

# Yodelling in American Popular Music

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by Timothy Elbert Wise.

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## Abstract

This is a study of yodelling as a musical and cultural signifier.

A definition of yodelling and a typology useful for the description of the various yodel phenomena heard in English-language popular music are proposed.

Yodelling is then considered in a chronological sequence, beginning with abstract yodel signs in European instrumental classical music where these tended to signify pastoralism, idealism, and other ideas relating to romantic conceptions of the self. A discussion of yodelling in light classical and popular music through the nineteenth century follows. The differing ideologies associated with "art" music and "popular" music are discernible in attitudes toward the yodel during this time. The Americanisation of yodelling in terms of both its musical-formal manifestations and the ideas it articulated through these are discussed before considering yodelling's role in both the hillbilly and the cowboy genres. The emphasis throughout is upon the semiotic aspects of yodelling which I characterise as the difference between the "rough" and the "smooth". The yodel seems always to be associated with what is rough: peasants, shepherds, hobos, and hillbillies. This distinction between rough and smooth has a correlative in the very creation of the sound in the sense that the production of yodelling is a rejection of the orthodox classical singing styles with their cultivation of the "smooth" transition between vocal registers. The result for the yodel has been its thorough ironisation over the middle years of the twentieth century, as an emerging cool aesthetic could no longer countenance it.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

This air [is] so dear to the Swiss that playing it among their troops was banned on pain of death, since it made those who heard it melt with tears, desert, or die, so much did it stir in them the passionate desire to see their country again. It would be vain to search in this tune for the powerful accents capable of producing such astonishing effects. These effects . . . only come from habit, from memories, from the thousand circumstances which, retraced by this tune for those who hear it, and recalling for them their country, their early pleasures, their youth, their way of life, stir in them a bitter grief in having lost all that. Thus the music does not act precisely like music, but like a commemorative sign.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1768.<sup>1</sup>

The air to which Rousseau refers in this often-quoted passage is a *Ranz des vaches*, the French term for the German expression *Kuhreihen*. It is an alphorn melody Swiss herdsmen use for calling their cows and has long been associated with nostalgia.<sup>2</sup> When these tunes are sung, they frequently begin or end with yodelling.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History, Vol. 5, The Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. Wye Jamison Allanbrook, New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998, p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> "Theodor Zwinger quoted an example in his chapter 'De phthopatrialgia' on the effects of nostalgia (*Fasciculus dissertationum medicarum*, Basle, 1710)", quoted in "Ranz des vaches", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001, Vol. 20, p. 662.

<sup>3</sup> *Kuhreihen* and *Ranz des vaches* both denote an Alpine melody either performed on alphorn or sung and are strongly associated with yodelling. Sources include Fritz Frauchiger, "The Swiss *Kuhreihen*", *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 54, 1941, pp. 121-131, and Max Peter Baumann, "Der *Kuhreihen*", *Musikfolklore und Musikfolklorismus*, Amadeus, 1976, pp. 127-146.

That Rousseau describes the action of this music in these terms should be of interest for students applying semiotics to music analysis. This is for the reason that definite mood associations do become coded into musical images, and these indeed derive “from habit, from memories, [and] from the thousand circumstances” which music retraces.

Extending the notion of *Ranz des vaches* to include yodelling and its related vocal phenomena<sup>4</sup>, this study contends that yodelling “does not act precisely like music”: it acts upon, extends, and transmutes the parameters of musical expression.

The subject of this thesis, then, in the wider sense, is the semantic coding that inevitably develops in the construction and use of musical gestures. More specifically, its topic is yodelling in American popular music, but I conceive of “the yodel” as a sign. So this is a kind of history of a musical idea, which I call the “yodel idea”, a musical idea that made its earliest appearances as a stylisation in nineteenth-century classical music, but was more or less simultaneously proliferating as “yodel phenomena” in popular music. “Yodel idea”, then, refers to abstract representations of yodel calls in instrumental music, their uses, and their connotations within a musical

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<sup>4</sup> The varieties of yodel phenomena are discussed in Chapter 2.

construction; more broadly, yodel idea refers to a set of paramusical associations experienced in response to yodel phenomena. “Yodel phenomena” refers to actual instances of register breaking in a human voice. As such, these terms represent two aspects of this particular musical sign: the actual vocal call is implicit in any use of a yodel idea, whereas the yodel idea follows from any concrete occurrence of voice breaking in musical contexts. They are the signifier and the signified of the yodel sign. I use the term yodel idea, not only because, as will be seen, many musical gestures involve various evocations of yodelling without actually involving a human voice, but also because the “idea” associated with an actual yodelled vocalisation explains its purpose in a musical text.

That yodelling has long been an important aspect of popular singing styles is easy enough to see. Yodelling has enjoyed an unbroken tradition in Western popular music, particularly in German-speaking countries, obviously, but also in America, where it has been cultivated since the early nineteenth century when it began to be well known. In America it has been heard in all forms of popular entertainment: minstrelsy, ragtime, vaudeville, music theatre, operetta, country, pop – virtually everything. The yodel, however, is something more than simply another gesture in a range of musical expressive devices. Its significance goes well beyond music’s boundaries. It is a cultural

symbol: omnipresent, occurring not only in many kinds of music, but also in film, in advertising, as a corporate logo for an internet company, and more.

Yodelling – and not just yodelling, but the very mention of the word – can provoke strong reactions. This observation is based simply on the frequent reaction I get when I tell people about my research subject: aside from actual yodellers and specialists in musicology and related subjects, the people I talk to have tended to respond with smiles, smirks, even belly laughs, but almost always with some degree of incredulousness; very many people simply do not take yodelling seriously. So I am not surprised by these reactions: my own interest in the subject – initially – was ironic. But as my interest in yodelling grew, my attention turned to the question of why the yodel is so often dismissed as an amusing irrelevance. Had it always been that way? Or did the yodel slowly begin to appear ridiculous to many people? What processes contributed to the ironising of the yodel? The answers to such questions seem to me to reside in the meaning – the semantics or semiotics – of “the yodel”.

One approach to such questions is to view the ideological implications of yodelling as a signifier. Professor Jan Ling, in his *History of European Folk Music*, quotes an amusing anecdote originally appearing in Max Peter Baumann’s study of the yodel:



One of these people had come to Paris and was taken to the opera where he was so carried away by the trills of the castrato that he was rude enough to state that this song was far too feminine. He put his fingers into his ears, raised his voice in a *Kuhreihen* and soon out-shouted the opera singer entirely. Louis the Great and his court were greatly moved by all the intricacies of this song, and asked the singer to perform in the royal garden, but the Swiss man refused, claiming that he was a free man, the equal of the King, and only sang when the spirit moved him. (Quotes after Baumann 1976, p. 143)<sup>5</sup>

The kind of social and ideological division illustrated in this passage is apparent throughout the story of yodelling in American popular music. That division is the starting point for this study.

What follows is a semiotics-based analysis of yodelling, dealing principally with American popular music. The reason the focus is upon American music is simply because in that country yodelling has been consistently cultivated, fully absorbed into a variety of genres. Although other English-speaking countries – Canada, Australia and England – have produced fine yodellers, and in the case of Australia, its own yodelling tradition, nevertheless yodelling seems not to have permeated those cultures in quite the same way as it has in America. Some of the reasons for this phenomenon are discussed in Chapter 9.

Attention is given to both classical music and popular music for the reason that, in terms of musical signification, in a sense one has laid the foundations

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<sup>5</sup> Jan Ling, *A History of European Folk Music*, University of Rochester Press, 1997, p. 32.

for the other. Chapter 3 deals specifically with an analysis of the yodel idea in nineteenth-century classical music, but the primary focus after that is on yodel phenomena in American popular music.

My attempt to understand the yodel sign in its historical and cultural framework is roughly in line with the approach to cultural forms taken by Roland Barthes, especially regarding connotation and secondary signification. Therefore, yodelling, or more exactly “the yodel” in its abstract senses, is discussed here in semiotic terms, that is, as sign, signifier, and signified. More particularly, the musicological-analytical method employed derives from that developed by Philip Tagg. I will therefore briefly outline some of the key points in his approach.

Conventional sign typology recognises three basic types: icon, index, and conventional sign. In addition, Tagg posits other specifically musical signs, which he labels anaphones, and which are characterised by their tendency to communicate extra-musical ideas and sensations, such as motion (kinetic anaphones), sound (sonic anaphones), or touch (tactile anaphones).

A significant element in his analytical model is the concept of the museme as a meaning bearing unit. The idea of the museme has been integral to Tagg’s

analyses since his stunning *Kojak, 50 Seconds of Television Music* (1979). In his most recent book, Tagg defines the museme as a

minimal identifiable unit of musical discourse that can recur in the same guise and produce the same recognisable effect with the framework of any one musical style in the context of the same culture, definable in terms of parameters of musical expression.<sup>6</sup>

The abstract musemes are understood more concretely – are revealed – through the application of two complimentary analytical tools: Interobjective Comparison and Paramusical Association. The first has to do with any measurable features of the music that bear resemblance to features in other musical texts, hence the term interobjective. Interobjective comparison concerns the concrete sound phenomena that are the signifiers of the abstract musical sign. The second, paramusical association, has to do with the feelings, emotions, and mental concepts that result from hearing music; they represent the signified of the musical sign. Paramusical association is naturally highly subjective, yet it is not entirely so: the reception tests devised by Tagg demonstrate the remarkable uniformity of response listeners have to many types of music.

The approach in this study, however, is quite different from Tagg's analyses. Instead of a minutely detailed analysis of the complex musemic content of a single item of popular music, my approach is to follow a single sign through a

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<sup>6</sup> Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida, *Ten Little Title Tunes*, New York and Montreal: Mass Media Music Scholars' Press, 2003, p. 808.

variety of genres and styles over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In addition to Tagg, I have followed the example of two other musicologists who have dealt with the idea of the “topic”: Leonard Ratner, the author of the influential *Classic Music*, and Raymond Monelle, particularly his essays devoted to musical topics in *The Sense of Music*.<sup>7</sup> I borrow the idea of the topic as it has been developed in their work for my analysis in Chapter 3.

The English word yodel derives from the German *jodeln*, which means to call, to cry and to sing. Max Peter Baumann has written that “according to Grimm and Grimm (1877), the verb *jo(h)len* or *jola* is derived from the interjection *jo* and may have gained the additional ‘d’ for vocal-physiological reasons.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the modern word derives from the sounds used in the vocal act.

The English word was simply borrowed from the German, albeit with a change in spelling. In fact, numerous variant spellings exist in the sheet music. Nineteenth-century English forms such as “jodle” and “yodle” are commonly seen, but over the twentieth century, the modern spelling “yodel”

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<sup>7</sup> Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music*, Schirmer Books, 1980; Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Max Peter Baumann, “Yodel”, *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001, Vol. 27, p. 661.

has replaced these. Nevertheless, British and American orthography differ with regard to the gerund and the present participle forms: in these American spelling maintains a single “l”, while British English favours geminating this consonant. Naturally, I follow British orthography in this study, but a variety of other forms will appear as individual items from different regions and different eras are discussed.

Yodelling in its original European manifestation is a species of work song.<sup>9</sup> It is not the type of work song intended to keep up a steady rhythm or to urge on tired participants, for yodels are not associated with heavy work: hauling, lifting, chopping, and so forth; those basically involve a call and response, a kind of cooperative dialogue performed by a group of people on a shared task. Instead, *Ranz des vaches* and yodelling are herding calls which are basically solitary: they announce, for example, the herd or flock as it makes its way down a foggy mountain path. They do, however, have an element of dialogue, in that they hail from a distance and even are sometimes addressed to the animals. They can be a way of keeping in touch, so to speak, but they are not the rhythmically organised group pieces typically thought of as work songs. Yodelling relates to other varieties of solitary work song, such as kulning or the American field holler.

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<sup>9</sup> See Ling, Chapter 2, for a discussion of some of the many varieties of work song.

That the yodel in its classical and popular music contexts, particularly, has never been intensively studied is surprising given its ubiquity<sup>10</sup>. It has gone in and out of fashion, a fact that has been remarked on by other writers. But the relationship of the yodelling to socio-cultural struggles and ideologies has generally been overlooked.

In the gradual split between classical music and popular music that took place over the course of the nineteenth century, the conflict articulated in yodelling was one between two forms of expression and their ideologies: one concerned with its literature and also its battles for the ideal singing voice, the other with novelty and idiosyncrasy. “Art” music tended toward the cultivation of what I call (in a conceit running throughout this thesis) a “smooth” aesthetic: an aesthetic which valorised homogeneity of sound and sought uniformity of tone colour throughout the compass of an instrument or voice, resulting ultimately in a normative performance technique to which all performers must aspire; in the interest of such an aesthetic, art music eventually banished the “rough” and quirky yodel. This opposition of rough and smooth is adopted in this study as a metaphor in order to dramatise the distinction between two differing styles of vocal production and their contrasting aesthetics. In this opposition greater esteem has, generally speaking, been

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<sup>10</sup> The appearance of Bart Plantenga’s book *Yodel-Ay-Ee-Oooo, The Secret History of Yodeling Around the World*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, represents the first attempt in English to address this issue.

accorded to the aesthetics of the classical, while popular styles – yodelling particularly – historically have been regarded as less valuable: to borrow a term from postmodernist theory, they have been relegated to the position of “other”.<sup>11</sup>

However, while yodelling was dying out in classical music, popular music in its burgeoning forms in the latter part of the nineteenth century embraced it, for yodelling offered the popular music of the day a technique capable of communicating showiness, or prettiness, or soulfulness, and more. Moreover, yodelling could evoke connotations of a romanticised Golden Age, or it could conjure up the Old Country, with its beer hall boisterousness. In some special forms it could evoke loss, regret, and heart break. Indeed, there seems to be a romantic element in a great deal of yodelling: in the twentieth century, for example, it is most commonly associated with romantically conceived personae, such as the singing hobo or the yodelling cowboy.

### **Yodelling in classical music**

Why is it important to look at the yodel as it occurs in classical music? For one, classical music’s use of the yodel predates mass-mediated popular music’s use. As such, classical music’s uses represent some of the earliest codification of the yodel outside its occurrences in folk music – that is, in

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 9.

music that was not its original context. In this way classical music's appropriation of the folk yodel formed a basis for further representations in popular and theatre music; this is for the reason that classical music was in fact the only mass-distributed, such as it was, music – the music that crossed borders.

The fact that classical music is a written and therefore text-based, printable art form made it amenable to wide-scale distribution at a time when everything else was oral tradition and thus local. Naturally, the scale of distribution for classical music was small when compared to the sort of circulation that developed with Tin Pan Alley's exploitation of popular markets or to that later in the early twentieth century when recording technology made possible the truly mass distribution that characterises modern music's reach – such a state is obviously conditional on historically-determined factors, such as technologies, available income, and so forth. Nevertheless, the printability of what we nowadays universally call "classical music" made it the only viable *lingua franca* during the early nineteenth century and as such the channel for the spread of the initial musemic signs conveying the yodel idea and its connotations.

Additionally, classical music was the only widely recognised representation of broadly shared ideas in music. All else was regional and limited, and this



fact therefore militated against widespread acceptability. However, when local features mix in with the general store of signs, this serves to increase the likelihood of novelty and interest, and consequently to aid the appeal to wider audiences. Because earlier forms of popular music in the modern sense (that is, in the sense of a mass-marketed music with commercial and broad-appeal aspects) clearly drew on classical models – and therefore spread the ideas and associations to new audiences, and in fact must have recombined ideas with others and thus re-codified musical images – then it is sensible with regard to the semiosis, to examine the earliest classical uses. The printed nature of classical music and the tradition of travelling performers and singers are facts that contributed toward a pan-European stock of signs.

It is significant that no notational device or sign to indicate yodelling ever came into being. In some cases in the early nineteenth century, passages in written music may be marked “yodel”, but that is usually as far as it goes. Such passages thus become improvisation, which was also edged out by traditional classical music pedagogy. Some passages expected to be yodelled look conventional – there is nothing in the written symbols to denote yodelling. Were yodelling to become a permanent standard device, it would have had to have a method of notation devised for it, which never happened. Since classical music is learned from scores, not from listening, then without a

secure place within the system of notation – one of the things that make classical music what it is – the yodel's chances of survival were limited.

Take for example the case of *messa di voce*. This is an expressive swell in the volume of a tone singers employ for the purpose of decoration.<sup>12</sup> It is akin to trilling. There never developed a means of notating this particular effect. It is known because it was described, but it was not really a part of vocal technique in the nineteenth century; rather it was a baroque device that went in and out of fashion, but was never notated. Instead it was learned by tradition and applied according to taste in an improvisatory manner.

The yodel is similar: it is a special effect that was at one time fashionable, learned by tradition and by ear. Yet its position within the canon of acceptable technique was precarious and tenuous at best. Ultimately, within classical music, it was excluded and forgotten, partly for the simple reason that what is not able to be notated in classical music by and large is left by the wayside. Had classical music been learned through oral tradition – through listening alone – then maybe yodelling would have survived in it. But classical music is not learned this way, and so the yodelling that enjoyed a brief life there died, but not before inseminating through a not altogether clear

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<sup>12</sup> Owen Jander and Ellen T. Harris, "Singing, Performing Practice", *The New Grove Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001, Vol. 23, pp. 428-436, p. 434.

passageway certain types of popular music, where it found a more hospitable atmosphere in which to live.

The yodel was never a part of the pedagogical tradition either. Even now, where professional voice teaching must take account of popular music singing styles, such as Broadway and rock styles, there is no place found for yodelling. So partly because of the centrality of notation to the idea of classical music, and partly because its technique is antithetical to the technique of classical singing, the yodel lost its home in classical music.<sup>13</sup> What seems to have happened is that art music kept the yodel idea, but expunged the phenomena.

### **Semiotics: signs, histories, contexts**

While the lines of transmission are not always apparent, musical devices move freely within popular genres and flow into popular music from other sources.<sup>14</sup> Musical ideas are memes, the cultural equivalent of biological genes. They pass from one organism into later progeny and seem to fight for

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<sup>13</sup> There are rare exceptions, such as the *Fiakermilli* in *Arabella* by Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, first performed in 1933. However, despite passages in the score marked "*stimmt ein freches übermütiges Jodeln an*" and "*antwortet zärtlich, ohne Worte, mit einem Jodler*", for example, these indications are something modern sopranos appear usually to ignore. See *Arabella, Richard Strauss Edition, Complete Stage Works*, Vol. 13, Vienna: Verlag Dr. Richard Strauss GmbH & Co., pp. 237 and 317.

<sup>14</sup> For example the obvious influence of Tuvan throat singing, or overtone singing, that is beginning to be felt in German-speaking countries, as evidenced by the group *Stimmhorn*.

their survival by finding ever-new uses for themselves.<sup>15</sup> The yodel is something like that. Innovation may not be introduced very often, but once it has been, popular music is quick to capitalise upon it. This is the case with voice breaking on individual words while singing, a subset of yodelling described in Chapter 2; this yodel type is extremely prevalent in contemporary popular music, being a favourite device – mannerism, indeed – of Dido, for instance, and heard frequently in Coldplay, Chris Isaaks, The Cranberries, and many others.<sup>16</sup> Such a thing is almost an expressive cliché in our day, but it demonstrates the fact that once a technique is introduced into contemporary mainstream music, it will spread and find a role in a variety of styles.

The yodel-sign is worthy of investigation if only for the fact that yodelling generally has been so little studied. In terms of historiography and analysis, yodelling has for the most part been shunned by just about everybody except ethnomusicologists and folklorists. In popular music studies it seems hardly to exist. Popular music studies seem, generally speaking, to favour the hip, cool, and high status topics, so it is unsurprising to find scant attention paid to the outré yodel.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1990.

<sup>16</sup> This kind of voice breaking I call second species yodelling. See Chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> Philip Tagg, "High and Low, Cool and Uncool, Music and Knowledge. Conceptual falsifications and the study of popular music", <[www.tagg.org/articles/iaspmuk2000.html](http://www.tagg.org/articles/iaspmuk2000.html)>.

The yodel seems to carry with it, regardless of its immediate musical context, certain key semiotic components, and while these are doubtless interpreted differently by individuals – depending on their cultural background and codal competence – these affective components nevertheless are an integral part of the conventional meaning of the sign. The yodel is habitually associated with the outdoors, with rustic rather than sophisticated personae, with particular emotional or psychological states or semantic fields. This is not an essentialist theory; rather, I argue that convention and history have determined that certain components of meaning are flagged up whenever a yodel is let loose upon the world, and that these units of meaning, which this thesis explores, have determined yodelling's reception.

The yodel is a musical device, by which I mean an isolatable expressive gesture intentionally added into a musical texture, and hence a signifier within that context. But it is, of course, not just any type of musical device: yodelling is separate from other types of musical device. For example, consider a trill. Trilling is a musical device, but it has significance primarily and fundamentally within the parameters of a musical discourse. The same can be said of "fugue" or "fuzz-tone" or "triple-tonguing". These concepts lack a life of their own outside their musical contexts – they depend upon

music, probably would not exist except for music. This is different from the yodel. For the yodel is a different kind of thing – exterior to the music, but able to blend with it and be indistinguishable from it. So the way I am using “device” is in the sense of both technique and a resource, one that is used because it is expressive or significant in some way.

### **Methodology and selection**

My method has been empirical, involving examination of instances of the yodel idea and yodel phenomena in their many manifestations in classical and, primarily, popular music. In the case of the popular sheet music from the nineteenth century, I examined every piece I could find that had any yodelling or any likelihood of yodelling in addition to many non-yodel songs on similar lyric themes.

By using printed music sources I arrive at some different conclusions from those few others who have written on the yodel in popular music. Their sole reliance upon recordings leads to conclusions regarding priority and transmission that are cast into doubt when other material is examined. For clearly, considering that commercial recording only began in the 1890s, the sole use of recordings as source material renders virtually the whole of the nineteenth century prehistoric: basically inaccessible and unknowable. But

the evidence is there in the written forms, as I try to demonstrate in the pages that follow.

With regard to recordings from the electrical era, I have limited my attention in the discussion that follows to figures widely accepted as significant, including Jimmie Rodgers and Wilf Carter. These particular singers in many ways are paradigmatic for popular music yodelling styles of their era. Others whose yodelling is distinctive for one reason or another are considered in relationship to these figures.

After a definition of yodelling in Chapter 2, which I hope will be useful beyond the context of this thesis, I survey the historical uses of yodelling in European, and especially, North American popular music. Chapter 3 deals with the explicit referencing, allusion to, or suggestion of yodelling found in classical music of the nineteenth century: in other words, the yodel idea. Chapter 4 considers yodelling phenomena in popular music in the nineteenth century. Yodelling on records made during the era of acoustic recording follows before an examination of the widespread vogue for yodelling in the 30s and 40s, especially on the so-called hillbilly series of the major labels.

The concluding chapters deal with sign change – through appropriation and cooption in an era of a generally changing aesthetic paradigm. In the final

chapter the reasons why yodelling provokes such strong comical reactions are sought. It asks how the yodel became such a joke.

### Previous studies

Previous work on the yodel has tended to come from two very different camps: ethnomusicology and country music history. Hyatt King's "Mountains and Music" is unusual in that it is devoted to evocations of mountains in classical music, but as such he includes more signifiers than just *Ranz des vaches*.<sup>18</sup> In other studies *ranz des vaches* are frequently mentioned in connection with certain composers, yet appear to be only rarely dealt with collectively or as a musical topic.

In the field of ethnomusicology, the interest in the yodel has been much greater than elsewhere, and thus there is a long-established discourse, especially in German-speaking countries. Most of the focus is of course on yodelling as it occurs in Alpine regions. Of these investigations, the most respected and inclusive is that of Max Peter Baumann; moreover, his study also considers the spread of yodelling through non-Alpine regions.<sup>19</sup>

Baumann is also the author of the entries on yodelling in the *New Grove*

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<sup>18</sup> Hyatt King, "Mountains, Music, and Musicians", *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, 1945.

<sup>19</sup> Max Peter Baumann, *Musikfolklore und Musikfoklorismus, Eine Ethnomusikologische Untersuchung zum Funktionswandel des Jodeln*, Winterthur: Amadeus: 1976.



*Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and in *Die Musik in Geschichte und*

*Gegenwart*.<sup>20</sup> I have drawn heavily upon his authoritative work, especially his description of the *Kuhreihen* and of the *Jodellied*. His description of the spread of the yodel from Alpine working calls into folk music and from there into the European mainstream is the foundation for any modern study of yodelling.

Another German-language study of the yodel I consulted is by Heinrich J. Leuthold.<sup>21</sup> His deals more narrowly with Swiss folk styles, but like Baumann, provides a useful summary of the work of earlier writers on the subject, notably E. M. von Hornbostel and Walter Wiora. The most recent German-language ethnomusicological study of yodel phenomena is Susanne Fürniss's *Zur Jodeltechnik der Aka Pygmaen*; while that author deals with a very different musico-cultural context, her emphasis on understanding the yodel through its acoustical features has influenced my second chapter.

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<sup>20</sup> Max Peter Baumann, "Yodel", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 2001, Vol. 27, pp. 661-663; also, "Jodeln" *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik begründet von Friedrich Blume, Zweite neubearbeitete Ausgabe herausgegeben von Ludwig Finscher, Sachteil 4*, Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1996, pp. 1487-1503.

<sup>21</sup> Heinrich J. Leuthold, *Der Naturjodel in der Schweiz*, Altdorf: Robert Fellmann-Liederverlag, 1981.

## Popular music discourse

Aside from one notable exception, Graeme Smith's article on yodelling in Australian country music, there is a paucity of academic material specifically concerning the yodel and related falsetto styles in popular music studies.<sup>22</sup>

There are notable studies of the voice in popular music, but by and large these have been either very general or have dealt with genres rarely using yodel techniques.<sup>23</sup> Articles on yodelling will occasionally appear in magazines devoted to country music. Generally speaking these are written in response to the re-release of material from earlier eras, or to the death of the performer.

They are likely to be published only in small journals devoted to the genre such performers worked in anyway.<sup>24</sup> Even so, the attention given to yodellers in such publications tends overwhelmingly to be biographical, historical, or discographical. This is the case even with Nolan Porterfield's excellent biography *The Life and Times of Jimmie Rodgers, America's Blue*

*Yodeler*<sup>25</sup> and Nick Tosches's recent book on Emmett Miller, *Where Dead Voices*

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<sup>22</sup> Graeme Smith, "Australian Country Music and the Hillbilly Yodel", *Popular Music* 13 (3), 1994, pp. 297-311.

<sup>23</sup> Studies devoted to voice in popular music include Richard Middleton, "Rock Singing", *Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed., John Potter, Cambridge University Press, 2000; Simon Frith, Chapter 9 of *Performing Rites, On the Value of Popular Music*, Oxford University Press, 1996; and Sammie Ann Wicks "A Belated Salute to the 'Old Way' of 'Snaking' the Voice on its (ca.) 345 Birthday", *Popular Music* 8/1, 1989, pp. 59-96.

<sup>24</sup> For example, two tributes by country music writer Brian Golbey, "Rex Griffin, the Man Who Wrote 'The Last Letter'", *Country Music People*, January, 1997, 36-7 and "The Cowboy's Sweetheart, Patsy Montana", *Country Music People*, June, 1996, pp. 18-9.

<sup>25</sup> Porterfield, 1992/1979.

*Gather*.<sup>26</sup> The black influences on Jimmie Rodgers's yodelling, and vice versa, are discussed in David Evans' "Black Musicians Remember Jimmie Rodgers".<sup>27</sup>

Rodgers's yodelling is more specifically dealt with in Robert Coltman's "Roots of the Hillbilly Yodel".<sup>28</sup> The title of that important early work, however, does indicate the need for a broader context. The yodel seems to have been conceptualised principally as a hillbilly phenomenon. My research shows that while the yodel enjoyed a particular popularity during the hillbilly era, it was by no means limited to that. Coltman's essay is an important piece of scholarship, though, and represents a rare attempt to treat the yodel as a significant phenomenon in music. It is also practically the only one to mention certain yodellers who seem to me to be noteworthy, such as Ward Barton and Matt Keefe.

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<sup>26</sup> Nolan Porterfield, *The Life and Times of America's Blue Yodeler, Jimmie Rodgers*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992/1979; Nick Tosches, *Where Dead Voices Gather*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 2001.

<sup>27</sup> David Evans, "Black Musicians Remember Jimmie Rodgers", *Old Time Music*, 7, 1972, pp. 12-4.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Coltman, "Roots of the Country Yodel: Notes Toward a Life History", *John Edwards Memorial Foundation Quarterly*, 12:42, Summer, 1976, pp. 91-4.

The best general history of country music is Bill Malone's *Country Music USA*, in which many yodellers are discussed.<sup>29</sup> This is a valuable asset to anyone interested in that important part of American culture. Individual acts such as Patsy Montana and The Girls of the Golden West have had articles about them appear in *Old Time Music* when it was published. Bits about them are scattered in the country music discourse, as is the case with the relatively obscure DeZurik Sisters. A useful book devoted to the female singers in country music is *Finding Her Voice*.<sup>30</sup>

Yodelling in the nineteenth century is rarely discussed. Hans Nathan's article on the Rainer family is virtually the only study devoted to them.<sup>31</sup> Baumann discusses the *Jodellied* in depth, and Jan Ling's *History of European Folk Music* is excellent on herding songs and early appropriations of yodelling by popular composers. Between them, these two eminent writers refer to many specific items.<sup>32</sup> Ling's book on European folk music has proved very helpful generally.

English language yodel songs for the most part have been ignored by everybody. Much of what I offer relating to this music has had to be deduced

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<sup>29</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985/1968.

<sup>30</sup> Robert K. Oermann and Mary A. Bufwack, *Finding Her Voice*, New York: Crown, 1993.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Nathan, "The Tyrolese Family Rainer and the Vogue of Singing Mountain-Troupes in Europe and America", *The Musical Quarterly*, XXXI, 4, 1945, pp. 395-419.

<sup>32</sup> Baumann, 1976, and Jan Ling, *A History of European Folk Music*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997.

from the extant sheet music. However, for the general context of nineteenth century popular song I have consulted Charles Hamm's *Yesterdays*, Nicholas Tawa's *The Way to Tin Pan Alley*, and John Finson's *The Voices that are Gone*.<sup>33</sup>

Three writers in particular have devoted attention to yodelling, and their work has been the obvious place for me to start. Christoph Wagner's "T for Tyrol" gives a useful history of the spread of yodelling from Europe to the United States. Furthermore, he has done an enormous service by assembling a collection of yodel songs called *American Yodelling 1911-1946*, as well as writing the informative booklet that accompanies this CD.<sup>34</sup>

Nick Tosches's book on Emmett Miller, *Where Dead Voices Gather*, was published while this thesis being researched. While clearly of importance to anyone interested in Miller and the various channels that fed into blackface minstrelsy in its final stages, Tosches's work nevertheless is flawed by his apparent determination to canonise Miller as the progenitor of blues yodelling. For example,

But it was Emmett Miller who employed the yodel as more than a novelty. It was Miller who cultivated it as something plaintive and disarming, something that would become – in Jimmie Rodgers's "Blue Yodel" (1927) and all his subsequent blue

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<sup>33</sup> Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America*, New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co, 1983; Nicholas Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley, American Popular Song, 1866-1910*, New York: Schirmer Books, 1990; Jon Finson, *The Voices that are Gone*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>34</sup> Christof Wagner, "T for Tyrol", *Folk Roots* 179, Vol. 19, No. 11, 1989, pp. 31-34; *American Yodeling 1911-1946*, Trikont US 0246 62, 1998.

yodels, in Van and Pete's "Yodel Blues" (1928), in the yodelling of Jimmie Davis and Hank Williams and Jerry Lee Lewis, as well as in the wondrous black yodelling of Tommy Johnson's "Cool Drink of Water Blues" (1928), of Stovepipe Johnson's "Devilish Blues" (1928), of the Mississippi Sheik's "Yodeling Fiddling Blues" (1930), of the Rhythm Wreckers' version of Rodgers's "Blue Yodel" No. 2" (1937) – an expressiveness pure and free.<sup>35</sup>

This is a very broad assertion, and highly problematic when not simply inaccurate. To imply that Miller somehow influenced Tommy Johnson is, it seems to me, to stretch too far. Moreover, Jimmie Rodgers was the obvious and immediate model for several of those named here. Certainly, the Mississippi Sheiks, in this instance, sound very indebted to Rodgers, right down to the spoken interjections. Of course, Tosches would have it that as Miller inspired Rodgers to yodel, then Miller is therefore the inspiration for all these. Nevertheless, all those interested in Emmett Miller are indebted to Tosches: what we know of Miller, we know because of Tosches's interest in him.

Bart Plantenga's *Yodel-ay-ee-oooo, The Secret History of Yodelling Around the World*, was published this year.<sup>36</sup> This fascinating book manages to mention just about every yodeller one is able to think of and touches on many interesting points about transmission. Moreover, Plantenga very usefully summarizes much of the literature on yodelling, drawing especially from Leuthold. Although he is a true enthusiast, his desire to cover virtually every

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<sup>35</sup> Nick Tosches, *Where Dead Voices Gather*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 2001, p. 65.

<sup>36</sup> Bart Plantenga, *Yodel-Ay-Ee-Oooo*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

yodeller from all over the planet has meant that there is a lack of depth in his treatment. Moreover, Plantenga tends to take things at face value without problematising the material. The work of both Plantenga and Tosches is problematical also for the reason that they have dealt almost exclusively with recordings. As such they have not considered other material that gives a fuller picture of the entire field.

The work of record labels such as Bear Family in Germany, especially, and the meticulous research of their discographers deserve special mention. The catalogue of such a company makes available to the scholar or enthusiast a great amount of material that for the average person would simply have been lost. Drawing on material held by eminent collectors, they are preserving, if not rescuing, many hillbilly records and making them accessible to everyone in a way that public archives cannot. I feel a sincere debt of gratitude to discographers and historians Kevin Coffey, Nolan Porterfield, Tony Russell, and Richard Weize, to name only a few. Their scholarship is felt on every page of what follows.

The writers I have mentioned in this section represent virtually the only interest in the yodel to date. So while there is a reasonable and growing body of literature devoted to yodelling, the work remains compartmentalised. It is treated as a question of ethnomusicology, for instance, or as a physiological

phenomenon, or a country music fad.<sup>37</sup> I try to offer something of a synthesis. My interest is in the yodel as a communicative device, but not in the sense of distance calling, but more as a cultural symbol.

In the popular music accounts, such as those by Tosches and Plantenga, much of the emphasis is upon matters of who yodelled, and upon transmission and influence. Very little attention is given the actual yodelling itself. In the sonic event lies the evidence of its history. When writers speak of, for example, “Jimmie Rodgers adding ‘an alpine yodel to the end of each verse’”,<sup>38</sup> we may reasonably question what was Swiss, if anything, about the yodel by that time in the vocal device’s history? Does yodelling always mean “Swiss”? How has the yodel functioned within the codes of our musical language?

Yodelling is one of music’s loudest proclamations about identity. It delineates geographical regions – one of its earliest connotations – and it marks out social class and status. And it does so with some force, for people seem rarely to be ambivalent about it. I hope this study of the yodel, which concentrates upon the primary yodel musemes and their associations, will be a contribution towards understanding how musical gestures acquire significance, how they accrue meaning which is historically and contextually

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<sup>37</sup> I discuss some of the scientific studies of yodelling in the next chapter.

<sup>38</sup> Plantenga, p. 190.



determined and codified, becoming ultimately an unconscious but evident part of our cultural knowledge. That is really what this thesis is about.

## Chapter 2

### Yodel: Definition and Acoustical Features

The yodelling styles we hear in English language popular music lack a convenient vocabulary that would facilitate their description. This is partly due to the fact that the conventional ways of describing vocal production have been the preserve of classical singing pedagogy, and yodelling has had no part to play in that. With Alpine yodelling, on the other hand, there is a bewildering variety of names and types. These include *Lockruf* (call tune), *Viehlöcker* (cattle call), *Betruf* (prayer call), and many others. This difference is akin to the oft-remarked fact that the Inuit have many words for snow, while in English we have one. In the context of the Alpine traditions, many signals and yodel-types developed for functional or for other reasons – reasons that simply do not obtain outside that environment. It is not necessary to focus upon them in this study as they are dealt with thoroughly by Baumann and Leuthold.<sup>39</sup> These numerous call-types have no particular significance in the context of English language popular music.

What is significant for English language popular music is the incorporation of yodelling into musical frameworks, a development that took place around the

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<sup>39</sup> Baumann, 1976, and Leuthold.

turn of the nineteenth century in Switzerland. The form that resulted is known as the *Jodellied*. In his description of traditional Swiss music in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Max Peter Baumann makes the following remarks concerning this type:

A form comprising alternate solo yodelling and singing, known as *Jodellied* or *Gsätzli*, appeared with increasing frequency towards the end of the eighteenth century. Its development is most closely associated with the work of J. H. Tobler, F. Huber and F. W. Kücken, who accentuated the particularly Swiss element in their choral songs. F. Huber, A. Glutz . . . and J. Lüthy concluded their songs with a yodel-like coda . . . Because of the close association of the *Jodellied* with the “stylised yodel” defined by A. Tobler (a yodelling melody whose vocables are replaced by words), and with the analogous type of *Ranz de vaches* whose melody has also been given words, it is difficult to distinguish these song types in performance.<sup>40</sup>

Most English language popular music with yodelling derives from the *Jodellied*. Of particular interest for the types of yodel heard in the music under discussion in this thesis is the mention of the “stylised yodel” wherein the syllables of words, rather than nonsense syllables, are yodelled. This type of yodelling has been extremely significant in English-language contexts, while at the same time has posed definitional problems.

Since yodelling in popular music is almost always contextualised within the framework of a conventional song type, it may not be too reductive to consider all occurrences of vocalising making use of yodelemes (defined later)

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<sup>40</sup> Max Peter Baumann, “Switzerland, Traditional Music”, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001, Vol. 24, p. 790.

as subsets of the generic term yodelling. This seems especially sensible in light of the “stylised yodel” mentioned above: yodelling while singing words. The occurrences of yodelling differ only in the elaboration of their structural-technical features, that is, in their prolongation.

The interplay between vocal registers that characterises yodelling is effected by a sudden and surprising break at a relatively large melodic interval, usually at least a fourth, but more commonly a major sixth or an octave.<sup>41</sup> In English-language popular music contexts the switching between the registers is normally made with a very noticeable, percussive “break”, rather than with a smooth transition to conceal the change.<sup>42</sup>

Baumann has written that most definitions of yodel presume the following features to be present:

1) singing without text or words, in which the play of timbres and harmonics is emphasized in the succession of individual, nonsensical vocal-consonant connections (such as ‘yo-hol-di-o-u-ri-a’) which are also 2) connected in a creative way with the technique of continuous change of register between the chest voice and the (supported or non-supported) falsetto (or head) voice. 3) The tones, often performed in relatively large intervallic leaps, are either connected to one another in a legato

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<sup>41</sup> These at least are the intervals characteristic of European, American, and Hawaiian styles. However, Susanne Fűrmiss has shown that the Aka yodel with smaller intervals than these. See Fűrmiss.

<sup>42</sup> “A vocal break is a sudden transition from one voice register to another”. J. Švec and J. Pešák, “Vocal Breaks from the Modal to the Falsetto Register”, *Folia Phoniatica et Logopaedica* 46(2), 1994, 97-103, p. 98.

fashion during the continuous change of register (register break), or are additionally broken up in traditional styles with the use of glottal stops.<sup>43</sup>

For the moment, we can ignore the fact that Baumann in his definition of a yodel states that the connections between the two registers may be performed legato: while this is common in the Swiss yodel styles with which Baumann is primarily concerned, it is in fact rare in yodelling heard in English-language popular music. Beyond that, however, we are presented with slightly problematic terminology. "Register", for instance, is so commonly used that the fuzziness of the concept is often overlooked. While the term is very frequently encountered in a variety of musical contexts, its denotation varies significantly across various music disciplines and practices. Register will be discussed a little later in this chapter.

Defining yodel as the interplay between chest voice and head voice is also difficult for the reason that women singers are supposed not to use the so-called chest voice, yet clearly yodel. So understanding yodel as the switching between these two types of voice seems inadequate especially with regard to popular music.

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<sup>43</sup> Max Peter Baumann, "Yodel", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001, Vol. 27, p.662.

Even the term “falsetto” is not without controversy, if only for the connotations of the word. For example, John Steane writes in *The New Grove*

*Dictionary of Opera*:

As a resort for a tenor who cannot produce a full-bodied top note it has long been popularly condemned in Italy, and in other countries the preferred term is normally ‘head-voice’, though that can mean something different. The terms ‘alto’ and ‘countertenor’ also have different status from falsetto, though it may in practice be difficult to determine at exactly what point a proficient falsettist is entitled to take the more dignified title of ‘countertenor’.<sup>44</sup>

Another problem with accepted definitions of “yodel” in popular music is simply the idea of a wordless passage built on nonsense syllables. Clearly such yodels are common and may indeed be what people likely imagine when they hear the word “yodel”. But experience shows that many vocal effects in popular music are yodelled, but are not wordless: they are examples of the “stylised yodels” mentioned above. However, the common conception of the wordless passage with register switching so dominates our understanding of yodelling that it makes us hesitate to recognise the phenomenon in any other manifestation. This equivocation explains why even a writer such as Nick Tosches, in his book on Emmett Miller, *Where Dead Voices Gather*, seems to demur when describing the sounds Miller makes: “To

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<sup>44</sup> J. B. Steane, “Falsetto”, *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Press, 1992, Vol. 2, p. 113.

be sure, Miller was not the first blackface minstrel to yodel, if that is what we are to call his break-voice falsetto bleat".<sup>45</sup>

The phrase, "if that is what we are to call", points up the insufficiency of our terminology. Other examples tend to corroborate the apparent uneasiness about what to call this ubiquitous vocalisation. With regard to one of his most popular recordings, Slim Whitman has said, "I heard 'Indian Love Call' – Jeanette McDonald, Nelson Eddy – and I just started fooling with it, doing a kind of yodel thing. All they did was 'OoooOooo'".<sup>46</sup> Is "kind of yodel thing" the same as "yodel"? Why should there be a difference?

Music journalist Bryan Chalker has expressed it well:

Yodelling, in one form or another, has helped shape the course of country music, and, whilst hardly a marketing force to be reckoned with these days, this unique form of vocalising is far from being as dead as a Dodo. One man's country yodel is another's glottal stop and even those artists like Ray Price and the late David Houston, with built-in 'yips' in their voices, can be included within the many variations that go to make up yodelling as a distinct musical vocal trait.<sup>47</sup>

Chalker is exactly right to recognise that all the falsetto-break vocal effects are indeed yodelling "in one form or another".

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<sup>45</sup>Nick Tosches, *Where Dead Voices Gather*, Boston, New York and London: Little, Brown and Company, 2001, p. 64.

<sup>46</sup>Kevin Coffey, "Slim Whitman", book accompanying *Slim Whitman – Rose Marie*, Bear Family BCD 15768 F1, 1996, p. 11.

<sup>47</sup>Bryan Chalker, 2002, "Yodellin' Gold", *Traditional Music Maker*, No. 51, February/March, pp. 20.

Therefore, in order to move beyond definitional quibbling and to propose a useable terminology that covers the many examples of yodel phenomena in popular music, the remainder of this chapter will outline current understanding of the concept of register, especially as it relates to yodelling, and then investigate yodelling with reference to the biological mechanisms that create it. The definition and classification that follow will be used for the description of yodelling in this thesis, but they are adequate for the description of all voice breaking phenomena.

## Register

Register is a concept associated with many aspects of music. Its use in musicography begins in organ building, wherein various sets of pipes activated by the stops and creating a particular tone-quality were termed registers. The use of the term has extended and broadened and now encompasses a range of connected ideas.<sup>48</sup>

Modern usage of the term is somewhat nebulous. However, register generally refers to a particular tone-quality resulting from the characteristics of the region within the overall compass of the instrument or voice.

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<sup>48</sup> Tim Wise, "Register", *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, London and New York: Continuum, 2003, Vol. II, *Performance and Production*, pp. 591-92.



As an instrument or voice progresses upward through its compass from the lowest possible note to the highest, the tone quality and the strength of the sound vary at particular points. Some instruments, such as the clarinet or grand piano have distinct points of cut-off, as though laid end to end, so to speak.<sup>49</sup> The voice allows a certain overlapping of the registers; that is, certain pitches can be taken in either the normal mode or falsetto. In some instances, register refers principally to tessitura, such as high, medium or low. In the case of woodwind instruments, register can refer simply to the octave placement of the pitch performed.

The matter is somewhat more complicated with regard to the voice. This is a result of the very long tradition of vocal performance and pedagogy associated with classical music training and the discourse and terminology that surround it. In the classical singing tradition, a very detailed approach to the production, resonance, and projection of the voice, coupled with a normative idealised tone toward which singers aspire has generated a particular terminology reflecting the values and aesthetic standards of their art in general.

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<sup>49</sup> The piano is included here for the reason that a different bridge and a different type of stringing (wound strings fewer in number in the bass, unwound sets of three in the tenor) result in marked variations in string tensions between these registers. The tone regulator's task is to try to minimise the changes in tone quality that result from these mechanical disparities in order to produce the homogeneity of sound classical music aesthetics seems always to demand.

## **Chest voice and head voice**

The classical singing tradition recognises a distinction in male singers between chest voice and head voice. Chest voice refers to the normal mode of production with the air produced by the singing voice resonating in the chest cavity, while head voice refers to resonating in the head. Women singers of the European classical singing tradition generally do not use what is referred to as “chest voice”.

The situation becomes problematic when the European classical tradition is left behind. For instance in the United States of America there is a long tradition of female singing making full use of the resonating capability of the chest. Female singers such as Bessie Smith, Sophie Tucker, and Ma Rainey can be singled out as examples. Their performance techniques appear to have influenced female singing techniques generally in America, so that many singers now perform with the European-proscribed chest voice.

In contemporary singing practice, where a singer is very likely to be performing in any of several traditions – classical, jazz, pop, rock, etc. – there is considerable blurring of the technical boundaries. A recent survey of voice teachers in North America reveals that modern pedagogy there recognises at least three, rather than the conventional two, “voices” or registers: chest, head, and mixed. The use of “mixed” register, which is a combination of chest and head, is especially associated with singers in non-classical styles of

music; these types, according to by Jeannette L. LoVetri and Edrie Means Weekly, are collectively referred to as “contemporary commercial music”.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, the terms head voice, chest voice, mixed, and so forth within the context of practising performers refer primarily to resonance areas: parts of the body into which the air flow is directed to produce a desired tone. Pragmatic in their conception and tending toward an aesthetically-determined normative singing voice, these distinctions are not registers as conceptualised by scientists. Rather, these “registers” are conceptualised without regard to, or perhaps it is better to say, are independent of, laryngeal activity.

These categories furthermore are built upon the conventions of voice teaching which have canonised certain practices. The “true art” is determined by the mastery of the approved techniques. Thus results the emphasis upon training and the remarkable sameness of approach in classical singing, which reflects a general tendency in later twentieth-century classical music towards homogeneity of performance styles. This phenomenon is likely the result of

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<sup>50</sup> Jeannette L. LoVetri and Edrie Means Weekly, “Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) Survey: Who’s Teaching What in Nonclassical Music”, *Journal of Voice*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2003, pp. 207-15.

recording and the mass media facilitating mutual influences and gradual assimilation.<sup>51</sup>

Attempts to counter this orthodoxy are met with resistance and, indeed, hostility, as Michèle Castellengo has told us. When she suggested a more scientific terminology for the description of vocal register, voice teachers were outraged.<sup>52</sup> Controversies over the whole notion of register are proof that the concept is socially determined. Not only that, but they reveal how the differing concepts embody the ideology of those who use them and how important it is for these sub-groups to control the language regarding their techniques. Classical singing traditions have developed over a very long period, and masking the break – smoothing over the rough – is in itself constitutive of their ideology.

## Physiology

Physiologists and acousticians who study vocal phenomena define register in terms of quantifiable actions within the larynx without regard to the

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<sup>51</sup> One effect of competitions in classical music seems to be a continual reinforcement of orthodox performance styles in orthodox repertoire.

<sup>52</sup> Michèle Castellengo, "The Human Voice and its Registers: the Value of Interdisciplinary Collaboration", PAS Conference, October 3-5, 2002, <[http://www.med.rug.nl/pas/Conf\\_contrib/Castellengo/Castellengo\\_bio\\_touch.htm](http://www.med.rug.nl/pas/Conf_contrib/Castellengo/Castellengo_bio_touch.htm)>. (16/12/2003)

resonating cavities that are the concern of voice teachers. Here we note the difference in terminology resulting from the contradictory interests of those using the concepts. One is concerned with physics, the other with aesthetics, and both vie for sovereignty over the term. Since classical music's pedagogical orthodoxy excluded yodelling, then we may wish to opt for the physicists' definition. Even the "expressive break" that Castellengo mentions in regard to Caruso's voice, while often enough indulged in by a brave tenor, is not ordinarily taught as a matter of course.<sup>53</sup>

In order to understand the mechanisms producing the change of register, a brief excursion into the physiology of the larynx is necessary. The larynx, or voice box, consists of several sections of cartilage: thyroid cartilage, arytenoid cartilage, and the cricoid cartilage. (Figure 2.1) Within these hard sections are contained the vocal folds, which are sometimes called the vocal cords. The actions of the vocal folds are controlled by two sets of muscle groups: the thyroarytenoid (containing the vocalis muscles) and the cricothyroids. The glottis is the space between the vocal folds. Adduction of the glottis refers to the vocal folds' closing together in order to prevent air passing through the larynx. Abduction refers to their separating to allow the passage of air.

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<sup>53</sup> Castellengo, pp. 5 and 9.

