

Issues in Traditional Song Past & Present

Notes from the workshop discussion on Friday January 8th, 2016
at the fourth annual Youth Traditional Song Weekend

Youth Traditional Song Weekend is a youth-focused (though not youth-exclusive) weekend for young singers and aspiring leaders in the trad song community. This document is the product of group discussions in a workshop attended by members of the YTS community. This document does not represent a set of rules or endorsements by the individuals or organizers, but is meant to share out the thoughts and ideas discussed in the workshop.

What brought you here? What were you talking/thinking about?

- Authenticity & permission to modify
- Due respect to communities of color
- At what point is it “trad” or not?
- Coming to music from different backgrounds/contexts/experiences
- Importance of creating safe and comfortable spaces
- Songs that you would never sing with others! And where to sing them?
- Where do each of us fit into the bigger community & tradition?
- Not thinking about issues at first, then thinking of them later
- Giving space for all people of all levels to participate and creating high skill level/quality (welcoming while directed)
- Cultural appropriation, dialect, religion - which things are more important or comfortable? Which things bug people more?
- “Canon” in trad. song communities
- Ownership of a certain song

Issues We Think About

- Cultural appropriation, especially with regard to race
- Authenticity of learning process (context, technology uses)
- Historical accuracy
 - The “right” way
 - improvisation
- Potentially objectionable lyrics
 - What happens for you? For others?
- Changing cultural sensibilities & notions of appropriateness
- Gender perspective
- Religious songs
- Preservations vs. modification
- Permission, authenticity
- Diversity of participants

- Curating - how things get chosen to pass on, and who decides
- Who ISN'T represented in the music?
- When do you call it "trad"?
- How to respond to something you find problematic
- Representations of violence in songs
- Performing AND listening
- Transposing and keying for a variety of voices

What are our shared and different experiences and perspectives (across generations/ages)?

Shared

- Discomfort with song topics; editing
- Singing consciously
- Singing for known vs. unknown groups, and how choices and perception play out, and how you think differently considering your surroundings
- Shared question: How to respond when you're uncomfortable with how someone else does something?
- Discomfort with presentations of some topics, eg. violence against women
- Religious songs as telling stories rather than specific belief, while respecting the song's meaning
- Building community
- RAGE REACTIONS!

Different

- Thinking personally vs. thinking about community or group, esp. as an organizer
- Different places of where we draw lines about authenticity - What do or don't you feel comfortable singing
- Singing a song from different gender perspectives
- How to build community
- Purposes of songs
- Attention to history of a song
- Performative contexts make for different ways of talking about songs
- Generational differences in how and how much we think about and discuss singing
- Differences in which aspects of song we're thinking about