

The Folklore Society

O F G R E A T E R W A S H I N G T O N

P. O. Box 19174 • 20th Street Station • Washington D. C. 20036

November 12, 1966

Edward J. Orem, Jr.
1717 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Orem:

I would like to express the Folklore Society's appreciation for your taking time to give us your comments regarding some of our activities. Few people do. I do feel though that we should not be sending the questionnaire to new members who, as you point out, haven't been in the Society long enough to answer many of the questions.

When we organized FSGW three years ago we had many long discussions as to what we would call it. After much hassle we chose the present name. We decided to use the term "Folklore" instead of "Music" for several reasons. Mainly, we do want to (and have in the past) include other aspects of folklore besides music. Our emphasis is necessarily on music because most of the members want it that way. Let me reply to your numbered comments in order.

1. The Society is, indeed, strongly oriented toward music. We do include other aspects of folklore as I will point out in number 2, below. The ranks of the Society include several folklorists. Joe Hickerson, vice-President, has an M.A. from the University of Indiana and is currently employed in the Archive of Folksong of the Library of Congress as a Reference Librarian; Esther Birdsall teaches courses in Folklore at the University of Maryland; Helen Schmeyer has been singing and studying Negro music and lore for over 30 years; and I have been deeply involved with material from Georgia and the Southern Appalachians; since I was a kid. There are many more of our members quite involved with folklore. I am relating this simply to point out that we are certainly cognizant that folklore is not folk music. (You may want your money refunded anyway, but that's another point).
2. The Society moves in a direction determined by the desires of its members and the amount of money in its treasury. Some of the activities we have had in the past three years outside the realm of music are:
 - Lecture-Demonstration-Workshop on the Appalachian Dulcimer
 - Film Programs - Including (beside music) Tall Tales, Anthropological Studies, etc.
 - Lecture on "American Folk Life Research" Dr. Bruce Buckley
 - Discussion of music on commercial "Race" & "Hillbilly" records.
 - Reports on folklore research by students from Univ. of Md.
 - Lecture on American Industrial Songs by Archie Green
 - Workshops on Instrument Repair, Puppet Making, Corn Shuck Dolls, and other subjects.

Various FSGW members have been collecting material in this area and some of it has been presented in Society programs.

3. Question 7 should have been left off the questionnaire. The Society does function

The Folklore Society

O F G R E A T E R W A S H I N G T O N

P. O. Box 19174 • 20th Street Station • Washington D. C. 20036

during the summer. We have informall pick-niks with singing and workshops; last year we had a small festival combined with camping out in Prince William Forest Park, Va. We have no formal programs during the months of July, August, and September for the simple reason that the people required to organize and run these activities are taking vacations during this period. Also, there are many festivals around the country that many of us attend. There is just not the time or labor available during the summer. We have never concerned ourselves with attracting the college crowd or with "popularity polls" or whatever is "in" at the moment. As stated previously, most of us have been involved in folklore for many years; long before the "folk music revival" began in 1955. In fact, it was only after the 13 coffee houses in this area closed and the boom appeared to be over (most of the faddists had gone on to "folk-rock") that we organized FSGW. After you have been a member for a while it will be obvious from our programs that we are not concerned with popularity.

4. I think I have already answered your comments on question number 9. We are not concerned with youth or fad. There is no reason, however, that folk music programs and/or programs dealing with any aspect of folklore cannot be entertaining, as well as educational.

We plan to present some papers in several subjects next year. Perhaps you would be interested in presenting one on the subject listed in your questionnaire. If so, how about calling Joe Hickerson at: 283 2735, or drop in and talk to him in the Folksong Archive.

Speaking of youth...I just figured that the average age of the Executive Board is 34.

I hope I have allayed some of your fears regarding FSGW activities. Thanks again for your comments.

Regards,

Chuck Perdue, President

The FOLKLORE SOCIETY of
GREATER WASHINGTON
(Box 19174, 20th St. Station, Wash., D.C. 20036)

A questionnaire:

In an effort to find out who likes what the FSGW is doing and who doesn't, as well as to involve more members in actively doing something with and for the Society, this questionnaire has been prepared (or thrown together). Please fill it out and return it as soon as possible.

1. What are your favorite styles of folkmusic?

Blue Grass, sea songs.

2. Do you feel that the Society has presented a proper cross-section of musical forms, or have there been glaring omissions?

As a new member, I am not qualified to say.

3. Who (list half a dozen or so) would you most like to see presented by the Society? In what capacity? A sampling of performers in various capacities: Mississippi John Hurt, Hal Holbrook, C. F. Voegelin, Melville J. Herskovits.