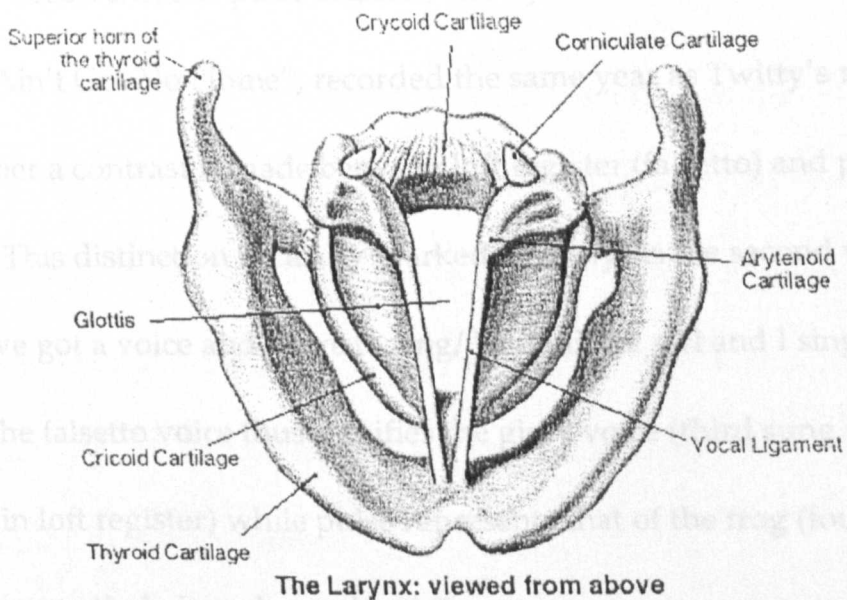
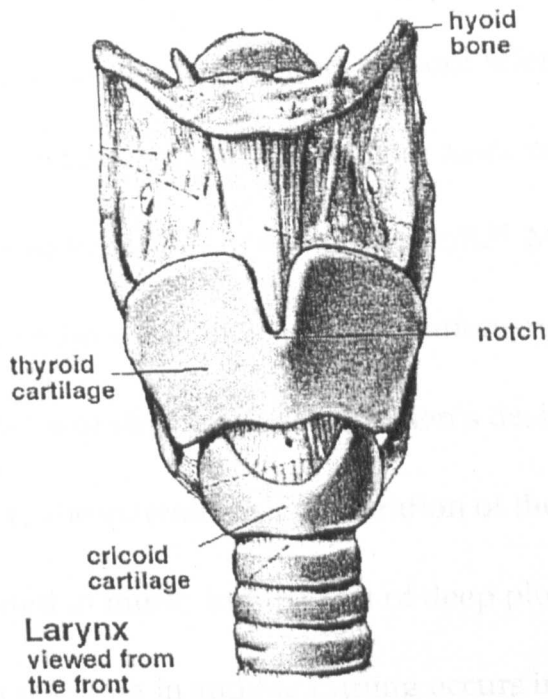


Figure 2.1. Diagrams of the larynx.

Source: <<http://www.worldzone.net/music/singingvoice/images/larynx.gif>>

\* Conway Twitty, "Lonesome Blue Boy", rec. 1958, reissue on Conway Twitty: The Hits, Universal, UMS 424757, 2007.

\* Carl Mann, "Ain't Got No Home", rec. 1952, Philips 68 751 P/W.

In an important study, Harry Hollien postulates three registers only, each determined by physiological activity alone, without reference to questions of resonating areas and totally devoid of ideologies associated with fine singing or aesthetics. These he labels pulse, modal, and loft.<sup>54</sup> Modal corresponds to the normal activity of the vocal folds in conversation and most European and North American styles of singing. Loft is Hollien's designation for falsetto, while pulse refers to the extremely slow vibration of the vocal folds. Pulse register is rarely used in music, but the sort of deep plunge of the voice into this lowest region resulting in audible rattling occurs in, for example, Conway Twitty's "Lonely Blue Boy" on the line "Yeah lonely, lonely blue boy is my name".<sup>55</sup> In that example the connotation is of dejection and defeat. Another of the rare occurrences of pulse register, clearly marked for humour, is Carl Mann's "Ain't Got No Home", recorded the same year as Twitty's record. In this number a contrast is made between loft register (falsetto) and pulse register. This distinction is clearly marked in the lyric: the second verse states, "Well, I've got a voice and I love to sing/ I sing like a girl and I sing like a frog". The falsetto voice thus signifies the girl's voice (third sung verse, sung entirely in loft register) while pulse represents that of the frog (fourth sung verse, sung entirely in pulse register).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Harry Hollien, "On Vocal Registers", *Journal of Phonetics*, 2, 1974, pp. 125-43.

<sup>55</sup> Conway Twitty, "Lonely Blue Boy", rec. 1959, reissue on *Conway Twitty, The Hits*, Universal Ims E249357, 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Carl Mann, "Ain't Got No Home", rec. 1959, Phillips Int. PLP 60.

In a study titled “Vocal Breaks from the Modal to the Falsetto Register”, the actions of the muscles within the larynx are described.

The vocalis muscle is considered to play the main role in determining the register. Through its contraction the vibrating mass of the vocal folds is increased. The result is a complex movement of the vocal folds modulating the phonation air stream, which produces a characteristic colour of the chest register (a part of the modal register). The relaxation of the vocalis muscle in higher voice range positions causes a change in the mode of vibration which is being limited to the margins of the vocal folds only. This is the falsetto register. Both registers are differentiated by their acoustic spectra, so that they can be identified perceptually. Each of the two registers has its own frequency and intensity. These registers overlap partially, so that some frequencies may be produced within both registers with the same intensity. A continuous transition from one register to another is a gentle process requiring a long time training. Trying to do it there usually arises a vocal break in untrained voices. Generally this is manifested by a sudden change in all the basic qualities of a tone, i.e. fundamental frequency, intensity, as well as frequency spectrum.<sup>57</sup>

It is interesting to note the correlation between the notion of the break and the notion of training. Smooth transition has been valorised in the Western classical singing tradition. Only those committed to the training have a chance of acceptance. Smoothness is thus the mark of distinction from the untrained. Here we have in the break a signifier that separates ideologies expressed through voice timbre.

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<sup>57</sup> Jan Švec and J. Pešák, p. 98.



Several other important studies into the biological mechanisms producing register changes in the voice have contributed to our understanding of yodelling. With the aid of video images, Harvey Fletcher demonstrated that chest voice, the more common term given to the normal mode of vibration in speech and singing – modal in Hollien’s terms – is produced by a complete closure of the glottis accompanied by complex movements of the vocal folds.<sup>58</sup> Adduction enriches the harmonic spectrum of the wave form produced in the larynx: the fact that the flap of tissue at the top surface of the vocal fold is free to vibrate adds to the complex of overtones. Falsetto voice, on the other hand, results when the glottis vibrates but does not close completely. In this case, Fletcher was able to demonstrate that the vocal folds move as a single unit, resulting in a simpler wave form.

Alteration in the tension of the thyroarytenoid and cricothyroid muscles creates the changes between the harmonic-rich normal mode of vibration and the more sinusoidal tones in the falsetto voice. Modal vibration is characterised by the cricothyroid muscle’s remaining relatively relaxed while the thyroarytenoid and vocalis muscles contract to increase pitch. This is the normal mode of vibration in the speaking voice and the type of phonation male singers in the classical tradition use when producing “chest voice”.

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<sup>58</sup> Harvey Fletcher, *Speech, Hearing, and Communication*, Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1965.

Because the cricothyroid is relaxed in this mode, the tissue covering the thyroarytenoid relaxes even as the thyroarytenoid contracts. This relaxation in the tissue allows it to vibrate and thus to add overtones to the wave form produced by the vocal cords: normal-mode vibration – modal in Hollien’s terms – is therefore characterised by a more complex waveform resulting from the presence of these overtones. In contrast, falsetto-mode vibrations, or loft mode vibrations, result from the contraction of the cricothyroid in order to increase pitch. Because of the stretching of the vocal fold muscle and the tissue above it as the tension of the cricothyroid increases, the entire vocal fold appears to vibrate as a single element. The consequence of this phenomenon is a more sinusoidal wave form with a resultant loss of overtones.

Pitch jumps between the two modes of vibration have been studied by Švec et al. Their study of data derived from an excised human larynx and three living subjects “revealed that a small and gradual change in tension of the vocal folds can cause an abrupt change of register and pitch”.<sup>59</sup> In the interest of a smooth transition throughout the compass of the voice, classical singers work to mask this “jump” between the modes of vibration in the larynx. In yodelling, on the other hand, the jump is emphasised.

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<sup>59</sup> Jan Švec, Harm K. Schutte, and Donald G. Miller, “On Pitch Jumps between Chest and Falsetto Registers in Voice: Data from Living and Excised human Larynges”, *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, Vol. 106, No. 3, Pt. 1, September 1999, 1523-29, p. 1523.

This process that Hollien, Fletcher, Švec et al, and others have identified – this moment when the vocal register abruptly switches – ought to be the central focus of a definition of the yodel for the purposes of popular music, rather than the various vocal complexes, involving rhythms, other pitches, nonsense syllables and perhaps words – the things that singers do with a yodelling voice.

It may be that this concentration on “the yodel” results from the greater emphasis the noun form receives in comparison with the verb form. This nominalization tends to make us conceive of yodelling as though it were a *thing*: a wordless melodic vocalisation with sudden shifts between natural and falsetto registers, a melisma with falsetto, and so forth. These terms certainly describe a huge number of vocal phenomena in popular music. However, the noun “yodel” seems to give priority to what the voice *has produced* over what the voice *is doing* in the production. A conception of “yodel” that is essentially noun-orientated conceals the fact that yodelling is an *action*, a *doing*. Therefore, yodelling may be better served with a verb-orientated definition: something that more generally includes all of the many vocal phenomena deriving from this switch in the voice box that we hear, and not just in popular music. This kind of definition is more useful in that it describes any use of register breaking.

We started out with a very general definition of yodelling as singing in a manner that exploits noticeable breaks between natural and falsetto voice. It is not important how often or how infrequently the voice breaking occurs within a song; what matters is that the break should be recognised as intentional – in other words, not made accidentally for any reason. It has to be assumed that the break in the voice is made for some kind of *expression of emotion or significance*. The point in the overall musical stream at which this break happens is crucial to the passage's affect: it is a point where something *different* happens. This "difference" distinguishes such a moment from one in which, for example, there is a simple change of pitch, or where a rhythm is intoned at a constant pitch: the difference is a change of vocal register that is particularly arresting, even startling.

The precise moment when the break from natural voice into falsetto, or vice versa, occurs is the distinguishing feature of the yodel. In fact, it is the *only* distinguishing feature. This break in register is the sonic event within the flow of the musical line that startles and delights the ear. I call this "yodel moment" in the musical flow a *yodeleme*, a coinage analogous to similar concepts such as phoneme and museme and intended to indicate a primary unit of meaning. This key moment in the musical flow when the register

abruptly shifts can justifiably be termed a yodeleme for two reasons. First, it is irreducible: no component of the yodeleme can be removed without its identity as “yodel” being taken from it. This is because, without a switch in register, the *melos* is either simply falsetto or simply natural: there is no change. The second reason is that all yodels, no matter how they are described or defined, contain at least one yodeleme. The yodeleme, to reiterate, is the essential distinguishing feature.

In fact, what all these various forms of vocalisation known as yodel have in common – the *only* thing some of them have in common – is the presence of the yodeleme. Whether appearing in a working cattle call, or in Alpine valley vocal play, or at an emotional point in a popular song, the presence of the yodeleme is the factor that determines whether the passage is understood as a yodel. The yodeleme connects all the various forms of yodelling, from the Swiss herdsmen to the Tennessee rockabillics. While the meaning attached to the yodeleme no doubt varies with the cultures and even between subsets of more pluralistic societies, not to mention all levels of idiosyncratic reception, the yodeleme, nevertheless, is primary. It exists in two forms, ascending or descending; however in popular music contexts yodelling with a descending initial interval is relatively rare.

The yodeleme can be understood as a sonic event occupying three dimensions: it represents changes in musical information along three axes: melody, in that a pitch change always occurs; rhythm, in that the pitch change brings about a musical articulation; timbre, in that the articulation is accompanied by a switch between two “voices” or registers. It is thus a melodic unit with the added, less usual, dimension of timbral change, which seems to emphasise or to sharpen the rhythm.

### **Yodel species**

If the yodeleme is accepted as the primary determinant of any yodelled passage, then the various yodel types occurring in English-language popular music can be classified according to species, of which there are three.

The *first species* comprises all wordless – that is, based upon nonsense syllables – yodeleme strands alternating between natural and falsetto voice and usually unfolding over changes in the harmony. This species is that described by Baumann in his definition, cited earlier, and it is very likely what most people normally think of when they imagine yodelling. The following example from Jimmie Rodgers’s “Dear Old Sunny South by the Sea” illustrates this species.<sup>60</sup> (Figure 2.2)

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<sup>60</sup> All the Jimmie Rodgers songs referred to in this study are contained in the Bear Family edition titled *Jimmie Rodgers, the Singing Brakeman*. Bear Family BCD 15540 FI, 1992.



Figure 2.2. Jimmie Rodgers, “Dear Old Sunny South by the Sea”, 1928, yodel refrain.

The *second species* involves breaking register while singing a word. Thus, second species corresponds to the “stylised yodels” defined by Alfred Tobler, mentioned earlier in this chapter in the quotation from Baumann. In popular music contexts these are often isolated yodelemes. That is, they are single occurrences of a break into falsetto voice, although they may occasionally occur in pairs or other patterns. The break into falsetto occurs in the middle of singing a syllable, hence splitting the word. I refer to this as *word-breaking*, another coinage that will be employed in this thesis. The rhythmic pattern of second species yodels is typically short-long, implying that the first part of the vowel (in natural voice) is short and the falsetto portion is longer. Frequently, however, the break on a single syllable of a word is extended through the agglutination of further yodelemes to produce a strand. Examples of second species yodels abound in popular music. The “vocal bleats” of Emmett Miller, as Tosches describes them (see earlier), are all second species yodels,

as are the plaintive cries of Tommy Johnson and the falsetto passages in Hawaiian singing styles. The following example is from Kenny Roberts's "Broken Teen Age Heart".<sup>61</sup> (Figure 2.3) Note that there are two yodelemes, one rising and one falling, resulting in the breaking of the word "easy".



Figure 2.3. Kenny Roberts, "Broken Teenage Heart", 1956, opening vocal line.

The *third species* is a yodelled grace note. This generally reverses the order of the second species – a long-held natural tone is followed by (or occasionally preceded by) a very brief yodelled tag. Known as "feathering" in rockabilly parlance, this is an important vocal device as well as a style indicator for country music. Plantenga notes this type. He calls it voice-break singing and remarks upon its use "to add emotional resonance to a song".<sup>62</sup> Third species yodels also include the "expressive break" of Italian tenors as described by

<sup>61</sup> Kenny Roberts, "Broken Teen Age Heart" (Lake Cely), rec. 1956, reissue on *Jumpin' & Yodelin'*. Bear Family BCD 15908 AH.

<sup>62</sup> Plantenga, p. 310.



Castellengo.<sup>63</sup> The following example is from Kenny Roberts's song "Hillbilly Style".<sup>64</sup> (Figure 2.4)

We like our mu - si - - - ic hill bil ly style

V7 I

Figure 2.4. Kenny Roberts, from "Hillbilly Style", 1952.

The structure of extended yodel passages can be broken down into various segments, which involve either yodelemes or phrases only in the natural voice or only in the falsetto voice. Rapid alternations between the voices can be understood as sequences of yodelemes, or yodeleme strands. In this way, the yodels that occur in popular music can be broken into their constituent parts. Thus, yodelemes combine with segments to create longer yodel strands whose shapes are usually determined by musical considerations: conventional melodic patterning, harmonic movement, and cadence.

The structure of the entire yodel strand can be understood as having two possible parts: a *quasi-anacrusis*, which will end with the first occurrence of a

<sup>63</sup> Castellengo, pp. 5 and 9.

<sup>64</sup> Kenny Roberts, "Broken Teen Age Heart", 1956, BCD 15908.

yodeleme, and an *extension*, comprising the falsetto portion of the phrase (or phrases) and any further combinations of yodelemes and other segments.

The quasi-anacrusis is an optional component, occurring very frequently in popular music yodels, but by no means always.

The following Jimmie Rodgers pattern is an example of a typical first species yodel strand from hillbilly music of the late 1920s. It is a turnaround figure that he used frequently and which was widely imitated by his followers.

(Figure 2.5)

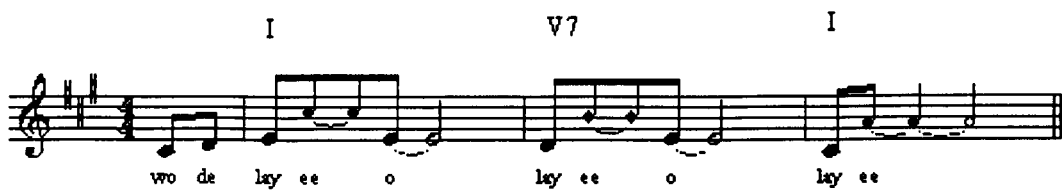


Figure 2.5. Jimmie Rodgers, "Blue Yodel", 1927, turnaround.

The initial three notes in stepwise motion act as a quasi-anacrusis for the first leap into falsetto at the interval of a major sixth. The remainder of the passage consists of a sequence of similar rising and falling yodelemes – the extension – whose shape outlines the harmonic structure of the phrase.

A much more elaborate first species yodel strand, from Slim Whitman's "Casting My Lasso Toward the Sky", shows a similar quasi-anacrusis, but with a far more developed extension. (Figure 2.6)

tai yi o da lay i di di di di yo yo di yo di yo di

3 yi yo yo di yo di yo di di yi yi yi tai yi o lay i ti di yo ti di yo ti yo yo di

7 o di o di o di o di o di o di o di o di oo

Figure 2.6. Slim Whitman, "Casting My Lasso Toward The Sky", 1949, opening yodel.

The pick up measure again acts as a quasi-anacrusis, and like the Rodgers example, ends with a leap of a major sixth. The first complete bar after the anacrusis is sung entirely in falsetto and thus can be understood as an extension of the first leap into falsetto. However, for musical reasons, the entire yodel strand shown here is perceived as a unit or period. For that reason, everything following the anacrusis until the words of the verse begin can be taken as the extension.

In bars two, three, and seven the rapid oscillation between normal mode phonation and falsetto phonation can be understood as yodeleme strands. Finally, on the third beat of bar six, the leap up to a brief falsetto note could be considered a third species yodel were it to occur in isolation, although its effect as such may not be apparent in this example, subsumed as it is within an overall first species yodel.

Because the definitions and parameters of yodelling and vocal registers are socially determined, it follows that these will have a bearing on the perception of these vocal phenomena. Consider, for example, yodelling performed while humming. This might not in all cases be immediately understood as yodelling, primarily because of its low dynamic level and because it is a variation not specific to Swiss or German styles. It has nothing to do with the distance calling aspect of yodelling the way it is frequently conceptualised. But in the context of a Jimmie Rodgers song, for example "I'm Sorry We Met", it is clearly understood as a yodel. This is because Rodgers, who billed himself as "America's Blue Yodeller" and who yodelled in virtually every song he recorded, was *expected* to yodel. Therefore any break in his voice, even the expressive break such as Castellengo points out in Caruso's recordings and which Rodgers also indulged in, is interpreted as a form of yodelling; in another context, say high in the Alps, such vocalisations at such

low amplitudes and with no suggestion of distance calling, might not be. So clearly, context and expectation play vital roles in our reception of vocal signs.

There are many falsetto techniques that have a different origin from Swiss yodelling, such as the ecstatic leaps into falsetto so frequently heard in gospel music, or the voice breaking in Hawaiian music, or even perhaps the voice breaking in the Cranberries' "Zombie", for example.<sup>65</sup> Because yodelling and other falsetto styles have merged in popular music, it is not easy to separate what might be derived historically from Swiss practices from other practices deriving from other sources. While this may be true, it seems beside the point. When we encounter obvious examples of parallel evolution, such as that of the Aka or the Samoans, we have no difficulty with the term yodel: it is common to describe their vocalisations as yodelling. However, where styles have merged due to the inevitable mixing that characterises popular music, there is an apparent tendency among performers to try to maintain a distance from yodelling, whose associations are felt to be the wrong kind. This is an example of the negative connotations that have dogged yodelling seemingly throughout its history in English-language popular music. So people who

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<sup>65</sup> The Cranberries, "Zombie" (Dolores O'Riordan), *Stars: The Best of 1992-2002*, Island Records 04400632772, 2002.

make breaks between registers in their singing may deny they are yodelling when their larynxes suggest that they are.<sup>66</sup>

### **Conclusion: the Rough and the Smooth**

To summarise, vocal register is conceptualised in various ways in music; but with regard to yodelling, vocal register it is best understood as a result of a particular laryngeal mechanism. Yodel phenomena are thus characterised by the presence of a yodeleme: it is the essential feature of any yodelled passage. Three different musico-expressive types of yodelling occur in the context of American popular music, which it has designated species. These distinctions will be employed in later chapters.

The yodeleme can be conceived metaphorically as a switch, on or off. Its binary nature gives it especial interest as an item of information, as a moment when change is perceived. It jumps. This phenomenon must be a key to its semiotics, particularly considering the difference of effect between smooth connectedness and sudden jerks. Even the consonants of the word “smooth”

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<sup>66</sup> This blurring of the distinction between Swiss practice and other traditional practices is somewhat analogous to the blurring of the tradition of Hawaiian steel guitar techniques with black bottleneck styles. These guitar techniques represent two different lines of development that merged in popular music styles in the American South in the first third of the twentieth century. This is more or less the same time that these vocal techniques of different origins blended together.

indicate this, as do the connotations of its translations: *suave*, in the style sense, and *soave* in the taste sense. Smooth in both instances carries suggestions of sophistication and poise, easy grace among the social elite. Smoothness is a marker relating to diplomatic manoeuvring among the sophisticated classes. On the other hand, the snap in the voice signals something working against this: the gauche break in the voice of the awkward pubescent – one may think of Sid Vicious singing “My Way” – or the losing of one’s cool in the sob – the expressive break of Caruso. Smooth means never losing that control, whereas, paradoxically, the control of the superb yodeller only strengthens the impression of unselfconsciousness and disinhibition.

## Chapter 3

### The Yodel and its Affiliates in Nineteenth-Century Art Music

#### Introduction

Representations of yodelling in classical music are common. This chapter is concerned with the nature of these representations and their role in music.

In instrumental music the yodel-sign was, of course, always a stylisation or an abstraction.<sup>67</sup> Rarely was it even in vocal music an actual yodel; more often it was a mimetic gesture: an icon.<sup>68</sup> In many cases composers used melodies derived directly from a *Ranz des vaches*. For example, Max Peter Baumann has written of the romantic composers' interest in such melodies to suggest pastoralism and local colour.<sup>69</sup> But a particular motive combining elements suggestive of key Alpine signifiers – *Ranz des vaches*, yodel, and alphorn – occurs so often and in so many contexts across the genres that it can be regarded as a “topic” associated with a particular subset of central European home-grown pastoralism. The appearance of this motive provided one of the

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<sup>67</sup> Tagg, in reference to another museme, calls such a sign an anaphone derived from a real-world sound, Tagg and Clarida, p. 292.

<sup>68</sup> There are exceptions to this, such as the Tyrolienne towards the end of Rossini's *Il Viaggio a Reim*. Yet a very great deal of “yodelling” in classical music has been of a much more abstract kind. Yodelling in light classical and popular contexts is discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>69</sup> Baumann, 1976, p. 144.



ways in which the pastoralism shaped by burgeoning romanticism was symbolically mediated. For one of the aspects of the new sensibility expressed in romantic art was the recasting of the classical ideas of the Golden Age and of the pastoral tradition stretching from the *Idylls* of Theocritus in terms of their own folk culture: Alpine shepherds playing pipes replace Arcadian shepherds playing other kinds of pipes.

The variant manifestations of this “yodel sign” and their function within a semiotic framework are discussed in this chapter. The yodel sign is treated as a topic in the sense defined by Leonard Ratner. In his book *Classic Music*

Ratner states

From its contacts with worship, poetry, drama, entertainment, dance, ceremony, the military, the hunt, and the life of the lower classes, music in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century developed a thesaurus of *characteristic figures*, which formed a rich legacy for classic composers. Some of these figures were associated with various feelings and affections; others had a picturesque flavour. They are designated here as *topics* – subjects for musical discourse.<sup>70</sup>

The yodel topic emerged at a later time than those described in Ratner’s book, but the musemic formulas that are manifest in numerous examples of nineteenth-century music function in the same way.

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<sup>70</sup> Ratner, p. 9.

## Intrinsic Musical Signs and Extrinsic Musical Signs

To state the matter in very simplistic terms, there were two general classes of musical sign available to composers at the end of the eighteenth century: intrinsic signs and extrinsic signs.<sup>71</sup> Another way to state this idea is that there are two general ways in which a musical sign may operate: pointing inward or pointing outward, as it were. There is no clear division between these, and, indeed, it is probably often the case that a sign acts in both roles simultaneously. As their names imply, each type bears a particular relation to the musical text, and each type's meaning is implicit in this relationship.

Intrinsic musical signs are those types of sign that refer to the internal properties of music in general. These relate to the text's internal characteristics as regards its tonality or modality, its pulse and rhythmic structures, and its overall internal cohesiveness deriving from its chord sequences or thematic cross-referencing, among many other possibilities.

Two examples will serve to elucidate intrinsic signs. A motive, such as that which opens Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, is one such example. It has no obvious external referent, yet its own significance is apparent to the listener after a few bars, when it becomes clear that this motive is the building block on which the first part of the exposition of the movement is based. Not only

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<sup>71</sup> These terms are roughly analogous to Leonard Meyer's terms "embodied" and "referential". See his *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, pp. 1-3.

does it serve as a fragment that by a kind of agglutination becomes “melodic”: it also serves as an instantly recognisable sonic event generating climaxes and delineating sections. As has been pointed out many times before, the opening motive is the simple germ from which the entire structure of the movement grows. Despite the apocryphal “Fate knocking at the door” story, its “meaning”, according to classical music orthodoxy, is primarily, if not entirely, derived from, or understood in terms of, the internal musical processes of the movement.

Another example of an intrinsic sign, more unassuming than the Beethoven motive, is a major chord arpeggio, such as the sequence of notes C E G C'. Even listeners with no musical knowledge (that is, if they have the faculty of hearing and are members of the culture that uses this particular sonic code) will recognise this sequence as a unit, or at least as a sequence of pitches very frequently encountered. Its significance derives from its relationship to the major scale, and although its uses within a piece of music are probably infinite, it is understood to relate to the tonality of the piece or at least to the chord with which the piece is at that moment concerned. Thus the arpeggio, because of its strong association with a particular chord and consequently with a key and therefore with tonality itself, points inward, so to speak, toward a tonal relationship or process within or underlying the piece of music.

Any number of other types of intrinsic sign could be cited as examples: scalar or modal passages, recurrences of themes, inversions of themes, contrasting themes, accidentals, modulations, and so forth. Intrinsic signs were the primary ones – the only ones – considered permissible under the rubric of “absolute” music. As long as musical signs were understood as constituting “purely” musical processes and their significances were apprehended within the limits of conventional “form and analysis”, the boundaries of absolute music were not overstepped. The music could safely, ideologically speaking, be merely “about” itself.<sup>72</sup>

But there is, of course, another kind of musical sign: the extrinsic sign. As the name implies, such a sign refers to something outside the music. It has a signified located not in the music’s process, but somewhere within the general culture.<sup>73</sup> Further, this signified is known and nameable, and for this reason is the bugbear of absolutism in music.<sup>74</sup> Many extrinsic signs are mimetic, but they do not have to be. There are numerous types of extrinsic sign; some have been in use in classical music for so long that their function as extrinsic signs

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<sup>72</sup> On the development of the concept and aesthetics of absolute music in the nineteenth century see Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, University of Chicago Press, 1991/1978.

<sup>73</sup> *Signified* here refers to the other side of the *sign* in Saussure’s construction: the mental concept the signifier denotes.

<sup>74</sup> Of course, from the point of view of recent ideas about intertextuality, even intrinsic signs in music such as I describe nevertheless relate to other items of their genera by virtue of the connections that are shared by all aspects of the code.

may sometimes be overlooked and they may be mistaken for intrinsic signs.

An example of an extrinsic sign that has become a convention in music is the military call.

*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* differentiates between fanfare and military call.<sup>75</sup> The fanfare is a brass flourish that heralds royalty or nobility. The military call is a bugle signal used to communicate with an army on the field: for example, to direct its movements. Other military calls are the familiar *Reveille* and *The Last Post*. These distinctions aside, the use of brass figures has been extremely common in classical music since 1660, particularly in opera. Although the features of the typical fanfare, such as arpeggiated figures or scalar runs, may be identical in some respects to the intrinsic signs discussed above, other characteristics are intended to preserve the identity as a fanfare *per se*, and thus to reinforce its extrinsic significance. To use another Beethoven example, the trumpet flourishes in *Fidelio* (and in the *Leonore* overtures) are intended to represent the approach of Don Fernando, the king's minister. The motive's relation to military bugle calls is immediately understood and through that association is connected with law and authority. Moreover, in Beethoven's use the trumpet signal is sounded offstage and at different distances to the events on stage: the use of spatial

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<sup>75</sup> See Edward H. Tarr, "Fanfare", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 2001, Vol. 8, pp.543-44, and Peter Downey, "Military calls", Vol. 16, p. 683.

relations is a further signal mediating an idea to us: the approach of Florestan's saviour.

Extrinsic signs are iconic. But although they function as icons, they need not in all cases be mimetic. For example, the appearance of *La Marseillaise* in Tchaikovsky's overture *1812* is an icon in the sense that it is a section within the overall composition that sounds like the French national anthem. Yet we understand that it signifies the French army by virtue of the sign's indexical relationship to the country of which it is the national anthem. This differs from a mimetic sign, which imitates some feature of the signified in order to suggest it. From the same piece of music we can find passages that imitate or suggest, by virtue of similarities between salient features, the battle that ensues, for example, or the canter, or possibly trot, of the cavalry horses of the victorious Russian army.<sup>76</sup>

To summarise, it is possible to distinguish between those musical signs which can be labelled intrinsic and those which can be labelled extrinsic. To the latter may also assigned such icons as the car horns in Gershwin's *American in Paris*, the sirens in Varèse's *Amérique* and *Ionisation*, the pistol

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<sup>76</sup> The rhythm and tempo do not suggest the full gallop. For two differing but interesting analyses of rhythms associated with horses see Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music*, Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 45-65, and Tagg and Clarida, pp. 291-307.

and the typewriter in Satie's *Parade*, and the wind machine in Strauss's *Don Quixote*.

Moreover, with the rise of romanticism in the nineteenth century and the combined influence of programme music and of opera, wherein naturally there are strong links between apparently innocent musical gestures on the one hand and literature and other paramusical phenomena on the other, certain signs that may have originated as intrinsic signs – i.e. with no external referent – took on despite themselves extrinsic associations: the musical sign became emblematic through its uses in later contexts. The development of “fate” motives provides a good example here. By fate motives I mean musemes associated with the more baleful or doom-laden aspects of the romantic conception of fate in programme music, opera, or film. Fate motives have a particular set of characteristics, some of which they share with funeral music: they typically have a heavy, ponderous quality, they commonly involve rhythmic patterns based upon triplets, and they usually occur in the context of minor-key harmony. The evolution of such a motive can be traced from devices used by Beethoven. Archetypes of the fate-formula in his works include the Fifth Symphony motive already mentioned (as well as its transformation in the third movement), a figure from the first movement of the *Appassionata* Sonata (figure 3.1), and the cadential triplet figure in the funeral march of the *Eroica* Symphony. The last two examples indicate how

apparently “neutral” or “innocent” musical signs are linked to paramusical ideas simply from their occurrence in pieces with descriptive titles.



Figure 3.1. Ludwig van Beethoven, *Appassionata* Sonata, 1807, first movement, bars 236-238 – a prototype fate motive.

These formulaic gestures underwent continuous use and transformation throughout the nineteenth century and had emerged as full-blown fate motives and mottos at least by the time of Tchaikovsky’s *Fourth Symphony*, whose opening comes complete with a composer-provided programme as related to Nadezhda von Meck. Tchaikovsky was fond of this kind of gesture. The pounding rhythms under the main theme of his *Manfred* Symphony and the timpani figure at the close of *Romeo and Juliet* also fit this paradigm. The opening motto of Mahler’s *Fifth Symphony* and the music Franz Waxman wrote to symbolise the monster in *The Bride of Frankenstein* show the continuing use of the same code in classical and popular contexts,



respectively. Clearly, an abstract figure had acquired, after almost a hundred and fifty years of use, a fairly specific meaning within the culture. (Figure 3.2)

bassoons and horns in octaves

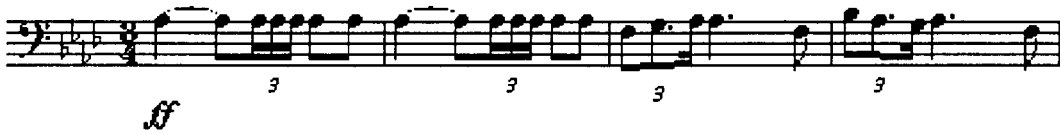


Figure 3.2.1. Pete Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 4, 1878, first movement – opening figure.



Figure 3.2.2. Gustav Mahler, Symphony No. 5, 1904, first movement – B flat trumpet opening figure.



Figure 3.2.3. Franz Waxman, *Bride of Frankenstein*, 1935, Universal – the monster's motive.

This, it seems to me, is the way musical signs acquire meaning, regardless of whether the signs are intended “to mean” or not. Associations simply accrue. This is because the music never appears in isolation, separated from everything else in the culture. It goes along with images, words, events, and ideas; it accompanies dramatic action on stage or on screen; it is fancifully titled. Even music conceived as “absolute” finds itself drowned in a discourse that forces it into a relationship with words: commentators perceive, name, and discuss its operations and moods. Sounds “become”, because they are so labelled, sad, heroic, wistful, sublime, sarcastic, funereal, or festive.<sup>77</sup> Music and ideas – even though they are not the same thing – have an inevitable interface and are inseparable. This interface is constructed within a culture by the people who are using the music.<sup>78</sup> And as Barthes has told us, the intention of the author is of little consequence.<sup>79</sup> Our “codal competence”, the obverse of “codal incompetence or interference”, is a reflection of this acculturation in music, an aspect of our knowledge of the way sonic gestures appear to have meaning for or within our culture.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> I am ignoring for the moment physical responses to music. See Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, pp. 23-26, for example.

<sup>78</sup> See Fornäs for a recent analysis of the relationship of music and words.

<sup>79</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London: Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 142-8.

<sup>80</sup> The idea of codal incompetence/interference in relation to the understanding of popular music texts appears in Philip Tagg, *Kojak, 50 Seconds of Television Music*, Mass Media Music Scholars’ Press, 2000/1979, p. 102-103.

Having made this distinction between a sign's relationships to its text, however, it is important to stress that the line between intrinsic sign and extrinsic sign is not always clear or even present, and that the distinction, however arbitrary, ceased to exist from at least the time of the *Futurist Manifesto*.<sup>81</sup> For the time being, it is necessary only to consider the two types coexisting in many musical structures.

### **Yodel signs**

Representations of yodelling and its affiliates act primarily as extrinsic musical signs. Yodels have an existence outside music, and although they share many features with music, such as pitches, melodic curves, and rhythms, their original existence was not associated with music but with work.<sup>82</sup> Analogous to bugle signalling in the military, yodelling is a long-distance signal or call, originally used to announce to distant hearers the approach of the herd or to call or drive the herd itself. And, as was the case with the military bugle call, when the yodel was introduced into classical music, the effect was to refer to, and to suggest, the associations derived from its primary usages. The icon in the musical text related to something external, which itself articulates meaning as an index. Raymond Monelle has expressed this relation thus:

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<sup>81</sup> 1909.

<sup>82</sup> Baumann, 1976, and Ling.

The topic is essentially a symbol, its iconic or indexical features governed by convention and thus by rule. However, topics may be glimpsed through a feature that seems universal to them: a focus on the *indexicality of the content*, rather than the content itself. . . . Thus, it is possible for a musical syntagma to signify iconically an object which itself functions indexically in a given case; the example . . . of the cuckoo's call [in Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*] is such an item, for the heralding of spring is an indexical function of the cuckoo itself, not of its musical representation.<sup>83</sup>

Whereas the military calls in opera or symphonic music lent connotations of pomp, pageantry, aristocracy, or battle (the list could go on), the yodel was incorporated as a metonym for mountain landscapes, which in themselves connoted a range of romantic and pastoral ideas.

With the emergence of romanticism in European art, music developed a renewed interest in the descriptive, both pictorial and philosophical. In the wake of Jean-Jacques Rousseau artists turned their attention with increased vigour to the depiction of nature. Furthermore, what captured their imaginations was not the idea of nature subdued or nature shaped by the mind of man, as had been the prevailing intellectual attitude during the Enlightenment, but rather nature as a special force in itself. Nature wild and untameable, uncorrupted by the interference of humankind, began to hold aesthetic and philosophical values for artists and intellectuals such as it never possessed before. In particular, the Alps, which during the Enlightenment had seemed to some observers harsh and ugly, chaotic and formless, now exerted a fascination for writers, painters, and composers, who were more

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<sup>83</sup> Monelle, p. 17.

interested in depth of experience than in order. The Alps began to feature prominently in key works of the romantic era, such as, for example, Byron's *Childe Harold* (1812-18) and *Manfred* (1817), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and in paintings by Kaspar David Friederich.

Changes in the attitude toward nature can be viewed through its treatment in music. In Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, for example, the interest is in nature as it impinges upon human actions, whereas nature for its own sake has no particular value in the eighteenth century. Unshaped by human art, nature lacked refinement. In the era of *Empfindsamkeit*, a well-cultivated garden had appeal; perilous gorges did not. With Haydn's *The Seasons*, we see the beginnings of value in nature in its own right. For the next generation in particular, the Alps represented the zone least tamed by human hand, and therefore became an object of fascination.

Charles Rosen has written that:

Mountains had a privileged role in the development of modern sensibility. The new taste of the eighteenth century for Gothic horror and the fashionable craving for strong emotions fostered a novel desire to be terrified by landscape. The dizzying heights and fearful abysses of Alpine Nature were no longer objects of disgust. Travellers now delighted in seeking out sensations of acrophobia. The terror of high altitudes was often accompanied by a light-headed feeling of liberation.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, Harper Collins, 1996, p. 142.

Musical figures suggestive of these kinds of landscape, chief among which were evocations of herding songs, began to interest composers. As Ling states, the attitude towards the Alps in fact changed as tourism increased. Of course, it was only the wealthy and intellectual elite who travelled, but it was they who mediated the ideas concerning them through their writings, and thus their ideology. Eventually, representations of the Alps took on genial and comforting connotations. As Ling writes, "The Alps were no longer seen as a grey, wild, terrifying area, but as a basically idyllic, friendly region offering pleasant adventure. As the tourist trade picked up speed, Tyrolean songs multiplied like wildfire, performed by native inhabitants, now in the obligatory folk costume".<sup>85</sup>

Ling further states that, "The Swiss have two different categories of herding music, the *Kuhreihen* and yodelling".<sup>86</sup> Stripped of their distinguishing features when they become instrumental music abstractions, the two merge into one figure. Yet they do seem to represent two different emotional or psychological tendencies: the yodel associated more with cheerfulness, the *Ranz des vaches* with gloom. These tendencies are exemplified by the exuberance of the yodel-like themes in the finale of Louis Spohr's Octet, Opus 32, and in Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, on the one hand, and, on the other,

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<sup>85</sup> Ling, p. 112.

<sup>86</sup> Ling, p. 32.

by the emotional burden borne by the stylised *Ranz des vaches* in Schumann's *Manfred* Overture or the desolation of the shepherd's pipe in Act 3 of *Tristan und Isolde*.

Musical phrases derived from the yodel and its associated form the *Kuhreihen* or *Ranz des vaches* were frequently employed by classical composers either for colouristic or pictorial effects, intended to evoke images of peasants, of mountains, or of the countryside in general, or for something more subtle: that is, to imply psychological states connected with romantic ideas about nature or ineluctable forces.

One of the earliest well-known examples in the repertoire is Rossini's use of *Ranz des vaches* melodies in *Guillaume Tell*, staged in 1829 at the Paris Opera.

(Figure 3.3) Such a device is doubtless efficient in establishing location from the point of view of effective theatre. But the *Ranz* has added resonance in an opera about Swiss nationalism: as the quotation of Rousseau which begins this thesis indicates, such melodies were emblematic for the Swiss of their land and their statehood, which was held up as a model for others as democratic, pragmatic, and successful.

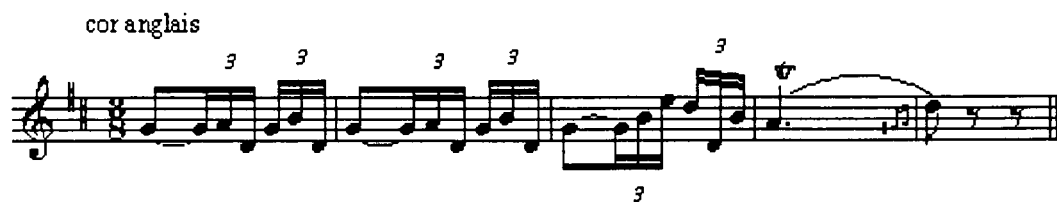


Figure 3.3. Gioacchino Rossini, *Guillaume Tell*, 1829, overture, *pastorale*.

The first appearance of this melody is in the famous overture, itself an example of early romantic composition that abounds in extrinsic signs – for instance, the famous *brio* finale section with military calls and galloping horse rhythms. The *Ranz des vaches* appears in a very calm section coming immediately after the depiction of a thunderstorm – a classic example of pictorial extrinsic signs, ranging from representations the first drops of rain to the stormy deluge that follows. The calm *Ranz* episode is understood as a musical evocation of a mountain pastoral scene.<sup>87</sup>

The question is how this understanding of the music comes about. The primary feature for the establishment of this image is the melody, a *Ranz des vaches* played by the cor anglais, an instrument with pastoral associations

<sup>87</sup> I write this in full knowledge of Berlioz's statement that the staccato woodwind notes "amateurs call 'drops of rain'". Hector Berlioz, "Guillaume-Tell, de Rossini", *Gazette musicale de Paris*, 1834, reprinted in *Strunk's Source Reading in Music History*, Vol. 6, New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1998, pp. 84-99. I am less dismissive of amateurs than Berlioz. At any rate, he seems somewhat inconsistent when he writes later in the same text that "the triangle . . . represents the little bell sounded by the flocks as they saunter quietly along while the shepherds call and answer with their joyful songs", p. 86.



resulting from its supposed derivation from the syrinx, Pan's instrument. Jan Ling points out in his study of folk music in Europe that several other instruments were associated with herding: "herding instruments included valve horns, bugles, French horns, flutes, and pipes, as well as the whip [which could be used for various types of signalling], staves with rattles and clapboard instruments".<sup>88</sup> However, classical composers made no use of these. In the interest of compression and abstraction, composers tended to favour suggestion over realism. A salient characteristic, such as a combination of rhythm, sonority, and melody is sufficient to communicate the idea; these were the normal resources of orchestral music in the first place. The whip, rattle, and so on could be sacrificed, and the message still comes through as long as sufficient information is carried in the music to communicate the idea.

Moreover, the selection of the critical features incorporated into the yodel-formula influence the connotation of the figure. Whip and rattle, although metonyms of the Alpine shepherds' lives, would communicate an entirely different message from that of a *Ranz* played on a woodwind instrument. So the nature of the message – what the pastoral figure is intended to signify – is decisive in the construction of the motive.

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<sup>88</sup> Ling, p. 25.

Similarly, the type of instrument was not fixed. While the cor anglais and oboe were very commonly used, so too were the flute and clarinet for the representation of the shepherd's pipe. The use of double reeds, however, reinforces the classical connection with the shepherds as imagined by Theocritus. For the classical understanding of Golden Age still dwells in the imagery associated with these ideas, even if the European romantic concept has made the shepherds locals, and not Arcadians. It is a claiming of the idea, an appropriation of the classical idea dressed in local garments.

The important feature of this melody is the repetition of a figure using the intervals outlining a major chord in the first inversion: a six-four chord. This is a characteristic melodic turn that conventionally signals "*Ranz des vaches*" and by association, as an index, its affiliate, the yodel. While not every *Ranz* or yodel employs these intervals, the repetition of such figures nevertheless is iconic for *Ranz*. The pastoral association is reinforced by the plain drone-like accompanying harmonies of a G major tonic chord in root position. Because of the features of the melody – principally its repetition of an arpeggiated figure and its sounding on an instrument with pastoral associations – the tune is understood as pastoral, rustic, and serene.

The *Ranz des vaches* is technically not a yodel, but a yodel-like melody played on an alphorn or a song sung to one of these tunes. Yodelling, however, is

understood by some as the vocal analogue of the alphorn, and many of the traditional melodies of the alphorn are imitated or suggested in yodelling. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2, while the *Ranz des vaches* does not normally involve yodelling, that is, does not involve breaking into falsetto, it may nevertheless be introduced or ended with a yodel.<sup>89</sup> Frequently in orchestral music the various manifestations of the alpine calls, whether vocal (yodel) or instrumental (alphorn or shepherd's pipe), are merged and given over to a woodwind instrument. This is supposedly because of the association with shepherds' pipes and especially from traditional associations with Pan. Thus the entire classical tradition of pastoralism is suggested here, and not just Alpine associations. What is important for the semiotic potency of these melodic figures is not so much whether an actual yodel or an actual alphorn is intended, but the more general associations of these ideas collectively. It is through the regular close association of yodels, alphorns, and shepherds' pipes that the musical gesture is understood as a synecdoche for all the ideas taken as a totality.

A dramatic and pictorial musical gesture in Beethoven's Sixth Symphony typifies the function of this sort of musical synecdoche. The tune which acts as a transition between the fourth and fifth movements shares some of the same characteristics as the melody in Rossini. For example, it occurs

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<sup>89</sup> Baumann, "Switzerland, Traditional Music", *New Grove*, Vol. 24, p.788.

immediately after the music representing a storm. The movement is titled “Shepherd’s Song: Thanksgiving after the Storm”. According to Donald Francis Tovey, “it begins on the dominant with a kind of yodel on a pastoral pipe”.<sup>90</sup> (Figure 3.4) The first entry of the theme is on the clarinet, so the connection with the pastoral pipe is not far off. The tune is also sounded over an open fifth based on the tonic, which, as in the Rossini example, suggests the peasant drone accompaniment. The repeat of the figure is sounded on horns, which may suggest alphorns to some, and which may also suggest either the concomitant gesture of echo or of a response from another soul within earshot.<sup>91</sup> It doesn’t matter, however. The fact is that in this programme symphony the composer is intent upon fixing in the imagination of the listener an image of happy shepherds, and this is how he does it. Since the concern in this study is with the establishment of a musical convention, it is sufficient to note that this musical figure is based upon the identical components making up the example heard in the later *Guillaume Tell*: a repeated figure based upon an arpeggiated 6-4 chord sounded over a drone.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Vol. 1, Symphonies, London, Oxford University Press, 1935, p. 55.

<sup>91</sup> Hyatt King remarks that this melody is based upon the *Ranz des vaches*; however he mistakenly states that the first appearance is on the horns, followed by the clarinet. See his “Mountains, Music, and Musicians”, *The Musical Quarterly*, XXXI, No. 4, October, 1945, pp. 395-419, p. 403.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Talbot has identified other occurrences of *Ranz* and yodel derivations in this symphony: “This [local] colour is anticipated in the alternate section in 2/4 of the scherzo-like third movement (‘Joyous Meeting of the Peasants’), not only in the yodels of the main theme but also in its counter-motif (beginning on first flute in bar 173), which seems to be based on a fragment from a *Ranz des vaches* different from the one on which the finale theme is based”. See his *The Finale in Western Instrumental Music*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 167.



Figure 3.4. Ludwig van Beethoven, *Pastoral Symphony*, fifth movement, opening figure.

Early romantic composers were entranced with these pastoral musemes. A further example is Schubert's song *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, his last completed work, which dates from October, 1828. It is a setting of a poem by Wilhelm Müller and Helmina von Chézy which begins

*Wenn auf dem höchsten Fels ich steh,  
Ins tiefer Tal hernieder seh,  
Und singe, und singe,*

*Fern aus dem tiefen, dunkeln Tal  
Schwingt sich empor der Widerhall,  
Der Widerhall, der Widerhall der klüfte.*

[When I stand upon the highest rock,  
And look down in the deep valley  
And sing, and sing,

From deep within the dark valley  
Ascends the echo,  
The echo, the echo that rends.]<sup>93</sup>

The figure that suggests “yodel” is the melodic shape played by the clarinet in bar eight. (Figure 3.5) Schubert's musical representation of this singing into

<sup>93</sup> My translation.

the valley and the ascent of the echo is achieved by the use of a stylised yodel tune sounded on the B flat clarinet and the piano.

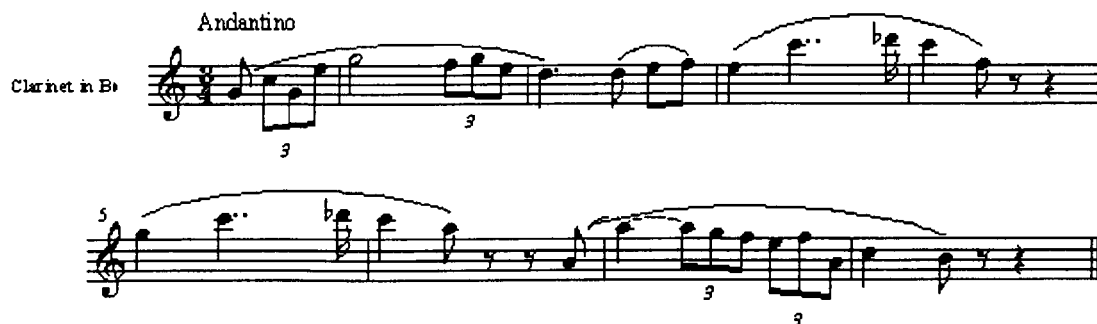


Figure 3.5. Franz Schubert, *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*, 1828, bars 8-16.

