbers, dates, and site of the recording. In the case of the Phipps Family's recordings, much of this information was lost in a fire which struck the offices of Starday Records. In most other cases here, the Phippses were unable to assist in supplying needed discographical information. It should be noted that this was the only occasion that the Phippses did not fully assist the author in his research.

The recordings are presented in two groups: the long-playing albums first, followed by the extended play discs. Those which have two numbers (e.g., "SLP 139 PMR 139") were released on the Starday label and later on that of Pine Mountain Records. Records bearing a "T" designation are also available on eight-track tape. Every attempt has been made to list the records in the order in which they were released.

Long-playing albums

SLP 139 (PMR 139) "Most Requested Sacred Songs of the Carter Family"

- Keep on the Sunny Side
- Motherless Children
- Cyclone at Rye Cove
- Lonesome Valley
- I Can't Feel at Home
- Little Log Cabin By the Sea
- River of Jordan
- On the Rock Where Moses Stood
- No Telephone in Heaven
- Anchored in Love Divine
- Little Poplar Log House
- Diamonds in the Rough
- A Distant Land to Roam
- Where Shall I Be?

95
SLP 195 (PMR 195)  "Old Time Pickin' Mountain Pickin' and Singin'

I Like to Sing the Old Songs
Death's Black Train
The Engineer's Last Ride
When He Blest My Soul
The Death of Abraham Lincoln
Little Country Home Among the Hills
Kentucky Mine Explosion
Great Reunion Bye and Bye
Poor Orphan Child
Wreck on the L & N Railroad
The Miner's Fate
Just Before the Battle Mother
A Soul Winner for Jesus
Plenty of Room
The Son that Went Astray
The Yellow Tomb

SLP 248 (PMR 248)  "Echoes of the Carter Family"

Wildwood Flower
Foggy Mountain Top
A. P. Carter
Darling Nellie Across the Sea
Forsaken Lover
Little Darling Pal of Mine
Bury Me Beneath the Willow
Bring Back My Blue Eyed Boy to Me
My Clinch Mountain Home
Storms Are on the Ocean
Sweet Fern
When Mother Maybelle Played the Auto-Harp
Sweet as the Flowers in Maytime
I Have No One to Love Me

Vanguard VRS 9182  "Traditional Music at Newport, II" (with other artists)

Anchored In His Love
God Gave Noah the Rainbow Sign

Folkways FA 2375  "Faith, Love and Tragedy"

The Merry Golden Tree
The Unclouded Day
Red Jacket Mine Explosion
Away Over in the Promised Land
The Old Pine Tree
The Great Titanic
I Never Will Marry
Forsaken Lover
Charles Guiteau
My Home Among the Hills
Pearl Bryan
Just Another Broken Heart
Gonna Row My Boat
Pine Mountain PMR 125  "Greatest Old Gospel Hymns" (includes ten cuts by other artists)

When the Roll is Called Up Yonder
Shall We Gather at the River
Leaning on the Everlasting Arms
There is a Fountain Filled With Blood
Oh What if We Fail to Get There
There's a Deep Settled Peace in My Soul
I Won't Turn Back
Oh Why Not Tonight
There is Power in the Blood
The Lily of the Valley

Pine Mountain PMR 126  "Outstanding Easter Songs"

In Gethsemane Alone
He Prayed
The Heart That Was Broken
For Me
On a Hillside So Lonely
All Alone

They Crucified My Lord
Alone the Savior Died For Me
I Remember Dark Calvary
Is He Satisfied With Me?
On a Hill Lone and Gray

Pine Mountain PMR 127  "Only Through Grace"

Only Through Grace
Two Robes
When I Can Read My Title
Clear
Bright City
Day is Breaking in My Soul
Amazing Grace

This Life is Wonderful
The Beautiful and Blessed Forever
I Am Satisfied with Jesus
God is Getting Worried with Your Wicked Ways

Pine Mountain PMR 128  "Old Time Christmas Songs"

His Only Darling
Joy To the World
It Came Upon a Midnight Clear
While Shepherds Watched their Flocks
I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Silent Night
Away in A Manger
O Come All Ye Faithful
Hark the Herald Angels Sing
Beautiful Star of Bethlehem
Pine Mountain PMR 129 - "Give Me The Roses While I Live"

Little Poplar Log House
Give Me the Roses While I Live
Daddy, Is Mama Coming Home?
On the Rock Where Moses Stood
Calling Me
I Can't Feel at Home
Just Beyond the River

Look How This World Has Made a Change
Here Farewells Are Sadly Spoken
Golden Light
I Would Not Be Denied
We Shall Meet Beyond the River
Motherless Children
Fifty Miles of Elbow Room

Pine Mountain PMR 130 - "In the Sweet Bye and Bye"

Church in the Wildwood
In the Sweet Bye and Bye
I Must Tell Jesus
Is Not This the Land of Beulah?
I Love to Walk With Jesus
No Not One

Glory to His Name
Beautiful Robes of White
That Terrible Day
Whosoever Will
The Unclouded Day
Farther Along

