

S. 1. 6. – TALES AND SONGS OF THE SEA

Chair: Anne Tove Austbø

(Stavanger maritime Museum/Museum Stavanger & University of Agder)

Oral circulations and French songs crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the Prize Papers collection (17th-18th centuries)

ÉVA GUILLOREL (Université de Caen Normandie)

Abstract

A comparison between folksongs collected in French-speaking colonial America and in mainland France shows many similarities that lead us to inquire into the processes of circulation of oral cultures in the early modern Atlantic area. The documentation provided by 19th century ethnographical surveys lends support to the idea of a basically oral transmission, although the link between orality and writing must not be neglected. However, such circulations are very hard to document. Studying the archives seized on board French ships captured by the British in the 17th and 18th centuries while crossing the Atlantic offers rich possibilities to know more about these cultural mobilities. Handwritten notebooks, sheets of songs as well as music scores and printed broadside ballads kept in the High Court of Admiralty's Prize Papers collection give a precious picture of circulations of songs on transatlantic ships, whenever they left a paper trail. The comparison between these written archives and ethnographical recordings gathered in the last two centuries allows to propose a renewed analysis on the historical sources of folksongs.

Keywords

Oral circulations, French songs, Prize Papers, early modern history, folklore

Biography

Éva Guillorel followed a university education in History, Celtic studies and Ethnology in Brittany (France) and completed a PhD in early modern History in 2008. She did postdoctoral research for three years in the United States (Harvard University) and Quebec (Université Laval) and was then appointed as a Lecturer in early modern History at the Université de Caen Normandie in 2011. In 2012-2013, she was hosted at the University of Oxford (Hertford College) as a British Academy's Newton International Fellow. Back in Caen since 2013, she specializes on early modern oral cultures in France and in French American colonies. She is a member of the Institut universitaire de France since 2018 and has started a five-year research project entitled "What singing means in the French colonial Atlantic area: Oralities, circulations, appropriations, memories (16th-21st centuries)".

The sea shanty in its economic, social and cultural context

ROY FENTON (Independent scholar, BCMH fellow)

Abstract

This paper will look critically at the existing literature on sea shanties, characterised as work songs used to maximise the efficiency of muscle power on sailing vessels. It will take a maritime historian's perspective to explore the economic reasons why the sea shanty became a significant aspect of work and life on sailing ships in the nineteenth century, to the extent that shanty singers would be engaged expressly for their ability to lead the singing during hauling ropes, raising anchors and pumping out the bilges. The paper considers how the international trades in which sailing ships participated gave rise to the music and words that characterised the genre. In particular, it will look at how shipboard circumstances threw together singers familiar with traditional British-American music, and also exposed them to elements of Black music encountered in the southern states of the USA.

The paper also explores the social role of the songs in knitting together a crew who did not know each other at the start of a voyage, typically came from disparate cultures, often spoke different languages and had varying abilities as seamen. Lastly, the paper looks at the survival of shanties, and their characteristics which has meant a strong culture has grown up of singing them for pleasure.

The subtitle, 'sex and drink and rock and roll' reflects the three recurrent themes in the lyrics of sea shanties. There were frequent references to the women that sailors had encountered, or hoped to meet. Much was made of the pleasures and dangers of alcohol. A third theme is shipboard life in general: the work, the discipline, the officers and the dangers. For instance, the shanty chorus 'rock and roll me overboard' long predates the name given to the post-war popular music genre.

The presentation will be illustrated with brief snatches of recorded shanties

Keywords

Sea shanty, sailing ship, ship's crew, folk song

Biography

Dr Roy Fenton is an independent scholar, editor and publisher with a particular interest in coastal and deep-sea cargo ships in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, on which he has written extensively in academic and popular media. He was awarded a PhD in 2005 for a thesis on the transition from sail to steam in the coastal bulk trades. He has made presentations to a number of conferences including the ICMH in 2008 in Greenwich and 2012 in Ghent, and the annual Scottish Maritime History Conferences. He is a regular participant in events spon-

sored by the British Commission for Maritime History, of which he is a fellow and Honorary Treasurer. He also has a long-standing interest in traditional music, dance and drama, and is a regular participant in folk and shanty festivals in the British Isles.

A Sensitive Atlantic Ocean: historical connections, musical instruments, practices and sustainability within lusophone communities

JORGE RIBEIRO (University of Aveiro)

Abstract

The cultural connections between interconnected communities that had a Lusophone basis from a political and historical point of view, is a fruitful issue for the understanding of musical practices in different contexts, as is the case of Portugal, the Atlantic archipelagos of Madeira, Azores, Cape Verde, or Brazil. That is why the circulation of musical instruments and practices within these communities has been a very rich field for the understanding of cultural processes that took place in the past and still are significant from the perspective of cultural contacts, symbolic and political control and social memories. It is the case of specific instruments like viola and cavaquinho for example, that travelled and spanned within many Portuguese-speaking spaces around the Atlantic Ocean establishing a visible (or invisible) presence in different cultures and regions, dating back at least from the 17th century to the present. In this connected communities many relations of creation, enjoyment and work with music are marked by the sharing of disseminated repertoires, musical instruments and provided the construction of what can be designated as “sensitive, singular and autonomous universes” or “musical ecosystems”. The sustainability of this universes has been fueled by processes of memory reactivation through dialogue, musical creativity involving the instruments and its movements around the Atlantic Ocean.

In this paper I propose to (1) examine some global questions of musical connections in a lusophone Atlantic Ocean in the construction of symbolic, material and sensitive relations between communities in Portugal, Brazil and the archipelagos of Madeira, Azores and Cape Verde; (2) to discuss, in this contexts, how musical instruments are “sites of meaning construction” and “a part of political economy attuned by, or the outcome of, a range of associated ideas, concepts and practical skills” (Dawe 2003).

Biography

Jorge Ribeiro. Degree in Musicology (Universidade Nova de Lisboa). PhD in Music – Ethnomusicology (University of Aveiro - UA). Assistant Professor (UA), and Integrated Researcher at the Institute of Ethnomusicology: Center for Studies in Music and Dance (INET-md / UA). Areas of interest: Cape Verdean music, music in Portugal, migration, postcolonial studies, music and education, music in the Portuguese-speaking world and music as intangible cultural heritage. Extensive fieldwork in mainland Portugal, Madeira, Cape Verde and Brazil. Direction and Coordination of Research Project “Sensitive Atlantic (Atlas) - Memory and mediation of

musical practices and instruments in circulation between interconnected communities” with funding from FCT and participation in other six funded projects. National and international academic publications, including books, articles, essays, ethnographic recordings and audio-visual documentaries. Academic papers presented in 11 countries.