The echo is important as a musical and programmatic theme. Echo effects are closely associated with yodel figures, naturally enough, because they simulate natural phenomena in mountain settings. It is a very old musical icon. Such effects are common in music and achieved in the simplest way by merely repeating a figure at a quieter dynamic level, often an octave higher. The programmatic implications for echo effects result from attempts to depict the sound of one's voice returning, the sound of two people in communication, the simulation of enormous distances, and so forth.

With the development of romanticism other associations of *Ranz*-type melodies were constructed. A particularly innovative example is the third movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, titled *Scène aux champs*. This

movement is similarly based upon an abstract *Ranz des vaches* which is characterised by the same kind of widely spaced intervals of fourths and sixths. The tune as presented by Berlioz is heavily stylised; as Julian Rushton has pointed out: “no cowherd could play the ‘*Ranz des vaches*’ in *Scène aux champs*”.<sup>94</sup>

The programme of Berlioz’s symphony involves more than mere picture painting, dealing as it does with the psychological states of a suicidal artist. The states of mind evoked by the musical images of shepherds in the third movement are really moving much closer to those of Byron’s *Manfred* than to those of Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*. Associations of loneliness, isolation, and indeed abandonment begin to supersede those of serenity and calm as the romantic era progresses. This is evident in the tortuous *Ranz*-type melody for cor anglais near the beginning of Act III of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. This moment, associated with Tristan’s despair, is one of the most striking examples of the shepherd-song/melancholia nexus in classical music.

The tendency to use the *Ranz* to signify gloom extends even into popular forms such as film, as, for example, *Son of Frankenstein*.<sup>95</sup> In this film from 1939, the baleful shepherd pipe melody occurs immediately after one hour

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<sup>94</sup> Julian Rushton, *The Musical Language of Berlioz*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 152.

<sup>95</sup> *Son of Frankenstein*, Rowland V. Lee, dir., Universal, 1939.

and five minutes into the film and again at about one hour and twelve minutes. These are moments when the monster (played by Lon Chaney, Jr.) is sent out by the evil Ygor (played by Bela Lugosi) to murder the jurors who had condemned Ygor to hang. Seeming to descend from the same tormented sound world of the shepherd's pipe in *Tristan*, this tritone-saturated *Ranz* is also given to the cor anglais, the instrument that Constantin Floros has called "the instrument of lament par excellence".<sup>96</sup> It is interesting to speculate on the emotional trajectories of the yodel and the *Ranz*, as the former is normally associated with joy and the latter with gloom. The *Ranz*, generally speaking, is represented in classical music as a soliloquy, while the yodel is a communicative signal. Even in the *Scène aux champs*, where its first appearance is in a dialogue, the later occurrence of the *Ranz* is very tellingly and movingly unanswered. Thus the *Ranz* very frequently signifies loneliness, while the yodel, implying an interlocutor somewhere, suggests dialogue and communion.

Berlioz's second symphony, *Harold in Italy*, also makes use of a pastoral sounding melody. This occurs in the third movement, titled *Sérénade d'un Montagnard des Abruzzes à sa maitresse*. The shape of this tune has much in common with the *Ranz*-style melodies already discussed. Primary amongst

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<sup>96</sup> Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler, The Symphonies*, trans. Vernon and Jutta Wicker, Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2000/1993, p. 177.



these are the intervals of the fourth and the sixth. Here, however, the order is reversed, so the falling third from the upper sixth to the fourth is absent.

(Figure 3.6) However, the instrumentation and the general shape of the tune link it not just with the similar pastoral melodies discussed above, but with other melodies which convey outdoors, pastoral landscapes or distances.



Figure 3.6. Hector Berlioz, *Harold in Italy*, 1834, third movement, bars 34-39.

Clearly the conventions for constructing musical signs intended to create pastoral imagery had become well-established by the middle of the nineteenth century. Two further examples, from mid-century and from the latter part of the century, will serve to illustrate how the arpeggiated 6-4 chord, given a suitably evocative title, is sufficient to suggest the music of peasants or herders. Schumann's "The Happy Farmer Returning from Work" from his collection *Album for the Young* introduces the motive in the bass voice in the third bar. More subtly, Grieg works it into bars four, five, and six of his piano piece "The Cowherd" (from opus 17) and ends the little piece with the characteristic repeated figures over unchanging harmony; however the

sonority is enriched with a suspended ninth resolved into the tonic G in the final bar.

One might expect stylised yodelling in Richard Strauss's *Eine Alpensinfonie*.

This enormous orchestral work was the last in his series of tone poems, in which he took the nineteenth-century concept of programme music to new extremes. With Strauss, the programme might be either pictorial or philosophical. *Eine Alpensinfonie* is primarily concerned with the former.

The yodels (and these, it is safe to assume, are intended to be understood as yodels, not *Ranz des vaches*) occur in the section called *Auf der Alm* (On the Mountain Pastures). Sounded by the conventional cor anglais, but doubled by two B flat clarinets and three bassoons, the yodel figures are based on the familiar intervals of the rising sixth and falling third (outlining the 6-4 arpeggio), while in their repeat the intervals are stretched to rising ninth, falling fourth. The yodels are answered by four E flat horns in a magnificent evocation of an alphorn. The yodels call once again, and then another four horns sound a second alphorn's answering call. The whole is a brilliant depiction of grandeur and vast space.

The important point which is here reinforced is that the yodel figure in instrumental music has become conventionalised as a repeated gesture constituted by particular intervals. When the context suggests such an

inclusion is appropriate, either by way of a descriptive title or other means, then this type of figure, it follows, will be understood as a yodel, depending of course upon the codal competence of the audience.

To recapitulate, from the early examples in opera and programme music, from Rossini and Beethoven, through Berlioz, Wagner, Schumann, and Grieg to Richard Strauss, composers have used conventionalised formulas for suggesting mountains, pastoral landscapes, shepherds or peasants, and psychological states associated with these ideas. These formulas make repeated use of basic musical facts which can be reduced to particular combinations of intervals in repeated phrases. Bearing in mind, then, that these musical gestures became a kind of code, what is one to make of the occurrence of the same items in other contexts?

Of course, without the context of a programme, it is extremely difficult to know quite what is intended when melodies similar to these stylised figures are encountered; but frequently either yodel or *Ranz* is suggested. It is not possible to finally pin down musical expression in words, but certainly there is a group of devices which acts as a sign associated with the pastoral or the many other accrued associations of *Ranz des vaches*. Among these are the musette, the drone bass, and the use of instruments suggestive of Pan's pipes. But especially noteworthy are particular intervals in certain rhythmic

combinations. These figures often suggest yodels or *Ranz des vaches*. Quite whether these are *intended* is of course impossible to say. But it is not out of the question to imagine yodel patterns lurking somewhere in the collectively received ideas about what kinds of melodies *sound* rustic.

For instance, the tune of the trio in the third movement of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony shares many features with yodel melodies and contrasts with the gloomy cast of many *Ranz* stylisations in the repertoire. Here we have the sunnier aspects of "yodel" signalling simplicity and contentment, perhaps. The entire movement in fact is interesting in that it has been read as a representation of two contrasting social classes: the aristocracy suggested by the hunting calls and the peasantry suggested by the yodel.

For example, with regard to the trio's tune, shared by first flute and first clarinet, Hermann Kretzschmar in an early analysis had this to say: "The trio as we might expect, stands in even sharper contrast to the depiction of the stirring life of the huntsman. From the outset, it sounds like a simple dance, and has a very droll, at times burlesque, effect that derives from its lolloping main melody suggesting the lower social classes and their pleasures".<sup>97</sup>

Donald Francis Tovey wrote that "the trio violates every Bruckner precedent

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in *Music Analysis in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ian Bent, Cambridge University Press, 1994, Vol. II, Hermeneutic Approaches, p. 115.

by being quite frankly a tune; a slow and comfortably pinquid *Ländler*, too rustic to be called Viennese”.<sup>98</sup> And Robert Simpson wrote of this passage in his book, *The Essence of Bruckner*, “Nothing could be more amiably rustic than its tune”.<sup>99</sup> Clearly, commentators across the generations have been struck by the bucolic quality encoded in the rhythm and intervals of this yodel-like melody. This tune is played over a G flat drone until the modulation to B flat in bars 6 and 7. (Figure 3.7)



Figure 3.7. Anton Bruckner, Fourth Symphony, 1878/80 version, ed. Nowak, third movement, trio, bars 2-10.

However, where there is greater uncertainty in the context – due to the absence of a programme or any of the other conventional signifiers for “pastoral” – is there any justification for understanding a melody as “yodel”? At what point does music reach a level of abstraction where meaning is clearly indeterminate? When melodies seem mimetic of *Ranz* figures, yet the context surrounding them seems intentionally unmarked for such

<sup>98</sup> Tovey, p. 77.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Simpson (1992) *The Essence of Bruckner*, London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, p. 102.

associations, what then? How far can a composer go and still have a theme recognisable as a yodel figure? Or perhaps the way to phrase the question is, how far are listeners justified in interpreting a melody as a yodel figure?

For example, there is a similarity between a figure in the finale of Mahler's Fourth Symphony and the clarinet theme in Schubert's *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* given above. (Figure 3.8) Commentators on this finale frequently state that it is pastoral in tone, but not much is indicated about how this atmosphere is created.<sup>100</sup> This movement does have paramusical features which help to establish or to justify this connotation or interpretation. However, without what Roland Barthes has termed *anchorage*, it is difficult and perhaps unwise to read such figures as iconic, even where their kinship to *Ranz des vaches* seems apparent.<sup>101</sup>



Bflat clarinet and cellos

Figure 3.8. Gustav Mahler, Symphony 4, 1904, finale, bars 176-77.

<sup>100</sup> For instance Floros, p. 130.

<sup>101</sup> Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image" in *Music Image Text*, Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 35-51.

Here clearly are the intervals of the yodel and *Ranz* figures described in this chapter, and indeed Mahler gives the very first appearance of this figure, in the finale's opening bar, to the B flat clarinet and later on to cor anglais, the two instruments that appear most often to be assigned pastoral tunes. (The example above is from the close of the symphony.) There is, moreover, further contextualisation from the lyric, a child's idea of heaven; yet there is no suggestion of mountain landscapes or peasants. A very similar figure occurs in Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote*, in the second variation at figure 23, where it is clearly connected with graphic pastoralism: this is the famous passage with the mimetic sounds of grazing sheep. When Strauss uses a variant of this, his own figure, again at the end of *Ein Heldenleben*, at figure 99, where it ushers in the utter calm of the conclusion as the melodies representing the man and the woman reach their culmination, how should we understand that? At that moment in the latter work there is obviously no suggestion of mountains or peasants, yet the serenity associated with romantic pastoralism is surely invoked. Although these figures and their contexts are highly abstract, and not anchored in obvious ways by other symbols, they do seem to work, nevertheless, as synecdoches. In this way they communicate certain aspects suggested by "pastoral", albeit without clearly defined images. They are abstract, yet appear, nevertheless, to be directed.

## Conclusion

The point of this discussion has been to demonstrate that composers of the classical music tradition have used stylised yodel figures in conventional ways. Not only that, but that there is a fairly specific way the yodel and its relative *Ranz des vaches* have been codified. This is the important point: particular intervals in particular repeating rhythmic patterns on particular instruments became a code for yodel/*Ranz*. The yodel, thus represented, then becomes, by and large, a synecdoche for a species of pastoralism. While there are numerous subtle versions of this, the rustic association, triggered by musical allusions to shepherds or peasants, establishes the image of an idealised pastoral society. The romantic cultural ideal that the pastoral life is in some senses preferable to the sophistication of urban life is the assumption underlying the significance of the musical gesture. The yodel-like musical figures point to a Golden Age and to happy, peaceful shepherds tending their flocks, untainted by the cares of a rapidly industrialising society.

Overall, classical musicians may have been more interested in the *Ranz* than in the yodel, although there are numerous examples of stylisations linked easily enough with yodelling; yet, it would be wrong to imagine all such examples as mimetic. The intention in all cases surely cannot be simply to imitate a yodel. The abstract nature of any musical sign makes it all the more suggestive of many kinds of ideas and associations. The extreme difficulty of



relating music via words – the non-logogenic nature of the practice of music making – renders any such attempt somewhat suspect. Nevertheless, figures assume conventional associations and connotations through repeated use in many contexts. That they eventually articulate specific meanings seems inevitable.

## Chapter 4

### The Yodel in Nineteenth-century Popular Song

It is wrong to assume the separation of classical and popular music during this period, since there were fewer divisions between these concepts than there are in our era. Though in the postmodern theoretical context we are again getting “popular” and “classical” music from the same source, so to speak, such has not been typical for a long time.<sup>102</sup> In the early part of the nineteenth century, however, these concepts did not exist. It is out of convenience that this distinction is forced upon the material now. The stock of symbols that music in the nineteenth century drew upon was the same. But in the course of that century the split into two separate musical practices, both making use of the same folk material, became apparent. The difference in their aesthetics meant that while the yodel in the abstract could be enlisted as an emotional resource, actual yodelling was edged gradually out of classical technique because of its emphasis upon control and homogeneity of sound.

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<sup>102</sup> The release of a ballet composed by Elvis Costello and performed by conductor Michael Tilson Thomas is a recent example. Consider the confluence of many different streams: the ballet, based upon Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, bears the Italian title *Il Sogno*. It is performed by the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by an American and recorded by *Deutsche Gramophone Gesellschaft*, one of the most prestigious classical labels. As if to emphasise the “classical” aspect of the enterprise, the art work highlights the famous DGG trademark on a wide yellow band running vertically along the left side of the CD cover.

## The Rainer Family yodels

Among the first yodels heard professionally in the United States were those performed by the Tyrolese family Rainer. The Rainer family toured the United States from 1839 until 1843 and are acknowledged to have begun the vogue for singing families in the middle of the nineteenth century, inspiring American family troupes such as the Hutchinsons. The Rainer family not only deeply influenced American performers; according to Hans Nathan, they also:

transplanted from Europe the idea of "family" performances. They also established the group-arrangement that was adopted by their successors in America, with one or two "sisters" in the middle and the men flanking them, each resting his hands on his hips or belt. They popularised in the concert hall informal ensemble-singing and free harmonizing in the "mountain style". This accounts for the otherwise inexplicable fact that all later American troupes had "Alpine" songs in their repertoire, such as the *Alpine Echo* of the Alleghanians, the *Lament of the Alpine Shepherd Boy* of the Barker Family, and others, some of which were but weak imitations of the Tyrolese style.<sup>103</sup>

Nathan further remarks that among their influences upon American audiences and performers "came an upsurge of interest in folk music, particularly in the melodies that suggested the wide vistas and clear air of the Alps".<sup>104</sup> The interest in this type of musical sound had been anticipated by the appearance of collections of Swiss *Ranz des vaches* numbers in the 1820s and the fad for "Tyroliennes" in the 1830s.

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<sup>103</sup> Hans Nathan, "The Tyrolean Family Rainer", *The Musical Quarterly* XXXII, 1946, p. 64.

<sup>104</sup> Nathan, p. 67.

Fortunately, some of the pieces that the Rainers performed have been preserved in sheet music from the period. However, such examples of sheet music as survive are of course transcriptions of their pieces, and in English translation at that. We cannot really know what their music actually sounded like or how much modification may have been necessary to fit it into conventional patterns and thereby make it acceptable to a music-purchasing American public. Particularly with regard to the syllables in the transcribed yodels, we will never know exactly what the Rainers did, or whether the melodies as transcribed are even accurate. What we do know is that they were very popular and that their yodelling is often cited as one of the reasons for their popularity.<sup>105</sup>

That said, we can learn from the sheet music something about their yodelling, in which, according to Nathan, they “could display their genuine mountain style”.<sup>106</sup> The association of the yodel with mountains is entirely predictable and logical since the Swiss yodelling technique and musical patterns originated in them. That mountains should figure prominently in the texts of the songs follows automatically. Such is the sort of imagery that was evoked through the use of yodel-like figures in the classical music of the era, so it is fairly certain to conclude that in the popular imagination of the time yodels

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<sup>105</sup> Nathan has already been cited, but see also Christoph Wagner, “T for Tyrol”.

<sup>106</sup> Nathan, p. 70.

were musical signals intended to conjure up thoughts of mountain landscapes and the emotional associations listeners would derive from them.<sup>107</sup> This, presumably, is what Nathan refers to when he writes of “melodies that suggested wide vistas and the clear air of the Alps”.

Some conventional associations of mountains in these contexts are discussed in Chapter 8. For the moment, three of the yodel songs performed by the Rainers and published in English translations just before the middle of the nineteenth century will be considered. Their titles are “The Tyrolese War Song”, “The Sweetheart”, and “The Alpine Hunters”.

The front cover of the sheet music to “The Tyrolese War Song” follows the main title of “Tyrolese Melodies” with the words “arranged with Symphonies and Accompaniments by Friedrich F. Müller”. The collection was published by Wm. H. Oakes of Boston in 1841.<sup>108</sup> In the key of B flat major, in 2/4 time and marked *allegro vivace*, the piece as presented in the sheet music is a conventional march-type song. Based on simple tonic/dominant harmony and with a very forthright rhythm, it is quite similar to the kind of marching

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<sup>107</sup> The musical representation, the sign, that is “understood” as a yodel in classical music is really only an abstraction of one, yet nevertheless has iconic significance. This icon, then, is responsible for the associations in the mind’s eye – which associations are, of course, indexical; that is, they function as indices.

<sup>108</sup> Publication details refer here to the sheet music consulted as part of this research. It was common during the period, however, for various publishers to release the same item simultaneously by prior agreement.

tune that American composers George W. Root and George C. Work were writing at much the same time.<sup>109</sup> What distinguishes “The Tyrolese War Song” is its yodelled refrain. The yodel is here associated with a kind of reveille – it serves as a sort of bugle-substitute. (Figure 4.1)

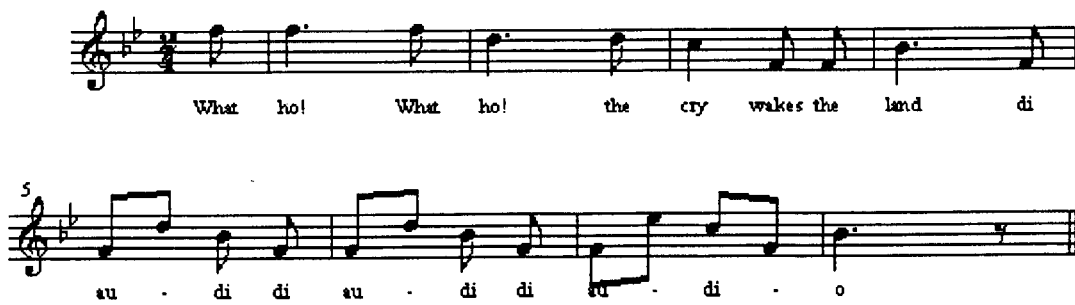


Figure 4.1. Rainer Family, “The Tyrolese War Song”, 1841.

One is naturally suspicious of any similarity between this piece of sheet music and what the Rainers actually did in performance. For example, as Hans Nathan stated in the passage quoted above, the Rainers employed “free harmonising”, and we can merely guess how differently that may have sounded from what has no doubt been regularised for sheet music publication. Furthermore, the accompanying instrument in most of the

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<sup>109</sup> For example, the rhythms and harmonies resemble those of Root’s “The Battle Cry of Freedom” published in 1862 and Work’s “Marching through Georgia” published in 1865. George Root mentions the Rainers in his autobiography, but he unfortunately makes no remarks about their yodelling other than to say, “The Rainers were a family of Swiss Yodlers, the first, I think, to come this country and were singing in costume and in their native language their pretty Swiss songs. Everybody went to hear them”. George F. Root, *The Story of a Musical Life*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1979/1891, p. 16.

published versions of their songs is the piano, which the Rainers did not use. Indeed, the front cover of the sheet music is decorated with a picture of the family, standing exactly in the manner described by Hans Nathan, and the only instrument shown is a guitar, held by one of the women.<sup>110</sup> The piano accompaniment represents the automatic normalisation and formulisation processes of the music publishing industry of the time. The music was presented to the buying public in a form readily useable by the average sheet music customer. This approach to the marketable form of the music contrasts with that of classical music: where classical music makes the score the primary text and sacrosanct, “other” kinds of music, such as that the Rainers made, was, no matter what it really sounded like, pressed into conventional formats in order to be marketed successfully to the domestic piano-playing market.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Interestingly, the guitar was not yet a fashionable instrument in the United States at the time of the publication of this song, although it would become the single-most important instrument associated with the wave of performers who re-popularised the yodel and gave it a new meaning in the late 1920s. According to Washburn and Johnston, in the mid-nineteenth century the most popular plucked stringed instruments were the mandolin and the banjo, with the guitar lagging far behind. See Jim Washburn and Richard Johnston, *Martin Guitars, An Illustrated Celebration of America’s Premier Guitar Maker*, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, 1997, p. 74.

<sup>111</sup> The situation is very different today, although by and large the practice of regularising popular music for mass market publishing exists in our era as well. The difference is that since the development of recording, the record has come to be considered the primary text in popular music and its main commoditized form. Nevertheless, all manner of arrangements and reductions of popular hits are available in sheet music form. See Tim Wise, “Arrangement”, in the *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, ed. Shepherd, et al, London and New York, 2003.. Moreover, the increasing availability of careful transcriptions of, for example, country blues guitar styles in traditional notation and tablature based upon recordings reflects not just the greater seriousness of interest in popular music that differentiates our era from the Rainers’, but also the differences of technology.

The supposed yodel war cry uses the same interval that is basic to the stylised yodel calls codified in the European classical music tradition, namely the major sixth. After two occurrences of the outlined 6-4 chord, the interval changes to a minor seventh to spell the dominant seventh chord of the cadence. This particular voicing of the cadence is typical of Swiss and Austrian folk tunes and is doubtless an aspect of the overall connotative fields including "Swiss", "Alpine", or "Austrian".

Presumably the yodel break in the voice occurred between the F and the D, that is, between the pitches of the major sixth interval, and between the F and E flat of the minor seventh. Whether the syllables written under the pitches correspond at all to those actually yodelled by the Rainers is doubtful. For the break into falsetto, a new syllable is expected, whereas as printed in this source, the "au" of the f rising to d is continued with a slur.

"The Sweetheart" was published by Oliver Ditson of Boston in 1841. Just below the title on the first page we read: "Rendered into English, and arranged for the Piano Forte". The clear implication of this caveat is that a considerable amount of regularisation of the parts and of the harmonising of the voices has been undertaken, removing us one stage further from the



presumed spontaneous quality of the Rainers' actual performances. In G major and in 3/8 time, marked *allegretto*, "The Sweetheart" is an example of the extremely simple sentimental song. It has a yodel refrain after each phrase of the verse. In this regard, it is similar to "The Hunters of Tyrol" and probably to a great many of the earlier Swiss *Jodellieder*. (Figure 4.2)

allegretto

Far a way hence from the Ty rol I come Ai ho

ai ho ai ai ai ho And my sweetheart I've left in my dear moun tain

home Ai ho ai ho ai ai ai ho

Figure 4.2. Rainer Family, "The Sweetheart", 1841.

Again, the imagery in the songs refers directly to Tyrol and to mountains and the leaving of a lover. Separation from home and from loved ones is an extremely common theme in this period.

Despite its genteel-sounding *andante quasi allegretto* tempo indication, which is merely a concession to the conventions of published music, "The Alpine Hunters" (D major, 3/4 time, published by Wm. H. Oakes of Boston in 1841)



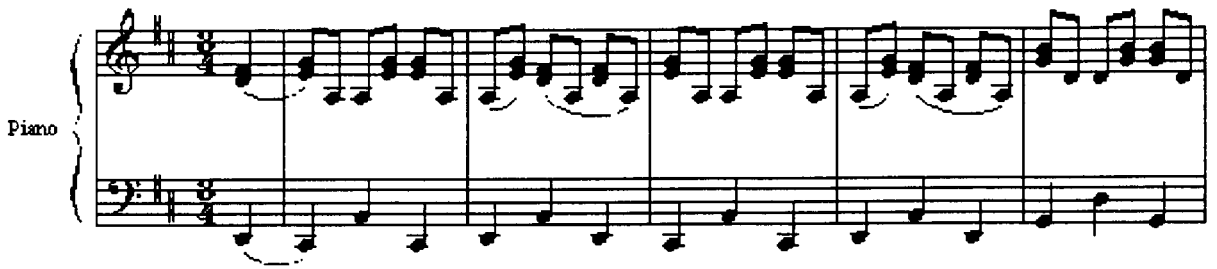


Figure 4.4. Franz Schubert, *Wiener-Damen Ländler*, No. 5, beginning.

The words are similarly exuberant, exhorting all Swiss to join in the bracing pleasures of the chase:

Come, hunters, come! Young and old!  
 Care not for storm, or for cold,  
 Quick be about, quick be about!<sup>112</sup>

As well as each phrase being punctuated by the propulsive rocking yodel, each verse similarly ends with a longer yodel strand. These yodels are once again based on the characteristic intervals already noted: the arpeggiated 6-4 tonic chord and the cadential dominant seventh chord. The predominating intervals are the major sixth and the falling octave. (Figure 4.5)

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<sup>112</sup> I have regularised the punctuation, and in some cases the spelling, in the lyrics presented here and elsewhere as examples.

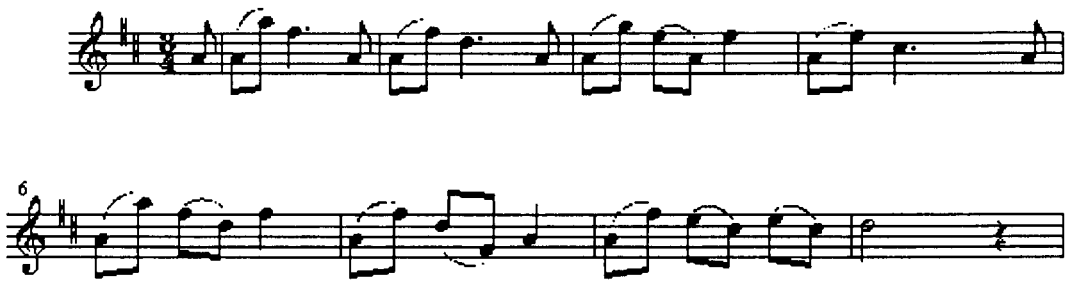


Figure 4.5. Rainer Family, "The Alpine Hunters", yodel at close of verse.

To summarise: the yodels in these songs by the Rainer family are linked with such themes as the hunt, echoes, separated lovers, and return. Their music was sufficiently popular to have been appropriated for other lyric themes, but the true nature of their yodelling is lost to us due to the regularisation of the music resulting from its transcription for the domestic market.

The Hutchinsons were the most famous of the home-grown singing families in America to follow in the wake of the Rainers. As in the case of the Rainers, the sheet music is an unreliable record of what their performances must have been like. One example from their work can serve to demonstrate their use of the yodel. "The Mountain Echo" celebrates mountain landscapes in a way obviously influenced by the Swiss.

The mountains, the mountains, the song to the mountains,  
 There nature's dominion prevails  
 There the scream of the eagle, in solitudes regal,  
 Is borne like a clarion blast on the gale.

Oh the vale rose is sweet in its balm laden air  
 But the Mountain rear'd laurel is blooming as fair  
 And its delicate hue in its crystalline dew

Redeemingly softens the loneliness there

This is fairly ordinary stuff. Yet the image of the eagle, of course, has a special resonance in the United States, having been adopted by the federal government as the symbol of the nation.<sup>113</sup> Laurel, moreover, carries connotations of the victor. The Hutchinsons were well known for the patriotic and moral bent of their material, so these images may be read as contributing to the construction of mid-century American values. The second verse clearly identifies the locale as American, geographically as well as ideologically: the mountains “rise from the Hudson’s magnificent tide”, ultimately:

Encircling the vale of Wyoming they seem  
Like ramparts of emeralds adorning a dream.

So the Hutchinsons seem to have taken care to let us know that they are not singing about just any mountains: this is not Switzerland. The first aural images in the lyrics – the scream of the eagle and clarion blast of the gale – set a brave tone for some lusty yodelling. The yodelling itself forms a link in the chain of associations linking mountains with eagle, freedom, clarion call, and yodel.

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<sup>113</sup> Examples include patriotic marches such as Sousa’s “The Invincible Eagle”, published by John Church in 1901, and “The Stars and Stripes Forever Song”, published by John Church 1898, with its words by Sousa himself. The second verse begins, “Let eagle shriek from lofty peak, the never-ending watchword of our land”.

Each verse is followed by an eight-bar yodel refrain with an echo effect. This is a particularly simple yodel passage over rather obvious tonic and dominant seventh chords. (Figure 4.6)

Figure 4.6. Hutchinson Family, "The Mountain Echo", 1853.

As in the case of the Rainer songs, examination of the syllables raises some doubt about the accuracy of the notated passage. Could this represent what the Hutchinsons really sang? One would expect the tense back vowel to correspond to the upper falsetto notes, while lax front vowels would occur on the lower natural voice notes. Such a pattern, necessary from the point of view of the laryngeal mechanism creating the yodeleme, is reversed in the printed music, except in the penultimate bar. Of course, it is possible that the "ho" was broken with a glottal stop and the upper tone pronounced on an "o" sound, but that is not exactly what this notation denotes, either. Obviously, discrepancies between sheet music reductions of performed music and the

music as it actually sounds in any given performance are nothing new in popular music. Were we reliant only on the accuracy of printed sheet music, we would necessarily ponder either the sloppiness of the transcription of yodelled passages, or question whether this is indeed a yodel. Knowing that the Hutchinsons did yodel, we assume, therefore, that this is simply a representation of a yodel rather than an accurate transcription.

The Rainers and the Hutchinsons are representative of the singing family groups who helped to popularise the yodel in mid-nineteenth-century America. However, by this time stylised yodel figures were already in use in music written in the U.S.A. We can be fairly sure that a certain amount of yodelling had already been heard in, or at the very least suggested by, an earlier generation of popular music texts published in America. Some of these songs are considered in the next section.

### **Light Classical Songs in the early Nineteenth Century**

This section traces the evolution of the themes associated with yodel and other Swiss images. Pieces without dates are considered first.

The first wave of interest in Swiss-themed songs is apparent during the 1820s and includes many songs that feature a wordless call of some sort. This was not unusual in English song; “tra la la”, “fa la la”, and similar refrains have a

venerable tradition in English-language song; one thinks, for example, of “Deck the Halls with Boughs of Holly”, to cite only one instance that most people will know. Yet rather than being just nonsense syllables serving to round out a verse or serve as a merry refrain, these passages acquire, in the songs under discussion here, the significance of icons. They are understandably read as vocal representations of the sounds invoked in the words of the song. As such, they can represent, or associate with, bugles, horns, pipes, songs, or vocal calls of an unspecified type. It is the non-specificity of the lyrics that makes these vocal calls particularly interesting. They seem at times to depict one thing in one verse and another thing in the next.

Usually, there are more clues to their significance than the simply extra-musical or verbal. For example, particular rhythmic patterns have conventional associations with particular verbal images. Thus, for example, various kinds of rhythmic pattern linked with horn calls or with the movements of running horses animate the melodies in these pieces, especially where hunt imagery has importance in the lyrics. These topics thus situate the song within certain generic codes and associated moods. Other rhythmic “feels”, such as *Ländler* rhythms, have their own tendencies to locate the music within certain regions, both semantic and geographic. The other main clue to the significance of the calls is the nature of their intervals, which, like



the rhythmic patterns and rhythmic feels. have their own particular associations. Together, these parameters provide a framework for understanding the iconic nature of the individual vocal call.

### Henry R. Bishop

As is evident from the quotation of Hans Nathan given above, the appearance of the Rainer family in America had been preceded by the appearance of Swiss *Ranz des vaches* and so-called "Tyroliennes". Additionally, an apparent fad for sentimental Swiss-style songs occurred in the 1820s and 1830s. Such songs typically had Swiss or Alpine lyric themes and frequently made use of various wordless vocal calls. These calls were not necessarily yodels. The point that is of concern here is that the musical representations of these calls are sometimes indistinguishable from those indicating yodels. What the calls represent varies from song to song: sometimes a call-passage appears to be an iconic representation or suggestion of a bugle, a hunting horn, an alphorn, a shepherd's pipe, or something else. The wordless passage, the mountain setting, and the melodic line consisting of what will be referred to here as a *mountain call motive*, constructed from the same intervals already so frequently encountered, all served to precondition the audience of the time to the appearance of actual yodelling in later songs. Sometimes, it is not possible to establish with certainty whether the wordless vocal passage is intended as a yodel or not. But the use of a wordless call as refrain, interlude, or coda was

certainly a frequent feature of these early mountain-themed songs and clearly show the influence of the *Jodellied* described by Baumann and noted at the beginning of Chapter 2. Given such a context, it is hard to read them as something other than yodels without seeming somewhat perverse.

An early example of such an Alpine-themed song is Henry R. Bishop's "The Merry Mountain Horn", the cover of which states: "Composed In imitation of the Swiss Style"; it was published by W. Taylor of New York (date unknown). H. R. Bishop (1786-1855) was one of the most successful of the English composers whose songs are associated with the pleasure gardens that became the sites for songs alluding to pastoral imagery and themes of love.<sup>114</sup> Few of his songs are remembered today other than "Home, Sweet Home".

"The Merry Mountain Horn" is in 2/4 time in the key of B flat major and is marked *allegretto marziale*. What is interesting is not only that it includes the imagery of the "merry mountain horn" – an example of one of these fairly ambiguous images: it could be a hunting horn, or perhaps an alphorn – but also that the mention of the instrument is followed by a wordless passage

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<sup>114</sup> See Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays*, New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1983/1979, Chapter 1, for a discussion of the English pleasure gardens. According to Hamm, the types of song performed in these served as models for popular song as it developed in the United States.

resembling a yodel. This seems clearly identifiable as a yodel call, especially when set alongside the call in Bishop's "Wind Thy Horn, My Hunter Boy".

Thus, as in so many of these early nineteenth century songs, the Swiss images of alphorn, hunting horn, shepherd's pipe, yodel, and *Ranz des vaches* occur in close proximity to one another or even become fused. The crucible in which all this imagery is amalgamated is the musical motive. Such a motive has the brevity of a call and incorporates the intervals and characteristic rhythms of the yodel, or the alphorn, or the hunting horn. It is thus sufficient to suggest any or all of these within the appropriate musical/lyrical context.

Furthermore, like many songs of this type, "The Merry Mountain Horn" expresses a favourite sentimental theme: that of return:

Come, my gallant soldier, come.  
Leave the proud embattled field,  
Shrilly fife and rolling drum,  
All the pleasures war can yield.

Quickly come again, behold  
The happy land where thou wert born  
And hear its music, sweet and bold.  
The merry mountain horn.

At the mention of the horn the yodel ensues. Since the sheet music explicitly states that the song imitates the Swiss style, we can look for the musemes that signal this. It will be noted that one of the musical devices signalling "the Swiss style" is the already encountered arpeggiated 6-4 chord, which occurs

on the words "soldier come" and "rolling drum". The yodel that follows similarly makes full use of these intervals. (Figure 4.7)

Figure 4.7 shows a musical score for "The Merry Mountain Horn" by Henry Bishop. The score consists of five staves of music, each with lyrics underneath. The music is written in a single melodic line on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "Come my gallant soldier come leave the proud embattled field; Shrilly fife and rolling drum all the pleasures war can yield. Quickly come, again be hold The happy land where thou wert born, And hear its music sweet and bold, The merry mountain horn Yhu ei o, ei o, Yhu The merry mountain horn." The score includes measure numbers 5, 10, 14, and 19.

Figure 4.7. Henry Bishop, "The Merry Mountain Horn", n.d.

The glorification of battle in the lyric is typical of its era. This is supported musically through a kind of "cavalry" rhythm, comparable to such well-known pieces as "The Radetzky March" by Johann Strauss senior. The same theme is apparent in Bishop's "Wind Thy Horn, My Hunter Boy", which also

shows a fondness for hunting imagery and mimetic horn calls. These may resemble the yodels but perhaps should not be taken for them *tout court*.

Rather, such pieces reveal that all kinds of romantic imagery involving remote settings and escapade were of interest to the composers of the time. As such, these yodel-signs are a subset of all such musical imagery reflecting the wider interest in evoking romantic locations. As Hamm has pointed out in *Yesterdays*, the setting of the pleasure gardens provided a popular venue where romantic and erotic images could be played out.<sup>115</sup> In this setting, the yodel, like the hunter's horn, or his "ha-la-li", is a romantic image functioning as a paralinguistic if not pre-linguistic index of joy. Most often, the emotion is joy, although there are numerous other songs where the same figures have a different emotional cast.

Certainly, these stock musical figures do not startle us today with their originality. But that is not to say they were not so perceived in their day. The issue does not really matter very much for the present argument. Rather the relevant question here is how musical phrases become codified for the representation of certain definite ideas. As the various forms of the tonic chord triad in one or the other of its inversions must serve for all such figures, whether standing for alphorn, hunting horn, shepherd's pipe, yodel, or whatever, it stands to reason that the various patterns will tend to resemble

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<sup>115</sup> Hamm, *Yesterdays*, p. 5.

each other. One is naturally influenced by the other images constituting the overall text: the lyrics, most obviously, but also the images on the sheet music itself, for these surely convey some of the conventional associations of the day. Unfortunately, investigation into the process of selecting the engraved artwork for the covers of these examples of nineteenth century sheet music takes us well beyond the scope of this study. But it would be interesting to consider how the engravers' art was influenced by the music, what previous representations served as models, and how such images conditioned the reception of the music: for surely, just as in our day, the image and the music were in a permanent state of mutual influence.

### **Leonardus Devereaux**

No biographical information of any kind has been located so far for this composer, but he was clearly interested in Swiss- and Alpine-themed songs. "The Mountaineer's Return", subtitled "Evening Song of the Alpine Peasants", and "The Swiss Hunter's Welcome Home" (for which he is credited as arranger, implying that the song is possibly "borrowed" from a European source) both demonstrate this, although neither piece features the museme linked to the wordless call. But Devereaux's "The Swiss Herdsman", published in New York by E. S. Mesier,<sup>116</sup> exemplifies the codification of the

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<sup>116</sup> Although there is no date on the printed music, the date of publication is given as "183-", in *The Newberry Library Catalog of Early American Printed Sheet Music*, Newberry Library,

mountain call motive that this chapter endeavours to trace. The illustration on the cover of "The Swiss Herdsman" depicts a mountain idyll: a woman is sitting in a clearing, and just behind her a man is reclining, while to their left a standing man is playing an alphorn. Behind them is a rude cabin; above and behind the entire scene are benign mountains and a waterfall. This is the sort of romantic scene associated with the mythical Switzerland of the lyrics.

(Figure 4.8.)



The Swiss Herdsman ;  
*Prose*  
 MADAME YESTRIS.  
*Composed and Arranged by*  
 L. DEVEREAUX.

*Author of "The Swiss Herdsman" &c.*  
 New York: E. S. Mesier, n.d.

Figure 4.8. L. Devereaux, "The Swiss Herdsman", cover, New York: E. S. Mesier, n.d.

Like “The Merry Mountain Horn”, “The Swiss Herdsman” expresses the theme of returning home after battle:

Oh yes I'll leave the battle, the battle field,  
 And seek again my native land.  
 I'll cast aside the spear and shield  
 To join the merry mountain band.  
 To roam o'er hills and valleys green  
 I'll gaily rise at early morn  
 And listen to the echoes wild  
 Of the winding mountain horn.

After this final line the alphorn is suggested in the piano accompaniment by the usual arpeggiated 6-4 chord played *forte*; this is followed immediately by another musical representation that came to signify pastoral mountain scenes: the echo. The echo effect is achieved quite simply by the repetition of the same motive played *pianissimo*: a long-established code in music. The notion of echo is of course closely associated with those of yodel, mountains, and valleys. As such, it forms one of the several musical or verbal devices that act by a process of synecdoche to connect us to the whole spectrum of associations evoked by mountain pastoral scenes: mountain landscapes, cows and herders, goats and shepherds, alphorns, hunting horns, yodels, serenity, and isolation, to mention only a few. Any one of these images may be invoked in order to trigger associations with the rest; indeed, they appear only rarely to occur in isolation. However, it is the music, through the conventionalised musical symbols of the arpeggiated 6-4 inversions, echo effects, or actual vocal calls, that reinforces the verbal imagery in the text.



Another of Devereaux's efforts in Swiss musical imagery is "The Swiss Hunter's Welcome Home", which he arranged (no composer or lyricist is mentioned on the sheet music). Yet this song concerns a very different musical topic. The song was published in Boston by C. Bradlee, again without a date, but between 1827 and 1833 according to the Newberry Library Catalog.<sup>117</sup> The title aside, the hunt theme is apparent in the tempo indication, "tempo la chasse", and in the opening piano figure, which is marked "corni" and followed by an echo.<sup>118</sup> Despite the echo and the fact that a 6-4 inversion of the tonic chord comprises the main motive of the tune, this song does not suggest yodel at all. This is due to the somewhat skipping 3/4 rhythm of the piece. Despite the reference to "His halloo resounding", there are no iconic vocal calls. The song relates in this sprightly 3/4 rhythm the exploits of a hunter chasing chamois through the mountains and his return to his idyllic cottage home life. The themes of home and homecoming were greatly favoured during this period, their nostalgia and sweet sentimentality being typical of the age.

The repeated use of yodel-figures and echo ultimately codifies these as signals for these particular mood situations and thus for the indexical emotional

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<sup>117</sup> Newberry Library Catalog, p. 96.

<sup>118</sup> The word "echo" is actually written above the passage.

responses of the audience. Reinforcement of the musical associations results through their continued juxtaposition with lyrics such as these. This sensibility was typical of the nineteenth century. The yodel would be recodified in a different musical language just after the turn of the twentieth century.

### **William Ball**

Ball's songs show an interest in the same kinds of pastoral theme, some, such as "The Swiss Boy", presenting Helvetian images. Several bear titles that allude to their inclusion in this genre of pastoral song. Mountain themes appear to have interested Ball, as in "He's Coming from the Mountain" and "The Little Mountaineer". Similar titles include "The Herdsmen's Return" and "The Hunter Boy". "The Herdsmen's Return" is, according to the sheet music, "adapted to a celebrated Tyrolese air".

Oh! Welcome, ye rays, o'er the uplands that shine,  
The bright dawning morn for our lads and the kine.  
See, maidens! where newly the mountain tops burn  
The herd and the herdsmen today will return.  
'Tis long since they went to the pastures away,  
The springtime was fair and the blossoms were gay.  
Come, neighbors, prepare! all our dear ones, draw near:  
The herd and the herdsmen, they soon will be here.

This is a good example of the Swiss-themed sentimental song of the early part of the century. Although lacking any sort of wordless call, this song manifests some of the features that became constituents of the bucolic mountain musical

“topic”. The primary associations of this type of melodic theme include the easy rolling 3/4 of a *Ländler* and melodic shapes comprising wide-ranging arpeggios spelling out tonic and dominant seventh chords. Conjunct melodic movement is by-and-large avoided. There are two ways in which to view this: one is that conjunct intervals do not so easily convey the sweep and spaciousness of the mountains and valleys. In one literal sense the up-and-down movement of such lines is indeed iconic for mountains and valleys (taking into account our traditional way of graphically representing music). But beyond this lies the fact that such melodic patterning is typical of many actual Swiss and Austrian folk tunes.

“He’s Coming from The Mountains” makes considerable use of the image of the lover’s horn – to the point where a Freudian analysis suggests itself:

He’s coming from the mountain,  
 He’s coming by the mere.  
 And I beside the fountain await his horn to hear.  
 For when, said he, the quiet Eve  
 Shall light her guiding star,  
 Oh hie thee there and then believe thy lover is not far.

’Tis he, my hunter free,  
 His horn, his horn,  
 His merry horn, his merry horn,  
 His merry horn I hear.

“The Shepherd Minstrel”, subtitled “A Swiss Ballad”, has the lyric features that will by now seem typical, if not downright stereotypical.

When descends the golden sun  
and the day is nearly done,  
from the uplands, from the uplands  
When the homeward shepherds throng  
O'er the valleys, o'er the valleys,  
How the rising murmur thrills,  
As they mingle, as they mingle  
In their merry mountain song.

At this point there begins a melody sung to nonsense syllables. Although the music does not state explicitly that this is a yodel, clearly it is intended as one.

### **John Hill Hewitt and Francis H. Brown**

In Hewitt's “The Alpine Horn” of 1844, the refrain is sung to nonsense syllables resembling those of a yodel. Clearly, the intervals suggest a yodel: so here we seem to find a yodel or quasi-yodel, at least, representing the horn call – itself a metaphor for the indomitable spirit of the hunter. This is a further instance of the fusion of the various elements of the mountain call motive. In any case, the melody is eminently suitable for yodelling: each yodeleme occurs on the typical yodel intervals, and the rhythmic structure permits full sounding of the falsetto portions.

The vocalise at the end of this song is curious. It is not clear whether this is the original alphorn or a yodel. The syllables provided in the text make no sense, a mere “ai ye ho” sufficing for the entire eight bars. These are not sung

to intervals conducive to yodelling, for a start. Moreover, there is no consistency in their application to the pitches. It may simply be a case of extremely perfunctory notation on the part of the engravers; or the syllabification may have a simple, non-literal mnemonic function founded on the assumption that those who would attempt the yodel would know what to do. (Figure 4.9)

Does all this really matter? The musical representation fuses the two putative elements, and the repetition of the vocalise melody an octave higher adds the dimension of echo as well.

1.  
 Hear ye the Alpine horn,  
 Sweetly it sounds  
 While breaks the rosy morn,  
 And the roe bounds.  
 Gaily its music  
 On the air thrills,  
 It speaks in the valley  
 The voice of the hills.

[REFRAIN sung after each verse]  
 Ai ye ho &c.

2.  
 Up to the mountain brow,  
 Down in the vale,  
 O'er beds of trackless snow,  
 Breasting the gale;  
 See the young hunter,  
 Seeking his game;  
 No ice-cliff nor torrent  
 His spirit can tame.



Figure 4.9. John Hill Hewitt, "The Alpine Horn", 1843, yodel refrain

"Lament of the Alpine Shepherd Boy" by Francis H. Brown is presumably the song mentioned by Nathan in the quotation about the Rainer family recorded at the beginning of this chapter. Although technically not a yodel song, compositions of this type strengthened the basis for the association of the calls and nonsense-syllable passages in songs to be understood as a coding for yodels. They clearly suggest yodels, or some vaguer way of long-distance communication with the voice (though usually pretty distinct from simply yelling or hollering!). As in the classical music of the period, their idiom alludes to the shepherd's pipe, features the echo (a concomitant of the yodel), and also makes use of typical mountain call leaps. (Figure 4.10)

Voice

That voice once a gain - Now I know thou art nigh - The

5 echo - Sweet - e - cho! With thee - let me die Sweet e cho!

10 Sweet e cho! with thee let - me - die Sweet

Figure 4.10. Francis H. Brown, “Lament of the Alpine Shepherd Boy”, n.d.

“By the Margins of Fair Zurich’s Waters”, meanwhile, has no composer’s name indicated, which suggests it is a translation and arrangement of a Swiss song. It was published in Baltimore by Geo. Willig Jr. Here we find all the familiar elements:  $3/4$  *Ländler* rhythm; major-key mountain call motive; bucolic setting for the lyric. So it may be safe to conclude that all the elements so far discussed are regularisations and codifications of musemic material from Swiss sources. In this specific instance, the yodelled passages accompany the tongue-tied lover’s attempts to confess his love (first verse) and the lover’s enigmatic reply. There is no extended yodel – just a little two-bar refrain within the verse. This is not marked “yodel” explicitly – but how else might the phrase be interpreted (even if rendered in performance without the device)? (Figure 4.11)

The image shows three staves of musical notation in treble clef, 3/4 time. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff starts with a measure rest followed by the lyrics: "Oh! list to me dea rest I pray" ai - ai - u when she. The second staff starts with a measure rest followed by: did so he on ly - could - say ai - ai - u ai - ai - u A\_. The third staff starts with a measure rest followed by: lack well - a - day ai - ai - u ai - ai - u was all he - could - say.

Figure 4.11. "By the Margins of Fair Zurich's Waters", Baltimore: Geo. Willig, Jr., n.d.

### Other yodel songs of the mid-nineteenth century

"The Swiss Girl" of 1848 is by G. Linley. This is presumably George Linley, 1798-1865. According to the Newberry Catalog, the song was published by C. Bradlee in Boston, E. Riley in New York, and Wm. Dubois and Stodart, also in New York. What starts to happen around the middle of the nineteenth century is that "yodel" is specifically mentioned in the sheet music.

The syllabification of the yodels in this song gives one of the best indications so far of how the breaking was likely to have occurred. The syllables conform to the yodeleme's occurrence at the major sixth with the lax front vowel in modal or normal register and the tense back vowels in loft or falsetto register. We do not know whether singers may have broken other vowels



during singing. With so much apparent fascination for yodelling during this period, there is little reason to suspect that they did not. This song also features the rocking pattern characteristic of many popular music yodels.

Significant in this song is that the yodel itself is the girl's response to the entreaties of a suitor. In answer to the man's repeated proposal, the girl yodels her lay. The sound is very Schubertian, the tonic and dominant passages contrasting with the subdominant replies from the Swiss girl.