4. What special events (such as square dances, festivals or whatever) would you be most interested in? A cross-regional comparison of verbal folklore, instrumentation and song, dances, and physical folklore (see Attachment #1), in form of lecture series, displays,

5. Such events take time and people. Would you, as a people, exhibitions, offer some of your time?

Yes, without reservation.

6. How do you feel about the open sings? Should they be continued? Too formal or informal?

See answer to #2.

7. Should the Society continue to function throughout the summer?

See Attachment #2.

8. Do you know of any likely meeting places (schools, churches, campgrounds, etc.) that might be used if need be in the future?

Not at the present time.

9. This is perhaps the most basic question of all: The FSGW was originally founded as a society, not just as a concert bureau to be run by a few pencil-pushers. What can be done to further this intention?

See Attachment #2.

NAME (optional) — Edward J. Orem, Jr.

ADDRESS — Center for Applied Linguistics, 1717 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., 20036

PHONE — 265-3100, ext. 333

ATTACHMENT #1

The questionnaires sent me, as well as the material I received at the last meeting of the Folklore Society of Greater Washington, stimulate the following questions regarding the functions of the Society:

1). The Society seems strongly oriented towards instrumentation and singing. Does folkmusic cover the range of your involvement in the ethnography of American folklore? (If so, you must recognize that folklore ≠ folkmusic, and therefore the Society is mis-termed. Indeed, I should like my dues refunded if you believe folklore = folkmusic.)

2). Or are you moving in the direction of broader concern to include the areas in folk culture and craft studies which a true "folklore" group is necessarily interested in? (Some of the more obvious inclusion might be:

Verbal folklore

riddles, rhymes, proverbs;
superstitions and customs, e.g. fate, luck, time and space boundaries, wishing, talismans, magic, marriage and funeral ceremonies;
myths, e.g. tales, fairies, ballads, legends about persons;
beliefs, e.g. nature, life cycle, folk medicine, seasonal festivities, religion;
anecdotes, e.g. individual thoughts, memories;
traditions about foreign countries and people;
linguistic phenomena, e.g. special vocabularies for trade, profession, social role; language assigned to animals.

Dances

photographs and recordings;
movement notation study [Labanotation];
participation for study and recreation.

Physical folklore, e.g. musical instruments.)

The wide dialectal and ethnological variations (i.e. Virginia Piedmont, Delmarva Peninsula, Tidewater, Pennsylvania Dutch) existing in this region make available to FSGW a rich assortment of folkloric content of the above categories, and present the opportunity for this Society to become a major catalyst for folklore studies in the eastern United States. These important advantages should be exploited fully.

ATTACHMENT #2

7. The answer to this question obviates an answer to whether or not the Society wishes to continue its chief role as a socializing agent in drawing young people together. An organization which depends upon the lemming-like seasonal migrations of the young is severely handicapping itself temporally, qualitatively, and quantitatively. Implicit within the question of seasonal operation is the statement that the Society is concerned with ~~the~~ popularity and popular fancies. What happens to FSGW and its membership when folkmusic ceases to be "in"? I believe the value derived from folklore study is an undated one devoid of the whimsy of the popular tide.

9. The answer here, too, must rest upon the Society's interpretation of its functions. The binary comparison presented in this question suggests that there is some danger of FSGW's turning into a "concert bureau...run by a few pencil pushers." This cannot be resolved until the scope of the Society widens beyond (1) youth, (2) fad, and (3) entertainment.

CHARLES A. FERGUSON director

CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

Telephone [202] 265-3100

Cables CENTAPLING

December 1, 1966

Chuck Perdue
President, Folklore Society of Greater Washington
P. O. Box 19174
20th Street Station
Washington, D. C. 20036


Dear Mr. Perdue:

Thank you for a conscientious reply to my previous comments and questions regarding FSGW. Your remark that perhaps new members should not be answering some of the questions was also appreciated -- and well taken. It could be that I was blunt and too quick to draw conclusions, but it served my purpose of finding out just what sort of stuff the organization is made of. I am looking forward to participating in the activities of FSGW and exploring its scope and structure further. (At this point I should like to ask a question: how is it that members are informed about meetings? I have yet to receive any announcements about time, place, topic.)

Concerning your invitation to present a paper before the Society, I am doing something at present -- field collections of tales and attitudes towards the children of different social backgrounds telling the stories -- but it probably has too much a socio-linguistic slant to be of interest as yet. Perhaps one of the many side studies to be reaped from my main concern can be developed by next spring -- if you would be interested.

Again, my thanks for your very adequate answer.

Sincerely,



Edward Orem

Education and Research Program