Announcer: From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC

[00:26] John Fenn: Welcome to the Folklife Today podcast. I’m John Fenn, the head of Research and Programs at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. I’m here with Stephen Winick, a Folklorist at the Center, and the creator of the Folklife Today blog.

[00:37] Steve Winick: Hello, everyone! Last time we did an episode on summer songs, and like our winter songs exploration a few months ago, we decided to make it epic and do a second episode.

John Fenn: That’s right. We just had so many favorites, we couldn’t narrow it down. So we have with us once again our guest Jennifer Cutting, another folklife specialist at the Center. Hi Jennifer!

[00:47] Jennifer Cutting: Hi John, hi Steve!

Steve Winick: We thought that you might want to get us started with your first song.

Jennifer Cutting: Oh, sure, I can do that! This first song is the epitome of something we were talking about last time, which is the pastoral ditty where a young man roves out on a summer morning and encounters a pretty maiden. Now, in songs like this, the man usually tries to woo the woman. Sometimes he succeeds, and sometimes, like in this song, not so much! This song is extremely popular on the British folk scene, so I heard...I hear a lot of this song in my folk clubbing days in London in the 1980s. It’s called “The Banks of the Sweet Primroses.”

John Fenn: Why do you think it was so popular?

JC: That’s an interesting question with some history to it. As many of our listeners will know, a lot of American folksongs were first recorded on commercial records rather than on folklorists’ field recordings. As the country, blues, and ethnic genres started to be recorded in the 19 teens and 1920s, traditional musicians found a market niche for their music. That wasn’t as common in England, where most of the folk songs to make it onto commercial 78 were arranged as light classical songs and sung by trained vocalists with an orchestra. But this song was an exception. In 1937,
Columbia Records released a 78 of this song as sung by the traditional singer Phil Tanner from the Gower Peninsula in Wales. It was also sung in the 1950s for the BBC by the great singer and collector Bob Copper. So it got a really early start on record and in radio—which were the main fuel of the later folk revival!

Steve Winick: Yeah, that’s true, and I’ll just say that one of the people to learn Phil Tanner’s version was Dave Swarbrick of Fairport Convention, who also adapted some songs from the AFC archive like “When First Unto this Country” in order to play with the band. And through Dave Swarbrick’s version, I really came to love the Phil Tanner recording—Tanner had an absolutely amazing voice! But I know that neither the Phil Tanner nor the Dave Swarbrick version is in our collections at the American Folklife Center archive, so whose rendition did you bring along?

Jennifer Cutting: Well, this is another version from the 1950s, recorded by Alan Lomax from the music-hall singer Colin Davis. You can hear just a bit of classical training in his voice, and it’s great for this pastoral subject matter!

John Fenn: Wonderful, let’s listen!

[4:08 Singing “The Banks of the Sweet Primroses”]

[7:12] John Fenn: Again, a quintessential Summer Song from Colin Davis. It’s part of AFC’s Alan Lomax collection, and Lomax just labeled it as “Sweet Primroses.”

Steve Winick: That’s right, and that reminds me of another great Alan Lomax recording.

John Fenn: And what would that be?

Steve Winick: In 1962, Alan Lomax recorded a man named Cephus Louis in Trinidad. And to show you how pervasive and influential this whole English genre of pastoral courtship songs was, Lomax recorded one from Cephus Louis, whose father was from Trinidad and his mother was from Tobago, and Lomax noted down that it was an English Lyric Ballad—that’s what he wrote in his notes. And indeed you listen to it, and it sounds just like one of these English songs like the Banks of the Sweet Primroses. But in fact there’s no trace of this precise song in England. It’s just that the song
follows the generic conventions so closely that Lomax assumed it was an English song. It is a really nice expression of this genre of song, with some lovely Caribbean and maritime touches though, and I really love Mr. Louis’s singing. And true to this whole genre, it’s called “One Fine Summer’s Morning.”

John Fenn: Let’s hear it!

[08:23] [Cephus Louis sings One Fine Summer's Morning]

[11:38] John Fenn: That was “One Fine Summer's Morning” by Cephus Louis. And you’re right, it’s great. So great that we’re going to hear more from Mr. Louis before this episode is over! But right now I’ve got another song to play for you. I was reminded of this song by thinking about so many people in the last year who were either ill themselves, or for whom the Pandemic caused them to lose work over what has now been two summers. This comes from the Florida WPA collection. It’s by James Griffin, an African American turpentine worker and logger. In Florida from the early part of the 20th century, turpentine was made from the resin in pine trees, and the workers’ camps maintained barracks or shanties for people to live, and a company store where they shopped. So you had to pay the company for your food and your lodging, and THEY paid YOU by the tree for the work you did. Unfortunately for Mr. Griffin, he got sick and couldn’t work for three months, but he had nowhere to live except in the camp, so he ended up owing them three months back rent. And for that, he says he went to jail for three months. During that time, he says this was his “theme song.” It’s called “Worked All Summer Long.”

[12:45] [James Griffin sings Worked all Summer Long]

[14:36] Steve Winick: Again, that was “Worked All Summer Long” from James Griffin. And we are bringing more summer songs to the Folklife Today podcast, with our guest Jennifer Cutting. Did you bring another song, Jennifer?

Jennifer Cutting: I did! This is another of the cool summer songs that Alan Lomax recorded in Russia in August 1964. So think back: while the Beatles were on their first tour to the US and Canada, Alan Lomax was recording Tuvan music and Georgian music, and other regional musics of the then-Soviet Union!
John Fenn: How did his trip to the Soviet Union come about?