### **The Herdsman's Song**

Subtitled "The Celebrated Echo Song, sung by Madame Jenny Lind", this was written by the Swedish composer Jacob Ahlström (1805–1857) and published in New York by Samuel C. Jollie in 1850. This is in many ways the archetypal generic mid-nineteenth-century yodel song. It is presented in a slightly theatrical way; it is clearly a show piece, rather than a conventional song. Here, again, we find the familiar cluster of symbols: the arpeggiated 6-4 chord, the echo figure, and the imagery of the herdsman. The song features a piano introduction in 6/8 time based upon the arpeggiated 6-4 inversions, beginning on the tonic, falling to the dominant and then rising up – a formula

clearly reliant on the well-established codes noted for the earlier pieces. This introduction is immediately followed by the standard representation of an echo – namely, the repetition of a rising major third one octave higher and at a softer dynamic. In fact, the piano introduction is quite extended – 28 bars – which tends to bring this piece closer to Schumann and others at the more developed “classical” end of the continuum.<sup>119</sup> (Figure 4.12)

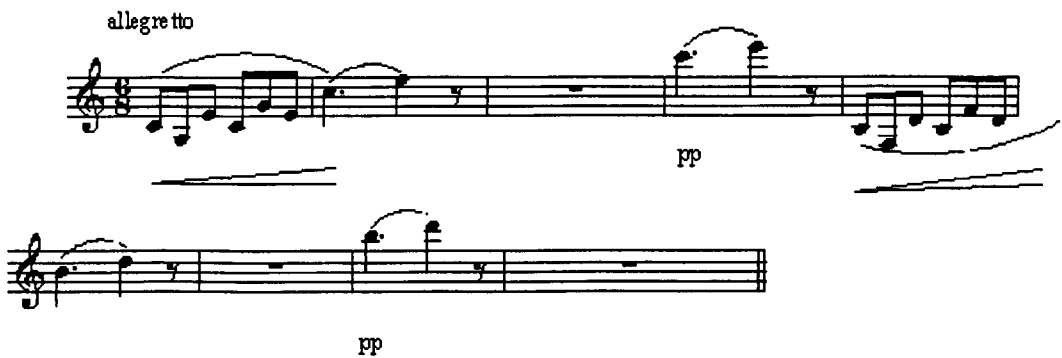


Figure 4.12. Jacob Ahlström, “The Herdsman’s Song”, 1850, opening figure with echo.

Here, the echo is conventionally represented by the repeat of a figure an octave higher after a short caesura.

As an icon, the arpeggiated 6-4 chord seems have done multiple service: when the situation arose, this figure could allude to a hunting horn, an alphorn, a yodel, or a *Ranz des vaches*. The repetition of short arpeggiated units suggests that the melody is to be understood as a *Ranz de vaches*. This is

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<sup>119</sup> Ahlström was in fact the composer of many pieces for solo piano, including a concerto.

the same sort of motivic repetition that was discussed in Chapter 3, and the similarity of this tune to that occurring in the fifth movement of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* is obvious. Intertextual associations such as these allow the ready recognition of the code. (Figure 4.12)



Figure 4.12. Jacob Ahlström, "The Herdsman's Song", *Ranz* tune.

### The Mountain Echo (1896)

This song was composed by G. Albert Reuhl with words by Ewart G. Ellis.

Here we encounter virtually all the elements making up the typical nineteenth-century musical code for the yodel pastoral "topic". The song is saturated by the major sixth, which serves as the main harmonic device signalling mountain pastoralism. In a flowing 3/4 time, with a verse consisting of two eight-bar phrases, it is utterly conventional. Swiss mountain themes have by this time become highly generalised, connecting stereotyped

“bliss” and “paradise” imagery with euphoric emotional states. The second verse can serve as an example, since it associates the song of nature with the yodel in the song:

My Love lives in a favor'd spot,  
 Where violets and forget-me-not,  
 And mountain roses scent the air,  
 'Mid nature's smiles so warm and fair.  
 It fills my heart with love's delight  
 To linger mid scenes so bright,  
 And spend the evening free from care,  
 With Madge my own true love.

Yodler

Interlude (piano only)

(second verse)  
 There lofty mountains touch the skies,  
 And guard this little paradise.  
 There mountain streams in cascades fall,  
 And silvery echoes greet my call.  
 The perfume laden air itself  
 Conveys the songs of nymph and elf.  
 'Tis here I find the pearl of all:  
 Sweet Madge, my own true love.

Yodler

Interlude

(third verse)  
 There feathered songsters haunt the trees  
 And warble as the gentle breeze  
 The rustling leaves in motion brings.  
 In chorus there all nature sings.  
 It sings of life and joy and love.  
 All precious boons of heav'n above:  
 There I am happier than all kings  
 With Madge, my own true love.

Yodler

Interlude

(fourth verse)  
 Soon we shall wed ne'r more to part,

The mountain girl has won my heart.  
 All nature is her chaperone  
 Her jewels are but nature's own.  
 And in this spot we love so well  
 Through all our lives we hope to dwell,  
 Where I to her my heart made known  
 To Madge. my own true love.

Yodler

Postlude

This song is unusual not only in its structure featuring interludes and refrains, but also in that the yodel is a descending one.

The image of Paradise is one that will continue to be associated with the yodel in a later generation of yodel songs of both the hillbilly and the cowboy types. Here, it accords with the general romantic fluff of the words, and is really not to be imagined as in any essential way different from the generalised, idealised stereotypes of the same kind found in other songs of the era. The combination of these images with a yodel refrain and the predominance of the major sixth chord is the point of interest here. The interval of the sixth was clearly important in the early romantic songs as the prime indicator for the mountain call motive. Yet those examples did not actually feature tonic chords with added sixths. Here, the sixth added to the tonic chord strengthens the German/Austrian folk character feel, while fitting the 6-4 mountain call motive as well.

Major-key melodic patterns initiated by a falling sixth and generally travelling through an arpeggiated triad have by the time of this song become a code for happiness, serenity, and bliss. Numerous examples of comparative material can be cited. Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* has a very familiar passage repeated sequentially. The mood of this music is clearly indicated by Beethoven's own title to the movement, "Awakening of joyful feelings on arrival in the country". (Figure 4.13)



Figure 4.13. Ludwig van Beethoven, *Pastoral Symphony*, first movement, bars 67-70.

This use of the descending arpeggiated tonic major chord with added major sixth has remained a code for bliss, serenity, lack of care, and dreaminess. More recent versions of the same idea are heard in "Singing in the Rain" and, slightly modified by beginning with a rising upbeat figure, in "Stardust", where the harmonies are enriched by the addition of minor thirds and a major seventh. (Figures 4.14 and 4.15)

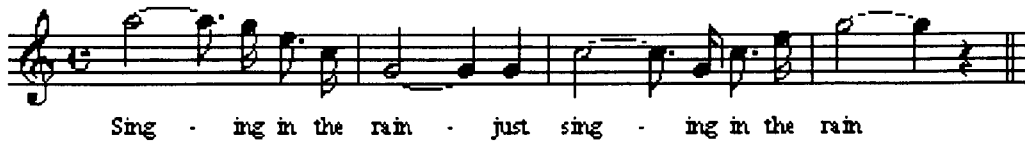


Figure 4.14. Arthur Freed and Nacio Herb Brown, "Singing in the Rain", MGM, 1952.



Figure 4.15. Hoagy Carmichael and Mitchell Parrish, "Stardust", Mills Music Inc., 1929.

The third verse of "The Mountain Echo" combines the key semantic concepts of mountain, paradise, echo, and call:

There, lofty mountains touch the skies,  
 And guard this little paradise.  
 There, mountain streams in cascades fall  
 And silvery echoes greet my call.  
 The perfumed laden air itself  
 Conveys the songs of nymph and elf,  
 'Tis here I find the pearl of all:  
 Sweet Madge, my own true love.

The yodel refrain is eight bars long and follows the first and last pairs of verses. The yodel itself is followed both times by a piano interlude, which also occupies eight bars. (Figure 4.16)





such as “The Alpine Horn”, written by A. Hartl and published in 1879, or the ubiquitous “The Alpine Rose”. These sentimental pieces seem aimed at the amateur market. Their titles and obvious thematic locales compare with examples from more illustrious composers, such as Grieg’s “The Cowherd”, for example.

“The Swiss Herdsman” is typical.<sup>120</sup> It features the characteristic 6-4 shapes which have been noted in many of the previous examples. How many sonatinas and beginners’ pieces have begun in exactly this way? The rising sixths and sevenths might go unnoticed, were we not searching for some musical code to understand the title’s significance, since its wording implies the presence of some element corresponding to contemporary notions of “Swiss-ness”. (Figure 4.17)

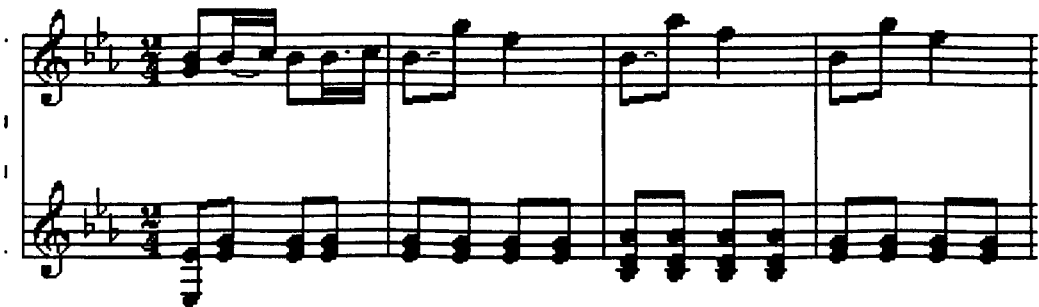


Figure 4.17. Adolfe Nebauer, arranger, “The Swiss Herdsman”, n.d., opening figure.

<sup>120</sup> “The Swiss Herdsman”, arranged with variations, for the piano forte by Adolfe Nebauer, published by Geo. F. Cole, Baltimore, n.d.

The hundreds of Tyroliennes published in piano form attest to their status as popular music, although they seem to occupy an uneasy space between the high art of German classical music and the sentimental parlour song of mass appeal. Could it be that their picturesque nature, their love of sweeping arpeggiated major chords and their idealised musical portraits of mountain life made them “popular”, in addition to the fact that they were mass-mediated to amateur markets?

Since all these themes were the common stock of yodel songs, there can be little wonder that such images were evoked at the mere mention of the word. This is even before one considers any accompanying iconography: but iconography is ever present. Such paramusical phenomena contribute to our understanding of musical texts. Although this fact may be criticised as extra-musical, that criticism is in some ways invalidated by its missing the point. That iconography and other artwork accompanying these musical texts shows such consistency seems evidence for a regularity of association with the music. This consistency goes beyond what can be expected from the influence of the words and titles of the song only.

There is a necessary over-emphasis upon sheet music in this chapter. The option of considering this music in its performed state – the actual yodel songs particularly – is not really operational here: we have no recordings of

how the music may have sounded in actuality. In the case of Tin Pan Alley songs we are aware that there were discrepancies between what was printed and published on the one hand, and what was actually performed, and in some cases is still being performed, on the other. But our perspective on mid-nineteenth century music is not aided by the absence of aural documents. So it is with some trepidation that we imagine performance styles and situations of the era, especially with regard to yodelling, where the written part may not have been carefully followed. A proper context is hard to assemble with accuracy. Thus the sheet music is reified and examined by the musicologist in a way perhaps more consistent with classical music procedures.<sup>121</sup> I would not wish to assert the priority of the sheet music form of the music over the performed. I wish only to ask, what does the production of so many songs with yodels for the presumably amateur market tell us about the tastes and pursuits of the market for this music?

## Conclusions

While the yodel figure was clearly becoming codified so that the spelling of the 6-4 chord and an allusion to Switzerland was sufficient to establish the topic, one has to resist the temptation to find it in every example of a song with a Swiss theme. For Switzerland did seem to hold a particular fascination

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<sup>121</sup> See Richard Middleton's discussion of this problem in Chapter 4 of his *Studying Popular Music*.

for many of these early song composers. Yet jollity and exuberance, two key semantic fields mapped by the uses in these examples, are doubtless out of place in songs of more sombre cast. Bishop's "The Boys of Switzerland" is a case in point: there can be no room for the joyous yodel – the lamenting yodel had yet to appear in popular music – in a song about the orphaning of two young Swiss children.

Certainly, one could argue that arpeggiations of the second inversion of a major triad are in no way unique to this type of museme, and that indeed all such inversions are the stock-in-trade of tonal melodies. This is obvious.

What is different about the mountain call museme is its concentration into a brief, recognisable motive of a particular association deriving from the numerous other elements in the particular context of Swiss- or Alpine-themed pieces.

Also, in respect of this, it may be important to stress that this is not just the province of the composers: the engravers who created the images on the covers of the music, the lyricists who fashioned the words, and others, contributed to the associations triggered by the museme. Reinforced by all of these paramusical elements, the musical statement acquires its value, connotation, and potency. It is wrong to criticise music for this type of associative meaning by arguing that music is in fact "meaningless", that it

does not “express” these things but establishes associations only through conventional juxtapositions. It seems wrong for the reason that this is precisely the way that spoken language works: the words bear no natural relation to their signifieds, but acquire one only through their association with the idea that the word brings to mind. While language has the added capability of making assertions, it nevertheless relies on the same associative understanding as music at the primary level of its lexicon.

It is evident that there was a clearly defined genre of Swiss and yodel songs established by the middle of the nineteenth century. This had been preceded by early-nineteenth-century songs with other calls that seemingly were yodelled. The sort of imagery that accompanied the song conformed to genre conventions as well, with mountain settings, shepherds, herders, horns of usually unspecified types, and mood types and themes such as separation, return, and loneliness, or joy, happiness, and euphoria. These two mood types are polar extremes and tend to coincide with the themes discussed in classical music, where yodel figures tended to take on the more joyful aspects, while the *Ranz de vaches*-style tunes tended to suggest the other pole.<sup>122</sup> Interestingly, a similar dichotomy is perceptible in second species yodelling in recent popular music. This phenomenon is discussed in Chapter 8.

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<sup>122</sup> See Chapter 3.

The point I would like to emphasise is that, according to the received accounts,<sup>123</sup> it was the Rainer family and subsequent Swiss singing families who popularised the yodel in America. That may well be the case with regard to the yodel's popularity. But what I have tried to demonstrate is that the yodel sign in the language of the popular and classical music of the day was by then already well-established: an abstract formula consisting of a particular interval combination and a standardised rhythm representing the yodel was already in place by the 1830s, prior to the first performances of the Rainers in America. The Rainers may have stimulated interest in other countries visited prior to their years in America and indeed influenced composers of light classical pieces, but both *Ranz des vaches* and yodel-like calls had already been codified in classical music by that time. Therefore the yodel-idea in musical discourse, the yodel "topic", had crystallized before the actual yodel-phenomenon became generally known. For very large sections of the potential audiences, the sign preceded the experience.

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<sup>123</sup> Those of Plantenga and Wagner, for instance.

## Chapter 5

## J. K. Emmet, George B. Watson, the Phonograph and Yodelling

Of all the late nineteenth century composers and performers who are associated with yodelling, J. K. Emmet was perhaps the most significant figure for the early twentieth century. Most of those whose names appear on the title pages of sheet music featuring yodelling are long forgotten. Very few remember, for instance, Henriette Sontag, who gave us Eckert's "Swiss Song", or Mrs. Morley, not exactly immortalised on the title page of the Alpine melody "Shall We Ever Meet Again"?<sup>124</sup> The Swedish soprano Jenny Lind is of course an exception.<sup>125</sup> Her name is still remembered, and her American tours, especially those managed by P. T. Barnum from September 1850 through June 1851, are recognised for their contribution to the popularisation of classical music in America.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, her fame does not rest upon her yodelling. But the case is different with Emmet, whose impact is felt even now. While his name has long since slipped from the popular memory, at least one of his melodies – the lullaby from *The Adventures of Fritz, our Cousin*

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<sup>124</sup> Eckert's "Swiss Song", New York: Wm. Hall & Son, 1852, features a lithograph of Mme. Sontag on its cover; Mrs. Morley's likeness decorates F. Stockhausen's "Shall We Ever Meet Again" published in New York by Endicott.

<sup>125</sup> Jenny Lind's name appears on the cover sheet of Ahlström's "Herde Sång" and (along with Mme. Sontag's) on Eckert's "Swiss Song" when it was published by Oliver Ditson in Boston.

<sup>126</sup> See for example *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 203-204.

*German* – is a tune as deeply ingrained in America’s sonic consciousness as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” or “Happy Birthday”.

Emmet differed from others of the period in that he was the composer as well as performer of his yodel songs, foreshadowing the later singers/composers/yodellers of the hillbilly and cowboy music era in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Russell Sanjek, “Other than the minstrel men, Joseph K. Emmet was the first stage star to write his own songs”.<sup>127</sup> And at the start of the twentieth century, his were surely the best remembered yodel songs from the preceding century.

Joseph Klein Emmet was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on 13 March 1841 and died in Cornwall, New York, on 15 January 1891.<sup>128</sup> The music Emmet wrote was simple and tuneful with a maudlin sensibility irritating to modern tastes perhaps, but sweet and affecting to his own generation. His music was artless and easily taken to heart by the “common” people constituting his audience. To cite Sanjek again, “Joseph K. Emmet, in his Fritz shows, Ned Harrigan and David Braham, with their string of Harrigan and Hart plays with music, Tony Pastor, and all their imitators had been proving for many years that the common man’s ‘common music’ could pack theatres. It was a lesson that the

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<sup>127</sup> Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business – The First Four Hundred Years*, Vol. II from 1790 to 1909, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 307.

<sup>128</sup> Kurt Gänzl, *The Encyclopedia of the Musical Theatre*, Blackwell, 1994, p. 408.



originators of 'clean' vaudeville learned quickly".<sup>129</sup> This was truly popular music as we understand the expression today, and in the case of Emmet, yodelling was a central element in it.

The original play, *The Adventures of Fritz, our Cousin German*, was successful enough to spawn a whole series with exotic locations featuring Emmet's creation, Fritz Van Vonderblinkenstoff. These included *Fritz in Ireland*, *Fritz in Bohemia*, *Fritz among the Gypsies*, even *Fritz in a Madhouse*.<sup>130</sup> The continued attraction of these melodramas meant that Emmet was able to base his career almost entirely upon this same character.

The original Fritz play was written by Charles Gaylor with the music supplied by several others, perhaps Emmet at this time, although this is not clear. The first performance took place in New York on 11 July 1870. The appeal of these "comico-weepie-melodramas"<sup>131</sup> appears to have been greater in the smaller provincial theatres than in the urban centres – in other words, in generally less sophisticated regions. In the words of Kurt Gänzl, *Fritz our Cousin German* was "the most successful of all the comedy-melodramas with songs and dances which were popular provincial and occasionally metropolitan fare in America, Britain and in the English-speaking colonies in

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<sup>129</sup> Sanjek, p. 337.

<sup>130</sup> Gänzl, p. 408.

<sup>131</sup> Gänzl's term, p. 408.

the second half of the nineteenth century” and “allowed its star to run the gamut from extravagant sentimentality to dashing bravado and to broad comedy, whilst pausing regularly to deliver a song, a dance or an instrumental or specialty item”.<sup>132</sup> Strangely, there is no mention of Emmet’s yodelling in Gänzl’s account.

It is remarkable that so little attention is given to Emmet in discussions of yodelling. He is of course well-known among those scholars whose specialism is musical theatre, for example Deane Root and Kurt Gänzl, but, oddly enough, he is neglected by commentators dealing specifically with yodelling. His name is mentioned on occasion, but his actual work, the content of his yodels, is not discussed. I suspect also that Joseph K. Emmet may sometimes have been confused with Dan Emmett, the leader of the Virginia Minstrels.<sup>133</sup>

In addition to their presence in songsters that contained only the words of the songs, a number of Emmet’s many songs were published in the conventional way with piano accompaniment. This, it will be recalled, was the case with

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<sup>132</sup> Gänzl, p. 499.

<sup>133</sup> This seems to be the case, for example, in *The Guitar Players* by James Sallis, University of Nebraska Press, 1982. On page 130, the author states, “Daniel Decatur Emmett, author of ‘Dixie’, wrote many classic yodelling songs”. For a discussion of Dan Emmett, see *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Negro Minstrelsy* by Hans Nathan, University of Oklahoma Press, 1962.

the Rainer Family's music earlier in the century, and as was also the case with the Rainer family, Emmet would often accompany himself on the guitar.<sup>134</sup>

Not all the songs involve yodelling. A few of those that do, and that played a substantial role in twentieth-century yodelling, are listed here:

<b>Date published</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Play</b>
1879	"Cuckoo Song"	<i>Fritz among the Gypsies</i>
1882	"Sweet Violets"	<i>Fritz among the Gypsies</i>
1883	"Lullaby"	<i>Fritz our Cousin German</i>
1884	"Emmet's baby song"	<i>Fritz in Bohemia</i>

"Sauerkraut is Bully" is another of Emmet's songs that survived well into the twentieth century, but no details concerning its date or publication have been located so far.

A number of Emmet's songs were still being performed when the recording industry came into being. Moreover, one hears in these early records some of Emmet's yodel melodies appearing in other songs as well, a fact that attests to the popularity of his work for yodellers. Features of these melodies, in fact, became foundations for yodelling heard long after. The first example is the

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<sup>134</sup> Gänzl, p. 408, and Sanjek, p. 307.

famous tune from the “Lullaby”, which appeared in the first of the series, *The Adventures of Fritz, Our Cousin German*. (Figure 5.1)



Figure 5.1. Emmet’s “Lullaby, Boston: W. A. Evans, 1883.

On the surface this excerpt from the sheet music does not appear to be a yodel at all. However, the yodellers who recorded the Lullaby from *Fritz* during the era of acoustic recording<sup>135</sup> break their voices on the third beat of the second bar and on the first and third beats of the third bar; and again on the third beat of the fourth and the first of the fifth bar: that is, each time the word “baby” is sung, the first syllable is broken into two by a yodeleme forming intervals of a fifth, a sixth and an octave. This is what I earlier designated “second species yodelling”.<sup>136</sup> The fact that the yodellers perform this figure in this way leads to speculation as to whether Emmet himself established this mode of performance. This seems to me very likely, not least

<sup>135</sup> By acoustic recording I mean the early period of commercial sound recording prior to the invention and adoption of the electric microphone, that is until around 1925. The yodellers to whom I refer are George P. Watson (Columbia A-575, 1909) and Frank Kamplain (Columbia A-2904, date unknown).

<sup>136</sup> Yodel species are discussed in Chapter 2.

because there are other opportunities for such second species yodels in other of his songs. And as will be seen in a later generation of yodellers on record, wherever there are first species yodels, there are usually a few of the second species to be found. Whether or not Emmet yodelled these words is of less importance than the fact that by the turn of the century yodellers were singing this song in this way and the device became customary. Indeed, Oliver Hardy sings the song in exactly this way with these yodelemes in the Laurel and Hardy two-reeler *Brats*.<sup>137</sup> Clearly, the device of breaking the words in this song has a long pedigree. It may well constitute the earliest example of second species yodelling in popular music.

*Fritz* had premiered in 1870, but the lullaby was not published until 1878.

This fact caused Gerald Bordman to write with regard to the Lullaby:

Because playbills of the era often failed to list musical numbers, it cannot be determined exactly when Emmet's 'Lullaby' became a part of the show. Although a place for it was clearly there from the start, the song was not copyrighted until 1878. Whenever it was introduced it quickly became popular and has remained one of the longest-lived melodies to emanate from our musical stage.<sup>138</sup>

However, Russell Sanjek offers a different interpretation of the late copyright date:

His famous "Lullaby – Go to Sleep My Baby, My Baby, My Baby", which remained popular until the end of the century, began as a guitar song called for in the original script. As the play continued in New York for a long run, changes were made and new business added, and "Lullaby" eventually became the climax of the evening in a 'grand parlour social scene'. Emmet later played Fritz in sequels, writing new songs for all of them and making national hits out of "Sweet Violets, Sweeter than all

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<sup>137</sup> *Brats*, prod. Hal Roach, MGM, 1930.

<sup>138</sup> Bordman, p. 28.

Roses", "The Cuckoo Song", "The Mountain Song", and "Come Back Baby". They were made famous not only by Emmet, but also by the German comedians who imitated him, but they did not appear as sheet music chiefly because the international star did not wish the counterfeit Emmets to have the music as he sang it . . . Emmet finally agreed, in 1878, to John Church's offer to publish his songs in their "only correct and authorized" printings, with a royalty on all sales.<sup>139</sup>

For the purposes of our discussion it does not really matter exactly when the song began to be used in the play. The point here is that this song was clearly a favourite when records started to appear and that the presence of second species yodelling in these early cylinders and disks attests to the fact that this technique did not emerge with Emmet Miller as has been implied by Nick Tosches. Miller's work and this question of priority are discussed later.

The next example of Emmet's yodel style is taken from the "Cuckoo Song", which appeared in *Fritz in Ireland*.<sup>140</sup> The yodel tune from this song must have been particularly admired, since it was often inserted into recordings of songs not composed by Emmet. (Figure 5.2) As such, however, it acts as a signifier for Emmet and establishes important textual connections between pieces within the yodelling genre. These will be explored later in the discussion of George P. Watson and others. Beyond that, the incipit of this yodel was transformed into a favourite beginning figure for Jimmie Rodgers and others of the hillbilly era; these are discussed in Chapter 6.

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<sup>139</sup> Sanjek, pp. 307-308.

<sup>140</sup> Emmet's "Cuckoo Song" was published in 1879 by John Church & Co. of Cincinnati.



Ex. 5.2. Emmet's "Cuckoo Song", Cincinnati: John Church, 1879, yodel.

The so-called "Dutch" character that Emmet made his specialty was a comic German speaker, new to America and unfamiliar with its customs and language. *Dutch* is a corruption of *Deutsch*, and in the context of nineteenth-century music theatre signifies a German and not a Netherlander. Such characters were increasingly common on the popular stage in the latter part of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. According to Charles Hamm, Dutch characters as popularised on the variety stage were

stereotyped as beer-drinking and sauerkraut-eating, somewhat slow and insensitive, but basically honest, earnest, hard-working, and patriotic folk. The music of 'Dutch' novelty songs was usually stereotypical as well, with rhythms invoking either a slow waltz (*Ländler*) or a march; robust, square, diatonic melodies were accompanied by oom-pah or oom-pah-pah figurations suggesting the sound of a *Biergarten* band.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Charles Hamm, *Irving Berlin: Songs from the Melting Pot: The Formative Years, 1907-1914*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 47.

The *Biergarten* tempo and feel are significant. Yodel songs earlier in the century incorporated *Ländler* rhythms, which would have been performed more slowly. The *Ländler*, at least in many of the Swiss-themed yodel songs published in the U.S., had a gentler feel matching the genteel themes and the romantic moods of the earlier generation. It was the typical rhythm of the romantic Alpine-themed songs of the generation before Emmet. With the comic German stereotyping, the gentle *Ländler* was transformed into the vigorous 3/4 oom-pah-pah beat heard on the acoustic records. The transformation is from tender and romantic to coarse and vaguely comical.

There are four points with regard to Emmet and the yodel that appear significant:

First, his use of the guitar, as noted by Deane Root, Sanjek, et al. is striking. This links him with the Rainers before him.<sup>142</sup> We gather that what is meant by the writers on Emmet is that the orchestra stopped playing in order for these songs to be performed with guitar accompaniment only. This was at a time when the guitar had not reached the level of popularity it would enjoy in

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<sup>142</sup> The Rainer Family is discussed in Chapter 5.



the twentieth century.<sup>143</sup> The guitar itself may be taken on one level as a signifier for “German”. After all it was the instrument used by the Rainers (who were of course Swiss but who sang in German) and doubtless was associated with them and similar singers of *Volksmusik*. Moreover, the guitar maker who had established what would become one of the most significant names in the industry was, like Steinway a few years later, a German immigrant to the United States: C. F. Martin.<sup>144</sup> So it may be possible to read the guitar, where it would not be possible to so read the banjo or the mandolin, as associated with “German-ness”, at least in such a context. In any case, reducing the accompaniment for a song from orchestra to guitar signals intimacy and immediacy, two qualities that seem to have been significant in Fritz’s representation of masculinity.

Second, his connection with the lullaby genre in general is noteworthy. The lullabies, indeed, may have been other signifiers for Germany. Of course, all cultures have songs for lulling babies to sleep, but there was a vogue for German lullabies in the middle of the nineteenth century. Many such *Wiegenlieder* were published either in English translations or as piano solos. Schumann had written such pieces; those by Brahms were very popular. His “*Schlaf, Kindlein, Schlaf*” (Opus 113, no. 4) may have even been a model, at

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<sup>143</sup> See note 113.

<sup>144</sup> For a discussion of Martin and his instruments see Washburn and Johnston.

least with regard to the lyrics, for the many American songs beginning “Sleep, Baby, Sleep”. The yodelling song “Sleep, Baby, Sleep” is discussed later. But for the present, it is enough to point out that Emmet, with this famous song from *Fritz*, as well as others such as the “Baby Song” from *Fritz in Bohemia*, established the lullaby as a yodelling mainstay for the next generation and beyond. This too was a part of his version of the masculine, for his fictional character had a strong pastoral streak expressed in his ceaseless attempt to protect both Katarina and Lena, two female characters who will be discussed a little later.

Third, we can trace the continued use of his techniques and melodic material in the recordings of the acoustic era and beyond. Of course, it is not claimed that, or even known whether, any of these devices, such as the second species yodelling or even the tunes of his songs, were original to him. Neither yodelling nor Dutch comedy was the creation of J. K. Emmet. But we have it on the authority of Deane Root, Russell Sanjek and Kurt Gänzl that he was internationally renowned and that his songs and his humour inspired many imitators.

Fourth – this is particularly important with regard to the intertextuality of yodelling songs – there are three words that repeatedly crop up in later yodelling contexts and which seem to act as signifiers for him: *Fritz*, *Katarina*,

and Lena. Each of these names appeared in the first play of the series, *The Adventures of Fritz, our Cousin German*, and each turns up later in the acoustic recordings in various contexts which seem intentionally to relate back to him or to recall him in a kind of homage (in the case of Watson's "Alpine Specialty") or as embedded material. Of course, it could be argued that a name like Fritz was already commonly associated with Germans generically, and that this was the reason why Emmet used it as his character's name. The same may be said of Katarina and Lena. However, after *Fritz*, the names acquire a different connotation relating specifically to the Emmet plays with music. These names were by this process recontextualised so that they were, to those conversant with popular entertainments such as these, now connected to the famous J. K. Emmet and his internationally-loved creation Fritz. These names, like the yodel melodies, link up in a way that is difficult to imagine as not being suggestive of Emmet. This is the case with the female names Katarina (Fritz's beloved in the plays) and Lena (Fritz's sister, addressed in the lullaby). The intertextual connections with J. K. Emmet are apparent even in "O-le-o-lady", a novelty item if ever there was one, written by Al Bernard and recorded by him with yodeller Frank Kamplain in 1923.<sup>145</sup> This light-hearted number is an unlikely context for something as old-fashioned as Emmet; nevertheless, this song, at this late date, not only name-checks Fritz ("When I come back with joy, you'll say, 'Fritz, that's the boy!'

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<sup>145</sup> Al Bernard and Frank Kamplain, "O-le-o-lady", Edison Diamond Disc 51115-R, 1923.

with your yo-del-e-ay-di-o-lady”), but confirms the connection since the extended first species yodel in the recording is identical to that appearing in the “Cuckoo Song”, first published in 1878 (see figure 5.2). One might also see the textual connection in Irving Berlin’s comic German novelty song, written for the “Dutch” comic Sam Bernard, with its title “Bring Back My Lena to Me”.<sup>146</sup> Even as late as 1938, a yodel song could be titled “I Yodel to Lena”.<sup>147</sup>

The female names Katarina and Lena frequently occur in yodelling contexts. It is certainly possible that these names had already become associated with female German stereotypes before Emmet used them. There are other examples in addition to the Irving Berlin number already cited of non-yodel material from the era making reference to Lena. “Louie and Lena”, for example, released by Zonophone circa 1905,<sup>148</sup> is a typical vaudeville-style comedy sketch involving a dialogue with singing. The female character is a comic Dutch role named Lena. At one point in this record the characters launch into an older song, “Meet me down at the Luna, Lena”, a gliding first generation Tin Pan Alley waltz imploring a young woman for an assignation<sup>149</sup>. The evidence suggests that these names contribute to a continuing web of semiosis and reference to “German-ness”, whether or not

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<sup>146</sup> This piece is mentioned in Hamm’s *Irving Berlin*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>147</sup> M. Moretti, “I Yodel to Lena”, 1938.

<sup>148</sup> Zonophone 397.

<sup>149</sup> This song was recorded about the same time in 1905, by Billy Murray and the Haydn Quartet, Victor Talking Machine 4369.

yodelling is involved. So while it may be that Emmet used these names because they already signified Germany, his songs naming Lena and Katarina strengthened the bond between those names and the yodel. This bond is apparent, for example, in the so-called "Swiss yodel song" composed by Charles Danvers and titled "Katrina" (a variant spelling commonly seen in the U.S. as well), published in London in 1900.

Emmet's legacy resides in the recordings of George P. Watson, Peter Lamar, Frank Wilson and others of the first generation of popular musicians to be recorded. Of these Watson is the most significant by virtue of the number and variety of recordings that he made, a substantial number of which involve material associated with Emmet.

George P. Watson was one of the earliest and most recorded of the yodellers in the acoustic era. Bart Plantenga states that he "recorded the first American yodels on wax cylinder in 1897".<sup>150</sup> That comment is, alas, all Plantenga has to say about him; and given Watson's historical significance, this seems short shrift. Watson's recordings seem to have had various effects. One was to introduce the music to new audiences who were too young to have heard Emmet. Further, his recordings would keep alive the memory of the great star to those who had been familiar with him. Finally, Watson's recordings

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<sup>150</sup> Plantenga, p. 184.

contributed to a kind of canonisation of Emmet among other yodellers.

Watson's records have had a lasting effect, although that effect is subtle.

Watson's records are a kind of nexus at which various strands of the yodel and its related images and musical contexts intersect. His material and style no doubt seem hopelessly old-fashioned to us now, but he can be regarded as a kind of summation of yodelling's career throughout the nineteenth century.

Regarding George P. Watson, there is virtually no biographical material available. He is mentioned only incidentally by Gracyk in *Popular American Recording Pioneers*, where he is cited among several others as one who recorded duets with Harry Macdonough.<sup>151</sup> Tosches' single reference to Watson is to state that he recorded Emmet's "Lullaby" in 1899.<sup>152</sup>

Yet Tosches's point in this particular passage is somewhat problematic. His concern seems to be to demonstrate the uniqueness of Emmett Miller and apparently to deny any influence from someone as old-fashioned as J. K.

Emmet. The passage in question is as follows:

As for antecedents, one contemporary review wrote that, "with his unusual voice, Miller will revive memories of J. K. Emmet and Nat Kreffe [Matt Keefe?] [Tosches's editorial]". The first of these, Joseph Kline Emmet, whose real name was Kleinfelter, was a German-dialect musical-stage entertainer known for his yodelling "Lullaby" (1878), from the show *Fritz, Our Cousin German*. So closely associated was J. K. Emmet with his lead role in this show that he came to be known as Fritz, and so

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<sup>151</sup> Tim Gracyk with Frank Hoffman, *Popular American Recording Pioneers 1895 – 1925*, New York, London and Oxford: The Haworth Press, 2000, p. 227.

<sup>152</sup> Tosches, p.228.

closely associated was his song with him that it came to be known as “Emmett’s Lullaby”, under which name it was recorded for Edison by the yodelling singer George P. Watson in 1899. J. K. Emmett was born in St. Louis in 1841 and died in 1891. We have no way of knowing what he sounded like, and neither did Miller. As for Matt Keefe, we know little more than that he was an old-fashioned, Tyrolean-style yodeller active in minstrelsy in the first decade of the twentieth century.

While I agree with Tosches with regard to Emmett Miller’s individuality and unique yodelling style, the point I question is that we “have no way of knowing what [J. K. Emmet] sounded like”. It is very likely that Watson and others of his generation had heard Fritz in action. Otherwise it is difficult to understand why they would have based substantial parts of their acts directly upon his material, as opposed to, say, more generalised “Dutch” humour. So we can assume that a performance tradition was being established or furthered by Watson, Wilson, La Mar and others when they performed Emmet’s material. While I concede that this is not the same thing as hearing Emmet himself, I do not accept that we “have no way of knowing” what he sounded like. The evidence lies in the sheet music – with the normal caveat for popular music that the printed music is not the real thing – and the numerous recordings of the singers in Emmet’s immediate wake, beginning a mere six years after his death.

Watson’s discography remains somewhat mysterious. There has as yet been no one willing to take on the honourable task of compiling a list of all his recordings. Various sources have been consulted for this research, but all of

these have proved limited and incomplete. The suspicion remains that other of Watson's recordings are still extant, but elusive. For this chapter, the following recordings have been considered:

<i>Title</i>	<i>Label</i>	<i>Date</i>
Snyder, Does Your Mother Know You're Out?	Concert Cylinder B-184	1899
Santa Claus Yodel	Edison 2-minute cylinder	1902
Lauterbach	Victor 4673	1905
Sauerkraut is Bully	Gold Moulded Cylinder 4023	1905
The Happy German Twins (with Len Spencer)		1906
Roll on Silver Moon	Victor 4836	1906
Cuckoo Song (J. K. Emmet)	Victor 17012-A	1909
Emmett's German Yodel	Columbia A575 (38121)	1909
Emmett's Lullaby	Columbia A575	1909
Sleep, Baby, Sleep		1911
Alpine Specialty (Popular Yodels)	Victor 20247-B	n.d.
Du Du (Old German Air)	Victor 4801	n.d.
Emmett's Favourite Yodel	Victor 20247-A	n.d.
Hi-Le-Hi-Lo	Victor 17257-B	n.d.
Papa's Baby Boy	Victor 17012-B	n.d.

The Library of Congress Online Catalogue shows three other recordings that I have been unable to hear: "Life in the Alps" recorded for Columbia in 1898, an earlier version of "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" recorded in 1898 for Berliner, and "Sweet Rose", also for Berliner the following year. Watson additionally



recorded "The German's Arrival", but that, too, has proved impossible to obtain.<sup>153</sup>

A mere glance at these titles confirms his position in the Emmet tradition of yodelling. Even records such as "Alpine Specialty" evoke the memory of Emmet by mentioning not only his name but incorporating his yodel tunes as well. Watson's "Alpine Specialty" begins with the melody of "Roll on Silver Moon" (not an Emmet number, but a favourite yodel song – a discussion of this song follows below) stated by the orchestra. It is in 3/4 time, based on a falling 5-3-1 melodic pattern. This is followed by Watson singing the famous strain of "Roll on Silver Moon" replete with yodelled words (second species). After the sound of applause, which creates the fiction of a gathered audience, Watson speaks in a stage German accent:

Anton, Heinrich, komm und sitzens uns by der table round and sing one of those good old songs zhoost like Fritz Emmet used to sing.

This is followed by the tune of "Sauerkraut is Bully" played in a very rough *Biergartenmusik* style. Watson sings in German and with exuberant yodelling breaking at the octave. "Sauerkraut is Bully" is apparently one of the many songs Emmet wrote for his character Fritz and may be based on an authentic German melody. This is followed by a statement of the yodel from "Cuckoo

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<sup>153</sup> The dates for these recordings have been obtained from various sources, including playlists for the Antique Phonograph Music Program and Edison's Attic ([wfmua.org](http://wfmua.org)), [meloware.com](http://meloware.com), [turtleserviceslimited.org/jukebox](http://turtleserviceslimited.org/jukebox), and The Online 78rpm Discographical Project, <<http://settlet.fateback.com>>.

Song", but performed with a more pronounced dance rhythm than is usual. The selection ends with the words, "Ah, das war ja gut gemacht, Fritz". The implication of the final statement is that the singer – Watson – has taken over the persona of the composer, that he is Fritz. Clearly, Emmet must be regarded as a paradigm in the first generation of recorded yodellers, and Watson, who was his most prolific exponent, can be viewed as continuing his popularity or introducing his songs to new audiences.

The remainder of Watson's recordings can be grouped as either German folk songs or as German comedy. Examples of the former include "Du, Du Liegst Mir im Herzen" and "Hi Le Hi Lo". The latter includes "The German's Arrival" and "The Happy German Twins". "Hi Le Hi Lo" is in the tradition of mountain-themed songs that were discussed in the previous chapter.

Another vigorous 3/4 *Biergarten* tune, it extols the joys of the rugged mountain life, the yodel being the sonic correlative of the exhilaration of the lyrics:

Im Wald und auf Der Heide  
 Da such ich meine Freude  
 Ich bin ein Jägers Mann, ja,  
 Ich bin ein Jägerman.

Hi li hi lo, hi le hi lo  
 Bei uns ist immer je länger, je schlimmer,  
 Hi li hi lo, hi le hi lo  
 Bei uns geht's immer noch<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> The lyrics were transcribed from the 78 by me with the assistance of Anja Löbert, whom I gratefully acknowledge.

Even the phrase “hi le” is a textual element that is found in other songs. It occurs for example in “Ragtime Yodling Man”, which is discussed later.

Watson is surely the last significant representative of the line of performers, stretching from Emmet to the turn of the century, to cultivate the droll send-up of the German stereotype that persisted in vaudeville. American popular music – the vernacular music that began with minstrelsy – has always been characterised by racial and ethnic distinctions and representations, and Watson’s material was not of course drawn solely from Emmet. Yet the other songs he performed were frequently connected somehow with German comic characters. While he recorded “Hi Le Hi Lo” and “Du, Du Liegst Mir im Herzen”, he also recorded the German folksong “Lauterbach”, but after one verse of German goes into a comic German accent to sing the English verses written for this tune by Septimus Winner in his “Der Deitcher’s Dog”, known virtually throughout the English-speaking world as “Oh Where, Oh Where has my Little Dog Gone?” The yodel Winner used in “Der Deitcher’s Dog” is, according to Richard Jackson, an old Bavarian yodel.<sup>155</sup> This tune also crops up in acoustic era records. Watson yodels this tune, but with more complicated rhythmic figuration. (Figure 5.3)

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<sup>155</sup> Richard Jackson, *Popular Songs of Nineteenth Century America*, New York: Dover, 1976, p. 268.



Fig. 5.3. Septimus Winner, "Der Deitcher's Dog", yodel.

### Other yodellers and yodel songs

Frank Wilson's recordings similarly reveal the deeply embedded intertextual connections with Emmet. His "The German's Arrival" in particular is the sort of comic Dutch role in which Emmet specialised: funny accent, malapropisms, and references to Katarina.<sup>156</sup> Could it be that this skit, also recorded by Watson, derives from a scene in one of the Fritz plays? The melody which acts as a frame for the spoken parts of this song is identical to that of the yodel in Winner's "Der Deitcher's Dog". This tune also serves as the basis for Wilson's yodelling, although he gives it much more propulsion by

<sup>156</sup> Frank Wilson, Victor Vi 17257-A, 1913?

subdividing beats three and four of the descending yodelemes. It is not surprising to encounter this yodel, which Winner stated was “an old Bavarian yodel”, in German-themed songs of a decidedly *Biergarten* character, but its reappearance in later cowboy-themed songs is remarkable and demonstrates the intertextual cohesiveness notable throughout the yodelling repertoire.

The Emmet connections are evident even in Wilson’s recording of “Sleep, Baby, Sleep”, which although not an Emmet number, is given a treatment that makes one think it could have been. For example, it is sung in a stage-German accent, which is unusual. None of the many others who recorded this song adopted this feature. It could be that Wilson’s act was based solely upon the comic German *shtick*, and therefore he performed all his material in character, so to speak. However, more to the point, his performance actually alludes to the melody from the “Lullaby” from Fritz, complete with second species yodels on the word “baby”, which is directly traceable to Emmet – or so it seems. Finally he even manages to work in a mention of Katarina, Fritz’s beloved. So it is apparent that even in the performance of songs not associated with him, J. K. Emmet served as a model and inspiration to the first wave of yodellers to entrust their acts to the “talking machine”.

There are further traces of Fritz Emmet in the several recordings of

“Roll on Silver Moon”. Published in 1848 by Firth, Pond & Co. of New York, this is another song that must have struck deep resonance with the singers and audiences. This surmise is based not simply upon the fact that it was recorded several times by different singers, but because its famous tune appears in numerous other songs, acting as a synecdoche, linking song with song and strengthening the coherence of the yodelling tradition. For reasons that are unclear, this song is quoted at the beginning of Watson’s “Alpine Specialty”, a number presumably comprised of Emmet’s material after that point. But why is it there? Could it be that this song was part of Emmet’s repertoire and thus taken up by his epigones?

The cover of the sheet music to “Roll on Silver Moon” states that the song’s melody is by Sloman and the lyric by Barker and that it was performed by the Barker Family. They were one of the many American singing families inspired by the Rainers who, like the Hutchinsons, may have yodelled in their performances as well. However, there is no indication of yodelling in the printed version of the music. That the song was very popular is proved not only by several extant recordings of it, but by the fact that it was published in several forms, sometimes consisting in the words alone. May MacDonald recorded it, as did Frank Kamplain, who called it “Silver Moon”.<sup>157</sup> The song

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<sup>157</sup> May MacDonald, Vi16077B, 1908. Frank Kamplain, Columbia A-2378 (78996), n.d.

was revived – or at least recorded – as late as the 1950s in a wonderful honky-tonk sock-rhythm version by Slim Whitman.<sup>158</sup>

May McDonald's recording is coupled with "Hush, Don't Wake the Baby", which seems an odd title for a yodelling song.<sup>159</sup> With words and music by Harry Kennedy and published by T. B. Harms & Co. of New York in 1896, this song, so the sheet music proclaims, was "written expressly for the New York Evening Sun". This is an interesting statement. One would assume that music written for a newspaper, and perhaps even distributed by it, would be an item likely to be popular with and performable by a broad swathe of the newspaper's readership. The fact that there is a yodel in the song then leads to the supposition that yodelling was of sufficient interest to the amateur market that they would be expected to buy this music and perform it at home. At any rate, the song remained popular enough that Victor in 1908, twelve years after its initial publication, recorded McDonald's version of it.

Matt Keefe is another yodeller who is occasionally mentioned in popular writing about yodelling. His "The Strolling Yodeler" typifies the late nineteenth-century style. A sweeping 3/4 rhythmic introduction by the orchestra sets up the lyric; each line is punctuated with a brief yodel tag. We

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<sup>158</sup> Imperial 8290, 1955.

<sup>159</sup> Victor Vi 16077-A (1908)

have seen how tags in the middle of lines often tally with exuberant joyfulness. It is a kind of outburst expressing something beyond mere words. These tags consist of a group of three yodelemes at the sixth, moving downward by steps. This is an extremely prevalent yodel pattern that carries through into the country music yodellers later in the century. As such it can be regarded as an archetype, and its recurrence demonstrates the textual coherence evident in the yodelling genre through the century. (Figure 5.4)



Figure 5.4. Matt Keefe, "Strolling Yodeler", melody of verse with yodel tags, transcribed from Columbia A 1604, 1914.

In addition to the yodel tags in the verse, the song features a yodel break. The yodel tunes in this record appear in later contexts. The soaring melody of the yodel break, for instance, features the 5-6-7-1 incipit that is found often in moods of joy or abandon. At bar five appears another yodel archetype: a descending pattern consisting of scale degrees 6-5-3-1-5. This pattern is heard in later hillbilly records, such as Rex Griffin's "You Gotta Go to Work", where



it has a very happy-go-lucky character due to his ragtime-influenced syncopation. More commonly this incipit is used to signal something dreamy or backward-looking. (Figure 5.5)

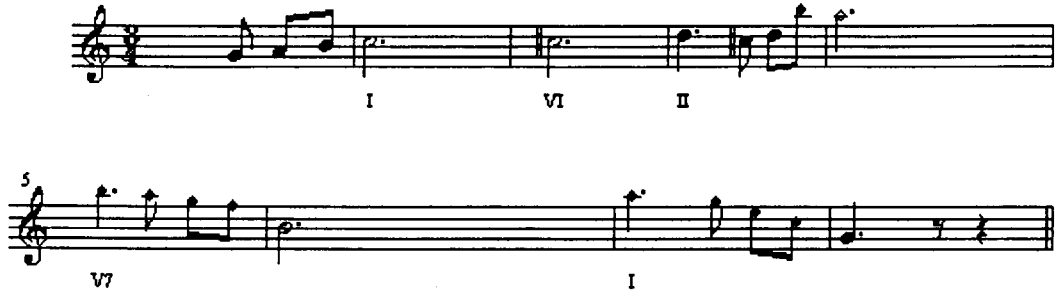


Figure 5.5. Matt Keefe, "Strolling Yodeler", yodel break incipit.

A final word may be added to this survey of the first generation of yodellers to make phonograph recordings. Robert Coltman asserts that "concert performers like Frank Kamplain (Gennett) and George P. Watson (Victor) presented their "Alpine specialties" to full orchestral accompaniment in the European manner".<sup>160</sup> But this statement is misleading. While it is true that Watson, Wilson, McDonald, Keefe and others recorded with orchestras, "full orchestral accompaniment" was not actually very common on the yodel records coming from Europe.

Yodel recordings made in Switzerland and Germany were distributed in the United States, and it is interesting to compare them with home-grown

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<sup>160</sup> Coltman, "Roots of the Hillbilly Yodel", p. 91.

American yodel records. The market for these records was imagined to be expatriots living in America, but doubtless many were purchased and enjoyed by people of different backgrounds.

The Swiss records tend to be of something closer to folk music than what was usually purveyed by the American performers. As such, they make frequent use of cowbells, zithers, accordion, bells, and clapping, all of which are very different from what is heard on the American popular music records. Some European records utilize a full chorus, rather than a solo singer as in the case of the American records. One also hears in the European records harmony yodelling, which Watson, Keefe, et al. never employed.<sup>161</sup> Finally, some of the records are either performed with piano accompaniment, such as Arnold Inauen's "Von Mine Berge", or performed solo, without any accompaniment, as in the case of Emmy Braun's records.<sup>162</sup> So the statement by Coltman is confusing, considering that the theatre orchestra accompaniment is really a feature of the American rather than the European yodel recordings.

It is noteworthy that there are fewer mentions of Switzerland or other European/Alpine allusions in these acoustic recordings than are found in sheet music. Indeed, in later songs the tendency to mention Switzerland

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<sup>161</sup> Ward Barton and Frank Carroll harmonised, but only Barton was yodelling.

