

MEDIA REVIEWS

***The Berkeley Folk Music Festival & the Folk Revival on the US West Coast—An Introduction.* Northwestern University. Website. <https://sites.northwestern.edu/bmf/>**

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The Berkeley Folk Music Festival & the Folk Revival on the US West Coast—An Introduction is a web-based digital exhibit focused on the Berkeley Folk Music Festival (BFMF) and, more broadly, the second wave of the folk music revival on the American West Coast from 1958 to 1970. It includes text, images, audio, video, and links to archival materials. Curated by Michael J. Kramer with assistance from a team of researchers and scholars, the exhibit's text presents a narrative similar to a monograph. After the introductory elements, information in the text is presented primarily in chronological order with diversions for context as needed. Unlike a traditional monograph, however, images, recordings, and links to archival resources are interspersed throughout the text, allowing the user to engage with scans of source documents, audio recordings of music and speech, and a plethora of links to resources from the Berkeley Folk Music Festival Archive digital repository and elsewhere. The exhibit produces a similar experience to conversing with an author in an archive. At any point, it is easy to divert one's attention from the primary narrative and investigate a particular document, musician, or other interesting topic.

The exhibit would be particularly engaging and valuable in the context of American folk music history courses. Undergraduate students would likely benefit most from utilizing the exhibit to begin research projects at the end of a semester, whereas graduate students may gain inspiration from the exhibit closer to the start of a seminar. The most important prerequisite knowledge in this context may be name recognition. Users already familiar with names like Joan Baez, Jean Ritchie, "Mississippi" John Hurt, Pete Seeger, Howlin' Wolf, Ewan MacColl, Richie Havens, Doc Watson, Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, Phil Spector, Charles Seeger, Alan Lomax, or Bess Lomax Hawes are likely to find the exhibit useful without the use of outside resources. Those lacking that knowledge may need additional guidance. Users may also find that prior knowledge of the history of the second wave of the folk revival in the United States would be helpful, but much of that context is at least mentioned in the text. The "What's In the Digital Exhibit?" section of the introduction explains the exhibit's scope succinctly and includes links to its sections.

In the introduction, Kramer and his team present preliminary ideas about the BFMF, its function, and its impact on American folk music communities. Section two is a brief account of the life and work of the festival's only director, Barry Olivier. Section three describes the creation of the festival and its early development from 1958 to 1961. Scholars may be particularly interested in the authors' presentation of the 1959 festival as a testing ground for Alan Lomax's "cantometrics" and "global juke box" ideas. Section four describes an increasingly mature BFMF. From 1962 to 1964, established figures brought crowds to the festival and enabled up-and-coming musicians to gain visibility in a context that increasingly combined commercial interests with political discourse and relatively progressive racial integration. It should be noted that this was not unlike the tactics used at the Newport Folk Festival during the same time period.¹

¹See Michael Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 60–66; Rachel Clare Donaldson, *"I Hear America Singing:" Folk Music and National Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University

Section five centers on the idea that the BFMF “suggests the continuities in Northern California between the folk revival of the first half of the decade and the countercultural turn toward the end of the 1960s.” In the next section, the authors present the idea that “it was all folk music now” by 1967 as the festival welcomed more groups from rock communities. This development occurred during a politically tumultuous period that included the Telegraph Avenue protests in 1968 that directly involved the festival. By 1970, the authors suggest that Olivier was exhausted and ended the festival after unsuccessful attempts to find a successor. In Section seven, Olivier is described as “a key participant in a national and even international folk circuit” who engaged with various other projects, including the canceled Wild West music festival. We are told that “Today, the original spirit of the Berkeley Folk Music Festival persists, if dimly, in contemporary music festivals.” Nevertheless, it is unclear how one might know that the “original spirit” of the BFMF is connected to the “ethos of shared, participatory involvement” in present-day festivals. Did the spirit of the BFMF persist or might another explanation be possible? In Section eight, Kramer and his team additionally conclude that the BFMF “galvanized a diverse, celebratory world of music and experience. It was ultimately less concerned with drawing strict lines over what counted as folk purity and authenticity than back East.” Such claims are also exciting and suggest an opportunity for additional research into the festival and West Coast revival movements more broadly.

The seamlessly integrated archival videos, photographs, and scans of source documents throughout the exhibit help one to feel invested in the material, but key images are displayed most strikingly in the timeline in Section nine. The audio recordings in the exhibit also allow for various methods of meaningful engagement. Not only are many recordings integrated into the exhibit’s main body, but users are able to engage extensively with the sounds of festival performances, lectures, and environments in the playlists in Section ten. However, the wealth of multimedia materials in the exhibit also generates the need for additional technical work and maintenance for exhibit staff, and several resources did not appear to be functioning correctly at the time of writing.

The text itself reveals valuable ideas that may not otherwise be readily apparent to researchers using the festival archive. For example, the authors identify Chris Strachwitz’s frequent involvement in bringing new groups to the festival, Sam Hinton’s critical role as master of ceremonies for the festival every year it occurred, and important contextual details that draw on resources not contained in the archive. As Scott Krafft suggests in the Foreword, such themes seem to be largely the product of Kramer’s extensive work with the archive, his research on other topics during the time period in question, and his experience teaching classes centering on the BFMF. The result is a clear and thorough narrative, though perhaps further research by other scholars would yield slightly different perspectives on the same material. Ultimately, the exhibit is an easily accessible and engaging pedagogical resource that can inspire researchers to further investigate important and under-researched revivalist communities on the West Coast in the 1950s and 1960s.

Nicholas Booker is a Ph.D. student and graduate teaching associate in musicology and ethnomusicology at The Ohio State University. His research interests include postnational and transnational musical identities, globalization, tradition, heritage, labor, commodification, and commercialization. He is currently focusing on the ways in which folk, traditional, acoustic, and singer-songwriter communities in the Great Lakes region of North America interact with similar communities in Cornwall in the southwest of Britain.

Press, 2014), 134–36; Ron Eyerman and Scott Barretta, “From the 30s to the 60s: The Folk Music Revival in the United States,” *Theory and Society* 25, no. 4 (1996): 501–43, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00160675>; Gillian A. M. Mitchell, “Visions of Diversity: Cultural Pluralism and the Nation in the Folk Music Revival Movement of the United States and Canada, 1958–65,” *Journal of American Studies* 40, no. 3 (2006): 600–2, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/article/visions-of-diversity-cultural-pluralism-and-the-nation-in-the-folk-music-revival-movement-of-the-united-states-and-canada-195865/F898920E6CAD87639BA78320DBB44118>.