Jennifer Cutting: Well, Alan was visiting the Soviet Union to attend the International Anthropological and Ethnological Congress in Moscow. While he was there he gathered recordings for his comparative research on world folk song style. Ethnomusicologist Anna Rudneva guided him through archives in Leningrad and Moscow, where he made copies of recordings of various nationalities including the Tuvan recordings. He also made recordings himself of music from Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia.

This song is a dub Alan made from an original ethnographic recording in the collection of Radio Moscow. It’s called “In Summer Pastures.” You’ll hear a sweet-toned zither called the chadagan, played by Mikhail Kenden and Konstantin Tamdyn. You’ll hear a banjo-like instrument called the chanzy, played by Aleksii Anai-ool. And you’ll hear singing by Kara-Kys Namzatovna Munzuk. I’ll point out that this isn’t in the so-called throat singing or overtone singing style that many people will associate with Tuvan music, but it’s just as distinctive and interesting!

John Fenn: And here it is!

[16:50] [Tuvan musicians perform “In Summer Pastures”]

Steve Winick: Once again, that was “In Summer Pastures,” Tuvan music dubbed by Alan Lomax in Moscow in August 1964. I should point out that we have some interesting Tuvan music in the Homegrown series, which we’ll link to in the blog post announcing this podcast at blogs.loc.gov/folklife

John Fenn: Great plug as usual, Steve. And I believe you also have a second song?

Steve Winick: Yes, I brought along a song in Basque! In the 1930s, Sidney Robertson Cowell had a hard time convincing her Basque friends to record, but she was determined to record their songs, and she wrote about it in her notes, which I’ll quote. So this is a quote from Sidney Roberston Cowell:

Certainly the most reserved group of folkmusicians in California are the Basques. Many Spanish Basques in Pacific Grove sang gladly for the writer after some months' acquaintance; but record, no. This was music of, by, and for the Basques. A friend might be permitted to share it, but fundamentally it was considered pure Basque business, not to be bandied
about on records that anyone might hear. Finally, however, a teacher of Basque descent was able to persuade an old lady, the cook in a small restaurant near the railroad station in Fresno, to record with her son. The Basque reserve broke down the minute the singers heard their own voices, and they made many suggestions for further recording. It should not be difficult to follow the connections of this one family out among the migratory shepherders in California valleys.”

So that old lady and her son were Mrs. Francisco Etcheverry and her son Matias and I’ve brought along one of their songs called “When the sun shines everywhere, how good the shade is!”

John Fenn: Wonderful, let’s hear a clip!

[20:18] [Etcheverrys sing “When the sun shines everywhere, how good the shade is!”]

[21:13] ]John Fenn: So again, a Basque summer song from California. Steve, what do we know about this song?

Steve Winick: Well, I did find something very interesting while researching it. You remember what Sidney Robertson Cowell said about following the connections out to the shepherders? Well, Basque shepherds in the American West are known for creating arborglyphs, that is to say, carving words or symbols into the bark of living trees. And as the trees grow, the glyphs remain as scars on the bark. There are Basque language arborglyphs in California, Nevada, Oregon and Utah going back to 1870 and extending until the 1980s. Often folks just carved their names, and maybe the town where they were from. Sometimes there are little conversations, so a shepherd would carve a sentence and another shepherd would write a reply weeks later. And sometimes it got even more elaborate. It’s a fascinating fact that in July 1951, a shepherd named Jean Biscay carved the lyrics of the song we just heard into an aspen tree near Reno—he signed it too. So we know the song stayed in the Basque tradition in the American west, to be passed on both in singing and in the unusual tradition of arborglyphs!

John Fenn: Wow, that’s strange and kind of cool! And I actually have a friend from college who had a summer job with the U.S. Forest service finding and doing rubbings of those arborglyphs up in northern California.

Steve Winick: Very cool!
Jennifer Cutting: Wow!

John Fenn: Now, we’re almost done with our exploration of summer songs here.

Jennifer Cutting: But not until you play us another song, John.

[22:45] John Fenn: Well, I have another one. Remember how I promised we’d hear more from Cephus Louis? I’ve got another song from him that reveals more of the African influences on the culture of Trinidad. This is a song that Mr. Louis said was about two young women arguing. One was married, and the other wasn’t married yet. And the married woman is kind of taunting the unmarried woman, saying that if she wasn’t married by August, she would never be able to marry after that! So part of its background is the widespread tradition of summer courtship and marriage. It’s called “June Come, You No Marry!” And it’s got a very cool syncopated rhythm which Louis plays by tapping a glass bottle with a spoon—and we have recordings of that exact same rhythm tradition from several locations on the African continent.

Steve Winick: excellent! Before we hear this, let’s thank all the performers and collectors, our engineer Jon Gold, and all the Library colleagues who help us deploy this podcast.

John Fenn: Good idea. And let’s thank our guest, Jennifer Cutting.

Steve Winick: Thanks, Jennifer!

Jennifer Cutting: Thanks for having me!

John Fenn: and thanks to you, Steve!

Steve Winick: Thanks to you too, John! And now let’s end with Cephus Louis singing “June Come, You No Marry.”

[23:57 ][Cephus Louis sings “June Come, You No Marry.”]

[25:00] Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at loc.gov