<sup>162</sup> Arnold Inauen, "Von Mine Berge", Columbia A 0510, 1905; Emmy Braun, "Aennel em Bärkli im Trueb" and "Der Geissbuer", Elite 1141, n.d.

seems to reassert itself. This is particularly so in novelty songs, such as those Al Bernard wrote and performed, and in later comical songs, for example those from the thirties through the forties, especially.

### **Yodelling in Ragtime Songs**

Aside from the Hutchinsons, who were discussed in Chapter 5, few showed much interest in putting the yodel into a singularly American context. Most songs maintain the usual connections between their yodel and Switzerland, or at least to generalised mountain landscapes replete with shepherds, but of no particular national identity. As such, the music and the nature of the yodelling were very much in line with past examples. Something began to change when yodels were added to ragtime songs.

The first performer of the acoustic recording era to reflect this change is Ward Barton. Unfortunately, Barton seems destined to remain a mystery to us. He is not mentioned in any of the standard biographical dictionaries, nor in *The New Grove*, and he escaped the notice of both Plantenga and Tosches. He is not even mentioned in Tim Gracyk's book, *Popular American Recording Pioneers: 1895-1925*, although this is forgivable since Gracyk's book is not specifically about yodellers.<sup>163</sup> In an unpublished article devoted to Matt

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<sup>163</sup> Tim Gracyk with Frank Hoffmann, *Popular American Recording Pioneers: 1895-1925*, New York, London and Oxford: Haworth Press, 2000.

Keefe, Gracyk does in fact mention Ward Barton, but without comment.<sup>164</sup>

Very little commentary about him is to be found at all. Robert Coltman's discussion is the most extensive: a few lines in a newspaper style column.<sup>165</sup>

Yet Barton is unique among these acoustic era singer/yodellers. He is the first whose music sounds something like a pop song. Moreover, there is an almost emphatic non-Swissness about his recordings: there are no mountains, no *Biergarten* rhythms, and no fake accent. He is the first recorded yodeller who links the older styles with modern ragtime rhythms and colloquial expression in something resembling witty urban pop. Here is more evidence of new coding for the yodel; what we find in Barton's few records is further movement along a process of recontextualisation of yodelling in a specifically American vernacular context. Whereas the Hutchinsons, for example, had placed the yodel within a thoroughly American topography, their musical language was not particularly differentiated from their European models. But with Barton, and from this point on, a new musical context for yodelling develops. Therefore, a new significance follows from that.

A song without yodel titled "The Only Girl I Love", published by Witmark & Sons in 1901, is the only other item of his I have found. That date shows he

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<sup>164</sup> Tim Gracyk "Matt Keefe" unpublished. Emailed to me by the author, 6/9/2000.

<sup>165</sup> Coltman, p. 91-2.

was involved in Tin Pan Alley from virtually its beginnings, since Tin Pan Alley only came into existence when publishers such as Witmark and Harms established themselves in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Ward Barton stands out from his contemporaries in a number of ways, for the reason that he represents a different style. One of the first things noticed is his use of guitar. There is one song with orchestra, but all of his other numbers are sung with guitar accompaniment. The use of a guitar for accompaniment to a yodel song looks back to Fritz while simultaneously looking forward to the hillbillies. Barton also introduces ragtime elements, including the characteristic rhythms of ragtime and aspects of its vocal style.

Barton's recordings – all those of which I am aware – are listed below:

Barton, Ward. "I'm Dreaming of You" (original) (45924) Columbia A1834.

Barton, Ward. "My Pretty Lena" (original) (45940) Columbia A1834. 1915.

Barton, Ward. "Rock-A-Bye Baby" (46688) Columbia A 2031. 3/??/16.<sup>166</sup>

Barton, Ward. "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" (46689) Columbia A 2031.

Barton, Ward and Frank Carroll. "When the Moon am Shining" (Barton)  
Victor 18035 A.

Barton, Ward and Frank Carroll. "Rock-A-Bye Baby" ("new version by  
Barton") Victor 18035-B. 4/3/1916.

Barton, Ward and Frank Carroll. "Hawaiian Love Song" (Barton) Victor  
17965-A.

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<sup>166</sup> The source for these dates is The Online 78rpm Discographical Project,  
<<http://settlet.fateback.com>>.

Barton, Ward and Frank Carroll. "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" ("new version by Barton") Victor 17965-B. 1916.

There is confusion with regard to the name of Barton's duet partner. Nolan Porterfield gives it as Frank Campbell.<sup>167</sup> In the playlist for WMFU radio, where Barton's "When the Moon am Shining" was played 19 February 2002, his name is given as Frank Barron.<sup>168</sup> But on the records I have, the name on the label is clearly Frank Carroll. Such discrepancies may be accounted for by the fact that these records are very old and worn; sometimes even because of the contour of the label, certain letters become obscured. On the other hand, they may also reflect an indirect acquaintance with the recordings.

"I'm Dreaming of You" is the exception among Barton's recordings, partly because it has an orchestra accompaniment which makes it the most conventional-sounding of the set.<sup>169</sup> The 3/4 metre – favoured by the early generation of Tin Pan Alley, the "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" or "The Man on the Flying Trapeze" rhythm<sup>170</sup> – adds to the old-fashioned feel, although it is not the same kind of Teutonic feel as occurs in Watson's recordings, for example. What this song has is the yodel tag at the end of the lines of the

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<sup>167</sup> Porterfield, 1992/1979, p. 129.

<sup>168</sup> Antique Phonograph Music Programme, <<http://wfmw.org/playlists/AP>>.

<sup>169</sup> Although the title is the same, this is not the song recorded in 1905 by Collins and Harlan, Victor Talking Machine 4546.

<sup>170</sup> Hamm discusses the metre of Tin Pan Alley songs in Chapter 13 of *Yesterdays*.

verse. A rapid 3/4 time commonly occurs in moods associated with exuberant joy or flights of abandon.<sup>171</sup> The yodel is a corollary – a different voice for the expression of such a state – and as such is comparable to what was observed in the nineteenth-century songs, when yodel tags added to the ends of lines or longer yodel refrains served as sonic analogues to the feelings expressed in the lyrics.

“I’m Dreaming of You” sounds old-fashioned in the context of the other songs. To be sure, Barton recorded “Sleep, Baby, Sleep” and “Rock-a-bye Baby” twice, and it is hard to find more old-fashioned songs than those in the yodelling genre. But he does, by virtue of his witty, playful versions, manage to blow at least some of the cobwebs off them. Especially with the exuberant and witty yodelling, they must have seemed updated to his contemporary audience.

His lullaby recordings give us an insight into the tastes current at the time. Lullabies were already one of the genres usually associated with yodellers and must have had an old-fashioned connotation by the time Barton sang them. They were extremely popular in the nineteenth century, often imported from Germany with English words added to them. For example, in addition to the well-known “Sleep, Baby, Sleep” by S. A. Emory, there were

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<sup>171</sup> One could put Ravel’s *La Valse* and even some of Nielsen’s finales in this category.

other lullabies with the same title published at roughly the same time:<sup>172</sup> so there was apparently a vogue for such ditties at the end of the nineteenth century. Effie I. Canning's "Rock-a-Bye Baby" is deeply embedded into public consciousness now; Barton recorded it twice, and these may be the earliest recordings of the song.

By beginning with the second verse, with its central image of the Grandmother, Barton seems to be highlighting the old-fashioned quality of the song in his day:

Grandma sits knitting close by the fire place,  
 With snowy white hair and a smile on her face,  
 The years have passed by, yet it doesn't seem long,  
 Since she rocked baby's papa to sleep with this song.

At this point the well-known melody of the chorus begins.

The yodel he adds to the end of the song, however, is one that we have encountered before: it follows the 5-6-5-3-1-5 incipit, and so links with the past. However, Barton adds stylistic features which make it seem much more

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<sup>172</sup> There are many songs with this title from this period, but according to Coltman, the song under consideration here originated with S. A. Emory in 1869. See Coltman, p. 92. Nicholas Tawa discusses a song published by J. Handley in 1885, with the same name and with the same imagery, and from his description one could be forgiven for thinking they were the same. See Nicholas Tawa, *The Way to Tin Pan Alley, American Popular Song, 1866-1910*, Schirmer Books, 1990, p. 125. In fact, many of these published ditties are so similar as to seem plagiarised; indeed, some were, in the modern sense of the word: plenty were German songs to which English lyrics were added, while others were new compositions fuelled by the apparent appetite for such music during this period. The constraints of the amateur's technique may have made these more slowly moving, gently melodic pieces popular with the domestic market, but they were common enough on the stage as well.



up to date: the rapid rhythm of this florid yodelling, especially, and the headlong acceleration of these passages. This record is noteworthy also for its second species yodelling in the refrain.

With some of the other songs, though, Barton seems to lean more toward what our generation might call "pop". Not only is there a change in the accompaniment and the rhythm from the genteel waltz to the raggy syncopation of the *fin de siècle*, but the words are altogether more colloquial and contemporary. "When the Moon am Shining" has all the hallmarks of a late generation coon song. For example, the "am" form of the copula is code for Negro, a linguistic trick going back to the early days of minstrelsy. Yet this song has no trace of derogatory or even patronising attitudes towards blacks. The trend toward less emphasis on racial aspects and toward a more acceptable form of song such that "the ragtime idea came to be accepted as American rather than as the exclusive property of Negro, or Negro-imitated music"<sup>173</sup> is another feature of later generation ragtime. Furthermore, the rhythm of the song is an example of the "tied syncopation", also characteristic of later generation ragtime. Edward Berlin has written that

the distinction between early and later stages of ragtime history is based largely on this shift [from untied to tied rhythm]. Whereas through 1900 59 percent of the rags used untied syncopation as the exclusive type of ragtime syncopation and only 17

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<sup>173</sup> Edward A. Berlin, "Ragtime Songs", in *Ragtime: Its History, Composers and Music*, ed. John Edward Hasse, London: Macmillan Press, 1985, p. 75.

percent were based on tied syncopation, the proportions shifted dramatically in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>174</sup>

Moreover, the vocal has a way of breaking up the syllables of the word, which is accomplished by adding extra syllables into the text. This feature was noted early on to be characteristic of ragtime song.<sup>175</sup>

Other features that put this song into the early twentieth-century pop frame include the verses ending in the kind of harmonic closure that has come to be associated with barbershop style: the I II V7 cadence with its “Adeline slide”. This coinage by Philip Tagg is defined as a “short, chromatic passage, usually covering a third and usually descending, as in ‘Sweet Adeline’”.<sup>176</sup>

Whether “When the Moon am Shining” is actually a yodel song is, admittedly, debateable. Unlike all Barton’s other recordings, the labels of which state “song with yodel” or similar, this record carries no such advisory. There is nothing like the long sections of first species yodelling as are found in the lullaby songs he recorded, for instance. But there is a flash of falsetto in the little arpeggiated refrain that opens the song. This figure establishes the raggy rhythm and mood of the song. Barton clearly begins in falsetto and at

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<sup>174</sup> Edward A. Berlin, *Ragtime – A Musical and Cultural History*, London: University of California Press, 1984.

<sup>175</sup> Berlin, 1985, p.73.

<sup>176</sup> A term coined by Philip Tagg, *Ten Little Title Tunes*, 2003, pp. 209-11.

some point in the line's descent switches to natural voice. Whether a yodeleme occurs is impossible to tell due to the state of the record. However, in the context of his other recordings, all of which feature obvious yodelling, it may be that this figure was too subtle and too brief to be labelled yodelling. The passage is somewhat problematic.

Barton's "Hawaiian Love Song" is particularly interesting. Hawaiian music was having a huge impact on the American mainland at this time, and Barton was apparently the first on record to include a yodel in a Hawaiian-themed song from the mainland U.S., that is, in a non-Hawaiian song. It has a number of elements distancing it from the showy display yodels clearly indebted to the older styles. It has the raggy rhythm in the yodel refrain, which acts as a vamp. Its references to Hawaii in the first place make it seem very up to date – what kind of paradise must Hawaii have seemed to urbanites at this time? Further, it has a mad-sounding wordless episode in the middle in cut time complete with percussive effects made by Barton tapping his guitar. Altogether, it is one of the most unusual yodel songs from this era.

An important aspect of Barton's work is that he is the first yodeller on record to sing his songs to simple guitar accompaniment. Not only is this a big contrast with the theatre orchestras that accompany Watson, Keefe, Kamplain,

and the others, but it is reminiscent of the performance styles of J.K. Emmett.

The songs thus find a new intimacy that makes the lullabies seem more attractive, but there is similarly a new immediacy to the snappier ragtime numbers.

The dialogical nature of yodelling songs is made apparent in these items by Ward Barton. On the one hand, some of them are concerned with establishing their contemporariness through their tempos, rhythms, lyric themes, and instrumental accompaniment. Yet on the other hand, their connections with past traditions are inevitable: the guitar is a case in point. Although it is “modern” in one sense, breaking from the standard theatre orchestra format of the previous generation, it still links with Emmett’s performance style, and further back even to the Rainers. Simultaneously it recalls Fritz and announces Riley Puckett and Jimmie Rodgers.

Barton’s “My Pretty Lena” demonstrates this point as well. Here again we have one of the magic names, a talisman invoking connections with Emmet, and with the Dutch character yodelling tradition. In Barton’s song, a cute vehicle for some spectacular yodelling, the name gives him the chance to indulge in silly rhymes, such as “My pretty Lena, peaches and creama”, which were common in popular song of his day and indicate his intention to

be witty and up to date. Moreover, this song features whistling, another one of the expressive registers that later yodellers with guitars would incorporate.

What is clear is that in 1915 Barton was recording perhaps the earliest versions of ragtime inflected yodelling. His were the earliest recordings, but other Tin Pan Alley composers, not surprisingly, had already grabbed the yodel as a trendy device.

Harry Von Tilzer and Edward Madden wrote “That Yodelin’ Rag” in 1910.<sup>177</sup> It is not so very different from thousands of other songs of the period. “To the extent that quantity is a legitimate criterion for ranking composers of popular song, the most important composer of the first decades of Tin Pan Alley was Harry Von Tilzer (1872-1946), who claimed to have written 8000 songs” is how Charles Hamm introduces his discussion of Tilzer in *Yesterdays*;<sup>178</sup> so no one will be surprised to learn that the indefatigable Von Tilzer turned his hand toward the yodel. Von Tilzer, who so typified the early days of Tin Pan Alley, and scored some of its biggest hits – such as “A Bird in a Gilded Cage” and “I Want a Girl Just like the Girl That Married Dear Old Dad” – was ravenous for song material; nothing escaped. The yodel was only one of very

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<sup>177</sup> Harry Von Tilzer, mus. and Edward Madden, lyr., “That Yodelin’ Rag”, New York: Harry Von Tilzer Music Publishing Co, 1910.

<sup>178</sup> Hamm, 1983, p. 308.

many of other trends, fads, or near-crazes that he hoped to capitalise on. Part of the first verse and the chorus are given here:

Grab me 'round the waist and see how – close I'm gonna cling,  
 Dance me up the mountain side and – let me hear you sing  
 Like an Aeolian,  
 Something Tyrolean.  
 Yodle for me, Yodle for me – Keep a yodeling!

Chorus:  
 Let's do the Yodeling rag,  
 Make it a Schweitzer zig-zag.  
 Sing a little syncopated Tyrolese,  
 Yodle please.  
 Love your little dove a little,  
 Kiss and cuddle and tease,  
 Give a Switzerland squeeze,  
 If you kiss me once,  
 You're going to kiss me twice.  
 I know it's awf'ly naughty but it's awf'ly nice.  
 Baby dear, Cuddle near,  
 I get queer when I hear  
 That yodeling Rag!

This lyric is fitted with the trendy syncopated ragtime rhythm of the day, so while Barton may have been the first to record raggy yodelling, he was not its originator. These rhythms in fact play a significant role in a vast amount of subsequent yodelling: even cowboy songs of a bluesy cast are animated by them. Ragtime in general was beginning to have a significant effect on yodel songs. This effect extends to far more than the snappy syncopated rhythms: it had a profound impact upon the imagery of the lyrics. Where Madden and Von Tilzer were happy to stress the Swiss connection in the context of a witty enticement to a romantic encounter, later ragtime composers wrote yodel

songs that stressed black elements. This brought about a dramatic change in yodelling in American popular music, setting it on course towards its association with blues.

“The Ragtime Yodling Man” of 1913 is noteworthy because it is a very early example of cowboy imagery combining with yodelling in a ragtime song. This is six years before Bentley Ball made what are regarded as the first recordings of cowboy songs.<sup>179</sup> Also noteworthy is the “Hi Lee” which the “Dan” named in the song is supposed to sing, as this seems to recall George P. Watson’s “Hi Le Hi Lo”, another mountain song.

Way up above upon the mountain rocks,  
 Way up above beside his mountain flocks,  
 Is happy Dan the cowboy Yodling man,  
 A singin Hi Lee with a yo-del-o,  
 Like a to-da-lo tune.  
 Way down below down where the echoes creep,  
 Way down below with hearts that give a leap,  
 The maidens all await his loving call,  
 And softly sigh to the singer’s reply.

Chorus:  
 Just hear that rag-time Yodeling man!  
 Nobody can  
 Yodel like Dan, for when he  
 Hi lee Yea-lee hoos,  
 You ought to hear the rattle  
 As the rocky mountain cattle  
 Drill around the hills in single file,  
 While following the echoes ring mile after mile  
 Of that Hi-le-hi-Year-lee hoo  
 Of Dan the yodelling man.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Malone, 1985/1968, p. 139.

<sup>180</sup> E. Ray Goetz and Malvin Franklin, “The Ragtime Yodling Man”, New York: Waterson, Berlin and Snyder, 1913.

“The Big Eyed Goblin Man” of 1916, and “When They Yodel Ragtime Songs in Tennessee” of 1918, both further demonstrate the attempt to put yodelling into a thoroughly Americanised context. While the latter does mention Switzerland, such a reference is pointedly missing from the former. The minstrelsy imagery may embarrass today, but it is noteworthy in re-locating yodelling and its personae. The mention of the Mason-Dixon Line, for example, functions as an excuse for the inclusion of black features such as the raggy rhythm. It is interesting, also, that there are elements of the lullaby lingering in this yodel song.

In my Southern home  
 Far below the Mason-Dixon Line  
 When I used to sit on Mammy’s knee  
 And she’d sing to me most all the time  
 Of the Goblin man  
 Hid behind the great big silv’ry moon  
 In accents soft and low  
 To me she’d sweetly croon

Refrain:

Oh, honey love, now close your little eyes,  
 And mammy’ll watch you till you reach the golden skies  
 Oh slumber sweet  
 Now rest and don’t you fear  
 That big-eyed goblin man  
 While your black mammy’s here

Yodle (ad lib.)

Many years ago  
 Down upon the dear old bayou  
 Where the three old wicked witches met  
 And the leafy trees sighed soft and low  
 When the twilight shades



Used to turn into the darkest gloom  
 And the big eyed goblin man,  
 Swept the cobwebs from the moon:

Refrain<sup>181</sup>

The yodel appearing in this sheet music is full of bluesy turns. In fact, it fits into an eight-bar blues pattern over the typical IV-I-V-I sequence. (Figure 5.6)



Figure 5.6 Oklahoma Bob Albrit, "The Big-Eyed Goblin Man", New York: Witmark and Sons, 1916, yodel.

Will Morrissey's "When They Yodel Ragtime Songs in Tennessee" also plays with the Southern black stereotype. The name Alexander was probably already a common signifier for blacks since so many blackface skits used it; this may explain why Irving Berlin used the name in his famous "Alexander's Ragtime Band" of 1911. Several other pieces predate it, such as "Alexander and his Clarinet", so we can take the name as code for a black character.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Oklahoma "Bob" Albrit, "The Big-Eyed Goblin Man", New York: Witmark & Sons, 1916.

<sup>182</sup> Collins and Harlan, "Alexander and his Clarinet", Oxford 4418, rec. 1908.

Way up in Switzerland,  
 There lived a colored man,  
 His name was Alexander Brown,  
 He took his family  
 And moved to Tennessee,  
 Just to settle down;

And when he got there,  
 I say he got there,  
 He heard a banjo strumming,  
 He couldn't help from humming,  
 Melodies right from his Alpine town,  
 Way up in Switzerland.

Darkies far and near,  
 Gathered round to hear:

#### CHORUS

When he started yodeling ragtime songs in Tennessee  
 (*yodel*) (O-la-la-li-e-o)  
 Ev'ry colored song sounds like a mountain melody,  
 (*yodel*) (O'la-la-li-e-o)  
 If a pickaninny cries,  
 Ev'ry colored mammy tries  
 To yodel some ragtime lullaby  
 (*yodel*) (My little baby)  
 So pretty, Oh, weep no more my  
 (*yodel*) My little baby  
 (*yodel*) My little baby  
 (*yodel*) My little baby  
 Ev'ry melody they use  
 Is kind of mixed up with a little Memphis Blues  
 When they yodel ragtime songs in Tennessee  
 (*yodel*) O-la-li-e-o.

#### 2nd verse

Now down in Tennessee,  
 This happy family,  
 Have bought a cabin and some land,  
 And when the sun goes down,  
 The darkies gather 'round;  
 For a great big colored band is coming through there,  
 It's something new there,  
 The carnival is coming,  
 And everyone is humming,  
 Melody has hit that little town,  
 Way down in Tennessee.  
 When Alexander hears that band,

His thoughts go back to Switzerland.

CHORUS<sup>183</sup>

The chorus of this song is given in Figure 5.7.

When he start ed yo del ing rag time songs in Ten nes see o la la

li e o ev' ry col oured song sounds like a moun tain me lo dy o la la

li e o if a pick a nin ny cries ev' ry col oured mam my tries to

yo del some rag time lul la by my lit tle ba by so pret ty oh weep no

more my my lit tle ba by my lit tle ba by my lit tle ba by

boy ev' ry me lo dy they use is kind of mixed up with a lit tle

Mem - phis blues when they yo del rag time songs in Ten ne see o la li e o

Figure 5.7. Will Morrissey, "When They Yodel Ragtime Songs in Tennessee", 1918, yodel.

<sup>183</sup> Will. Morrissey, "When They Yodel Ragtime Songs in Tennessee", New York: Leo Feist, 1918.

Other signifiers for the Deep South in this song are the allusions to Stephen Foster's "The Old Folks at Home". There are two: on the line "weep no more my" and the little figure in the final two bars; and with the reference to W. C. Handy's "Memphis Blues", the song is not only brought up to date, but has its southern locale reinforced. Altogether, the lyric and the music manage to touch most of the bases in order to suggest both the locale and the contemporary popular style.

These songs are particularly interesting in the way they combine so many of the later features associated with yodelling in America. The features include Southern settings, ragtime rhythms, and even cowboys. Taken together, they demonstrate that the process of combining such lyric themes with yodelling is older than the hillbilly era. Cowboys and yodelling had been combined in the fictional universe of the popular song by at least 1913.<sup>184</sup> This is well before Jimmie Rodgers recorded his cowboy-themed songs and certainly before Gene Autry. Popular song writers, especially in the Tin Pan Alley era, were absolutely predatory in their search for topics, themes, and imagery.

Moreover, we see the use of the Southern setting as an excuse for racist caricature: this is signalled by lines such as "Way down beneath the Mason Dixon line". (Even Jimmie Rodgers echoed this line, but by his time it was

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<sup>184</sup> The development of the interest in the cowboy theme is discussed in Chapter 7.

more to signal the “Southern-ness” of the song, rather than to signal a locale associated with blacks).

These songs and others indicate a brief fad for yodelling in Tin Pan Alley. We are not surprised at the ludicrous and unlikely combinations of images in them since that was Tin Pan Alley’s stock-in-trade: anything that even hinted at being popular or becoming popular was tried out in dozens of songs, that number rising exponentially if a hit came out of something similar.

In these songs we get something much more black-inflected, although it is at an obvious remove. Some of the musemes compare with similar ones in the music W. C. Handy was publishing around this time. His “Memphis Blues” has already been mentioned. Musical ideas such as those in Handy were not necessarily original to him, but their presence indicates that they had some currency in the South and elsewhere. They became standard melodic patterns, licks, runs or whatever. Intimations of such tropes are discernible in some older piano ragtime, e.g. “Black and White Rag” or “The Entertainer” to mention well-known ones. Later figures based on those in “Memphis Blues” became prime signifiers for blues, so it is not surprising to see them in the yodel songs.

Al Bernard and Frank Kamplain recorded a number of bluesy blackface pieces with yodelling: “Oh Joe” (Edison Diamond Disc 50672 R, 1920) and “O-le-o-Lady” (Edison Diamond Disc 51115 –R, 1923), and “31<sup>st</sup> Street Blues” (Edison Diamond Disc 51271 –R, 1924). Of these, “O-le-o-lady” is the oddest because of its combination of stock Swiss images with Emmet’s yodel melody from “The Cuckoo Song” and references to blues. A few lines will give a good indication.

I just arrived from Switzerland, (yodel)  
 Where they make holes in the cheese so grand (yodel)  
 Where I leave my red-cheeked sweetheart (yodel)  
 When she’d cry I’d say oh my (yodel)  
 I said to her I will be true  
 I’ll sing this song when I feel blue

Chorus  
 O le o lady, that will drive away the blues  
 O le o lady,  
 Etc.

Yodel from “Cuckoo Song”

When I come back with joy you’ll say Fritz, that’s the boy  
 With your yodeleodele-ay.

What these tired out yodels and stock references to Fritz tell us is that by this time in this type of music the yodel was losing its artistic seriousness. The ghost of Emmet might still be evoked, if only through habit rather than intention. Yet the utter embarrassment of white men impersonating the fictitious ignorant coon, yodelling to lame rhymes and trite Swiss images – as

though a yodel without the framework of a Swiss setting of some kind was unthinkable – demonstrates just how tenuous the connection between yodelling and so much of this music really was. These songs by Al Bernard were the death throes of this type of entertainment, when the yodelling seems there only as a comic element and not for its beauty. But well before this time the yodel had found a more congenial home where it once again had the stamp of authenticity and appropriateness. In the rural music of America a new romanticism gave the yodel a place and purpose, where it no longer needed stock imagery as its excuse. A consideration of the new sensibility rightfully begins with yodelling's saviour from the South, Jimmie Rodgers.

## Chapter 6

### The Yodel and its Affiliates in Hillbilly-era Records

Yodelling features in a very large number of hillbilly recordings, a fact often attributed to the influence of Jimmie Rodgers. This chapter discusses his role in the burgeoning hillbilly music industry in the 1920s and 30s and considers his yodelling in relation to previous trends, his contemporaries and his epigones.

#### **Jimmie Rodgers's place in the country music canon**

In his book *Country Music USA*, widely regarded as the most authoritative history of country music, Bill C. Malone calls Jimmie Rodgers "the first country singing star" and asserts that "country music's evolution as a star-oriented phenomenon, with traits increasingly national rather than local in scope, is largely the legacy of Jimmie Rodgers".<sup>185</sup>

Rodgers's biographer Nolan Porterfield described him as "a big-time personality, the idol of millions, a show business institution, and a dominant influence in the development of one of the greatest cultural phenomena in

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<sup>185</sup> Malone, 1985/1968, p. 77.



twentieth-century America".<sup>186</sup> Rodgers is directly cited as a prime influence by many major figures in various sub-genres of country music, including Ernest Tubb and Lefty Frizzell in honky tonk music, Bob Wills in western swing, and Bill Monroe in bluegrass.<sup>187</sup> His impact is felt strongly even today. For example his song "In the Jailhouse Now" was used in the climactic scene of the Coen Brothers' film, *O Brother, Where Art Thou*.<sup>188</sup>

Unquestionably, Jimmie Rodgers occupies a revered position in the country music canon. Immediately upon his death, in fact, he became the subject of a strange sub-genre of yodelling songs devoted to his memory. Within three weeks of Rodgers's death in 1933, Dwight Butcher had recorded "When Jimmie Rodgers Said Goodbye" and nine days after that Gene Autry recorded two titles: "The Death of Jimmie Rodgers" and "The Life of Jimmie Rodgers".<sup>189</sup> More titles by other singers followed in quick succession. The

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<sup>186</sup> Porterfield, 1992/1979, p. 21.

<sup>187</sup> Sources for this statement include Ronnie Pugh, *Ernest Tubb, the Texas Troubadour*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996, esp. Chapter 2; Daniel Cooper, *Lefty Frizzell: The Honky-tonk Life of Country Music's Greatest Singer*, Boston, New York, Toronto and London: Little, Brown and Company, 1995, p. 19-20; Charles R. Townsend, *San Antonio Rose: The Life and Music of Bob Wills*, Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1976, p. 59; Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass – A History*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993/1985, pp. 46-7.

<sup>188</sup> *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, Ethan Coen, dir., Universal Studios, 2000. The use of this song in this film is discussed in Chapter 9.

<sup>189</sup> "When Jimmie Rodgers Said Goodbye" by Dwight Butcher and Lee Herscher, Crown 3516.

tradition continued at least until Elton Britt's "The Jimmie Rodgers Blues" of 1968.<sup>190</sup>

### **Academic literature devoted to Rodgers**

Rodgers was central to the concept of "hillbilly" music which began to emerge in the mid to late 1920s when the commercial recording industry began to focus attention on the rural South, and he has continued to occupy a key role in historiography and accounts of "hillbilly" music. When this music began to interest academics as an object of study, justification for their interest was based upon the music's relationship to "folk" sources and to black experience. Interest therefore centred on Rodgers as a folksinger, specifically as a carrier or transmitter of Negro blues traditions. His more obviously popular material, although it constitutes a large percentage of his corpus, was not considered worthy of investigation.

John Greenway's "Jimmie Rodgers – A Folksong Catalyst" is typical of this approach to Rodgers's music.<sup>191</sup> This was, according to Bill Malone, "the first article on hillbilly music to appear in a scholarly journal",<sup>192</sup> a fact which further contributed to Rodgers's special position in discourse on the genre.

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<sup>190</sup> Bear Family Records have released a CD called *Memories of Jimmie Rodgers* containing these songs and others: BCD 15938 AH. Elton Britt's song (WCA4-1944) appears on *Elton Britt, The RCA Years*, BMG DRC1-1486.

<sup>191</sup> John Greenway, "Jimmie Rodgers. A Folksong Catalyst", *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 70, No. 277, 1957, pp. 231-4.

<sup>192</sup> Malone, 1985, p. 431.

Greenway, however, was interested in Jimmie Rodgers primarily as an exponent of folk music. Regarding his music as folksong allowed the intellectual fiction of conceptualising him as an exception within the nascent recording industry and thus not “just another radio practitioner of commercial hillbilly degeneration”.<sup>193</sup> The blanket dismissal of popular music on grounds of commercialism typifies the mid-twentieth-century attitude toward much of the material constituting the repertoire of the hillbilly singers: individual items were always under suspicion of having been tainted with commercialism and therefore rendered inauthentic. Only those songs whose pedigree could be traced either through “folk” music (a dubious distinction in the first place) or through black experience were considered valuable or worthy of study. As Greenway explicitly states, “His miscellaneous and sentimental songs are of little interest to folklorists”.<sup>194</sup>

Greenway and others of his generation who were interested more in folklore than in popular culture found “Rodgers’s work . . . useful not only for helping us understand some of the changes undergone by folksong, but also for permitting the recovery of original phraseology which has since become corrupt”.<sup>195</sup> However, for students of popular music Rodgers is interesting more for his unique bricolage of material and moods and for his remarkable

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<sup>193</sup> Greenway, p. 231.

<sup>194</sup> Greenway, p. 232.

<sup>195</sup> Greenway, p. 233.

commercial success. This makes his “miscellaneous and sentimental songs” of particular interest. However, in fairness to Greenway, whose work is significant and important, it necessary to recall that he clearly stated that commercial hillbilly performers such as Rodgers should not be discounted by folklorists merely on aesthetic grounds.

As a consequence of the attention from folklorists, interest in Rodgers’s yodelling has primarily focussed on its occurrence in his blues songs.

However, it is precisely his material based on popular song styles that reveals much about the significance of his yodelling and its connections with earlier traditions. This material is discussed later in this chapter.

Other scholarly discourse on Rodgers has frequently been occupied with questions over his models and his influence upon subsequent yodellers.

Where he got his yodel has exercised many of his commentators. David Evans, for example, has written that

Rodgers probably owes his refrain less to black music than he does the occasional falsetto which he employs on words in his blues stanzas. This is a common technique among black folksingers and one that is undoubtedly indigenous to their music, since it can also be heard in some recordings of African tribal music. Rodgers probably picked up the technique from black musicians when learning the blues and somehow associated it with Swiss yodelling, with which he also must have been familiar. Thus was born the “blue yodel” in white folk music.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> David Evans, “Black Musicians Remember Jimmie Rodgers”, *Old Time Music*, Winter 1972/3, p. 13.

Others seem interested in missing link theories of various forms. Nolan Porterfield, for example, mentions a possible connection with Goebel Reeves, who often performed under the pseudonym The Texas Drifter. Porterfield argues that Jimmie Rodgers may have spent time around New Orleans working with Reeves; to him “it seems likely . . . that Jimmie absorbed a great deal merely from touring with Reeves and [Lucien] Parks, and may well have begun his assimilation of the yodel, the blues, and his unorthodox guitar style during this period”.<sup>197</sup> However, Fred Hoeptner, who interviewed Reeves several times in the 1950s, while relating the story of Reeves and Parks working together in New Orleans, makes no mention of a connection with Rodgers, except to say that Reeves’s composition “I’ve Ranged, I’ve Roamed, I’ve Travelled” “became successful through a recording by Jimmie Rodgers”.<sup>198</sup>

Nick Tosches in his book on Emmett Miller seems especially determined to establish a connection between Miller and Rodgers who may or may not have met in Asheville, Virginia, in the mid 1920s, although Tosches admits that this connection is impossible to establish with any certainty.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Porterfield, 1992, p. 43.

<sup>198</sup> Fred Hoeptner, “Goebel Reeves: The Texas Drifter”, *Old Time Music*, Autumn, 1975, p. 13. On the Bear Family issue of Goebel Reeves’s material (*Hobo’s Lullaby* BCD 15 680 AH) this song is titled “The Drifter”; Rodgers’s recording is titled “I’ve Ranged, I’ve Roamed, I’ve Travelled”.

<sup>199</sup> Tosches, p. 96.

As interesting as these theories may be, ultimately they are unnecessary to explain where Rodgers got his yodel. There was no single source of influence upon Jimmie Rodgers simply because yodelling surrounded him on all sides, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapters. Yodelling was everywhere, in many styles and genres. To imagine it was Swiss troupes, or some such, who influenced him is too specific, and unnecessarily so. Besides, black inflected yodel songs such as those described in the previous chapter demonstrate that ragtime-blues-influenced yodelling was widely current long before Rodgers began performing. Moreover, the variety of yodelled vocal figures Rodgers used reveals his eclectic interests. Clearly, he was influenced by many traditions and styles, not by one, and certainly not by only one performer such as Emmett Miller, whose yodelling he resembles only occasionally. These yodel figures include not only melodic patterns that would have been familiar to a large section of his original audience, but also other vocal devices that were drawn from other popular singers but which had apparently never been coupled with yodelling. These are discussed later in the section devoted to vocal variation.

### **The nature and significance of yodelling in Jimmie Rodgers's songs**

Viewing the hillbilly music phenomenon as a commercial endeavour – in other words, not from the narrow point of view of the folklorists – Richard Peterson in *Creating Country, Fabricating Authenticity* gives a perceptive

account of the nature of Rodgers's material and especially the role of his A & R man, Ralph Peer.<sup>200</sup> Peer actually had very little or no interest at all in the music that the hillbilly performers he recorded were making. It was purely a commercial concern to him. There was a market for this music, he knew, and huge profits to be made. But he was singularly unconcerned with and unmoved by its aesthetics.<sup>201</sup> The result of his indifference to Rodgers's music meant that he exerted very little pressure upon him in order to influence his music.<sup>202</sup> Peterson explains that "because of the snobbish attitudes of A & R men like Peer and others, Jimmie Rodgers and the generation of artists who began to record in the 1920s had great artistic freedom, greater freedom, in fact, than has been enjoyed by any later generation of beginners in country music".<sup>203</sup> Therefore, the material Rodgers recorded gives a clear indication of the music he was interested in, selected by him presumably because he felt it was what he did best. That he fitted yodelling into almost every item is significant because it indicates that Rodgers felt his yodel carried a considerable portion of the affective content: it was what moved people.

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<sup>200</sup> Had Peer worked in our era, he would have been called a producer.

<sup>201</sup> For example, Peer had described the singing of Fiddlin' John Carson, among the first southern rural musicians to make records, as "pluperfect awful"; quoted in Anthony Hawkins, *Hillbilly, A Cultural History of an American Icon*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 74. Peer's attitude toward the hillbilly music he was establishing as an important force in popular music is described in Porterfield, 1992, pp. 92-101.

<sup>202</sup> There are apparent exceptions to this. For example, two recordings featuring Peer's two most successful hillbilly acts in fictional encounters were apparently his idea: "Jimmie Rodgers visits the Carter Family" and "The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers in Texas", both recorded 12 June 1931.

<sup>203</sup> Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, University of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 47.

Despite the centrality of Rodgers within discourse on popular music and country music in particular, as well as the general agreement on the importance of his yodelling, there has yet to appear much actual analysis of his yodelling styles. Yet the yodel is surely a major factor in his popularity. His shortcomings in other aspects of musicianship have often been cited. Porterfield writes, for example, that he “is more or less immune to the finer points of musicianship”.<sup>204</sup> Peterson is more direct: “He was not a good musician, he could not read music, and he couldn’t keep time”.<sup>205</sup> We can well ask, then, what the factors contributing to his popularity were – or are. His yodelling, since it is virtually always present in one form or another, must surely be a part of that connection his audience make with him.

One aspect of Rodgers’s music that is often remarked on is his naturalness and directness. To quote Porterfield again, “To many, Jimmie Rodgers made ‘sincerity’, ‘honesty’, and ‘heart’ the compelling forces of country music”.<sup>206</sup> Chris Comber and Mike Paris wrote, “It was this genuine sincerity in his voice which gave him such widespread appeal. He did not put on any ‘airs

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<sup>204</sup> Nolan Porterfield, 1992/1979, p. 43.

<sup>205</sup> Peterson, 1997, p. 48.

<sup>206</sup> Porterfield, 1992/1979, p. 146.



and graces', and his singing voice was as unaffected as his speaking voice".<sup>207</sup> The perception of such qualities doubtless must have been facilitated to some extent by the improvement in recording technology resulting from the invention of the microphone. His vocal style would not have been well-served by acoustic or mechanical recording for it lacked the projection, the mere volume, necessary for success with a recording horn. His vocal inflection and the clarity of his guitar playing come through sufficiently well that people could respond to their immediacy, as it were, allowing him to be considered "one of us".

An important distinction between classical music and popular music involves the perception of the singer. In classical music the singers stand outside the song, so to speak. The singers are vehicles; the humanity they express is that of the creator, not themselves. In popular music, the situation is very different: the singer must always give the impression that he or she is the creator of the music, regardless of who has composed it. This notion of "sincerity" is vitally important in popular music. In order to appreciate the singer in popular music, one must to some degree identify with him or her. Rodgers had the gift, greatly facilitated by the new techniques of recording with microphones, of reaching audiences and convincing them of his

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<sup>207</sup> Chris Comber and Mike Paris, "Jimmie Rodgers", *Stars of Country Music*, Bill C. Malone and Judith McCulloh, eds., University of Illinois Press, 1975, pp. 128-129.

sincerity. Peterson states that what made his music work was his “ability to take a song and by bending the melody, breaking meter, finding guitar work that fit, and adding his signature yodel . . . , to make his music seem an expression of his own personal feeling, and those of the listener as well”.<sup>208</sup>

His yodelling must surely have contributed to these ideas of sincerity and honesty. For one thing, his yodelling is always very relaxed, as is his singing style generally. In some of the slower songs he tends to hold the notes rather than indulge in melodic decorations. He never engages in very rapid rhythmic oscillation or in dizzying speed, nor is there any pretence of virtuosity. The tessitura is always in a comfortable range, not much higher than his normal voice, so it lacks shrillness or bite. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the yodelling always has a quality of familiarity. This is due to the fact that his yodelling syllables and his melodic patterns vary so little. By following the same incipits based on a few basic melodic shapes and rhythmic profiles and pronounced with the same syllables, he makes his yodels instantly recognisable and familiar, regardless of the style of the song. Like a sonic calling card, the simple figures he fits into an extraordinarily wide range of material serve as a mark of his personality and ownership of the material.

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<sup>208</sup> Peterson, p. 48.

Yet paradoxically, his yodelling has in some ways been an impediment to his popularity. To refer to another of Porterfield's statements about Rodgers:

Even in Rodgers's time, the yodel was a handicap, considered foreign and old-fashioned by many, and early in his career he'd borne the jibes of those who thought he should dress up like Farmer Brown or an Alpine warbler, in lederhosen and feathered cap. There's a lingering suspicion that Jimmie, a strong-minded soul if there ever was one, persisted in yodelling, in part, purely in defiance of those who said it wasn't the thing to do. In any event, soon no one was laughing: he had transformed the yodel into something uniquely his own, quite unlike any other before or after.<sup>209</sup>

This is true, for surely Rodgers and the yodel became linked in many people's minds. The yodel became his trademark – his signature – in the phrase of Robert Coltman.<sup>210</sup> That the yodel functions as a sonic logo for Rodgers is apparent not only from the "token" yodels in many of his songs, such as the brief yodel at the beginning of his recording of "Frankie and Johnnie"; it is especially noticeable in the records "Jimmie Rodgers visits the Carter Family" and "The Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers in Texas": in both of these he yodels in the spoken sections as well as in the sung sections.

With Rodgers the familiar, the known, and the predictable seem very important, considering how similar his yodels are and the small number of techniques he employed. This is evident not only in his yodelling but in the selection of songs. There are certain types of song to which he returned over

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<sup>209</sup> Nolan Porterfield, "Hey, Hey, Tell 'Em 'Bout Us: Jimmie Rodgers Visits The Carter Family" in *Country, The Music and The Musicians*, eds. Paul Kingsbury, Alan Axelrod and Susan Costello, The Country Music Foundation and Abbeville Press, 1994/1988, p.39.

<sup>210</sup> Coltman, p. 92.

and over again: blues, lullaby, sentimental, jazzy, Hawaiian, and cowboy. Though there is novelty in his selection and he managed to stay up to date, novelty *per se* was not really what he was about; rather he seems interested more in the familiar and comfortable. Hence the ever-present use of his aural trademark. This can be compared with other singers who had a certain sound or mannerism that they employed to keep their image alive in the public's ears. Bing Crosby's series of plosives, his mellow "ba-ba-ba-boo", functions in much the same sort of way. We may think of these as mere gimmicks, yet such marks of distinctiveness are vitally important in establishing a performer's identity and ensuring audience recognition.

**Jimmie Rodgers's yodel types: turnarounds, melodic style, syllabic uniformity.**

The yodelling in Rodgers's songs generally falls into one of only a few basic patterns. These include first species yodels functioning as brief refrains, such as the blue yodel turnarounds, truncated turnarounds, longer refrains, and extended passages or breaks which occur only once within a song. In addition he frequently uses second species yodels to decorate or emphasise words. The following table illustrates some of these types. Not intended to be complete, it shows the typical Jimmie Rodgers yodel distribution in some of his well-known songs.

<i>B Y Turnaround</i>	<i>Truncated turnaround</i>	<i>Refrain</i>	<i>Break</i>
Blue Yodels (except Nos. 2 and 8) Memphis Blues	Frankie and Johnnie	Away Out on the Mountain, Dear Old Sunny South by the Sea	Never No Mo' Blues

The most common pattern found in his material is a yodelled turnaround occurring in the blues songs. This is a simple cadential figure involving the V and I chords of the song's key and serving to separate the verses of the song. Philip Tagg defines turnaround as a "(1) short harmonic sequence (e.g. at end of 12-bar blues) directed towards a reprise of the preceding periodic pattern; (2) by extension, a repeated sequence of chords, usually three or four and occupying a period of two to four bars, e. g. I-vi- ii/IV-V; a.k.a. 'vamp' (as in vamp till ready)".<sup>211</sup> Rodgers employs two turnaround figures which are essentially the same except in the diminution of the rhythm; hence, I call the second type a truncated turnaround. (Figures 6.1 and 6.2)

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<sup>211</sup> Tagg and Clarida, 2003, p. 810.

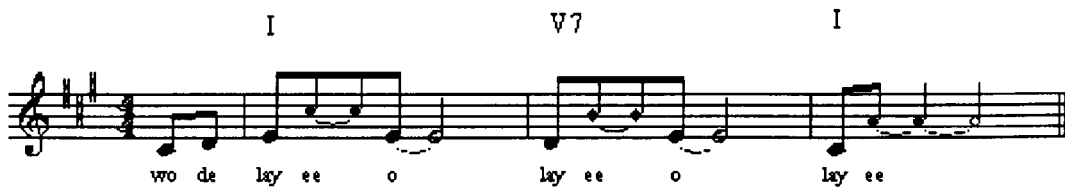


Figure 6.1. Jimmie Rodgers, Blue Yodel turnaround museme.



Figure 6.2. Jimmie Rodgers, truncated turnaround museme.

Fifty two of the one hundred and eight songs with yodels make use of one or the other of these turnaround figures. They occur in all but two of the so-called blue yodels, in his other blues songs, as well as in other songs, such as the ballad, "Frankie and Johnnie". When Rodgers employs his somewhat perfunctory yodel as a mere trademark – a token yodel – it is invariably the truncated turnaround.

A second type of yodel employed by Jimmie Rodgers is a refrain. These differ from the turnarounds in that they are usually longer and more expansive melodically. They frequently move away from the standard dominant/tonic cadence of the turnarounds, but not always. Very often the yodel refrain begins on the subdominant chord, as in "Away out on the Mountain", which contrasts with the verse's beginning on the tonic and opens up another harmonic region within the song. The effect of a new voice, such as the yodel represents, on a new chord freshens up the otherwise predictable atmosphere and texture.

While technically the turnarounds are refrains, their function and affect differ significantly. This is especially the case with the blue yodel turnarounds, discussed below, which are identified with the blues songs and therefore with the moods and imagery associated with them. Thus, not simply to avoid confusion with other turnarounds and refrains, but to mark their special quality, the blue yodel turnarounds receive their own classification.

Moreover, what is called a refrain with regard to the Jimmie Rodgers yodel-types often extends into a much larger yodel strand, involving other chords than those outlined by the refrain *per se*. These longer strands are called yodel breaks in this classification. The yodel breaks in Jimmie Rodgers thus function as a vocalised version of an instrumental break. The term break

derives from jazz performance practice and originally indicated all the other instruments dropping out for a brief flourish by one solo instrument (or two in the case of King Oliver and Louis Armstrong), break indicating a break in the instrumental texture. However, break now is commonly used in popular music circles to refer to an instrumental solo often over the same chords as the verse, and it is in that sense that the term is used here. In the case of Jimmie Rodgers's songs, however, the chords over which the yodel occurs are frequently different from those of the verse. A few songs incorporate both a yodel turnaround and a yodel break, but more often Rodgers relies on one or the other.

Aside from the yodel in "Sleep, Baby, Sleep", which is discussed below, Rodgers uses only one other conventional tune, the 5-6-5-3-1-5 pattern that we have seen already in an earlier generation of yodellers. A singer's use of a familiar yodel melody seems akin to the use of floating verses by blues singers in the construction songs. Their familiarity from other contexts opens regions of associations within the song that go beyond the words alone. This idea is discussed in the next section.



### **Sleep, Baby, Sleep and other lullabies**

Rodgers recorded "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" at his first session on 4 August 1927, in Bristol, Tennessee, and it has remained one of his most popular songs. It had already been recorded several times in the acoustic era by yodellers such as George P. Watson (1911), Ward Barton (1916), Matt Keefe (1917), and the black vaudevillian who performed in drag, Charles Anderson (1923). Not surprisingly, then, Rodgers considered "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" "old-timey" when he recorded it.<sup>212</sup> Yet it has been one of his most enduring songs, and the yodel melody in it has interesting textual relations not only with past performances of the song, but with many later songs in the hillbilly era.

It is salutary to remember that Rodgers (and many others of his era and later) learned music through oral tradition. While sheet music with yodelling was plentiful in his day, he learned his trade from other performers and from recordings.<sup>213</sup> Therefore we are not surprised at the way certain yodel melodies become treated as formulas that combine and recombine with other elements in the production and reproduction of the musical text. This concept has been discussed in relation to blues formulas constituting part of the oral blues tradition in Mississippi by David Evans in his book *Big Road Blues*.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Porterfield, 1992/1979, p. 75.

<sup>213</sup> Porterfield, 1992/1979, p. 46.

<sup>214</sup> David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in the Folk Blues*, New York: Da Capo Press, 1982, pp. 315-316.

Evans argues that floating verses (sometimes called maverick verses by other writers) and melodic material undergo various processes of recombination in the composition and performance of the blues that is analogous to the formulaic procedures of epic poetry.<sup>215</sup> There is evidence aplenty of this in the blues songs of Rodgers, where lines from “his” songs are heard in many others. There is no reason why the yodels in many of these songs should not be viewed in the same way. They occur in songs of similar type and mood, and they articulate with the past in a way that is nostalgic and comfortable, invoking the spirit and themes of earlier yodel songs by virtue of the allusion.

It has already been demonstrated in the previous chapters how melodic phrases of quite short duration were sufficient to suggest “yodel” in the context of classical music and how entire melodies might reappear in the context of a different song in popular music. This sort of process is in evidence in Rodgers, where a particular melody, in this case that associated with the yodelled section of “Sleep, Baby, Sleep”, can reappear in a different context. To those hearers familiar with the genre – that is those who are “codally competent” in Philip Tagg’s phrase – the melody has the power to evoke associations that go beyond the confines of one mere song, so to speak, and connect with others and the associations and connotations of those. The

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<sup>215</sup> Floating verses denote that category of stanzas, lines, or conceits that recur in many blues songs, as for example, “I’m going down to the river, take me a rocking chair” or “I went to the station, looked up on the board”.

field of association and connotation is thus broadly enriched as the intertextual relations within the genre reinforce one another. Rather than suggesting lack of originality or creativity, the sounding of the formula opens the doors to the semantic storehouse embedded in the genre's history.

