

English Folk Music

Folk music is the traditional music of the people, which they performed for themselves in their own communities.

Much of the traditional singing was unaccompanied. However, instruments such as the fiddle, concertina, penny whistle and Northumbrian small pipes were used with some ballads. During the 1950s, the popularity of American folk music in Britain added the guitar and banjo to this list.

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries destroyed the settled life of many communities and with them many of the traditional songs. Attempts were made to collect these ballads before they disappeared forever.

During the 1950s a great revival of English folk music began. Gradually folk clubs sprang up all over Britain. Two very different styles had developed within folk music. The traditionalists tried to reproduce the music as it was originally performed. This was often unaccompanied. Other musicians tried to create more modern and commercial versions of the old songs. Many, also wrote new songs in the folk style about modern issues such as drugs, homelessness and race. One such writer was Ralph McTell) who shot to fame in 1975 with his hit song, 'Streets of London'.

During the 1970s electric folk bands and folk rock groups experimented with new technology and the rhythms of rock music to produce a blend of traditional and modern music. Such groups as Steeleye Span and Lindisfarne achieved Top Twenty hits.

Since then English folk music has become less popular but its influence has lived on through its effect on musicians such as The Beatles and Paul Simon.