Pine Mountain PMR 131 - "Sings 'Em Mountain Style"

I'm Happy Now
I Shall Go to Dwell on Zion's Hills
Sinless Summerland
My Savior Will Take Me Home
In the Shady Green Pastures
Eternity's Night

He is With Me All the Way
Blessed Jesus Loves You Too
The Hand of God
Oh Be True
They Shall Live
Lord I'm Coming Home

Pine Mountain PMR 132 - "The Sufferings of Christ"

The Sufferings of Christ
He Loves Me
Bye and Bye We'll See the King
My Old Cottage Home
Grave on the Green Hillside

Shake Hands with Mother Again
Sea of Galilee
Angels Get My Mansion Ready
Glory to the Lamb
Count the Mile Stones
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pine Mountain PMR 133</th>
<th>untitled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Believe Jesus Saves</td>
<td>Calling Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work for the Night is Coming</td>
<td>God Shall Wipe All Tears Away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footsteps of Jesus</td>
<td>He Is Coming Again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come My Blessed Savior</td>
<td>Trust and Obey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Waiting My Call</td>
<td>Hear Him Calling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near the Cross</td>
<td>I'm Going Home To Die No More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Joy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pine Mountain PMR 134</th>
<th>&quot;Just A Few More Days&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silver Haired Daddy of Mine</td>
<td>Just a Few More Days of Sorrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dying From Home and Lost</td>
<td>Hello Central, Give Me Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where We'll Never Grow Old</td>
<td>When the World's On Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture on the Wall</td>
<td>I'll Be Home Some Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Long to Go Home</td>
<td>We Shall All Be Reunited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extended play records

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pine Mountain 1</th>
<th>untitled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Believe Jesus Saves</td>
<td>Footsteps of Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God Shall Wipe All Tears Away</td>
<td>Near the Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and Obey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work For the Night is Coming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pine Mountain 2</th>
<th>untitled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How Firm a Foundation</td>
<td>He's Got the Whole World in His Hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come Let Us Go Home</td>
<td>Near [sic] My God to Thee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'll Be Home Some Day</td>
<td>Where We'll Never Grow Old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pine Mountain 3</th>
<th>untitled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Have But One Goal</td>
<td>Hello Central Give Me Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Family Who Prayed</td>
<td>There'll Be Joy, Joy, Joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Hour</td>
<td>Reunion in Heaven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pine Mountain 4 untitled

Rock of Ages
Daniel Saw the Stone
When the Saints Go Marching In

Palms of Victory
On a Hill Lone and Gray
Picture on the Wall

Pine Mountain MEP 976 "The Phipps Quartet"

When He Blest My Soul
I Want to Love Him More
Happy Day
Glad Reunion Day

Some Sweet Day
A Soul Winner for Jesus

Pine Mountain MEP 144 untitled

Little Poplar Log House
Little Moses

The Last Mountain of Time
Moses and the Israelites

Pine Mountain MEP 159 untitled

Wreck on the L & N Railroad
Just Before the Battle Mother
When the Sunset Turns the Ocean Blue to Gold
He Has Done So Much For Me

Pine Mountain MEP 240 untitled

Oh I Want to See Him
Mother's Not Dead But Only Sleeping
God Gave Noah the Rainbow Sign

Walking on the King's Highway
Beautiful Star of Bethlehem
Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?
APPENDIX 2

PHOTOGRAPHS

The historical study of any entity, be it a nation or an individual family, necessarily involves photographic documentation. The photographs which follow are representative of the career of the A.L. Phipps Family and portray the family from its early performance career through the present. Included are early promotional photographs, one photo of the Phippes and the Carters taken at the Carters' home, several photographs of the family in performance contexts, and one photograph of the Phipps Family in a Nashville recording studio. These few photos are only a very small portion of those in the author's personal collection. Unless otherwise stated, the photos were taken by the author.
Photo 1: A.L. and Kathleen Helton Phipps during the early 1940s. Copy from a photo in the personal collection of the Phipps Family.
THE PHIPPS FAMILY

Hester  A. L.  Kathleen

Photo 2: A promotional card used by the family in the late 1940s when A.L.'s niece, Hester, was performing with her uncle and aunt.
Photo 4: The Phipps Family in concert at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, January, 1976. Left to right: Leemon, Kathleen, Trulene, A.L. Photo by Mary Helen Welsey.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS


PERIODICALS


Pearce, T. M. "What is a Folk Poet?" Western Folklore 12 (1953): 242-248.


UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS


INTERVIEWS, CORRESPONDENCE, AND MISCELLANEOUS SOURCES


_______. Interview, 1 November, 1975.

_______. Concert recording, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, 28 January, 1976.


_______. Interview, 23 June, 1976.

_______. Interview, 30 June, 1976.

_______. Concert recording, 3 August, 1976, Concordville, Pennsylvania (recorded by George P. Mercer).

Pierce, Don. Liner notes to "Most Requested Songs of the Carter Family." Barbourville, Kentucky, n.d.

_______. Liner notes to "Old Time Mountain Pickin' and Singin'." Barbourville, Kentucky, n.d.