Jimmie Rodgers's presentation of the yodel in "Sleep, Baby, Sleep", one of his most extended, deserves special consideration. It is typical of his way of simply holding his falsetto notes for long durations with gentle releases at the ends, a technique which may suggest dreaminess, floating, or serenity. These qualities seem to inhere in a number of his more plaintive yodels, as for example "Never No Mo' Blues". Yodellers of the earlier generation who had recorded "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" use the same melodic contour, but they lack the floating quality of the Rodgers version. Doubtless this is partly due to the facts that Rodgers was recorded in an entirely different technological circumstance and that he is performing solo accompanied by guitar.<sup>216</sup>

George P. Watson's 1911 version, for example, has a much more dramatic approach to the yodel, and he seems to be interested in maximum projection of his voice, which could be attributable to the constraints of acoustic recording. In addition to that, the excessive rubato of his phrasing may strike modern ears as very old-fashioned and cloying. Also contrasting with Rodgers's is Charles Anderson's 1923 recording, where the rigid beat and

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<sup>216</sup> As was Ward Barton on his recording of "Sleep, Baby, Sleep". See Chapter 5.

showy yodelling, with forcefully-held falsetto notes, militate against associations of warmth, comfort, and security that one might reasonably expect a lullaby to convey. One assumes that it was qualities such as these in Rodgers's yodelling to which Chris Comber and Mike Paris referred when they wrote that "it was this vocal phenomenon that catapulted Rodgers to fame and made his music different from anything that had come before,"<sup>217</sup> since it was patently not the first time yodelling had been recorded. (Figure 6.3)



Figure 6.3. Jimmie Rodgers, "Sleep, Baby, Sleep", yodel incipit.

While the yodel tune of "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" apparently derives from nineteenth century practice, Rodgers's use of it reaffirmed its prestige among yodellers of his generation. The tune recurs in very much the same form in other of his recordings, such as "Lullaby Yodel", while phrases derived from it occur in songs such as "Treasures Untold". These two songs extend the

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<sup>217</sup> Comber and Paris, p. 122.

mood associations of this tune. In the “Lullaby Yodel”, the lullaby theme is mixed with longing for the lost child, taken when the lovers parted:

My baby I know that you want me,  
 Each lonely night and day.  
 Your dear blue eyes how they haunt me,  
 Though you're far away.

“Treasures Untold” has a similar mood of longing, this time longing for the love of a girl he has just met:

Dreaming of you and your eyes of blue  
 I've loved you forever it seems.  
 I have longed for you dear  
 And wanted you near,  
 You are the girl of my dreams.

And though I have met you just now,  
 I'll tell you of my love somehow.  
 If I could but win your heart, little girl,  
 Then I would have treasures untold.

The kisses you give me in life's sweetest dream  
 Are even more precious than gold.  
 I love your sweet face and your dear smiling eye,  
 How often this story's been told!  
 If I could but win your heart, little girl,  
 Then I would have treasures untold.

Variations of the “Sleep, Baby, Sleep” yodel occur in many other yodel songs.

Goebel Reeves often used it, as for example in “The Tramp's Mother”,

“Hobo's Lullaby”, and “The Wayward Son”. These songs also have lyric

themes that are sentimental, backward glancing, and “down home”. They

share with the Rodgers songs a nostalgic longing, in Reeves's case, a longing for return or for home. They also share the 3/4 metre of Rodgers's songs, the time signature most frequently encountered in the sentimental songs.<sup>218</sup>

Rodgers's recording of the standard "Rock all our Babies to Sleep" shares the lullaby theme, but is really more of a droll comic song than a stylised lullaby. It was recorded several times in the hillbilly era: Riley Puckett's recording from 1924 has the distinction of apparently having been the first of the hillbilly records with yodelling. The Leake County Revelers made their version in 1928; Rodgers's recording is from 1932. Clearly the song was some kind of favourite, even if it seems dull to our ears. Its *Biergarten* rhythm and melody recall aspects of George P. Watson's "Hi Le Hi Lo" and suggest that this song's origins are in the late nineteenth century's fascination with comic German songs and parodies.

### **Blue Yodels**

The blue yodels are a special category of song in Jimmie Rodgers's output and by virtue of the tendencies of academia and historiography have been given a primacy in his recordings. There are thirteen altogether, including several unnumbered ones such as "Anniversary Blue Yodel" and "Jimmie Rodgers's

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<sup>218</sup> "The Tramp's Mother" is in 4/4, but the metre changes to 3/4 for the yodelled coda.

Last Blue Yodel". In addition there are several other blues songs virtually the same but not so designated.

In his article "Jimmie Rodgers, A Folksong Catalyst", John Greenway describes the blue yodel:

The identifying characteristics of the 'blue yodel' are (1) the slight situational pattern, that of a "rounder" boasting of his prowess as a lover, but ever in fear of the "creeper", evidence of whose presence he reacts to either with threats against the sinning parties or with the declaration that he can get another woman easily enough; and (2) the prosodic pattern, the articulation of Negro maverick stanzas dealing with violence and promiscuity, often with double meaning, and followed by a yodel refrain.<sup>219</sup>

Tony Russell adds that, "striking features of the blue yodels included the very frequent railroad references [and] the Negro maverick stanzas dealing with violence and promiscuity".<sup>220</sup>

The blue yodels are distinguished by their use of 12-bar blues form with an AAB stanza pattern. The verses are separated by the yodelled turnaround. While the yodeleme is the distinctive feature that makes a vocal passage a yodel, other musemes, naturally, combine with it to give the overall sonic event its character. One that can be cited as an example is the particular rhythm that is used frequently in the Jimmie Rodgers blue yodels. This is a

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<sup>219</sup>Greenway, p. 233.

<sup>220</sup> Tony Russell, *Blacks, Whites and Blues*, reprinted in *Yonder Comes the Blues*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 190.

lazy, drawled out “yodelayee-hoo” that begins many of this particular Rodgers yodel type.

This type of incipit is different from the very prim style of the earlier yodellers I mentioned, especially George P. Watson, whose yodelling occurs frequently in the context of songs making overt references to Germany or to Alpine themes and images. Furthermore, the music is frequently a translation of existing *Volksmusik*, or at least imitative of it. These pieces are invariably in major key tonality (that is, with a leading note), are usually based upon traditional dance steps like polka and waltz, and are played in straight rhythm.

Rodgers’s blue yodel turnarounds are different along virtually every parameter. First of all, they are based on blues scales – that is, have no leading note – and so they breathe a very different tonal atmosphere. Moreover, the rhythm is swung, which means that the divisions of the beat are not even tick tock tick tock, but rather short long short long. The lazy swung rhythm involves the body in a more fluid kind of response, and even hints at a grinding, sexual movement. The turnaround has more in common with the original yodel function, that of a call, rather than the opportunity for virtuoso display that the yodel seems to be in the early acoustical recordings. As such, and in the context of a blues song with highly sexualised lyrics, it



equates to the territorial call of a sexually aroused male. Moreover, as the blue yodels are based on variants of the twelve bar blues, it is not particularly surprising that we find that the blue yodel anacrusis is a vocalised version of the same museme that opens so many ragtime-blues, such as W. C. Handy's "The Memphis Blues". (Figure 6.4)



Figure 6.4. W. C. Handy, "Memphis Blues" museme, opening gesture.

Rodgers's records really sound different from the blues songs with yodels that Al Bernard and Frank Kamplain made in the early 20s. Whereas Bernard may swing his vocal line, Kamplain's yodelling doesn't suggest blues at all. "O-le-o-lady" mentions "driving away the blues", but that is as far as it goes: it is a fast waltz. The concept of "driving away the blues" clearly predated the musical form blues. Even the yodels in "Oh Joe" and in "31<sup>st</sup> Street Blues" sound light-hearted and more appropriate to a comic context.<sup>221</sup> With

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<sup>221</sup> Al Bernard and Frank Kamplain, "O-Le-O-Lady", Edison Diamond Disc 51115-R, 1923; "Oh, Joe", Edison Diamond Disc 50672-R, 1920; "31<sup>st</sup> Street Blues", Edison Diamond Disc 51271-L, 1924.

Rodgers the black idiom is not travestied as it is in Bernard's superannuated minstrel caricature. It is assimilated.<sup>222</sup> (Figure 6.5)



Figure 6.5. Kamplain's un-bluesy yodel in "O-Le-O-Lady", transcribed from Edison Diamond Disc 51115-R, 1923.

Musicologists have been singularly uninterested in Jimmie Rodgers. The notable exception to this fact has been the analysis of the thirteen blue yodels by the eminent Prof. Franz Födermayer of the University of Vienna. In his study "*Zur Jodeltechnik der Jimmie Rodgers: Die Blue Yodels*", Födermayer has analysed the melodic patterning of the blue yodels.<sup>223</sup> He notes the short two bar structure of most of them involving stepwise movement upwards followed by three descending sixths. This pattern occurs in all but numbers 2 and 8, which have more extended yodels. The three descending sixths have

<sup>222</sup> This is not to say Jimmie Rodgers did not sink to racist caricature of blacks. Like many of his generation he worked in minstrelsy during his journeyman years. Later, in 1930, he recorded a blackface sketch with I. N. Bronson called "The Pullman Porters", which was unissued.

<sup>223</sup> Franz Födermayer, "*Zur Jodeltechnik des Jimmie Rodgers*", *For Gerhard Kubik: Festschrift*, ed. A. Schmidhofer and D. Schuller, Frankfurt, 1994, pp.381-404.

already been noticed in Matt Keefe's "Strolling Yodeler", which was discussed in Chapter 5. As Födermayer is more concerned with the melodic shapes of the yodels, he does not discuss their significance; therefore it is that subject I wish to address now.

Of all the yodels types in Rodgers's songs, the blue yodel turnarounds most clearly function as calls. In other words, they have an announcing function. They announce the singer or the beginning of the song in some cases. They act as a kind of sign associated with the performer (and later with his style or genre). They are marked by a particular insouciant character and serve to announce and to objectify the character of the singer/persona. Obviously the blues turnaround lines up squarely with the call aspect of yodels generally and carries some of that connotation deriving from its historical uses. But in the new context of Rodgers's blues songs the yodel resembles a territorial marker for the sexual male animal on the prowl. Such yodelling fitted in very well with the personae of these blues songs: devil-may-care, tough, amorous, and louche.

The turnaround in the blue yodels is not the only variant of this figure, however. There is a shortened turnaround using the same pitches but in 2/4 rather than 4/4. This compressed turnaround acts more as a vamp. Perhaps due to its diminution, it has less of the wailing, howling quality of the most

effective blue yodel turnarounds. In comparison with the longer version, the truncated turnarounds seem almost perfunctory, and indeed they are, occurring as tokens in some songs where there is no other yodelling, for example in the ballad “Frankie and Johnny”. (See figure 6.2)

“Black falsetto” is described by Russell in this way:

The voice was raised an octave, generally in the last syllable of a word, often at the end of a line; the effect was rather of a whoop or howl than of the seesawing about the voice’s breaking point which makes a yodel. It is difficult to tell what relationship there was between the two devices. David Evans has suggested, very reasonably, that the blue yodel synthesised Swiss (yodelling) and African (falsetto) traditions; the falsetto ‘leap’ was established among Blacks since the days of the field holler . . .and Rodgers, hearing it, thought it analogous to the yodel and inserted both into his blues.<sup>224</sup>

This is all well and good, and in the case of a blues song the rising octave decorating certain words seems indeed to be modelled directly on black practices. But, as is obvious, Rodgers’s material was not only influenced by black traditions.

There is, in fact, a clear difference between two types of second species yodelling found in Rodgers: the black falsetto and word-breaking of the sort described in the previous chapter. If we recognise “black falsetto” in Russell’s definition, then the octave leaps at the ends of words in blues songs may be taken as members of that set. They occur at the end of the line of a blues

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<sup>224</sup> Russell, p. 194.

stanza. However, the second species yodels in many of Rodgers's other songs seem more in the tradition of word breaking such as we have seen in the nineteenth century classics, "Emmet's Lullaby" and "Roll on Silver Moon". It is the overall mood and genre context that differentiates these, as well as the actual technique of the break. That is, if it is the last word of the line, as in so many of the Blue Yodels, or if it is something medial. However, these distinctions are based more upon social factors, that is historical and genre relationships, rather than upon any physiological distinction. Numerous examples exist where it is difficult to assign a particular vocal trick to one particular line of influence, and it is at those points where distinctions such as "black falsetto", "Swiss yodel", "Hawaiian falsetto", and so on break down.

Cliff Carlisle was among the best of those who imitated Jimmie Rodgers's Blue Yodels. With Carlisle there is a greater emphasis upon the sexual innuendo in the songs, such as "Mouse Ear Blues" and "Ash Can Blues". Moreover, the boastfulness and even imagery of songs such as "Ring Tail Tom" recall and connect with legendary nineteenth-century heroes of the West. For example, folklorist B. A. Botkin, in his *The American People*, has given this excerpt from *Mike Fink, King of the Mississippi Keelboatmen*, published in 1933:

I'm a Salt River roarer! I'm a ring-tailed squealer! I'm a reg'lar screamer from the ol' Massassip'! WHOOP! I'm the very infant that refused his milk before its eyes were open and called out for a bottle of old Rye! I love the women an' I'm chockfull o' fight. . . Come on, you flatters, you bargers, you milk-white mechanics, an' see how tough I am to chew! I ain't had a fight for two days an' I'm spilein' for exercise. Cock-a-doodle-do!<sup>225</sup>

From this example we see how loud braggadocio coupled with whoops and yells were already a part of a particular masculine type that had found acceptance among many Americans at this time. The yodelled call appears in light of this as a musical analogue to both the boast and the yell. This concept is explored further in the following chapter.

### **Hawaii and Jimmie Rodgers**

A number of the Jimmie Rodgers songs are associated with Hawaii: this is either through explicit reference to Hawaii in the lyric, or through the instrumentation and styles of playing associated with Hawaiian music.

His interest in Hawaiian music is well documented.<sup>226</sup> His first foray into the style in his recordings is "Dear Old Sunny South by the Sea". Here the yodel can be regarded a paradise metaphor. This recalls the associations between yodel interludes and paradise imagery seen in the nineteenth century, only in this case the imaginary setting has shifted from pastoral Alpine peaks to

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<sup>225</sup> B. A. Botkin, ed., *The American People in their Stories, Legends, Tall Tales, Traditions, Ballads, and Songs*, London: Pilot Press, Ltd, 1946.

<sup>226</sup> For example, see Porterfield, 1992/1979, p. 58.

tropical seaside. Rodgers has even transplanted the typical Hawaiian landscapes to Dixie, stating explicitly in the first verse:

In my dear old Southern home,  
I was happy as I could be  
So I'm going back  
To that dear old shack  
In my dear old sunny South by the sea.

Upon which follows the yodel refrain. The Hawaiian-ness comes from the presence of both a ukulele and a Hawaiian guitar.<sup>227</sup>

However, Rodgers does not attempt to sing in a style that imitates Hawaiian practices, the so-called *leo ke'eki'e*.<sup>228</sup> This kind of falsetto singing is considered analogous to the harmonics played on Hawaiian guitar;<sup>229</sup> this sort of second species yodelling – exemplified by Mike Hanapi and Sol Ho'opi'i – was never engaged in by Rodgers, although there are numerous other examples of his singing second species. Richard Slatta, in his book *Cowboys of the Americas*, states that “Hawaiian music included yodelling in the 1890s”.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> For a discussion of Hawaiian guitar, also called steel guitar, see Tim Wise, “Hawaiian Guitar”, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, eds. John Shepherd, et al., New York and London: Continuum, Vol. 2. pp. 134-36.

<sup>228</sup> Plantenga, p.119.

<sup>229</sup> Mantle Hood, “Musical Ornamentation as History: The Hawaiian Steel Guitar”, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 15, 1983, pp. 141-48.

<sup>230</sup> Richard W. Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 127.

Stuart Hamblen's recording of "Hawaii" from 1930 is an interesting intersection of styles. Hamblen was an avowed follower of Rodgers. There are intertextual links with some of Rodgers's songs: for example the opening line "I am dreaming . . ." recalls the Blue Yodeller's "Daddy and Home", and there is the mention of the hut on the beach, analogous to the shack in "Dear Old Sunny South by the Sea". Further, the black falsetto, the name for the rising yodeleme figure, occurs on the final syllable when "Hawaii" is sung (pronounced "ha-wah-ya"). Yet the effect in this context does not suggest or recall blues. Rather it is clearly an indigenous musical resource – that is, already belonging to the musical techniques of the performer, used as an analogy, or as a replacement for the Hawaiian falsetto technique known.

Rodgers himself never actually imitated the Hawaiian singing style, a fact which is somewhat surprising given his great interest in Hawaiian music; several of his songs have Hawaiian themes or are connected by the use of Hawaiian guitar and Hawaiian musicians accompanying him. While he never overtly used second species yodels to imitate Hawaiian styles, his first species yodels bear resemblance to Hawaiian melodies. The yodel in "Never No Mo Blues", for example, shares characteristics with the refrain from "Aloha Oe", the famous tune composed in 1879 by Queen Liliuokalani, Hawaii's last monarch. All these songs have the theme of parting, while the smooth connectedness of the melody in the Hawaiian song is very suggestive



of the balmy serenity associated with the mythical tropical paradise, however without the forlorn quality of the yodel in “Never No Mo’ Blues”.

There were pressures upon many acts during the hillbilly era to conform to the stereotype through their manner and dress. In interview with Lyle Miles, who performed in a group called the Hornellsville Hillbillies, the response to the question, “Whose idea was it to put on the hats and the beard and the makeup?” is, “You had to do it if you was going to put an act on the stage”.<sup>231</sup>

Goebel Reeves was a very fine yodeller who, unlike Rodgers, better fitted the hillbilly stereotype. There is a comic element in many of his songs. Like Rodgers, he frequently used the “Sleep, Baby, Sleep” pattern in sentimental songs and lullabies. But unlike Rodgers he used a chromatically descending version of the 7-6-5-4-3 cadence that became a standard yodelling trope which took on particular importance in the cowboy-style yodellers. It occurs in Patsy Montana’s yodelling as well as in Wilf Carter and Elton Britt.<sup>232</sup> This particular trope allows very rapid yodelling to demonstrate virtuosity and virility. In Patsy Montana’s singing, however, it is much slower.

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<sup>231</sup> Simon J. Broner, “Corn Enough to make it Entertaining – an interview with Lyle Miles of the Hornellsville Hillbillies”, *Old Time Music*, 45, Spring, 1989, p. 8.

<sup>232</sup> These singers are discussed in Chapter 7.

Reeves also made effective use of trilling and gurgling. These features add the comic, loony outrageousness befitting the unselfconscious hick buffoon that Reeves adopted as his persona, the Texas Drifter.<sup>233</sup> Reeves also frequently employed variants of the yodel-eedle-odle incipit with the yodel refrain beginning on the subdominant chord; this is the same as Rodgers's "Away Out On The Mountain". But Reeves's trilling and quirky leaps give his yodels a far more humorous cast than any of Rodgers.

Although Rodgers records were made for the hillbilly market, that image is one he never cultivated. He was photographed in natty urban swell clothes, in railway gear, in Cowboy clothes, even early in his career wearing a lei, but he never posed in hillbilly costume. This is very significant. Neither did he sing songs that were overtly hillbilly. True, the occasional item in his discography is standard hillbilly material, such as "Rock all our Babies to Sleep". He also referred to one of his early ensembles as his "hillbilly ork";<sup>234</sup> but the image of the stereotype mountaineer was one that he avoided. Yet his yodelling style had an obvious impact on other performers whose work, and the market it was intended for, was designated hillbilly by the record companies who produced them.

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<sup>233</sup> This is just the most frequently used of his stage names. He really was a Texan, but no buffoon, having been raised in educated and privileged circumstances. See Hoeptner, 1975.

<sup>234</sup> Porterfield, 1992/1979, p. 71.

The yodel-eedle-odle pattern is very likely a variant of the Fritz lullaby incipit. This is plainly audible in Oliver Hardy's lovely performance of Emmet's "Lullaby" in the 1930 two-reeler *Brats*. When Hardy sings the lullaby, he sings the yodel as well, clearly enunciating the incipit on these syllables. *Brats* was released in 1930. Rodgers – on record at least – had only been using this figure since 1929. It begins to emerge in "Everybody Does It In Hawaii", but is fully-fledged only in "Jimmie's Mean Mama Blues" recorded in 1930. Thus, it is probable that this syllabic configuration was already in use and not in all likelihood a question of his influence.

However, the contexts in which Rodgers most frequently employed this incipit, and normally leading into a chord on the subdominant, gave it a particularly sunny cheeriness, which in turn fitted into later hillbilly songs as a sonic anaphone for grinning. In fact, the mere pronunciation of these syllables forces the lips into a grin, so it is little wonder that the primary effect is of grinning.

The yodel strand beginning 5-6-5-3-1 was used by Rodgers. Early versions of this are in Ward Barton's "Rock-a-bye Baby". This figure gets a particularly insouciant hillbilly characterisation in Rex Griffin's "You Gotta go to Work". Yet Rodgers used it more in his dreamy, backward-glancing songs, such as

“Whisper Your Mother’s Name” and “A Drunkard’s Child”. For him, it appears to have had a sentimental quality.

The following is a brief list of the songs of the hillbilly era employing second species yodelling. It is intended to give an indication of how widespread this vocal technique had become by the late 1920s and early 1930s in the hillbilly and cowboy, and in the case of Emmett Miller, blues and hot jazz-influenced, genres. Each of the performers mentioned, aside from Miller, recorded songs featuring first species yodels as well. Second species yodels appear not to have been employed by other singers of the era who did not yodel normally; in other words, the technique is heard in hillbilly, cowboy, and blues-influences songs, but not in the more mainstream popular material.

Therefore, the occurrence of second species seems in most instances to follow from the performer’s use of first species. Exceptions to this are examples of second species yodelling in Hawaiian music and occurrences of so-called black falsetto, as for example the word-breaking heard in some of Tommy Johnson’s recordings.

## Second species yodelling in songs by Rodgers and others

Jimmie Rodgers	Hobo Bill's Last Ride
Jimmie Rodgers	T. B. Blues
Cliff Carlisle	Chicken Roost Blues
Emmett Miller	Anytime
Wilf Carter	Hillbilly Valley
Wilf Carter	The Golden Lariat
Goebel Reeves	Cold and Hungry

### Vocal variation

In addition to the species described above, certain variants of vocal production while yodelling occur. These do not seem to appear on record before Jimmie Rodgers. None of the yodellers in the acoustic recording era did anything similar. Those employed by Rodgers include hummed yodelling and moaned yodelling, wherein the vowels are produced through the nasal cavity rather than the open mouth. Their use has a way of subverting the more raucous aspects of yodelling.

All of Rodgers's records, along with a number of alternate takes, have been released by the Bear Family Record Company including a discography prepared by Nolan Porterfield. It is interesting to compare records made at the same session. Frequently a vocal trick or mannerism will be used in a particular session and never again.

We can be reasonably sure that the fact that a certain vocal trick appears on all the tracks cut at a particular session and on no others indicates a momentary infatuation with the device. [Compare the “pick that thing” exhortations in the sessions from August 11 and 15, 1932.] Rodgers seemed to do this sort of thing in spurts. A particular mannerism appears on every record cut in a session, never to be employed again. It may be unfair to regard such mannerisms as gimmicks used on a session and more accurate to hold that these were something that interested Rodgers enough at the time to include in all the tracks he was cutting. The hummed yodels (for example in “Why Did You Give Me Your Love”) are a good example of this and similarly the little yodelled grace notes. But it is interesting that the use of these techniques correspond with the recordings of some of the more mainstream material, that is, not the blues and cowboy songs. It is as though Rodgers is looking for other, perhaps more acceptable forms of the yodel, for new ways of presenting the basic soulfulness of the cry from the heart, but more stylised and more repressed. The hummed yodels are an odd example. Clearly, humming is not the extrovert activity that yodelling is. Humming usually signifies a definite closing in on oneself; it tends to suggest a shutting off from the rest of the world, or boredom. Humming is frequently inaudible except to the person doing it. It does not imply the high degree of abandon or freedom from inhibition that a good loud yodel does.

Moreover, it is not really possible to hum particularly loudly. Therefore, by humming the yodel it is at a stroke toned down, tamed – domesticated, even. The falsetto-breaking of these nasalised vowels creates a somewhat queasy image. They certainly seem weaker and diffident compared to the blue yodel turnarounds. Add to this the somewhat fey grace notes, and the turn-of-the-century Tin Pan Alley sentimental song types seem to be evoked. This is very far from the gamblers and rounders in the blues with the turnaround. The humming was perhaps Rodgers's solution to the problem of how to yodel in the parlour.

“Those Gambler's Blues” is remarkable for its minor key; basically, it is a version of “St. James Infirmary”. This is for solo voice with Lani MacIntire playing guitar. However, it is also noteworthy for the extreme use of yodel grace notes for pathos and for the odd syllabification of the yodel. It is unlike all Rodgers's other yodelling, more of a despairing moan than his usual jubilant or insouciant call. It also has no quasi-anacrusis. This too gives it the feel of moaning, wailing, lamentation, which is of course fitting considering the context of the song.

To summarise, the yodel refrains beginning on the subdominant, comprising a swung incipit and using /i/ as primary falsetto syllable tend to be associated

with "hillbilly" material, in Rodgers as well as in his followers. But the blues turnaround was Jimmie Rodgers's big contribution, imitated very frequently and characterising the white hillbilly blues. Moreover, yodelling in many of these hillbilly songs seems to equate with boasting, as in Rodgers's "In the Jailhouse Now" ("I told her I was the swellest man around"), Goebel Reeves's "Reckless Tex", and practically all the blue yodels. The boastfulness is a theme that crosses into the cowboy songs considered in the next chapter.



## Chapter 7

### Cowboys and Yodelling

The cowboy is one of the triumphs of the mass media, for it is a ubiquitous idea. The mythicizing of the American West and Western heroes began in the nineteenth century, but with the development of radio, film, and finally the phonograph, the idea of cowboys as a special type reached well beyond the geographical region they inhabited and beyond even the borders of the United States. Popular music was integral to the mass mediation of the idea and of the representation of the cowboy, and yodelling was one of its primary signifiers.

America's westward expansion, its Manifest Destiny in the sonorous phrase of nineteenth century ideologues, was, to quote historian David Hamilton Murdoch,

personified by figures who were given special status. Out of the West ultimately came America's most durable heroes. When shorter-lived enthusiasms had faded, permanent heroic status was not given to Revolutionary War patriots, Southern cavaliers, intrepid Yankee skippers, penniless immigrants who became millionaire entrepreneurs, or men of the people who went from log cabin to White House – though each of these had his day and all embodied some aspect of America's belief about herself. It was the western hero who found the widest appeal and showed the most consistent vitality..<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> David Hamilton Murdoch, *The American West: the Invention of a Myth*, Welsh Academic Press, 2001, p. 26.

Murdoch is writing with regard to figures such as Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and Kit Carson. Although the first two were not cowboys, aspects of their legends ultimately were incorporated into the conception of the cowboy hero.

What the Western themes provided popular song was greater scope, and even a justification, for bravura yodelling. These result in part from the braggadocio and the rowdiness associated with the cowboy culture. These contributed to the creation a new masculine type that the yodel helps to characterise. At the same time the door was opened for the development of a new feminine counterpart as well: the singing cowgirl.

With regard to boasting, B. A. Botkin, in his *The American People*, argues that

Boasting – the epic brag – has always been part of the trappings of the hero. The strong man would gird himself for combat and inspire confidence in his followers by rehearsing his exploits in big talk. In his “paradise of puffers”, however, the backwoods boaster tended to boast in terms of the future rather than of the past, and seemed more interested in making claims than in living up to them. Moreover, since boasting, like bombast, contains in itself the seed of its own travesty, it became hard to distinguish bragging from windy laughing at bragging and serious from mock or burlesque boasts.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> B. A. Botkin, ed., *The American People in their Stories, Legends, Tall Tales, Traditions, Ballads, and Songs*, London: Pilot Press, Ltd, 1946, p. 18.

When the yodel was appropriated into the Western or cowboy genre, the aspects of the song context which changed were the details of its landscape and its mythology. Even in these, however, certain similarities with earlier yodel songs maintain: similarities in the ideas, notions, imagery, and so on of the lyric themes. Among these were an interest in the landscape, whether mountains or broad prairies, and in solitude.

Therefore, there were sufficient connections between lyric themes in the pastoral and mountain songs of the nineteenth century, and those in the commercially successful cowboy-styled songs of the 1930s, to create a site amenable to yodelling. Indeed, yodelling found its contemporary habitat, for the Western music genre is the only one today that actually cultivates yodelling in its first species manifestation. This means that the members of the Western Music Association now are the custodians of the yodel. They not only actively promote the Western heritage and mythology, celebrating it at annual conferences, but they have by their activity done the most to canonise yodellers and yodelling songs.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> The Western Music Association, according to its announcement at the beginning of each issue of *The Western Way*, was "founded in 1988 by western music performers and fans, supports and promotes the historic, traditional and contemporary music of the American West and the American Cowboy. A non-profit organization, the Western Music Association strives to bring ideals embodied in the "Code of the West" to everyone living in today's society. The American Cowboy represents honour, integrity, respect, and a love for mankind and the world in which he lives and works". The Western Music Association is based in Tucson, Arizona and publishes *The Western Way* quarterly.

Yet there is more than merely the landscape/yodel-call connection. The legends surrounding Western heroes very frequently depicted these men with some kind of yell or whoop. Thundering bluster was an important part of their representation: larger than life and louder than just about everyone else. For example, Botkin relates the following cowboy boast as an example of cowboy lore:

Half horse, half alligator, with a little touch of a snapping turtle, clumb (sic) a streak of lightning, and slid down a locust tree a hundred feet high, with a wild cat under each arm and never got a scratch. Whoopee-yip-ho!  
 I come to this country riding a lion, whipping him over the head with a .45 and picking my teeth with a .38 and wearing a .45 on each hip, using a cactus for a pillar (sic), whee-ee-e! I'm a two-gun man and a very bad man and won't do to monkey with. Whee-ee-o, I'm a bad man! Whoopee!  
 Raised in the backwoods, suckled by a polar bear, nine rows of jaw teeth, a double coat of hair, steel ribs, wire intestines, and a barbed wire tail, and I don't give a dang where I drag it. Whoopee-whee-a-ha!<sup>238</sup>

It is not difficult to understand how this kind of swaggering boastfulness, punctuated with whoops and hollers, can be transformed into song – especially songs with yodelling, for yodelling rarely fails to command attention. Even before the cowboys of the radio era, the Tin Pan Alley tunesmiths had made this connection between the Western he-man and his call. For example, in 1890 M. Witmark & Sons published a comic ditty called “A War Whoop from the Wild and Woolly West – O Wah Hoo” which, while not a yodel song, parodies the Western stereotype.

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<sup>238</sup> Botkin, p.53.

Oh there was once a desperado from the wild and woolly west,  
 He wore a big sombrero and a gun beneath his vest.  
 He took a trip to New York City just to give the West a rest,  
 And ev'ry where he went he yelled "O-wah-Hoo!"

He was a bold, bad man was this desperado,  
 And he struck that town like a big tornado.  
 And he walked around like the main Gazobo,  
 And ev'rywhere he went he yelled "O-wah-Hoo!"

He made a trip to Coney Island where he took in all the sights,  
 He saw the "Coo-chee Coo-chee" and the ladies dressed in tights.  
 And he became so much excited that he shot out all the lights,  
 And as he left the place he yelled "O wah hoo!"

Now there was one small Irish "copper" a patrolling on his beat,  
 He saw this Western cyclone come a whooping down the street.  
 And so he grabbed this desperado by his whiskers and his feet,  
 And put him where he couldn't yell "O wah hoo!"

He was a bold bad man, was this desperado,  
 But this Irish "cop" was a small tornado,  
 And he played "baseball" with that main Gazobo,  
 And ev'rywhere he went he yelled "O-wah-Hoo!"<sup>239</sup>

The cowboy image was cultivated in various sub genres that began to emerge out of the original hillbilly music during the course of the 1930s. This chapter explores some of the types and personae represented in these various sub genres incorporating the cowboy imagery and how the yodel contributes to these characterisations.

The Western genre began to emerge with the commercial recordings of cowboy songs and especially with the singing cowboy movies which

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<sup>239</sup> Karl Kennet and Lyn Udall, "A War Whoop from the Wild and Woolly West: O Wah Hoo", New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1890.

appeared in the 1930s. Douglas Green, music historian and yodeller/singer/guitarist member of the Western group Riders in the Sky, has written that early cowboy songs

had been written before the turn of the century; extremely romantic in very specific ways, they concentrated on the rough, lonely, difficult, sometimes wryly humorous life of the cowboy. From long work songs like "The Old Chisholm Trail" to humorous dialect pieces like Gail Gardner's "The Sierry Petes" . . . and reworked minstrel tunes like "The Little Old Sod Shanty on the Claim", these songs dealt in terms real or fanciful with such tangibles as housing, the art of branding or bronco riding, or a hundred other such specifics.<sup>240</sup>

Even more than the hillbilly genre from which it eventually separated, it laid great emphasis on costuming: the chaps and spurs, the bandanas and the broad hats. Of course, this was nothing new, as costuming and visual imagery had become essential in popular entertainments since the early days of minstrelsy. And as country music scholar Cecelia Tichi reminds us, the "hat acts" of today are their obvious descendants.<sup>241</sup> However, the particular combination of costuming and vocalising that characterised the cowboy as it began to be represented in the 1930s has outlasted many previous popular music types and has indeed transcended popular music to become a cultural type known the world over.

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<sup>240</sup> Douglas B. Green, "The Singing Cowboy: An American Dream", *The Journal of Country Music*, 7, No. 2, May, 1978, p. 8.

<sup>241</sup> Cecelia Tichi, *High Lonesome, The American Culture of Country Music*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994, p. 107.

Film played a primary role in the dissemination of this type. Westerns generally, but the singing cowboy films in particular, mediated to vast numbers a romantic idea of the West, even to people who resided there. The attractiveness of this idea was such that found its way even into comedy. For example, the Laurel and Hardy feature film *Way Out West* shows us just how popular the trend must have been, since it makes prominent use of a cowboy-style yodelling song.<sup>242</sup> This song, to which they perform an amusing little dance, occurs on their arrival in the Western town. While the obvious Western dress of the group performing this song is the visual signifier of the “Western-ness” of the location, the sonic component in the overall construction is the yodel.

The interest in America’s mythical Wild West that had begun with nineteenth century dime novels and the popular press intensified in the early years of the twentieth century. In an article by Lillian Turner appearing in *The Western Way*, the journal produced by the Western Music Association, the author states

The first decade of the twentieth century focused attention on the American cowboy. Buffalo Bill’s Wild West cowboys were still on the road. The cowboy was an important theme in the art of Charles Russell and Frederic Remington and appeared as illustrations for books and magazine articles. Photographers L. A. Huffman and Erwin E. Smith were making visual records of western ranch life. Owen Wister published his cowboy classic, *The Virginian* (1902). Early in the decade, the infant movie industry produced two short films, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) and *The Life of an American Cowboy* (1906). By 1908, western films were off at a gallop with

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<sup>242</sup> *Way Out West*, Stan Laurel, d., Hal Roach, p., MGM, 1937.

Essanay Studio's *The Bandit Makes Good*, the first of 375 Bronco Billy silent westerns, and the beginning of cowboy movie mania.<sup>243</sup>

Whereas the romantic image of the West had been planted into popular imagination originally in the dime novels of the nineteenth century, its primary mediation in the early twentieth century was through radio and cinema.

Cowboys were not just a concern of popular culture. They were having an impact on America's classical composers at the same time. This phenomenon is understood in classical music orthodoxy as having been an attempt at popularising modern art, of distancing from the prevailing modernism of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, and as a result of the impact of the success of Shostakovich, who himself was touted as the great exponent of Soviet Realism. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, and Virgil Thomson thus were incorporating cowboy tunes into their works.<sup>244</sup> Another composer of their generation, Elie Siegmeister, popularised American folklore with his performances with the American Ballad Singers, who, according to

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<sup>243</sup> Lillian Turner, "Songs of the Open Range: Giving the Cowboy Image a Voice", *The Western Way*, Vol. 12, Issue 12, 2002, p. 9.

<sup>244</sup> Thomson's *The Plough the Broke the Plains*, 1936, was perhaps the first to use cowboy songs, but Copland's *Billy the Kid*, 1938, was the first big hit, followed by his *Rodeo* in 1944. Roy Harris wrote two sets of *American Ballads* for piano, involving cowboy tunes. For the influence of Shostakovich, see Virgil Thomson, *American Music Since 1910*, New York, Chicago and San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, pp. 53-54.



newspaper reviews printed in their publicity material, included “cowboy yodels” in their performances of folk music.<sup>245</sup> Lectures and performances by folklorists such as John Lomax and poets such as Carl Sandburg further contributed to the thorough inculcation of cowboy mythology into America’s consciousness. Through the sanction of these figures, who were among America’s leading artists and academics, cowboys were indeed validated. This only strengthened what was already a positive image in America.

### Cowboys and yodelling

Did cowboys yodel? In the entry for “Yodel” in the *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World* Graeme Smith writes, “Although there is little to link yodeling to cowboy vernacular traditions, by the 1930s ‘cowboy’ singers such as Gene Autry had coupled yodelling with the mythological west”.<sup>246</sup>

There is, in fact, reasonable evidence of actual yodelling among the cowboys.

For example, there is this recollection of a cowboy about his “odling” to the cattle to keep them quiet:

Some evenin’s you could see a little cloud risin’ away up in the north and about dark you could see a little lightnin’ danglin’ and then you better look out ‘cause that night you would sure have trouble. On stormy nights like that I’ve seen balls of lightnin’ danglin’ all over the steers’ horns, and on them nights they would almost be sure to run. We always kept some of the cattle stirred up or awake at night ‘cause a big herd

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<sup>245</sup> The American Ballad Singers, Elie Siegmeister, Director, *American Memory* <<http://sdrdata.lib.uiowa.edu/libsdrc/details.jsp?id=/amerbalsing/1>>.

<sup>246</sup> Graeme Smith, “Yodeling”, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, eds. John Shepherd, David Horn, et al., New York and London: Continuum, 2003, Vol. 2, p. 176.

of cattle will run all night if they're tired and get to sleepin' too sound. The least racket will stampede 'em. You better never let 'em lay down an' go to sleep an' get quiet; you'll have trouble sure as the world. The boys always sang as they rode round the herd. That was the main thing, to keep a noise goin' so that no sudden racket would stampede 'em. I used to 'odel' (yodel) aroun' the cattle, but I never was much of a hand to sing. I could whistle an' make all kinds of funny rackets. I could sing 'Sam Bass' and 'Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie', but when all the hands could 'odel' it sho' was pretty singin'.<sup>247</sup>

These are the words of Ben Kinchlow, recorded when he was ninety one years old. Kinchlow had begun his life as a cowboy in 1872 in Uvalde County, Texas, and his reminiscences were documented as part of the Folklore Project of the Federal Writers' Project 1936-40. The fact that this cowboy whose recollections are recorded here happened to be an African American reminds us of the heterogeneous nature of the actual, not fabricated, cowboy culture. Indeed, the biggest influence on the culture of the cowboys were the *vaqueros*, the Spanish-speaking cowboys of Latin America who spread their culture across the western hemisphere and even into Hawaii. Falsetto breaking is common in much of their music, so it is little wonder that it should have found a home in the music of the English-speaking cowboys of the Southwest.<sup>248</sup> Moreover, there is plenty of yelling and calling in the cowboy styles, as is shown by the example from Botkin quoted earlier and in the

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<sup>247</sup> American Life Histories, Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940, American Memory, Library of Congress <<http://memory.loc.gov>>

<sup>248</sup> See for example the discussion of yodelling in connection with the theme tune to *The Virginian* in Tagg and Clarida, especially pp.350-55.

collections of cowboy lore and songs made by John and Alan Lomax.<sup>249</sup> Add to this the fact that yodelling was widespread in popular entertainments, from the rough minstrel shows to the melodramas of J. K. Emmet and beyond, and it seems reasonable to surmise that at least some cowboys may have had some exposure to it and, indeed, did it before Gene Autry rode along. However, despite the obvious influence from Latin America and the well-documented fact of the numerous black cowboys working cattle in the West, the cowboy image of the mass media representation that the whole world has come to know is white.<sup>250</sup>

Even if one chooses to disregard actual and circumstantial evidence to support the idea that at least some cowboys yodelled, there is plenty of semiotic evidence linking them to yodelling. The wide open spaces, the freedom, the untameable spirit, the rowdiness, and the harmony with the environment: all are present in the yodel as well as in the mythic image of the cowboy. Indeed, rowdiness is a particularly prominent element. This fact was dramatised and emphasised in the name Rowdy Yates, one of the characters in the long-running television series *Rawhide*.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> See John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, New York: Macmillan, 1938. The first edition of this work, by John Lomax, appeared in 1910.

<sup>250</sup> Herb Jeffries is the rare exception: a black singing cowboy for the segregated cinemas. Rather than yodel, he performs a skat solo in his recording of "I'm a Happy Cowboy".

<sup>251</sup> This character was played by Clint Eastwood. *Rawhide* ran from 1959 to 1965.

## Cowboys and their music

There are basically three types of “cowboy” singers in the popular music of the first half of the twentieth century. One type specialised in the songs actual working cowboys sang, such as were mentioned earlier in the quotation from Douglas Green. Many of these songs had been collected and published, first by N. Howard Thorpe, whose *Songs of the Cowboys* appeared in 1908, and then by John Lomax, whose *Cowboy Songs and Frontier Ballads* was first published in 1910.<sup>252</sup> A number of singers, such as Jules Verne Allen and Carl T. Sprague, made recordings of some of these. These singers and these songs are considered by many to be the authentic cowboy music.<sup>253</sup>

A second type of cowboy singer is the so-called “singing cowboy”. This is a creation of the cinema, and its most illustrious example is Gene Autry, who began his career with Republic Studios in 1934 with *In Old Santa Fe*. He was followed by Roy Rogers, Rex Allen, Ray Whitley, and many others.

A third type of cowboy singer is simply the singer of cowboy-themed songs. These were usually performed on the radio, and Autry began this trend

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<sup>252</sup> Green, p. 6.

<sup>253</sup> See for example Frank A. Mare, “Recordings of the Authentic Cowboys”, *Old Time Music*, No. 8, Spring, 1973, pp. 20-21.

before moving into film. To refer to Green once again, “When and where the singing cowboy image was originally developed is still uncertain, but as early as 1930 [Gene Autry] was appearing on KVOO in Tulsa, and despite the dire effects of the Depression he joined the National Barn Dance in Chicago in 1931 as ‘Oklahoma’s Singing Cowboy’”.<sup>254</sup>

### **The singing cowboy image**

Although cowboy songs had appeared on records before, Jimmie Rodgers was the first to sing romantic cowboy songs that involved yodelling, and so once again seems paradigmatic for the genre that developed in his wake. Moreover, Rodgers had moved to Texas in an effort to improve his health, and he quickly adopted the Texan image. Publicity photographs were made showing him in full cowboy regalia, and in one the recordings he made with the Carter Family, he is referred to by A. P. Carter as “the first cowboy we’ve seen in a long time”.<sup>255</sup> Hillbilly singers were quick to appropriate the cowboy image. One of the motivations for this was that the cowboy image was far more positive than the hillbilly image. According to Bill C. Malone,

By the end of the 1930s the cowboy or western impulse had become a refuge for country entertainers, or their managers, who sought a respectable or more up-to-date alternative to the hillbilly image. Cowboy costuming was decidedly more romantic than any kind of clothing associated with rural plain folk life, and western cut suits could in fact suggest the more dignified and hence more prosperous milieu of the

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<sup>254</sup> Green, p.15.

<sup>255</sup> “Jimmie Rodgers Visits the Carter Family”, Victor 23574, recorded in 1931.

rancher. Many of the cowboy songs, especially those from Tin Pan Alley, tended to be more sophisticated in style and structure than the typical hillbilly offerings. Country musicians who were receptive to hot dance or jazz instrumentation also gravitated toward the cowboy or western-style bands.<sup>256</sup>

When Hollywood began producing films featuring singing cowboys, these new characters became deeply imbedded into America's consciousness. This image represents a novel romantic figure in the era of international economic depression. We might read the singing cowboy of the films, and the other popular singers who adopted the idiom in other media, as a national anodyne: the presentation of this new pastoral hero recast the images of the Golden Age for the vast radio and film audience, salving the victims of failed capitalism.

The repertoire of the singers in the cowboy idiom combined traditional cowboy songs as collected by Lomax, or elements from them such as the "whoopie ti yi yo" as synecdoches, with newly composed material.

Yodelling became not merely a substitute for the cowboy yell, but a correlative of many of the traits thought typical of the cowboy: insouciance, incorruptibility, bravery, loneliness, and wildness, among others.

However, radio was the first important medium spreading the cowboy image.

Among the most popular of the radio cowboys was Wilf Carter.

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<sup>256</sup> Bill C. Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers, Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music*, Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993, pp. 94-95.

## Wilf Carter as paradigm for western-style yodelling

Carter is described by folk and traditional music journalist Bryan Chalker as

an easy-style yodeller, whose career spanned many decades. Wilf, a native of Nova Scotia, died in his 92<sup>nd</sup> year but achieved little chart success during his lifetime but nevertheless enjoyed reasonable record sales and was revered as a warm, sincere live performer and outstanding yodeller. He does, perhaps, illustrate the tenuous link between the real old-time cowboy yodellers like Goebel Reeves and the later Hollywood Tin Pan Valley silver-screen cowboys. . . .<sup>257</sup>

Whether or not one accepts Goebel Reeves as a real old-time cowboy, Carter certainly, of all the yodellers associated with the genre, had the best credentials, having worked as a cowhand on ranches in western Canada.<sup>258</sup>

Carter's yodelling is very distinctive and differs markedly from the Jimmie Rodgers models. The difference is apparent in "My Swiss Moonlight Lullaby", Carter's first hit, recorded 20 December 1933. The title alone deserves a moment's reflection. It gives every indication of being a yodel song by its reference to three of the most powerful metonyms of the past yodel repertoire – Swiss, moonlight, and lullaby – while the initial pronoun personalises these and claims ownership. Moreover, in Carter's lyric there is

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<sup>257</sup> Bryan Chalker, "Yodellin' Gold", *Traditional Music Maker*, Issue 51, 2002, pp. 20-21.

<sup>258</sup> Wilf Carter, *The Yodeling Cowboy Montana Slim from Nova Scotia*, originally pub. 1961, reprint in *Wilf Carter's Montana Slim Cowboy Songs*, Bear Family BCD 15939 HI.

a direct allusion to “Roll on Silver Moon”, the great yodel favourite of the late nineteenth century. Therefore, this song can be understood as a nexus – a fusion – of previously established conventions in a new popular music format. Like most of Carter’s early material, it is performed solo to his own guitar accompaniment, the guitar having been well-established by this time as the cowboy’s instrument.<sup>259</sup>

“My Swiss Moonlight Lullaby” has a splendid first species yodel. It resembles not in the slightest the Jimmie Rodgers style discussed in the previous chapter, differing along virtually every parameter. Carter opts for longer yodel strands than the turnaround formulas used habitually by Rodgers. The yodel here comprises two separate strains. It follows the incipit 3-4-#4-5, yet rather than hold the falsetto notes, he yodels athletic semiquavers on the top notes. (Figure 7.1)

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<sup>259</sup> Peterson notes that “the featured singing cowboys played guitars rather than fiddles and banjos, bringing this instrument to prominence for the first time”. Peterson, p. 93. However, as has been previously noted, the guitar’s association with yodelling songs extends back to the Rainers; it was also the instrument played by J. K. Emmet and Ward Barton.





Figure 7.1. Wilf Carter, “My Swiss Moonlight Lullaby”, yodel refrain.

The second strain is also based upon rapid oscillation of the sixths that conventionally make up the melodic material of yodels in popular music.<sup>260</sup> It is given added interest by his varying the syllables on the lower notes of the patterns, creating the impression of more voices.

Carter’s rhythmic patterns, moreover, are based upon even subdivisions of the beats, whereas Jimmie Rodgers always swings the rhythm in an easy-going fashion analogous to the drawl of his Southern accent. Additionally,

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<sup>260</sup> Emmet Miller’s yodelling is the exception. See Chapter 8.

the syllables that Carter yodels vary much more. As we have seen, Rodgers used virtually the same incipit in most of his songs, and favoured alternations between /e/ and /i/, with the latter very frequently prolonged as a final falsetto note. Carter would do this as well, but in addition he would frequently yodel on syllables such as /ho/ and /lo/. These, despite the differences in rhythmic drive, position his yodelling closer to Swiss and German traditions in that respect. This connection is further established by his frequent use of Swiss imagery. The speed of the yodelemes, the feature of the shifting syllables, and the straight and spirited rhythm give Carter's yodelling an athletic quality that connotes vitality and vigour.

Whereas Rodgers avoided all Swiss imagery, thoroughly Americanising his yodels and their contexts, Carter frequently alluded to Switzerland. While other characteristics of his sound – the rhythms, his singing voice, and accompaniment – keep him from ever sounding typically Alpine, these references to Switzerland serve the function of providing an excuse for yodelling. One wonders in the case of Carter if this reflects a lack of confidence in the yodel *per se*, such that a proper context must be established in order for yodelling to be acceptable or to make sense, and thus justify its inclusion in the other items in his repertoire. Or is the intention actually to maintain connections with the Swiss traditions? Titles such as "I Miss My Swiss" and "My Little Swiss and Me" seem to attest to his interest in keeping

some connection with the land most associated with his art. However, the light-hearted if not downright comical character of such songs suggests the excuse theory. When Switzerland is evoked – and not just by Carter but by many others since at least the acoustic recording era up to the present – it seems always to be in a humorous song, never in one that listeners might take as a sincere interest in Switzerland for itself. Instead, the inevitable rhyme with “miss” and trite cheese jokes are trotted out until the yodelling begins.<sup>261</sup> As such these Swiss-referencing songs seem like mere vehicles or novelty numbers. There is a long history of this kind of allusion: “O Le O Lady” recorded by Al Bernard and Frank Kamplain is just such an example from the pre-electrical recording days. But in the case of Carter, these songs represent a very small portion of his material: by far most of his songs from the period were on Western, hillbilly, or other subjects. Carter had a basically cheerful sound, occasionally becoming sentimental, but hardly soulful or pained; so the light-hearted Swiss-themed songs fitted in with his overall image of family entertainer.

Carter’s “How My Yodelling Days Began” is self-referential. This is common among yodellers; they almost invariably include songs about their own yodelling.<sup>262</sup> By quoting their yodel melodies, he links not only with his other

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<sup>261</sup> The DeZurik Sisters’s “The Arizona Yodeler” is an exception.

<sup>262</sup> The self-referential aspect of yodel songs is discussed in Chapter 9.

songs, such as “My Swiss Moonlight Lullaby” but also with earlier traditions through a quotation of the “Sleep, Baby, Sleep” yodel. So Carter appears to have been conscious of the cohesiveness of the yodelling genre and to have contributed to it by linking pieces with these textual allusions.

Carter’s songs do not involve outright bragging, but there is a swagger and sense of display in many of his songs. For instance, “Tonight’s My Night to Howl” is told from a rowdy cowboy’s point of view. Yet its mood is more high spirits than boastfulness. But the cowboy imagery is the concern of this chapter, and there are many examples of explicit reference to cowboy life in Carter’s songs. In “There’s A Love Knot In My Lariat” there is an explicit coupling of the yodel with the lariat image, a frequent image in the cowboy genre. The yodel pattern in this song also uses the same incipit as Whitman’s “Casting My Lasso toward the Sky”. The third species yodel on “oh” suggests high spirits and exuberance.

There’s a love knot in my lariat,  
 And it’s waiting for my blue eyed gal, you bet.  
 While I’m riding range all day,  
 My old lasso seems to say -  
 It twines around an orn’rey stray – oh!  
 There’s a love knot in my lariat,  
 And it’s waiting for my little prairie pet.  
 When I swing my old lasso,  
 You’ll hear my yo-del-a-de hoo (yodelled)  
 There’s a love knot in my lariat.

“I’m Hittin’ The Trail” is a fine cowboy-style song with evocative lyrics. Here is an example of the way images and other textual features from the generally regarded “authentic” cowboy songs of the early folklorists’ collections are combined with new material to fashion the romantic radio cowboy song. In this case it is the phrase “git along little dogie”, which first appeared in “Whoopi Ti Yi Yo, Git Along Little Dogies”, documented by Lomax. Each verse is punctuated with a shining virtuoso yodel refrain characterised by Carter’s rapidly oscillating figures.

I’m heading down the trail, it’s might windin’,  
 Headin’ for the valley far below.  
 Git along, git along, git along, git along, little dogie,  
 Git along git along git along hee dee ho.

(yodel refrain)

Oh Pal his legs are gettin’ mighty weary,  
 The weather’s kinda lookin’ like some snow.  
 Git along, git along, git along, git along little dogie,  
 It’s mighty hard to keep you on the go.

(yodel refrain)

I hear the lonely coyote howling,  
 The prairie dogs are duckin’ for their hole.  
 Git along, git along, git along, git along, little dogie,  
 Roll along, roll along, roll along roll, roll.

(yodel refrain)

The flamin’ sun is settin’ kinda peaceful,  
 The breeze is rustlin’ through the purple sage.  
 The birds have hushed their singin’, shadows fallin’,  
 I wouldn’t change my job for any wage.

(yodel refrain)

The lowin' of the cattle in the valley,  
 Smokin' camp fire like the break of dawn.  
 I fancy I can smell the steak a-fryin'  
 Git along, git along, git along, git along, git along.

(yodel refrain)

Oh, cow belly beans are appetisin'  
 Oh, after many miles along a trail.  
 Rolled up in your blanket's mighty peaceful,  
 Oh, dream you're pounding dogies on the tail.

(yodel refrain)

The lyrics feature other images that frequently occur in this genre, such as the purple sage. This is an allusion to the Zane Grey novel, *Riders of the Purple Sage*, published in 1912. Moreover, the images of coyotes howling and cattle lowing are characteristic. "I'm Hittin' the Trail" is likewise notable for its rhythm. This is the same as that heard in the gallop from the *William Tell* Overture and in the theme tune to *Bonanza*: so he seems to be heading down the trail at quite a pace. The melody line of the lyric has a very limited span and bears no resemblance to the kinds of ranging melodies in many cowboy songs. But the insistent rhythms, the evocative lyrics, and especially the yodelling make the song very effective. The first part of the yodel refrain is based on a simple descending pattern from the V7 chord to the tonic begun after the briefest quasi-anacrusis. The second phrase is a typical Carter display, with an extension consisting of a stream of rapid semi-quavers running through the primary chords of the key. It is a tribute to Carter's great

skill that his shaping of the line, his tone colour, and his sheer nimbleness transform the banal material into something haunting. (Figure 7.2)

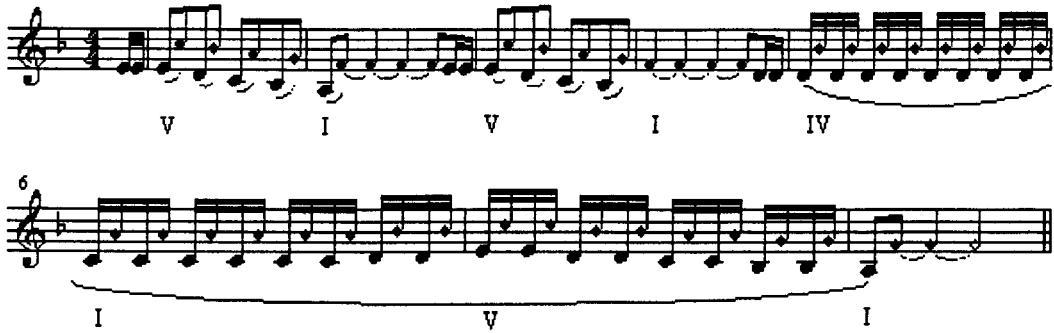


Figure 7.2. Wilf Carter, "I'm Hittin' The Trail", yodel refrain.

Carter's material is very eclectic, embracing both of the primary personae of the era: cowboy and hillbilly. He recorded a huge number of songs, many ballads and narrative type songs – "event" songs in the phrase of D. K. Wilgus<sup>263</sup> – often without yodel. But his cowboy and hillbilly songs virtually always feature yodelling, so it can be concluded that the yodel was the distinguishing feature separating the cowboy and hillbilly songs from other types. That is to say, the yodel was integral to the musical representation of the notion of both cowboy and hillbilly. The distinctions between the two are discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>263</sup> D. K. Wilgus, "Country-Western Music and the Urban Hillbilly", *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 83, No. 328, *The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition*, 1970, p. 164.

### Female yodellers in the western style

Whereas the hillbilly yodel genre was very masculine orientated, with its hobos, rounders, and gamblers as the chief personae, the cowboy style that emerged slightly later allowed space for female singers to develop yodelling styles and to reclaim and indeed to feminise the yodel. This is not to suggest that there were no hillbilly women performers. Sara and Maybelle Carter of the Carter Family are the obvious examples. But the Carter Family material generally followed a different tradition, stressing family roots, close ties to the land, and religious faith. The other hillbilly themes as depicted by Rodgers and his followers were in many ways antithetical to these, with their lawlessness, restlessness, and carnality. Thus, the usual personae of the masculine hillbilly types simply were not an option for the female performer of the era. The female type that had been apparent in hillbilly music tended toward the gingham-clad comedienne with stage names such as Lulu Bell.<sup>264</sup>

But once the barroom, the boxcar, and the jailhouse locales had been abandoned for the wide prairie and the cattle trail, women – white women, that is – could saddle up and sing too. Of course, the blues had had many important female singers, from Mamie Smith – the first to make a blues

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<sup>264</sup> Mary A. Bufwack and Robert Oermann, *Finding Her Voice, The Saga of Women in Country Music*, New York: Crown, 1993.



record – through Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey and Memphis Minnie, to mention only a few of the best known; but these were all black performers. For respectable white women of the American South during this era, the blues was off limits.<sup>265</sup> For them, the cowgirl persona offered an acceptable role.

Mary A. Bufwack and Robert Oermann, in their book *Finding Her Voice, The Saga of Women in Country Music*, describe the transition women made from country bumpkins to cowgirls. Many female yodellers in the Western mode appeared, including Patsy Montana, The Girls of the Golden West, and The DeZurik Sisters. There is a fairly clear delineation of types available for women singers. These include cowgirl songs, lullabies, sentimental-romantic songs, and comic songs. Blues-influenced yodels were associated with masculine types, and in the early stages were avoided by women. Later, in the 1940s, once boogie woogie styles had been appropriated for mainstream popular music by performers such as the Andrews Sisters, blues-based yodelling became acceptable for white women. Rosalie Allen's "Yodel Boogie" is a typical example – but this was in the era of World War II. In the 1930s, the female counterpart to the masculinised blue yodel was the coloratura yodel. Among the characteristics that female performers cultivated in the cowboy era were harmony yodelling and, in the case of the DeZurik

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<sup>265</sup> Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" began the commercial interest in blues. Also, see Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, University of California Press, 2000, Chapter 2, on the way women generally have been written out of blues historiography.

Sisters, virtuosity. Harmony yodelling was not confined to women: hillbilly acts such as the Callahan Brothers harmonised, but harmony yodelling came to typify cowboy styles, such as in the work of the Sons of the Pioneers and many others like them.

### **Patsy Montana**

Patsy Montana was a successful performer on the radio barn dance programmes of the 1930s and 40s. As such she recorded a large variety of material, much of it vaguely hillbilly, or mountain ballad. But her fame rests upon her image as a cowgirl singer, as reflected in her stage name. Her biggest hit, "I Want to be a Cowboy's Sweetheart" is an example of the cowgirl dream song in which she expresses a wish for a different life as a cowboy.

I want to be a cowboy's sweetheart,  
 I want to learn to rope and to ride.  
 I want to ride o'er the plains and the desert,  
 Out west of the Great Divide.  
 I want to hear the coyotes howling,  
 As the sun sinks in the west.  
 I want to be a cowboy's sweetheart,  
 That's the life that I love best.

I want to ride old Paint going at a run,  
 I want to feel the wind in my face.  
 A thousand miles from these city lights,  
 Going a cow hand's pace.  
 I want to pillow my head near the sleeping herd  
 As the moon shines down from above.  
 I want to strum my guitar and yodel-ay-ee-hoo,  
 That's the life I love.

“I Want to be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart” was her first big success and the first record by a female singer to sell a million copies.

Patsy Montana’s “Rodeo Sweetheart” of 1938 blends many of the features of ragtime rhythmic holdovers in the vocal line, but in this dance beat has much more of the square dance feel – the dip and swing of the dosey do. The faint falsetto grace notes on the line “you’re the champ of the rodeo” are examples of third species yodels. These decorations match the reference to being “all dressed up and a rearing to go”. The image of the strutting, bragging, and blustering cowboy fits well with the more florid style yodelling found in the Western genre. It has an aspect of display.

Ride ‘em high, ride ‘em low,  
Holler yippi yee ay o!  
Spur ‘em, fan’ em, let ‘em know  
That you’re the champ of the rodeo.

I’m all dressed up and rearing to go  
Rearing to go to the rodeo.  
Cowboys come from far and wide  
In the rodeo to ride.  
Colours bright they all will wear  
But they got no chance while you are there.

Rope that calf, bulldog that steer,  
Crack that bullwhip in the air.  
Tell that pickup man to scam,  
Ride that bronco through the air.

This song involves some of Patsy Montana’s most spirited yodelling. She was not the virtuoso Carter was, but she would frequently get into more snappy rhythmic patterns or quicker rhythms than would Jimmie Rodgers. Rarely

did he even allow faint grace notes. Speedy tricks were not really in the character of the songs he was performing. But the cowboy themes of activity, bravado, and braggadocio found a sonic correlative in the yodel. Like the crack of the bull whip, or the whirl of the lasso, the spiralling yodel was an acoustic fit.

Patsy Montana's other big theme was motherhood. She carried on the lullaby tradition as well, with the added bonus that she was a mother and could be marketed as one. The lullabies in her recordings, then, can be seen partly as an attempt to exploit her motherhood to the audience. As the blue yodel of the Jimmie Rodgers school was so loaded with masculine coding, women in the 1930s avoided it. Therefore, aside from the cleanly romantic cowboy fiction, one of the few areas left for a woman in the "hillbilly" genre was the lullaby.

It was a perfect image for the Depression: the thought of a cheerful young woman singing lullabies to her children, as though all was right with the world. For all the proclamations about her being a "She-Buckaroo" or tough independent type, it could clearly be regarded as a fiction, the soon-to-pass dream of the tomboy. In fact, the final verse of "She Buckaroo" announces her intention to marry and conform to convention. Patsy Montana's message

really, despite the avowed love of independence, is to conform to the social order.

The first part of the yodel passage of "She Buckaroo" is a variant of the one Septimus Winner incorporated into "Der Deitcher's Dog", connecting this song with a very long tradition of nostalgia and backward referencing.

George P. Watson used this same tune in his records. The second part is the incipit from the fifth note of the scale involving the augmented chord. So the yodels Patsy Montana sang further strengthened her ties with tradition, subverting her cowgirl image: she feminises to conventional expectations in the end. In this way she is like the media representations of Calamity Jane.

The tendency toward a normative female role – wife and mother – signified by the lullaby convention, wishing for the idealised cowboy life – the idealised male – in relationship with the simultaneous socio-cultural struggle raging at that time (meaning the International Depression caused by the stock market crash of 1929) makes us see the yodelling songs of the female singers as tending to support the old virtues. They were in some Althusserian way reaffirming the social order, not calling for radical solutions. If the yodel had had radical connotations – as it may have had in the early days when it was associated principally with Switzerland and its democracy and independence, as suggested by songs of the Rainers, for example – by this time the old-

fashioned quality of yodelling, clearly marked in the musical text by the use of the old tropes – the old *Biergarten* and Emmet melodies, for example – was operating in connection with lyrics to affirm the dominant social structure.

Once again we see the continuing importance of the lullaby yodel. This is apparent not only in masculine types, such as Carter, but especially in Patsy Montana's repertoire. It might be argued, for example, that Patsy Montana used the lullaby to oppose the masculine gendered blues songs of the earlier hillbilly songs, developing it into a special item in the repertoire of the modern show business type, the cowgirl.

Patsy Montana's lingering image is to be seen in Jessie the Yodelling Cowgirl in *Toy Story 2*. Montana performed novelty songs, packed with Western imagery and with exuberant and euphoric yodels. Some of these cowboy yodels may be regarded as homologous with the cowboy's lasso, a not uncommon image in these songs. The high tessitura (above the head of the cowboy) and its spinning nature – that is, a kind of centrifugal force of the accented notes in the repeating phrase, which is analogous to the accented whoosh as the lasso is spun round with the wrist – contribute to the effect of the yodel suggesting the lasso.

The DeZurik Sisters represent another approach to feminising the yodel. They follow the tradition of florid yodelling extending back to the mid-nineteenth century, when stars such as Madame Sontag and Jenny Lind gave performances of Eckert's "Swiss Song".<sup>266</sup> Somehow the yodel may relate to coloratura in these singers. Eckert's "Swiss Song" is a translation of his "Er liebt nur mich allein". The florid yodelling in the printed version of the piece looks well-beyond the capabilities of many an amateur. Later European yodellers such as Mina Reverelli extend that tradition. The DeZurik Sisters can be seen in relation to that. Their spectacular harmony yodelling in "The Arizona Yodeler" is unlike anything their contemporaries ever attempted. They were by far the most virtuosic of the Western-style yodellers.

### **Elton Britt**

Elton Britt is the yodeller who has perhaps the greatest esteem today. In an interview with me, Janet McBride frequently mentioned his work, particularly the song "Chime Bells".<sup>267</sup> Britt's "Patent Leather Boots" is an interesting example of the bravura yodelling in many of the cowboy songs. It has many bluesy turns to its yodel melody, with many of the snappy ragtime rhythms first noted on record with Ward Barton. These raggy rhythmic patterns fitted with blue notes in his clarion-toned falsetto give the song a real swagger. In

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<sup>266</sup> So proclaims the 1880 edition of this popular yodel song published by Oliver Ditson & Co. of Boston.

<sup>267</sup> Interviewed 15-2-2001, Mesquite, Texas.

many ways, this boasting cowboy song is a cowboy analogue to Chaucer's Chanticleer.

Shining up my patent leather boots,  
 Shining up my patent leather boots:  
 I'm riding out with my lady love tonight.

Silken scarf and patent leather boots,  
 Silver spurs and patent leather boots,  
 I'm gonna strut my material tonight!

Git along Paint, git along old Paint,  
 Jingle them silver spurs!  
 Git along Paint, gonna see if I ain't  
 The hombre she prefers.

The third stanza alludes to the old cowboy song "Git Along Old Paint", one of those collected and published by John Lomax in 1910. This song became very well known and has often been used as a code for the West. Copland used it, for instance, in his ballet, *Billy the Kid*. Here it strengthens the connection with the imaginary West, as does the use of the Spanish word for man, *hombre*, recalling the *vaqueros*. Such metonyms are common devices in the cowboy-themed songs.

This yodel incorporates the bluesy museme from the Jimmie Rodgers turnarounds, but the rhythm is very much punchier and sharper. It also has a much greater show of virtuosity in the range and speed. This is evident in the briskly descending cadential figure which in many ways typifies cowboy



yodelling. This is a commonly occurring pattern, heard frequently in Goebel Reeves, who was the most accomplished of the hillbilly yodellers. But in Britt's version, it has shed all connotations of the backwater rube. His deft swinging of the tune and shaping of the syllables puts a polish on this that is the sonic analogue of the shined up patent leather, really fitting the swagger of the lyric. (Figure 7.3)



Figure 7.3. Elton Britt, "Patent Leather Boots", opening yodel.

This kind of showiness helped to constitute a new masculinization for the yodel. It was a typical feature among many cowboy-style yodellers. Roy Rogers, for example, was fond of similar vocal tricks. The lazier-sounding blue yodel turnaround is in a different connotative sphere altogether.

Elton Britt exemplifies an interesting cross section in the semiotics of the yodel. He keeps alive the Swiss connection, specifically mentioning Switzerland in the lyrics of many of his hits. He thus maintains, or reinforces,

this kind of representation and association. However, at the same time he sings the very bluesy style yodels, the really mournful sound that seems to come from another source. He also performed many songs that strike even fans of yodelling as kitsch, such as Waldteufel's "The Skater's Waltz".

Britt's biggest hit was "Chime Bells". This song has been covered many times: Yodeling Slim Clark, Kenny Roberts, Eddie Arnold, Janet McBride, LeAnn Rimes, and others have recorded it. The song is in fact a modernised version of "Mountain High" which was recorded by Matt Keefe in 1914,<sup>268</sup> an observation no one else seems to have made. Who knows how many other versions of this song there were before that? This again reminds us of how intertextual features such as yodel melodic contour and lyric imagery connect the yodelling genre across the generations. Both Elton Britt and Slim Whitman revived yodelling classics in their repertoire: Britt with "Chime Bells", or "Mountain High" as it was formerly known; and Whitman with "Roll on Silver Moon".

### **Slim Whitman**

Though Slim Whitman doesn't really fit the Western mould in all respects, there is a vague Western feel to the themes of many of his songs. Whitman's "Casting My Lasso Way Up Towards the Sky" of 1949, combines elements of

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<sup>268</sup> Matt Keefe, "Mountain High", Columbia A 1604, 1914.

Western style bravura yodelling and Western imagery, as in the title, with a religious theme. This is 1950s chrome-plated Cadillac-with-fins yodelling, with a healthy dose of reverb.

I'm casting my lasso way up towards the sky,  
 Hoping my loop lands on a star.  
 I'm casting my lasso way up there on high,  
 Hoping it reaches that far.

I'm gonna keep on trying,  
 Gonna find my rainbow's end.  
 I know it's somewhere hiding,  
 Just around the bend.

Some day I'll be riding that new range by and by,  
 I'm casting my lasso toward the sky.

I'm casting my lasso way up toward the sky,  
 Hoping my loop will carry through.  
 I'm casting my lasso way up there on high,  
 Up toward the heaven so blue.

Ol' pards that left before me,  
 All a watching while I ride,  
 Up there in heaven's round up,  
 Across the great divide.

They're up there a riding, I'll join them by and by,  
 I'm casting my lasso toward the sky.

tai yi o da lay i di di di di yo yo di yo di yo di

3  
yi yo yo di yo di yo di di yi yi yi tai yi o lay i ti di yo ti di yo ti yo yo di

7  
o di o di o di o di o di o di o di o di oo

Figure 7.4. Slim Whitman, "Casting My Lasso Toward The Sky", opening yodel.

The verbal imagery's connection with Patsy Montana's "I Want to be a Cowboy's Sweetheart" is apparent, with its reference to the "great divide". In Montana's song it is of course geographical; here metaphorical. The reference to "ol' pards" also ties in with typical cowboy imagery. The entire conceit of imagining heaven as range riding in the sky is not too dissimilar to imagining the West generally as a kind of paradise, as it is depicted in so many romantic Western songs.

There is a marked similarity between this yodel and Roy Rogers's version of "Headin' for Texas and Home", another cowboy classic from the 1930s. The main features are the incipit and the preference for brisk alternation between registers. In the case of Whitman in particular, the strings of non-stop

yodelemes recall the rapid patterns of Wilf Carter. So it appears that Western-themed yodelling coheres around intertextual features such as these.

In Whitman's version, with its very strict and sharply articulated rhythm, it is much closer to the horse rhythms described by Tagg. Moreover, it shares with Tagg's examples the combination of horn-like calls "with prolonged tones as points of arrival".<sup>269</sup> It is as though these signify his determination.

There is another vocal style closely associated with some cowboy songs and connected with the yodel species outlined in Chapter 2, often in close proximity to them; but due to the possible absence of any voice breaking, it cannot really be classed as a yodel. This type is long wordless melisma entirely in falsetto. Its possible inclusion as a fourth species is problematic, since in many instances it occurs without any breaking of the voice whatsoever; consequently it is more accurately described simply as a falsetto vocalise. It can be conceived as an extension without a quasi-anacrusis or any drop back into natural voice. However, it is not uncommon to hear vocalise passages end with a descending yodeleme into natural voice.

The clearest example of this type occurs in the very popular "Cattle Call".

This cowboy song was written and recorded by Tex Owens, but became a big

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<sup>269</sup> Tagg and Clarida, 2003, p. 376.

hit for Eddie Arnold, and has since been covered by many others, including Slim Whitman. In Owens's original, the opening falsetto vocalise makes no use of voice breaking, whereas performed by Arnold and Whitman, the long falsetto vocalise eventually drops back into natural voice and has a little yodeleme pattern as a closing. In this way the entire passage can be imagined as a falsetto vocalise with a first species yodel tacked on at the end. (See Chapter 2) This recalls Baumann's statement that *Ranz des vaches* may end with a yodel.<sup>270</sup> This is a very interesting connection as both "Cattle Call" and *Ranz des vaches* mean the same thing. In some ways the long falsetto vocalise as performed by Owens resembles kulning, the most common name for Swedish herding calls, because of its association with herding and its high tessitura. The method of performance is very different, however. Owens's falsetto is very dreamily intoned, whereas kulning is performed with "a sharp attack and a piercing, almost vibrato-free sound, often very loud. . .".<sup>271</sup> That all these examples relate to herding is remarkable. Another very similar example is Skip Gorman's "Night Herding Song".<sup>272</sup>

Although Jimmie Rodgers never used this technique, there is perhaps a tendency toward it in the extensions (defined in Chapter 2) of many of his

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<sup>270</sup> Baumann, 1976, p. 127.

<sup>271</sup> Anna Johnson, "Voice Physiology and Ethnomusicology: Physiological and Acoustical Studies of the Swedish Herding Song", *Yearbook of Traditional Music*, Vol. 16, 1984, pp. 40-66.

<sup>272</sup> Skip Gorman, "Night Herding Song", *Hills of Home*, Rounder CD AN 17/17, 1995.

more soulful yodels, such as “Sleep, Baby, Sleep” and “Never No Mo’ Blues”, and which may account for their particular hovering or floating quality. In this regard, they resemble in an abstract sense the slow and unmeasured *Naturjodel*.

To conclude, the cowboy-themed songs that began increasingly to appear in the 1930s are distinct from hillbilly blues yodelling in a number of significant ways. Broadly speaking, they have a different approach to rhythm: cowboy-themed songs were much more likely to be performed in straight rhythm, as opposed to the grinding swing of the blue yodel; cowboy songs tend moreover toward major key tonality than blues modality, except in the case of the later Elton Britt. Moreover, they show a much greater tendency toward virtuoso display. I tried to show how these latter features relate to ideas associated with attributes of the cowboy stereotype, such as swagger and bravura; as such, they function as the musical signifiers in the romantic cowboy construction developing in America’s early twentieth century mass media. Cowboy-themed songs, at the same time, offered greater scope for women yodellers, who developed counterpart gendered yodel types. Unlike the hillbillies, the cowboys would make allusions to Switzerland, although often in a light-hearted context.

At the musemic level, on the other hand, both yodelling styles link with the wider yodelling tradition: they are often constituted of the same musemic material as the older yodelling songs, embedding the connection with the yodelling tradition in popular music. Interestingly, however, the yodelling in the constructed cowboy image – especially through the falsetto vocalise – seems almost accidentally to re-establish its connection with its original function: as vocal music associated with herding.



## Chapter 8

### The Yodel as Signifier

The cover of an LP entitled *Yodeling Hits* performed by the country singer Grandpa Jones provides a point of departure for a general discussion of the semiotics of yodelling in popular music. This record comprises eleven songs made popular by Jimmie Rodgers in the 1920s and 30s plus one traditional German song, "Tritzem Yodel". In the liner notes, written by the renowned steel guitarist Jerry Byrd, Jones is described as "a tradition in country music and one of its most respected performers," with the further comment that "Grandpa Jones has re-captured what has almost become a lost art in the music trends of today – a style of 'country yodeling' first made famous by Jimmie Rodgers".<sup>273</sup>

Despite the centrality of Rodgers's music on this LP and the emphasis placed by the liner notes on early country music tradition and indeed upon "country yodeling", the designers of the record's artwork nevertheless chose to feature a full-length photograph of Jones wearing *Lederhosen*, a red checked shirt, red knee socks, and an Alpine-style cap topped with a red plume: the stock

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<sup>273</sup> Grandpa Jones, *Yodeling Hits*, recorded by Monument Records, Nashville, Tennessee, 1963, released in the UK as London Records HA-U 8119.

imagery of an Alpine yodeller. While the LP's sonic and verbal textual material aligns with the southern blues and hobo associations of yodelling, the visual matter makes a contradictory statement by suggesting the Alps. On the surface, such a juxtaposition of conflicting imagery may be discounted as merely careless or insensitive or simply not uncommon in cases where there may be no co-ordination between the various departments of the record's production. Even so, the Alpine iconography is somewhat problematic, implying an indexical relation between the yodelling in these blues and country songs and the Alps. Of course, on a quite basic level such a connection exists, but that connection is remote. The reasoning behind the choice of artwork is assumed to be that since there is yodelling involved, there is a connection with Switzerland and that connection should be marked; this is despite the fact that there is in Jimmie Rodgers's material not a single mention of anything related to Switzerland or the Alps.<sup>274</sup>

But the cover of this LP has Grandpa Jones dressed unmistakably in Alpine folk costume, hand raised to his open mouth as if in the act of giving a long, loud call: iconography clearly linking the yodelling on this disc with the Alps. Can we interpret this cultural artefact beyond the acknowledgement that it is simply an intentional joke? (Figure 8.1)

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<sup>274</sup> See Chapter 6.



Figure 8.1. Grandpa Jones on the cover of *Yodeling Hits*.

This kind of visual imagery is not at all unusual with music involving yodelling. Historically, there has been a strong link between the music and graphic images of mountains, pastoral scenes, hunters, shepherds and so forth. These images are entirely understandable in connection with the music of the early and middle nineteenth century, when the lyrics of most yodel songs did make overt and emphatic reference to Alpine landscapes and associated imagery. Moreover, the actual music in most of these made overt connections as well, through their *Ländler* rhythms, or their *Ranz*-style melodies, or through their use of mountain call motives.<sup>275</sup> These connections

<sup>275</sup> Mountain call motives are discussed in Chapter 4.

have been of utmost importance in the yodel's coding and are based upon its historical associations. From very early on, idyllic mountain scenes populated with hunters or shepherds have been standard sheet music illustrations. This tendency continued throughout the remainder of the century as pictures of Swiss singers in their native costumes appeared in advertising and other publicity material. Seemingly automatic associations between yodelling and Switzerland extend well into the twentieth century. They are reinforced in numerous novelty songs, such as, "When You Sing about Love and Stars up Above (Start with a Yodel-Odel-Ay)". This Tin Pan Alley exercise in stock imagery was published in 1938, and with its reference to Bing Crosby works hard at being up to date. A few lines will suffice to make the point:

Sally Dean from Bowling Green  
 And her boy friend Billy White,  
 They'd listen to the radio  
 In her parlour ev'ry night.  
 They heard a man from Switzerland  
 Warble a yo-del-o,  
 And she said to Bill,  
 "Now there's a voice  
 For which I really go.  
 I'll give all my love to you  
 If you learn to yodel too;

Chorus:  
 When you sing about love  
 And stars up above,  
 Start with a yodel.  
 If you want a kiss,  
 Imitate a Swiss,  
 And start to yodel.

Once I was crazy 'bout the voice of Bing,  
 But if you want to be the king,  
 Then practise up your Yo-del-o-del-ay, I'll say.<sup>276</sup>

Whenever the yodel is so obviously exploited for its presumed humour, then stock expressions such as “Like a Switzer cheese, you can please” seem automatically to follow. As the whole song rests on cliché, one might expect something similar in the accompanying graphics, and indeed the cover for this song features an art deco abstraction in a lurid purple with a sketch of a figure in *Lederhosen* and cap, standing on a mountain peak, hands to mouth, apparently yodelling. The drawn figure looks remarkably similar to the image of Grandpa Jones on the cover of *Yodeling Hits*.

Representations such as these focus attention on the fact that yodelling strongly suggests Switzerland or the German-speaking Alpine regions, even when no other signifier in the text seems to, as in the case of the Grandpa Jones album (“Tritzem Yodel” notwithstanding). So does yodelling always signify “Swiss”? In the case of an extrinsic musical sign such as a yodel, the connotations seem doomed to a dialectical tension between the implications of the sign in its role *separate* from music – an Alpine call – and its role *as* music – as a musical gesture. The question this chapter explores is whether

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<sup>276</sup> Al Bernard and J. Russell Robinson, “When You Sing about Love and Stars up Above (Start with a Yodel-Odel-Ay), New York: Mills Music, Inc., 1938.

the other musical signs are ever sufficiently strong to overcome a dominant connotation deriving from the association of the word “yodel” itself and free the musical text from a historically-determined association with Switzerland, the Alps, or Germany. To put the question bluntly, just what does yodelling in popular music signify?

There are, of course, various ways that the yodel can signify, and these ways are constituted or determined by other aspects of the musical text. Various modes of signification include:

- 1) as a metonym for Switzerland or other Alpine regions, that is, to represent location or national identity
- 2) as a generalised signifier for pastoral, that is, as an index for a romantically conceived image of pastoral society or serenity, for example
- 3) as a trademark, that is, as a personal identifier for a performer
- 4) as a sonic metaphor for an emotional or psychological state.

This list is not exhaustive, but it is evident that the first and perhaps most obvious association of yodelling is, and has been, with Switzerland. Even the very word “yodel” is likely to suggest this particular country, before any other sound has been heard. Of course, the word is borrowed from the German language and as such carries a substantial connotative association, if

not an unbreakable connection, with that language and culture. Had a native English word been coined or appropriated to designate the technique, then surely a different type of connotation would follow. But the German word is the one we use, resulting in an apparently high degree of linguistic determinism.

Consider, for example, the American-English word "holler". This is a phenomenon once widely practised throughout the American South by both blacks and whites. It shares many features with yodelling, not least of which is the breaking in and out of falsetto. Hollering has functional uses which are similar, too. Hollers are used to summon animals, to communicate with others, to signal distress, or simply to amuse. Indeed, the resemblances to yodelling are such that Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the earliest commentators on the subject, called the hollering he heard in 1853, "Negro jodling".<sup>277</sup> Yet when one hears the word "hollering", one is not particularly likely to associate it automatically with Switzerland, although when hearing the actual practice, one might.

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<sup>277</sup> Sources for hollering include Ray B. Browne, "Some Notes on the Southern Holler", *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 67, No. 263, Jan.-Mar., 1954, pp. 73-7, and "Hollerin'", Rounder CD 0071, 1995. Frederick Law Olmsted is quoted in Harold Courlander's *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963, pp. 81-2.

Baumann relates that Emmanuel Shikaneder was the first to combine the word “yodel” with the image of happy and joyous Tyrol in 1796.<sup>278</sup> As outlined in Chapter 3, Swiss singing families such as the Rainers facilitated the spread of yodelling with their series of world tours in the early nineteenth century. The numerous Alpine-themed songs by European composers that appeared at the same time further established this Swiss association with yodelling; indeed, yodels appear to have been considered integral to these. When these songs were performed and published outside the German-speaking countries, they became models for other composers in the English-speaking countries. Yodelling arrived, then, not in isolation, but connected inextricably with definite national associations, aesthetic principles, and fully-fledged textual imagery. For the most part, these were adopted wholesale by later composers for about three quarters of a century, resulting in the near-indelible association of yodelling as a musical expressive technique and a particular set of moods, images, harmonic procedures, and even iconography.

Switzerland may have been the primary locale signified in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, but in the latter part, at least in America, the yodel

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<sup>278</sup> “E. Schikaneder erwähnt in seinem Stück *Der Tyroler Wastl* um 1796 wohl zum erstenmal das Wort *jodeln* in Zusammenhang mit ‘lustigen und frohen’ Tirolen.” Max Peter Baumann, “Jodeln”, p. 1488.



began to be associated with Germany.<sup>279</sup> This was partly through the influence of J. K. Emmet, whose Fritz Van Vonderblinkenstoffen character became a template for a whole slew of yodelling German comic stereotypes right through the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>280</sup> Part of Fritz's appeal was due to the solid virtues personified in his character. Warmth, good-natured dependability, tenacity: these were some of the sentiments articulated in the yodel through Emmet's character and performances. No wonder the lullaby became so closely associated with yodelling: what better song form to give a new embodiment of the pastoral codes historically embedded in the yodel?

Furthermore, Emmet's yodelling, allied to a manly kind of feeling, contrasted with the pretty sentiments in much of the contemporaneous material, such as the feminine-gendered yodelling in Eckert's "Echo Song".<sup>281</sup>

Although a nineteenth-century masculine coding for yodelling was established through the portrayal of Fritz, according to Deane Root, Emmet's creation "did not accurately reflect a German's life in America. The role was used in the context of a comic and sentimental play, and was never intended as dramatic realism or social commentary; rather, it portrayed a currently

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<sup>279</sup> This is not, however, to overlook the numerous Swiss immigrants to the U. S., settling in large numbers in Wisconsin and maintaining their folk traditions to the present. See James P. Leary, *Yodeling In Dairyland: A History of Swiss Music in Wisconsin*, Mount Horeb, Wisconsin: Wisconsin Folk Museum, 1991.

<sup>280</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>281</sup> See Chapter 7.

familiar character with whose accent, dress, and habits audiences could associate".<sup>282</sup> So even in the case of Emmet, there is a tendency to romanticise a complex of ideas that yodelling might signify through its juxtaposition with them. In fact, two tendencies are discernible: the yodel tending toward comedy or tending toward sentimentality, expressed in "Sauerkraut is Bully" and in the "Lullaby", respectively. The former continues through later "Dutch" characters such as Frank Wilson, who favoured brisk *Biergarten* vigour to the more delicately paced *Ländler* of, for instance, William Ball's compositions. The latter tendency was very long-lived, as sentimental lullabies with yodelling continue to appear well into the first half of the twentieth century.

Perhaps largely through Emmet's influence the lullaby became a primary vehicle for yodelling. This is a tradition extending at least from Emmet through George P. Watson, Matt Keefe, Ward Barton, Jimmie Rodgers, Patsy Montana, and beyond.

Why the yodel became connected with lullabies has never been investigated, although many lullaby yodels have been written and recorded. One would think the association of lullaby and yodel unlikely due to the sort of racket most yodelling involves, yet this appears not to have been much of an

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<sup>282</sup> Root, p. 54.

impediment. How is it that yodelling can fit comfortably into songs intended to induce sleep in infants? Of course, the possibility exists that it was a mere convention created by yodellers who would attempt to add their vocal stylings to anything. For obviously the lullaby as performed on the stage is not the same thing as that sung by a parent to a sleepy child. The audience is comprised of ticket-purchasing adults who want to be entertained, and not put to sleep, generally speaking. Nevertheless, one supposes that the yodel, when added to a song, must somehow fit, must be appropriate and amenable to the context, in order for it to be acceptable or meaningful. Put another way, a searing fuzz-tone guitar solo with lots of wailing feedback is unlikely generally to be thought appropriate within the established conventions of the lullaby and would be considered dubious if it were not merely ironic. So why do we accept the yodel in a lullaby?

A clue to answering this question may lie in child language acquisition theories in linguistics. For instance, a number of theorists have remarked on the type of language people seem instinctively to employ when speaking to infants. Linguists call this special register of language "motherese" or, in these politically correct times, "caregiver speech". Motherese, according to David Crystal, is "characterised by such features as short sentences, repetitive

discourse, simplified vocabulary, and expressive intonation.”<sup>283</sup> Michelle

Lowe and Ben Graham, in their *English Language for Beginners*, put it this way:

“Everybody adapts their language while talking to children and babies. Even

four-year olds do it when addressing their little brothers/sisters . . . We

separate phrases more distinctly, leaving longer pauses between them. We

speak more slowly. We use exaggerated ‘singsong’ intonation . . . We

generally use a *higher and wider pitch range*”.<sup>284</sup> Jean Aitchison has written that

child-directed speech “tends to be slower, spoken with higher pitch, and with

exaggerated intonation contours”.<sup>285</sup>

One explanation for this type of speech is that it encourages the baby to take

more notice of the speaker. Newborn children appear not to differentiate

between sounds automatically, but must learn to do so. Thus there is

probably a reason for our presumed universal use of this very particular kind

of baby talk: the baby would not otherwise pay any attention to us. We must

get its attention. The exaggerated vowels, the singsong intonation, and the

higher pitch of the voice all help to signal to the baby that we are talking to it.

The fact that these features are apparent in yodelling may help to explain how

it can strike us as appropriate and natural within the context of a lullaby.

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<sup>283</sup> David Crystal, *An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Language and Languages*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, p.258.

<sup>284</sup> Michelle Lowe and Ben Graham, *English Language for Beginners*, New York and London: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., 1998, p. 75, their emphasis.

<sup>285</sup> Jean Aitchison, *The Articulate Mammal: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*, London: Routledge, p149.

The more specifically Swiss pastoral songs of the early nineteenth century, with their stock characters, such as hunters and shepherds, eventually gave way to far more generalised images and locations. The Alps may still be mentioned, but the lyric themes were transformed into those of freedom and liberty, for example. An instance of this tendency can be seen in "To My Bright Alps Again". While the Alps are specifically cited, the theme of this song is more the contrast between the conventional pleasures of "the tame heart" and the greater depth of experience of "the free" in his/her romantic quest.

O try not to lure me 'tis only in vain,  
 For I must away to my bright Alps again.  
 My pathways from childhood, the rock and the lea,  
 The haunt of the Chamois, the wild haunts for me.  
 Display not your treasures, your brilliant Chateau,  
 They bear out the blessing the tame heart may know.  
 Then hope not to bind me still, still I am free,  
 The haunts of the Chamois, the wild haunts for me.

O go then ye gay ones, where tapers shine bright,  
 'Midst bowers of roses, the fairy and light,  
 But the wild mountain pathway is sunny and free,  
 The Hearts of the Chamois, the wild haunts for me.  
 No fashions to fetter, no rulers to know,  
 With the blue sky above me and the bright lake below.  
 The glad birds may flutter, but I am as free,  
 The haunts of the Chamois, the wild haunts for me.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Wellington Guernsey, "To My Bright Alps Again - an Alpine Melody", London: A. Hamilton & Co., 1861.

Traditionally, mountains have been viewed as either an idealised repository of virtue or as the home of the ignorant backwoods rustic. A swing in the emphasis of mountain imagery plainly occurred in North American popular music toward the end of the nineteenth century. Earlier songs were suffused with romantic idealism, but when the song's fictional locale shifted to America's southern mountains, such as the Appalachians or the Ozarks, the cultural stereotype of the hillbilly edged out any remnants of romantic idealism.<sup>287</sup> Indeed, where once pastoral connotations reigned, including bucolic semantic fields such as "caring", "nurturing", "serene", and "peaceful", now "rustic" was in the ascendancy, with its semantic fields including "coarse", "rough", "wild", and "rude". This southern rustic "wild" differs markedly from that in "To My Bright Alps Again". In that song, "wild" is imagined as the escape from the fetters of too much civilisation. In hillbilly contexts, wild means too little civilisation. Goebel Reeves's "Reckless Tex" is a good example. The yodelling in this example is also completely transformed as well, with its gurgling and trilling and comical leaps. So the new terrain – "Reckless Tex" lists dozens of American towns and regions – and its new character – the wandering Southern hobo – stake out the new semantic territory. It is no wonder that the musical structuring of yodelling follows naturally. It is unlikely that the codally competent would hear any trace of "Swiss" in this song.

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<sup>287</sup> Hawkins, *Hillbilly*.

If pastoralism, with its shepherds and hunters, was a favoured theme in the early nineteenth century yodel songs, what changes or continuities occurred when cowboys became the personae in yodelling songs? Do cowboys fit traditional notions of the pastoral? There are significant differences in the reality of herdsmen in the U. S. Southwest and their European counterparts. Certainly the cowboy's image lacks the maternal, nurturing associations of, for example, Nordic herdswomen.<sup>288</sup>

For one, the cowboy's drive was altogether a rougher and more brutal occupation. The American West was romanticised, without doubt; yet the nature of the romantic pastoral image created in late nineteenth-century North America contrasts strikingly with that regarding European pastoralism created in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe.

Why should this be the case? One reason is that the European herding traditions had been in place for centuries. Their pastoral culture and customs were well-established, generally isolated, and self-contained. The communities were homogeneous. They were not capitalists, but pastoral and agrarian.

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<sup>288</sup> On Nordic herdswomen and kulning, their high-pitched falsetto vocal calls and music, see Johnson.

In America, the situation was fundamentally different. Cattle herding as practised by the cowboys of the late nineteenth century was not ancient in any conceivable way; rather it was created by the arrival of the pan-continental railroad. It was first and foremost a capitalist venture arising from rapid expansion and the development of previously unsettled regions of the burgeoning United States.<sup>289</sup> It was in conflict not only with the indigenous population but with settlers who opted for farming. This fact gave it a built-in aspect of lawlessness manifested in powerful conflicts such as the range wars. The labourers, that is to say, the actual herdsmen – the term does not even seem particularly apt given its usual connotations – were recruited to do the work, not born into it as if by class or caste.

Moreover, the cowboys were a very heterogeneous community, if it can even be considered a community. They comprised so-called Anglos (although there were Scots, Germans, Swedes, and Irish at least among them), Blacks, and Mexicans.<sup>290</sup> There may have been very little personal connection or empathy between them and their animals. The cattle drive was very often a

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<sup>289</sup> Murdoch, pp. 4-5.

<sup>290</sup> Slatta, pp. 159-60.



brutal and miserable job done solely for the pay-off at the end: undertaken for profit.<sup>291</sup> This fact is reflected in a number of their songs.<sup>292</sup>

In some ways much of the actual content and circumstance of authentic cowboy culture may be beside the point, since the cowboy of song and yodel is not the same thing as the cowboy who drove cattle in the 1870s and 80s. Yet the Depression-era construct was based upon selected aspects of the actual nineteenth-century cowboy mixed with romantic notions of freedom and individuality. The yodel easily could be imagined to be a part of the real cowboy life, whether or not it actually was. Like the hat and the holster, it was emblematic of his rugged individualism and integrity. The cowboy construct in fact was pastoral only in the sense of its newly-fashioned representation of the Golden Age, and not in its relationship with the animals. Animals hardly figured, except the horses that Gene Autry or Roy Rogers rode: Champion and Trigger, respectively. But in this radio- and film-inspired dreamland image valorising the romantic West, yodelling assumes a special significance – a centrality, indeed. It becomes the key sonic signifier for the entire romantic idea. This is stated succinctly in the line from Patsy Montana's "I Want to be a Cowboy's Sweetheart":

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<sup>291</sup> Murdoch, p. 7.

<sup>292</sup> Green, p 8.

I want to strum my guitar and yodelayeehoo  
 'Cause that's the life that I love.

Sometimes the yodel's role in popular music is more prosaic. A common use of the yodel sign is merely as identifier of the singer. Consider Jimmie Rodgers and Emmett Miller, whose yodelling very often functions something like a trademark. Their yodelling operates on one level as an identifier of the singer, putting his personal stamp onto the performance, and reinforcing the stage image. In linguistics this would be called a redundant feature: coding in excess of what is necessary to make an utterance intelligible. We know, for example, that it is Jimmie Rodgers singing by all kinds of other signs – his name on the bill, for example – yet the yodel, because it is so identified with him through his recordings and publicity material, becomes a further feature making the same point. It is his mark of distinction. This is over and beyond its purpose as an expressive device. We know both Rodgers and Miller used their yodelling in this way since they both would yodel even when they were not singing a song. Evidence for this is his performance in “Jimmie Rodgers visits the Carter Family”. Emmett Miller can be heard giving his little bluesy yodelled cadence in skits without music in *Yes Sir, Mr Bones*, a low budget film from 1951 featuring a number of even-then-forgotten acts from the final stages of minstrelsy.<sup>293</sup> (Figure 8.2)

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<sup>293</sup> *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones*, Ron Ormond, d., Spartan, 1951.



avant-garde of its own, an altogether otherworldly voice, a bizarre malarkey of the soul that seemed a death-cry and a birth-cry, too . . . <sup>294</sup>.

Miller's yodelling comprises melismatic breaking, usually at the interval of the fourth, and leading into bluesy runs involving drops through seventh chords which emphasise the tritone between the seventh and third of the chord. Miller is apparently the only yodeller of his generation to emphasise that interval. An example of this occurs in the first part of the phrase in "I Ain't Got Nobody". His yodelled gestures clearly are modelled on jazzy blues-style figures of the day. (Figure 8.3)



Figure 8.3. Emmett Miller, "I Ain't Got Nobody", first line of chorus.

As Miller's career was in minstrelsy, the obvious question is to what extent his yodel style can be seen as a representation of the stereotyped caricature of the ignorant and uncivilised black man? How is his voice a correlative of the black stereotyped characterisation he specialised in?

<sup>294</sup> Tosches, p. 47.

There are many examples of characterisations of blacks loudly and comically calling or “yoo-hooing” and making full use of falsetto breaking. Some of these are performed by African Americans. For example, Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s poem “In de mornin’”, recorded by Edward Sterling Wright in 1914, provides ample evidence that such breaks in register were a feature of his representation of a black woman.<sup>295</sup> Wright was “an African American actor educated at Emerson College of Oratory in Boston. His recitations helped to introduce and popularise the works of African American poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar.”<sup>296</sup>

The text of Dunbar’s poem follows.

'LIAS! 'Lias! Bless de Lawd!  
 Don' you know de day's erbroad?  
 Ef you don' git up, you scamp,  
 Dey'll be trouble in dis camp.  
 Tink I gwine to let you sleep  
 W'ile I meks yo' boa'd an' keep?  
 Dat's a putty howdy-do--  
 Don' you hyeah me, 'Lias --you?

It is apparent that Dunbar is attempting to recreate black speech patterns in his orthography. Wright’s recitation takes this further; for instance, there is

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<sup>295</sup> Edward Sterling Wright, “In de mornin’” by Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Edison Blue Amberol Cylinder, number 2235, 1914.

<sup>296</sup> Information taken from <[www.archive.org/audio/audio-details-db.php?collectionid=EDIS-SRP-0191-08&collection=opensource\\_audio](http://www.archive.org/audio/audio-details-db.php?collectionid=EDIS-SRP-0191-08&collection=opensource_audio)> (26-9-04)

very clear falsetto breaking of the syllables in his pronunciation of the name "Lias". This is pronounced on each occasion with a big swell in the volume, finally rising into falsetto of indeterminate pitch for the final syllable. This corresponds very exactly with what I call third species: a falsetto grace note tag, usually at the end of a word. The sounding of this name very convincingly suggests an exasperated woman calling to a young boy who refuses to get out of bed. Assuming that Wright was familiar with black speech patterns and that he was sincere in his attempt to reproduce them, then this Edison cylinder is a good example of the sort of dialect that white minstrel performers imitated. Al Bernard was just this sort of white minstrel man. His 1923 recording of "My Dawg" illustrates how the imitation of black speech patterns, quite obviously, was crucial to the minstrels' stage representations.<sup>297</sup> In this record the same rising into falsetto at the ends of words which signified "Negro" can very clearly be heard. So these kinds of yodelled pronunciations of words were by Miller's time already signifying "black" by imitating some of their speech patterns.

Similarly, stammering was another signifier for black speech on the minstrel stage. This has been noted in relation to Emmett Miller by Tony Russell in his

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<sup>297</sup> Al Bernard, "My Dawg", Edison Diamond Disc: 51106-L, 1923.

notes accompanying recordings by Hershel Brown.<sup>298</sup> This use of stammering as a signifier was apparently very common. Even in the Jimmie Rodgers skit, "The Pullman Porters" (not a song, but a "comic" routine based on superannuated blackface minstrel caricature), Rodgers stammers as part of his representation of a "coon". It is not too fanciful, perhaps, to regard Emmett Miller's odd breaking up of words as a musical analogue to such stage stammering. The effect is to create the image of someone slightly sub-human: ignorant, shiftless, but canny. These stereotypes are borne out by the dialogue that introduces a number of these records, as well as by performances by various minstrel "coons" in *Yes Sir, Mr. Bones*.

Moreover, the yodelling in Miller's recordings suggests someone who doesn't have a check on himself. It creates the impression of someone who cannot hold the tone straight, but is constantly losing his grip. It suggests something wild, even close to madness and insanity. This can be compared even to someone as dissimilar as David Bowie, who when singing seems unexpectedly to lose vocal control, as if suddenly stabbed. This effect could be analogous to a mental stab, so to speak, as well. In other words, the sudden jerk in the voice that displaces the register need not be simply a

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<sup>298</sup> Herschel Brown, *Complete Recorded Works, 1928-1929*, Document Records DOCD-8001, liner notes by Tony Russell, 1990.

physical thing: it can signify the sense of losing one's mind, or of falling, or some such.

Good examples of this device in Bowie are two songs from his album, *The Man Who Sold the World*.<sup>299</sup> In "Running Gun Blues", for example, the singer/persona is going mad with blood lust. The word "I" is stretched out in a long disjointed melisma of the sort that Miller used, only without falsetto. The words suggest his madness and the vocal line displays the same sort of loss of control, or wild exaggeration of emotion, or perhaps emotions running amok. "She Shook Me Cold" similarly has the kind of unexpected leaps and changes in register that correspond with the sort of loss of control indicated by the lyrics, particularly so in the last line of the song. In fact, Bowie's vocal style seems increasingly to make use of these unexpected jumps in his voice. As madness and insanity are both important in Bowie's work, it is therefore not unreasonable to read his voice this way.<sup>300</sup>

Miller's vocal antics are indeed comparable to a character created by the comedian Jerry Lewis in his film *The Nutty Professor*.<sup>301</sup> The film is a re-telling of the Jekyll and Hyde story, with the socially inept Professor Kelp devising a formula that turns him into the cool but hateful Buddy Love. The scene in

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<sup>299</sup> David Bowie, *The Man Who Sold The World*, EMI 7243 521901 0 2, 1992/1972.

<sup>300</sup> I am indebted to Anja Löbert for a number of these insights.

<sup>301</sup> *The Nutty Professor*, dir. Jerry Lewis, Paramount, 1963.



question occurs about one hour and six minutes into the film, when the drunken Buddy Love, the hip alter ego of the klutz Professor Kelp, sits at the piano, trying to impress Stella by singing "I'm in the Mood for Love". As the effects of the formula begin to wear off, the ludicrous voice of Professor Kelp keeps intruding into his singing. The change manifests itself in uncontrollable switching between registers. In the case of Miller and his ignorant coon portrayal, the register switching is similar to the uncontrollable voice of Prof. Kelp. In the context of American culture, so it can be imagined, it is assumed that the civilised person is in control, where the uncivilised one is not.

Other wild men fit this paradigm, for example, Tex Ritter's version of "Sam Hall" – the unrepentant outlaw on his way to his execution.<sup>302</sup> Ritter's whoops and blasts into falsetto signify his untameable spirit as he sings from the gallows.

A final example equating yodel breaks with insanity or lack of control is Sid Vicious's singing of "My Way".<sup>303</sup> Clearly intending to evoke a warped vocal persona, Vicious alters the words from those sung by Sinatra into something far less bourgeois. Full of obscenities and provocation, his ironic version of "My Way" demonstrates a punk stylist's attitude toward voice. Again the

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<sup>302</sup> Tex Ritter, "Sam Hall", *The Singing Cowboys*, Pegasus PGN CD 836, 2000.

<sup>303</sup> The Sex Pistols, "My Way", *Kiss This*, Virgin CDV 2702.

voice breaking suggests one who has no firm control of his actions, but it also suggests pubescent voice breaking, which is presumably a marker for the refusal to act in a conventional adult manner. The breaks in Sid Viscious's voice do not suggest the same thing as the "emotive" breaks of Jimmie Rodgers, who seems in line with Caruso and popular song influenced by operatic devices. The punk style seems far more petulant.

The wild man antics and ferality in some yodel styles lead of course to the Tarzan yell. This connection has already been made by yodellers, such as Janet McBride's "How the Yodel was Born". Such wildness is usually masculine gendered in yodelling, as are wolf howling and hound dog imitations, but it is interesting to compare the feral side of yodelling with Brunnhilde's "Hojotoho". Although not yodelled, the wordless calling, the exuberance and energy, and most of all virtually the same intervals that constitute so many of the classical yodel stylisations make for an interesting comparison.

## Chapter 9

### How the Yodel became a Joke

Connoisseurs of music were barely able to keep a straight face when confronted with yodelling . . . .<sup>304</sup>

Professor Ling's statement pinpoints a problem that haunts yodelling and yodellers. Yodelling has rarely been taken very seriously. Its "folk" qualities are too strong to fit comfortably into "art", especially when they cannot be smoothed out through processes of musical abstraction, such as were considered in Chapter 3.

Prevailing attitudes toward yodelling have forced it into many comedy contexts. But why should this be the case? Is there something intrinsically funny about yodelling?

The answer to this is very complex, but the root of the problem probably lies in the yodel's difference from normal vocalisation. The surprising leaping between registers, not to mention the fairly strong amplitude usually needed for success, both militate against politesse. Whereas one can sing, certainly

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<sup>304</sup> Jan Ling, *A History of European Folk Music* (trans. Linda and Robert Schenk), University of Rochester Press, 1997, p. 3.

hum, and perhaps whistle quietly to oneself, yodelling is less easily tamed. By virtue of its volume, it commands attention. Successful yodelling necessitates a lack of inhibition, while lack of inhibition can appear gauche among the sophisticated and the refined.

Yodelling's position in contemporary society is very tellingly indicated by a statement in an instruction book titled *How to Yodel "The Cowboy Way"*. On page eight of this book in large print centred at the top appears this statement: "Warning! Some of the sounds made while learning to yodel will be annoying to other people".<sup>305</sup> There is little in the accompanying text to mark this statement as humour or irony. In fact, further down the page, the message is repeated: "First, find a private place to practice, where you can be alone, with no distractions. Some of the sounds made while learning to yodel will be annoying to other people. You must be in a place where you will not feel inhibited toward making these sounds, and not be disturbing to nor disturbed by anyone else".<sup>306</sup> These are easily read as straightforward statements of fact. Doubtless there may be some validity in such a "warning", but the same could be printed in a beginners' tutor for violin, trumpet, clarinet, or any other musical instrument. Why does self-consciousness plague yodelling?

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<sup>305</sup> Rudy Robbins and Shirley Field, *How to Yodel "The Cowboy Way"*, Anaheim Hills, CA: Centerstream Publishing, 1997.

<sup>306</sup> Robbins and Field, p. 8.

As has been stated already, in the lyrics of many songs a somewhat self-conscious Swiss connection is introduced, apparently to justify the yodelling. In a similar way, at a later stage, the yodel became associated with comedy, almost as though that kind of context were necessary to support yodelling, especially if Swiss themes were absent as they were in many hillbilly songs. Even so, as has been demonstrated, stock Swiss images were often incorporated presumably as part of the humour.

Yodelling in popular music contexts never linked up very successfully with more spiritual subjects and states of mind. It lost that connection it briefly enjoyed, for in the nineteenth century songs such as "*Roll on Silver Moon*", with its sorrowful theme of the death of a lover, incorporated yodelling. Yodelling became a part of the traditional way of performing that song presumably because it seemed to performers to provide that special voice or artistic register for the expression of the sorrowing soul. So, too, with a song such as Jimmie Rodgers's "*Never No Mo' Blues*" with its slow, forlorn, stretched out falsetto notes which really do bear the main emotional weight of the song.

There were wistful themes and melancholia in many cowboy songs. In a number of these the yodelling itself establishes the plaintive mood. An example is Rex Allen's "*Cowpoke*", where the minor pentatonic scale, the soft

dynamic, and gentle clip-clopping accompaniment convincingly communicate a resignation to loneliness.<sup>307</sup> In other material, unassociated with Western themes, second species yodelling commonly occurs in songs of more serious emotions: Tommy Johnson's haunting yodelling is the obvious example. In his "Canned Heat Blues", for example, where he sings of his alcohol addiction, the despairing wail of his yodelling is very affecting.<sup>308</sup>

However, despite some attempts to link it with spiritual matters, yodelling never acquired *gravitas* in its popular music contexts. Unlike related vocalisations with herding connections, such as *Ranz des vaches*, yodelling does not easily sit with moods of meditation and intimacy, perhaps because of the less intimate relationship that cowboys seemed to have with their cattle. A more intimate connection between herd and herder is signalled in *Ranz des vaches*, for example, by the custom of incorporating the names of the animals into the songs. It has been demonstrated how even in classical music practice, yodelling fitted in more with joyfulness rather than seriousness overall.<sup>309</sup>

There have been notable attempts to match up yodelling to the more spiritual side of hillbilly music as expressed in the sacred song. Although the saintly

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<sup>307</sup> Rex Allen, "Cowpoke", *The Legendary Singing Cowboys*, Sony Music Special Products, A26432, 1995.

<sup>308</sup> Tommy Johnson, "Canned Heat Blues", *Tommy Johnson (1928-1929) Complete Recorded Works*, Document DOCD-5001.

<sup>309</sup> See Chapter 3 on the moods associated with yodels and with *Ranz des vaches* in nineteenth-century classical music.

was not exactly Jimmie Rodgers's usual milieu, he did record with Sara and Maybelle Carter "The Wonderful City", which features harmony yodelling. However, the association of yodelling with the sacred was tenuous at best for Rodgers and was never repeated in his work. Rather, the blue yodel, the stronger, sexualised yodel trope was his primary mode for yodelling in a serious context.<sup>310</sup>

"The Wonderful City" was by no means the only attempt to match the yodel to Christian religious themes. For instance, Gene Autry recorded "I'm Goin' to Yodel My Way to Heaven".<sup>311</sup> Yet this song lacks real spiritual weight, tends toward the mildly humorous, and basically suggests the religious faith of the southern rural audience without really objectifying it.

Once there was a mountaineer  
Well known for his yodel,  
Tho' you'd travelled far and near  
His yodel you would hear.  
The preacher came to the mountaineer  
Who on his death-bed lay,  
He called the preacher to his side,  
And these words he did say:

I can't play no harp,  
I can't blow no horn,  
Tell Old Man Gabriel at the pearly gates  
I'm goin' to yodel my way to Heaven.  
Heaven  
Heaven  
(yodel).  
Tell Old Man Gabriel at the pearly gates

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<sup>310</sup> Although the darkly humorous aspects of these blues is equally apparent.

<sup>311</sup> Johnny Marvin and William Hill. "I'm Goin' to Yodel my Way to Heaven", Southern Music, 1932, recorded by Gene Autry, Victor 23691, 1932.

I'm goin' to yodel my way to Heaven.

Other yodellers of a later generation have sung religious and gospel songs featuring yodelling; Janet McBride, for example, has released an album of gospel songs, some with yodelling.<sup>312</sup> But generally speaking the type of yodelling one hears in them is more likely to be equated with the stand-up-and-testify variety of declamation rather than with devotional meditation, more Billy Graham than Boethius. Overall, yodelling as practised today seems devoid of mystery and mysticism. This is not to say it cannot have a spiritual dimension. For example, on an internet chat line concerning spiritual matters, the subject of yodelling was raised:

I remember sitting a Dathun (30-day meditation) at the Rocky Mountain Dharma Center in Colorado many years ago . . . half way through we had a day off . . . and I went for a long hike through the countryside . . . it was there that I contacted my Bavarian Ancestral Spirits and rediscovered the traditional art of yodelling . . . yodelled with the echoes bouncing off the mountainsides . . . a real spirit filler/cleanser . . . since then I have chanted with the Lamas on many occasions and it is yodelling that informs the experience, the Lamas love my chanting voice (as did the Sufis in West Africa) but it is with yodelling that I discover my innermost soul . . . the echo within echoing off the mountainsides . . . a perfectly natural experience . . .<sup>313</sup>

However, such mysticism is rare in connection with yodelling in song contexts. The unbridled yodelling in Whitman's "Casting My Lasso toward the Sky", for example, is absolutely joyful, but simply too exuberant to signify "spiritualism" and "devotion".<sup>314</sup> Moreover, in the somewhat cynical context of recent English language pop music song titles such as "I Want to Yodel for

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<sup>312</sup> Janet McBride,

<sup>313</sup> <<http://csf.colorado.edu/forums/deep-ecology/dec97/0040.html>> (24/5/02)

<sup>314</sup> This song is discussed in Chapter 7.



the Lord” are likely to provoke reactions in line with Karl Spaizier’s comment of 1790: “Any musician would have to work hard to suppress a sarcastic smile”.<sup>315</sup> Simply put, devotion, mysticism, and awe are not normally signified by yodelling in its typical popular music incarnations.

On the other hand, a vast amount of yodelling in twentieth-century American popular music seems to have occurred in the context of comedy. The radio barn dance programmes, for example, provided just such a framework to mix the purported music of the common folk with rustic humour and high jinks. Beginning with performers such as Uncle Dave Macon, who yodelled occasionally, hillbilly music and hillbilly humour were at times virtually indistinguishable as mediated via radio.<sup>316</sup> The presentation of the acts, their costuming, and performance styles were all deeply influenced by the comical notion of the hillbilly. Judy Canova was only one of many female hillbilly comedians to follow this tradition. Even the DeZurik Sisters, splendid yodellers that they were, found themselves using their talents in the service of comic animal impersonations in order to sell their radio sponsors’ farm feed products.<sup>317</sup> Indeed, the DeZurik Sisters were also known as the Cackle

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<sup>315</sup> Quoted in Ling, p. 3.

<sup>316</sup> That radio was crucial to the spread of hillbilly music and the hillbilly image has been convincingly argued by Robert Coltman. See “Across the Chasm: how the depression changed country music”. *Old Time Music*, 23, 1976, pp. 6-12.

<sup>317</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, *Finding Her Voice*, New York: Crown, 1993, p. 98.

Sisters, a name which emphasises the comedy of their yodelled barnyard imitations.

Emmett Miller's yodelling similarly has an undeniable comic dimension. His act was comic blackface in which he assumed the role of the ignorant black with humour as the object. Thus his amazing yodelling, with its startling jumps between registers, is at least partially in the service of a comic presentation. This observation is virtually proven by the fact that his smoothest, crooning song, "She's Funny That Way", has no yodelling at all: yodelling would only have trivialised his most sincere song.

The hillbilly and blackface performers were by no means the first to use yodelling for comic purposes. An early example of this is "Yew-ra-liar-ty", from 1893. Subtitled "Burlesque Yodel Song", this demonstrates an early tendency to use yodelling for hilarious effect. Each line of the ditty is punctuated with two brief yodels, but the refrain at the end of each verse constitutes the yodelled punch line indicated by the title. One verse will illustrate.

George Washington for truth was famed,  
 Tra-la-lie-ty, Tra-la-lie-ty,  
 And after him I have been named.  
 Tra-la-lie-ty, lie-ty.  
 I met a sweet young maid one day,  
 'Twas on the Alps so high.  
 I told her that I loved but her,  
 And this was her reply:

Yew-ra-liar-ty, Yew-ra-liar-ty,  
 Yew-ra-liar, liar liar,  
 Yew-ra-liar-ty, Yew-re-liar-ty,  
 Yew-ra-liar, liar, liar-ty.<sup>318</sup>

Other comic representations of the yodel from a slightly later period include “The Happy German Twins” recorded in 1906 by George P. Watson and Len Spencer. The yodel in this vaudeville sketch uses the incipit from the tonic, but without the usual quasi-anacrusis picking up from 5. Evidently this tune was construed as a signifier for Germany and, along with the stage accents, establishes the ethnicity of the characters. The best line occurs after a bit of Watson’s yodelling:

GPW: “Say, vat vould you do if you had a throat like mine, eh?”  
 LS: “I vould cut it.”<sup>319</sup>

Similar farcical appropriations of the yodel occur in the theatre. An example is the “Yodelling Duet” from *The Beauty Spot*, which was published in 1918. The duet for Josephine and Schamyl makes a mockery of the usual late romantic images associated with yodelling: at each mention of a stock figure, some ludicrous and unexpected sound effect is heard off-stage:

J: Hark! Don’t you hear that melody we know?  
 U-ra-li-tee O!

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<sup>318</sup> Charles House and George B. SeEVERS, “Yew-ra-liar-ty”, New York: M. Witmark & Sons, 1893.

<sup>319</sup> Len Spencer and George P. Watson, “The Happy German Twins”, 1906, *Bigot Songs*, EarthStation1.com, 2004.

S: Oh! U-ra-li-ti-i-ty O!  
 J: See, 'tis the shepherd on his homeward way.  
     What do you hear him say?  
 S: Ah! What is the gist of his lay, eh? (*Hee haw*)  
 J: There grow the Edelweiss so delicate,  
     Inarticulate.  
 S: I hear it calling its mate. (*noise*)  
 J: Hark to the music ringing in the dells.  
 S: Yes, it is the song of the bells. (*noise*)  
     Oh merry bells.

J: Far climbs the mountaineer into the snow  
     U-ra-li-tee O!  
 S: U-ra-li-ti-ti-ty O!  
 J: Hark, do you hear that modulating note,  
     So gentle and remote? (*noise*)  
 S: Ah! it is the trill of the goat.  
 J: Now do you hear the linnet in the vale,  
     Running up the scale? (*noise*)  
 S: Surely that is the nightingale!  
 J: Hush! Do you hear that bleating from afar?  
     Sweetly do the lambkins baa-baa. (*quack*)  
 S: Hark to the baa-lamb.<sup>320</sup>

This send up of the typical romantic conventions was probably very funny on stage. These examples show the increasing tendency to put the yodel into absurd contexts, which has the effect of reinforcing any inclination to see the yodel itself as absurd. This happened even in the sphere of classical music, where absurd appropriations of yodelling can be found, as for example Eric Satie's "Tyrolienne Turque" for piano.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Clifford Harris, Valentine, and Jas. W. Tate, "Yodelling Duet", *The Beauty Spot*, New York: T. B. Harms and Francis, Day & Hunter, 1918.

<sup>321</sup> Eric Satie, "Tyrolienne Turque", *Croquis et Agaceries d'un Gros Bonhomme un Bois*, Paris: Editions Max Eschig, 1913.

A much more recent example of comic contextualisation of yodelling occurs in the film *Mars Attacks!*, wherein the world is saved from destruction at the hands of homicidal Martians by the sound of Slim Whitman's yodelling.<sup>322</sup> Much of the humour in the use of the Whitman yodel derives from irony. Slim Whitman is in some circles a byword for corniness, and one reason for this is probably his yodelling. Indeed, "corn", "corn pone", and "corny" are all pejorative terms highlighting the split between urban and rural values that overtook the United States around the middle of the twentieth century: corn relates to the farm and thus to rustic. Corny music is at the opposite end of the spectrum from hip, and the joke in the film is, presumably, that this music is so "bad". The film assumes, and the audience accepts, that this music is loved only by marginalized Alzheimer patients such as Granny in the home where she is spending her twilight years. The director is also at pains to associate Whitman's music with Lawrence Welk's, whose programme is starting on the television when the scene shifts to the retirement home, and whose music similarly is apparently considered of interest only to the aged.

So in this case the yodel seems to signify "corn". The film's appropriation of Whitman's recordings is funny because not only do most humans in the film

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<sup>322</sup> *Mars Attacks!*, dir. Tim Burton, Warner, U.S., 1996.

apparently hate it,<sup>323</sup> but because it is literally intolerable to the Martians: it makes their heads explode, filling the inside of their glass helmets with green goo.

How did the culture get to the point that the yodel could become this type of signifier?

Recalling Ling's statement at the beginning of this chapter, we may imagine that the ironisation of the yodel is a process that perhaps has been latent in it all along. But its actuation in the context of the culture in the United States really speeds up from about the 1930s, paradoxically at the moment of its greatest popularity, when both hillbilly and cowboy performers were cultivating it. Perhaps representations such as the "Dwarves' Silly Song" from Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* located the yodel for the mainstream by making the "otherness" of the yodel apparent: it is the freakish little Dwarves who do the yodelling; even the title of their ditty announces to us how we are to regard it. Kind and benevolent as they may be, they are clearly not the sort who can hope to wed the likes of Snow White. They are the second class citizens, the colourful exotics, mild and friendly, but not like "us". The hope that they stay out in the forest and do not buy the

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<sup>323</sup> Tom Jones, playing himself, says with disgust, "Who put that on?" when he hears Whitman's yodel over the radio.

house for sale next door to ours probably lies just below our level of consciousness.

Yet in this classic film they are the ones who yodel. Prince Charming does not announce his arrival from a great distance with a manly yodel, for charm equates with “smooth”. While such masculine-gendered yodel calls had emerged in Southern blues (see Chapter 7), the personae associated with these were likewise “others”: the Southern, black-influenced hillbillies who were socially beyond the pale for the dominant mainstream market. That market, of course, was Disney’s target.

Disney, then, appropriates the yodel for his droll representation of what can be viewed in one sense at least as the lower class, the worker/proletariat, the *Nibelungen*, the miners – mining is indeed the very activity the Disney dwarves are so happily engaged in. They represent, ironically, all those victims of capitalism who had lost their jobs in the Depression.<sup>324</sup>

This is how Disney’s *Snow White* ties together with Tim Burton’s *Mars Attacks!*. The first film can be read as representing the social order that is on the brink of destruction at the beginning of the second. Together these films

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<sup>324</sup> In Richard Wagner’s tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the first to be subjugated by the sinister power of the ring made of the Rhine gold are the Nibelungs, who are, like the dwarves in *Snow White*, miners.

frame the era during which the yodel became totally ironised in North American popular music. During this period, several factors contributed to this process, among them urbanisation of taste and the emergence of the cool aesthetic.

The yodel has historically been tied to the outsider or lower class, never to have been accepted as the musical language of the dominant group (I am speaking of Western European and North American traditions). It always carries some aspect of “folk”, and that sets it in opposition to the mainstream, especially when mainstream tastes tend toward a valorisation of “sophistication”. In the nineteenth century, as a result of the romantic Alpine imagery bound up in the sign, it enjoyed a prestige in the musical vocabulary that it has lost. Indeed, at that time it often was associated with idealism and high art. Even then, of course, the yodel sign may have been of interest to primarily orchestral composers, appearing only from time to time in an actual singer’s repertory. In some contexts it represented, to put it very simply, a Golden Age, a romantic construct of a “better” time before the corruption brought upon civilisation from urbanisation and later industrialisation. Yet by the time of the twentieth century such romantic imagery had lost its appeal. On the other hand, the nineteenth-century paradigm’s replacement – the ragtime/blues yodel – was also constructed of elements whose signatures prevented it from taking its place nearer the centre of music making. And of



course when Disney used the yodel in *Snow White*, it is clearly the European version that it is modelled upon, resembling the southern yodel not in the slightest. So while the yodel may in some instances be tolerated, it is never completely embraced. In twentieth-century American popular music, it has been the voice of the outsider classes and exotics only.

A subtle subtext to the yodelling in *Mars Attacks!* emerges as well. The high-pitched falsetto yodel in this context might be read not simply as a marker of the alleged corniness of Slim Whitman, but as sign for America's mythic "lost innocence". Each corrupt or venal character personifies the innocence Americans forfeited. Yet the innocence (or naiveté), symbolised by Whitman's yodelling, ironically, saves them from destruction. After all, the other characters in the film, although clearly recognisable American types, are so far down their own slide from decency as to be incapable of positive action. There is the unctuous president and his odious press secretary. The newscasters are portrayed as utterly superficial, concerned only with the image they present on television. Las Vegas – itself emblematic of greed and gaudiness – figures as a dominant site within the film's action. And there are the militantly jingoistic all-American trailer-dwellers, first seen as their gung-ho son proudly demonstrates to his family his ability to assemble his automatic rifle in less than two minutes while blindfolded. In the context of the film this is read as his devotion to the United States Army, and clearly is

intended to be humorous and ironic. Later in the film this family dismiss the idea of protecting grandmother, showing more concern that the Martians do not steal their television set. Clearly, the American types shown here are distortions of the clichéd “American Dream”: greedy, misguided, and perhaps dangerous.

On the other hand, the sympathetic characters, the ones who actually make a difference to the outcome, are the “lost” ones; they are the apparently negligible people at the margins of society: the spaced-out, uncool and less popular son, who works in the donut shop, and his equally spaced-out grandmother, whom he does not abandon, although the rest of his family are willing to, and who inadvertently saves the world.

The yodel was “other” from the moment it went into the mainstream musical context in the early nineteenth century; much of its power lay in its exoticism. It is quasi-music, para-music, additional: very frequently mere “novelty”. Its inability to rise above second class status partly explains its ultimate exclusion by classical music. Interestingly, the use of the term “yodel” or “yodel song” increases in proportion to the distancing from the “serious” classical repertoire. In the case of Bishop and Hewitt yodel is not mentioned in the music, although the wordless passages clearly afford an opportunity for yodelling. However, in the latter part of the century, the title pages of many

pieces proclaim their status as “yodel songs”, but their style and idiom set them apart from their “serious” contemporaries, who by that time ignored the yodel altogether.<sup>325</sup> Indeed, after Hewitt, North American composers who imagined themselves contenders for greatness – that is, those who aspired to be “classical” – eschewed yodelling completely. By the turn of the twentieth century, classical singers such as Elizabeth Schumann-Heink and Margaret Keyes could get away with the odd yodel in a Swiss ditty placed near the end of a recital programme, but yodelling was far more likely to be welcome in acts such as Al Sweet’s Singing Band.<sup>326</sup> Sweet’s Singing Band, who performed in uniforms and shakos, featured a variety of material, including yodelling. (Figure 9.1) Otherwise, the gimmicky novelty songs coming from Tin Pan Alley via the revue or variety stage were far more likely to make space for some yodelling than “serious” songs.<sup>327</sup> So within the classical tradition the yodel became a gauche and unwelcome country cousin, embarrassing to those interested in “art”.

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<sup>325</sup> For example, “Mountain Echo” by G. Albert Reuhl and Ewart G. Ellis, published by K. Dehnhoff in New York in 1896.

<sup>326</sup> American Memory, Library of Congress <<http://memory.loc.gov>> (20-3-03)

<sup>327</sup> For a discussion of novelty songs, see Hamm, *Irving Berlin: Song from the Melting Pot: The Formative Years*, pp. 29-67.

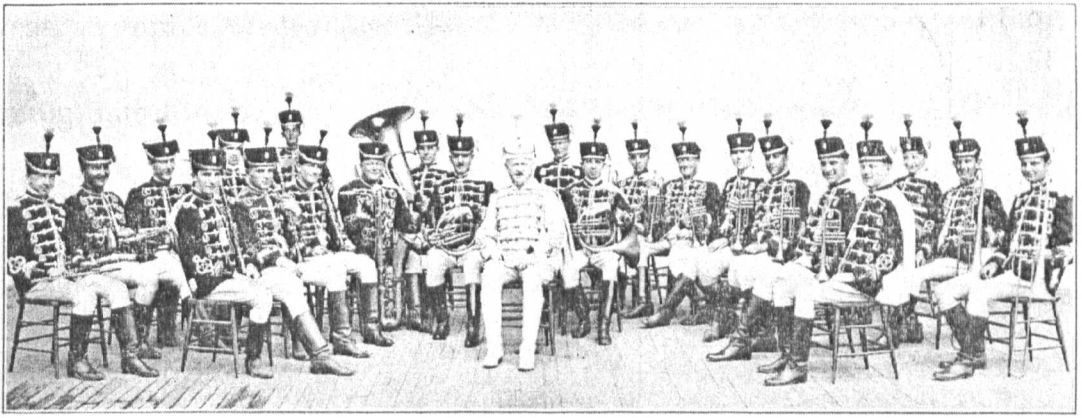


Figure 9.1. Al Sweet's Singing Band, ca. 1922.  
 Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries.

The yodel is thus “other” purely as a technical resource: eventually ostracised by the tastes deriving from Kantian aesthetics, yet amenable to the tastes of rural America.<sup>328</sup> It is interesting to speculate about what conditions prevailed in the United States that facilitated the yodel's acceptance into home-grown popular entertainment in the first place. This is a subject that is generally overlooked. After all, the Rainers and other singing Swiss troupes had toured many European countries before coming to America. These troupes had met with success in those lands, yet the yodel never took root in those countries.

What was different about America?

As Christoph Wagner has noted, the presence of German-speaking immigrants in the U.S. no doubt meant that there would be, at least in some

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<sup>328</sup> See Robert Toll, *Blacking Up*, on the development of the Jacksonian audience.

areas, an appreciative audience for the *Nationalsängers*.<sup>329</sup> These recent immigrants into the U.S. may have understandably felt a special kinship with the Swiss and Tyrolean groups. Their nostalgia for their native countries and mother tongue must have ensured a sympathetic reception for the touring families of singers. But this cannot explain the fairly rapid and wide-ranging adoption of the yodel into several types of popular music almost simultaneously. Unfortunately, many contemporary writers are silent on the issue. George F. Root's brief mention of the Rainers has already been pointed out in Chapter 4. How could the yodel have become so thoroughly assimilated throughout a broad range of genres?

Part of the answer to the yodel's ready acceptance into American vernacular music may lie in the unique social class structure that emerged in the nineteenth century. This was the era of great westward expansion. New frontiers were opened up and a free-spirited pioneer mentality was esteemed as an ideal. The vast majority of Americans were living in rural rather than urban areas, and the economy was predominantly agrarian. The population in these Western regions was very sparse. Rural conditions doubtless had an impact upon their way of life and entertainment. Many of the settlers had left the more densely populated regions of the Eastern seaboard to find a new

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<sup>329</sup> Christof Wagner, "Yodeling in America", the booklet accompanying his collection of yodel songs, *American Yodeling 1911-1946*, Trikont US-0246-2, 1998.

way of life, and they settled the frontier with firmly held notions of independence and self-sufficiency.

In this rural context, feelings of absolute self-confidence and freedom could blossom. Moreover, people had to make their own entertainment, at least initially, before more of the trappings of civilisation followed. Within these sparsely populated communities a fairly unbridled, uninhibited, and unconventional approach to recreation developed. Briefly put, people loved to have boisterous and rowdy fun. And in American music, examples abound of expressions of boisterous and rowdy fun, from Dixieland jazz to Charles Ives, from “There’ll be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight” to *On the Town*. The yodel, like other forms of whooping and hollering, may have been an early example of unbridled exuberance with musical possibilities.

A certain number of people are required around an individual to make that individual self-conscious. The loud, naïve bumpkin with his oafish behaviour is a stock character in the U.S. Ellie Mae Clampett and Jethro Bodine, humorous characters in the television series *The Beverly Hillbillies*, typify this well-known American type: loud, unselfconscious, naïve, and honest.<sup>330</sup> In urban settings, where close proximity to others makes people aware of themselves as they hear the sounds of neighbours through walls or meet them

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<sup>330</sup> see Hawkins *Hillbilly* for a discussion of *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

on the stairs, or mix with them in the street, behaviour is more likely to become inhibited and comportment to become codified into what is euphemistically called “polite”. In rural areas, especially during the era of westward expansion in the U.S., there were fewer models for polite conduct, and the stage was set for more extrovert and rambunctious forms of behaviour.

Thus, it is not difficult to imagine in nineteenth-century rural America a context where extrovert, unselfconscious behaviour might find encouragement. Social gatherings such as hootenannies, barn raisings, and rodeos provide arenas where boisterous behaviour is not merely tolerated but encouraged. These activities continue in the present day, as well as new and equally exuberant social gatherings. The high school football game, the focus of so many rural communities, is a force for inculcating socially sanctioned raucous modes of behaviour, with its marching bands, cheerleaders, pom-pom waving pep squads, and noisy spectators. And there are many other examples, from drag races to tractor pulls. Each of these highly popular social gatherings is big, loud, and brash, and the behaviour is by and large extrovert and joyous. All manner of whooping, which is a fairly common form of vocal display, is very likely to be heard at any of these events.

In sum, the context in which yodelling was likely to be heard in nineteenth century rural America, whether it was medicine show, travelling vaudeville show, tent show, or circus, would have included audiences who were no strangers to exuberant, uninhibited display. Whereas in more rigidly constructed societies the yodel may have been received as an amusing or pleasing novelty, but one without a place in the prevailing social scheme, in America it was welcomed and embraced.

In addition to the somewhat boisterous entertainments enjoyed by many Americans, the presence of other types of vocal display, many of them analogous to the yodel, were common in some of these rural areas. These other vocal practices, such as, for example, the field holler or the Cajun whoop, similarly created a context whereby the assimilation of yodelling was made possible. It must be the case that such societal attitudes conditioned the reception of the yodel.

Since the yodel had become so thoroughly associated with rural genres, especially after the rise of hillbilly music in the 1920s, it therefore became an index understood by the prestige classes as a signifier for those others who made and liked this "gauche" music. This alone was sufficient for the mainstream classes to marginalize yodelling or to distance themselves from it on matters of taste. One way of distancing was through comedy and later



through irony. In comic or ironic contexts yodelling is permissible; in “serious” contexts, it is not.

Yodelling was acquiring comical associations even among the hillbilly performers in the radio barn dances, as mentioned earlier. Performers of the calibre of the DeZurik Sisters were, perhaps unintentionally, helping to perpetuate the comic hillbilly stereotype by using their yodelling for comic effect, imitating barnyard animals and moving the yodel even further from a more soulful or serious kind of expression.<sup>331</sup> For many, the yodel must have seemed stuck in cornpone, unable to remove its straw hat and overalls. To this must be added the somewhat unfortunate tendency of many yodellers toward a near-unbearable self-consciousness in their material. Simply put, the yodellers seemed always to sing of the fact that they were yodellers. The tendency was apparent from the start of the hillbilly era. Jimmie Rodgers, for example, had songs with titles such as “The Yodelling Ranger” and “Yodelling My Way Back Home”. Wilf Carter wrote songs named “How My Yodelling Days Began”, “The Yodelling Cowgirl”, and “The Hobo’s Yodel”. Many, many others followed, such as “The Yodelling Teacher”, “Yodelling Fiddling Blues”, “Yodelling Mountaineer”, “Yodelling Radio Joe”, and finally, eschatologically indeed, “Will There Be Any Yodellers in Heaven?”. Perhaps

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<sup>331</sup> Bufwack and Oermann, p. 98.

this extreme self-reference contributed to the erosion of its artistic seriousness and its eventual loss of appeal and ironisation.

Around the time of World War II, rural values were beginning to be displaced by the ascendancy of urban attitudes. The notion of hip left its jazz underground roots and was taken up by the mainstream. Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters recorded several yodel songs, each apparently intended to be a little hip, or even tongue in cheek. One of these is the “Yodeling Ghost”, which makes reference to several of the usual images: Switzerland, coyotes, and cowboys. But Crosby was too hip to break his voice, and what comes out is yodelling manqué, merely a suggestion. The same is true of his “yodelling” in the film *The Emperor Waltz*.<sup>332</sup>

Clearly, when a singer wants to appear suave, the yodel finds little charity. This is detectable even in the recordings of Jimmie Rodgers and Emmett Miller. Miller for example omits his yodelling altogether in “She’s Funny That Way”, while Rodgers subverts his yodel with vocal variations, described in Chapter 6.

Because of its close association with rural culture, Frank Zappa could appropriate the yodel to signify reactionary attitudes in American society. It

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<sup>332</sup> *The Emperor Waltz*, Billy Wilder, d., Paramount, 1948.

could be used to represent conservatives, rednecks, chauvinists, and the reactionary South generally. For example, in Frank Zappa's film titled *200 Motels*, the redneck character Lonesome Cowboy Burt yodels. It is one of his significant markers. The following is an excerpt of the lyrics.

My name is Burtram, I am a redneck,  
 All my friends, they call me Burt.  
 All my family from down in Texas,  
 Make their living digging dirt.

Come out here, to Californy,  
 Just to find me some pretty girls.  
 Ones I seen get me so horny,  
 Ruby lips and teeth like pearls.

Wanna love 'em all, wanna love 'em dearly,  
 For a purty girl, I'll even pay.  
 I'll buy 'em furs, I'll buy 'em jewellery.  
 I know they like me. Here's what I'll say:

I'm lonesome Cowboy Burt – speakin' at ya!  
 Come smell my fringy shirt – reekin' at ya!  
 My cowboy pants,  
 My cowboy dance,  
 My bold advance,  
 On this here waitress  
 Odelohootiyay

He's Lonesome Cowboy Burt  
 Don't you get his feelings hurt.  
 Come on in this place,  
 And I'll buy you a taste,  
 And you can sit on my face,  
 Where's my waitress?

When I get off, I get plastered,  
 Drink till I fall on the floor.  
 I'll find me some communist bastard,  
 And I'll stomp on his face till he don't move no more.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Frank Zappa, *200 Motels*, Ryko RCD 10513/14, 1997/1971.

There are several notable aspects in this representation. One is the position of Burt's yodel, coming immediately after the line "my bold advance on this here waitress". Burt's lust and charmless way with women seems to be objectified in his yodelling, recalling one of the blue yodel's functions as a kind of mating call. But the telling line about Burt's character is revealed in the lines about drinking and beating up "some communist bastard", which is code for a hippie.

A similar use of yodelling is heard in some of the recordings made slightly earlier by the Fugs. "Johnny Pissoff Meets the Red Angel" is significant in this context as the yodelemes in Johnny's voice seem clearly intended as a style indicator for country music of the era (although on this particular track there is no first species yodelling).<sup>334</sup> That Johnny Pissoff expresses himself in the country idiom associates his attitudes with those of the reactionary elements of the society. His rant is directed at all the agitators for change: "And hey, mister – tell all the niggers my name is Johnny, Johnny Pissoff". Later it is "tell all the commies" and "tell all the draft card burners". The quickest musical code in the late 1960s for the communication of Johnny's reactionary politics was the country voice singing style, and this is signalled by his frequent use of the crack voice third species yodel. The chain of

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<sup>334</sup> The Fugs, "Johnny Pissoff Meets the Red Angel", re-released on *The Fugs: Electromagnetic Steamboat – The Reprise Recordings*, Rhino RHM2 7759, 2001.

associations is something like this: the yodeleme and the musical style are synecdoches of the country music idiom; this idiom is an index of the conservative and traditional attitudes of the people presumed to be fans of this type of music; so the yodeleme in Johnny Pissoff's singing are indexes of bigotry and reactionary politics. These two examples from the Mothers of Invention and the Fugs demonstrate how the yodel continued to be an effective sign in a completely new context, co-opting its historical associations with rustics to satirize right-wing politics and express the ideology of the counterculture in America.

The yodel in fact was a handy device, as it could clearly be used as a synecdoche for rural music, which itself connoted conservative values. A simple distinction could thus be drawn, delineating the contrasting ideologies during the middle and latter part of 1960s America. Progressive attitudes were associated with rock music; indeed, there was progressive rock music, as a subset of the larger genre. Progressive rock was generally considered the site of psychedelic experience and mind-alteration, and thus connoted liberation and a whole host of other attitudes associated with freedom.<sup>335</sup> On the other hand, country music, long the voice of traditionalism and conservatism, began to make overt political statements. Increasingly, country

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<sup>335</sup> See for instance Sheila Whitely, *The Space Between The Notes*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992.

songs were appearing that specifically confronted the hippies' countercultural stance. Songs such as Ernest Tubb's "America, Love It or Leave It" and especially Merle Haggard's "Okie From Muskogee" gave to country music its reactionary political voice – a voice directed particularly at the hippies, the draft dodgers, the bra burners, et al. Tellingly, Haggard's "Okie" uses the same crack-voice yodelme as a signifier for his ideological stance that Ed Sanders had used in his satirical "Johnny Pissoff Meets the Red Angel".

More recently, yodelling has appeared in films where its significances have been much less politically charged. Interestingly, while they create more affectionate and nostalgic contexts for the yodel sign, they nevertheless present it as basically comical.

The Coen Brothers film, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*,<sup>336</sup> is simultaneously an adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey* and a celebration of old time music. It would be perverse to read it as anything other than positive in its view of rural Southern music. Nevertheless, the yodelling in the film – occurring in fact at the film's climax – is again ironic and comical. It is heard in a performance of Jimmie Rodgers's "In the Jailhouse Now"; the performers, the film's protagonists – escaped from the chain gang and attempting to avoid capture – are dressed in outrageous hillbilly costumes, clearly marked for comedy. In

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<sup>336</sup> *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, Ethan Coen, d., Universal, 2000.

fact, with their long beards and flop hats, they resemble very exactly the stereotype outlined in Hawkins's study of this Southern type.<sup>337</sup> Moreover, the filming of the performers as they sing is done to maximise the comic effect, with humorously odd facial expressions for example. So while Southern rural music generally is celebrated, it is still performed with the comical overtones that have characterised its presentation since the radio barn dances of the 1930s. It is as though the ironic stance – ironic distancing – is necessary to make this music acceptable to the broader public.

*Toy Story 2* features a character called Jessie the Yodelling Cowgirl.<sup>338</sup> Clearly based upon the Patsy Montana-inspired cowgirl image, Jessie is an affectionate portrayal expressing nostalgia for childhood innocence. Yet her appearance and her boisterous behaviour again contextualise yodelling within comic stereotypes. It is part of the joke: she is old-fashioned, the sort of toy that middle-aged people might have owned when they were children, that they may fondly remember. Her yodelling is part of the Golden Age memory of childhood, part of the innocence of growing up. This idea of yodel equating to innocence is comparable to the subtext I referred to regarding Slim Whitman's yodelling in *Mars Attacks!* Part of the irony in *Toy Story 2*, of course, is that the 1950s, when the adults who can identify the toys

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<sup>337</sup> Hawkins discusses this particular representation in *Hillbilly*, pp. 18-29.

<sup>338</sup> *Toy Story 2*, John Lasseter, d., Walt Disney/Pixar, 1999.

in the film were growing up, was one of the tensest and most dangerous times the planet has experienced: the Cold War era, with its terrifying weapons build up and its brinkmanship between nuclear-armed superpowers.

### Final thoughts

The yodel's transmission across musical genres can be related to recent theories regarding the meme, the cultural equivalent of the biological gene.

The idea of the meme was first proposed by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*.<sup>339</sup> So long as the yodel maintains for itself a suitable functional role within a musical text, then it will be replicated in other texts. Its difficulty is in finding that suitable expressive role. Changes in tastes and in fashion necessitate evolving roles for the yodel. In early nineteenth-century music, that role was primarily as a signifier for Switzerland and the wealth of indexical relationships following on from that.

When the yodel's use for pictorialism and allusion to Switzerland lost its artistic currency, the function shifted to serve other purposes in the music. This may have been in the service of more generalised ideas of pastoralism, or ideas extending from concepts such as joy, freedom, solitude, and more.

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<sup>339</sup> Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*.



Ultimately, the longer yodels that I have been calling first species yodels were for the most part left by the wayside in the course of music's history. They survive in the Western music genre and appear occasionally when, for instance, some country singer revives something from the Jimmie Rodgers catalogue. However, showing the survival instincts of the gene and the meme, the yodel's primary characteristic, the yodeleme, tenaciously maintains a very strong representation in contemporary popular music. It found a new expressive function which continues its use, and thus its life, in the ongoing evolutionary processes driving music.

If we look at the corpus of yodelling material gathered in this research, the feature that links all these together is the yodeleme. In each case, the yodeleme is the signifier of *difference*. It is a difference in the musical information on the one hand, and a difference from prevailing vocal practices on the other. Always in a minority, yodelling proudly proclaims and celebrates its otherness.

The recurrence of established musemic formulas and lyric themes establishes cohesion within the groups who choose to be *different*. These intertextual melodies and themes help to maintain connections within the genre or tradition, both synchronically as well as diachronically.

The yodel was squeezed out of classical music because of its roughness. The broad changes occurring across classical music in the first half of the nineteenth century were very much in favour of power and regularity. It was during this time, for instance, that valves were added to horns. This innovation allowed more notes, greater reliability, relative ease of execution, and fewer distinctions in tone quality across the instruments' compass. This is analogous to the trend in singing, where pedagogy devised methods for power, projection, and preservation of the voice. In contrast, the yodel revels in its difference. In popular music contexts it is most frequently performed with a definite glottal stop to maximise its impact: the smooth transition valorised in classical singing styles ignored in favour of the sharp crack.

When the yodel was appropriated by the newly emerging hillbilly genre in the late 1920s, many of its standard musical tropes came with it, for instance certain incipits and certain melodies with their associated harmonies. In the case of the blues-influenced yodels, the rhythms and harmonic contexts also changed. While the simple I-V7 shuttle or cadence still crops up most frequently, the tonality had either changed from major key to blues modality or had been put into a bluesy framework with raggy rhythms. New forms meant new connotations and uses, and these in turn suggested future pathways to creative musicians.

There are, for instance, many examples such as Hank Williams's "Ramblin' Man", Kenny Roberts's "Broken Teenage Heart" and Lee Ann Rimes's "Blue" where second species yodelling is a signifier for pain, wistfulness, or sadness. These examples follow in mood and type Rex Allen's "Cowpoke". This is not to suggest that there is necessarily any influence. It is only to remark that the voice breaking technique gets fitted to expressive moods far removed from the dynamics and moods of distance hailing. The voice is, aside from touch, one of the primary modes for expression of intimacy or privacy. Yodelling with its normal Alpine associations seems very far removed from that.

Jimmie Rodgers appears to have been the first to yodel hummed and moaned passages, such as occurs in "Why Did You Give Me Your Love". In recent practice, second species yodelling, in particular, seems to associate with "delicate characters" signifying their vulnerability. There are numerous examples of this in recent popular music. One thinks of Chris Isaak's "Wicked Game" or of the Velvet Underground's "Jesus"; the Cranberries' "Zombie" was mentioned earlier. Alternatively, second species connotes ecstasy or abandon or exuberance, as in so many rockabilly songs. It is interesting to note that second species yodel seems to split into two contrasting mood areas: joy and ecstasy or loss and gloom. In this way it resembles the split between yodel and *Ranz des vaches* in the nineteenth century.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> See Chapter 3.

However, none of these just-mentioned contemporary singers is likely to want to be identified with yodelling, although the laryngeal technique they employ to produce the sounds is the same as in yodelling. This is a sociological question: singers seek ways of distinguishing what they do from what others do. The connotations of yodelling, which by and large are historically developed, are such that yodelling is now seen as comical, absurd, or simply rustic: all associations far from the urban and contemporary feel of this recent music. Yodelling distinguishes "otherness". It is as though it is permissible to call what the Aka pygmies do "yodelling", because their culture seems so different from ours. Perhaps this reflects a feeling of cultural superiority. "Others" yodel: rustics, peasants, and primitives. But in the case of Dido, for example, she is "one of us", and so the yodel label is uncomfortable, seems not to fit. This is how the contemporary prejudice against yodelling seems to work. This is a clear example of the distinctions/classification struggle as described by Pierre Bourdieu<sup>341</sup>. This struggle represents a wish to find a way of description that preserves the integrity and artistic purpose of the singer and avoids the association with and connotations of genres from which they wish to remain separate.

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<sup>341</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction, A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, tran. Richard Nice, Routledge, 1989, pp. 479-82.

But it is interesting to consider that at least one classical composers – Ligeti – has again been inspired by yodelling: that of the Aka. So we may find that popular performers again turn their attention toward it. The playful use of the voice in its trick with register is unlikely to vanish whatever it may be called. True, the full-blown first species variety is hopelessly (apparently) tied to the hillbilly and the cowboy and would take a radical recast of musical form to penetrate our culture with the same impact it once did. But ever-new uses of voice breaking will likely always be a part of popular music. It is simply too effective to abandon. As such, the suggestive power of humankind's primary musical instrument will remain a key area of study.

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"Yodelling Duet" (1918) from *The Beauty Spot*.

Zimmerman, Fritz (1923) "Ho-Lolo-E-Day – Jazz Yodel".

These items have been consulted in The British Library, The Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University, online at the Lester E. Levy Collection and at the American Memory division of the Library of Congress, among other sources.

## Discography – Acoustic Recordings

These are the 78s used in this research, listed by performer, more or less alphabetically (the couplings present the occasional infelicity here). The composer, where indicated on the discs, is shown in brackets after the title, as it appears on the label. I present all the variant spellings of “yodel” and of names such as Emmet as they appear on the sources I have. Moreover, where matrix numbers are present they are shown in brackets following the title and composer. Otherwise, the record number is shown. If the date is known from sources such as the Online Discographical Project, it is placed at the very end.

Barton, Ward. “I’m Dreaming of You” (original). (45924) Columbia A1834.

Barton, Ward. “My Pretty Lena” (original). (45940) Columbia A1834. 1915.

Barton, Ward. “Rock-A-Bye Baby” (46688). Columbia A 2031. 3/??/16.<sup>342</sup>

Barton, Ward. “Sleep, Baby, Sleep” (46689). Columbia A 2031.

Barton, Ward and Frank Carroll. “When the Moon am Shining” (Barton).  
Victor 18035 A.

Barton, Ward and Frank Carroll. “Rock-A-Bye Baby” (“new version by  
Barton”). Victor 18035-B. 4/3/1916.

Barton, Ward and Frank Carroll. “Hawaiian Love Song” (Barton) Victor  
17965-A.

Barton, Ward and Frank Carroll. “Sleep, Baby, Sleep” (“new version by  
Barton”) Victor 17965-B. 1916.

Al Bernard and Frank Kamplain. “O-le-o-lady”. Edison Diamond Disc  
51115-R, 1923

Braun, Emmy. “Aennel em Bärkli im Trueb” (Krengel?). (305) Elite Record  
1141.

Braun, Emmy. “Der Geissbuer” (Rieben). (306) Elite Record 1141.

Collins and Harlan. “Alexander and his Clarinet”. Oxford 4418, 1908.

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<sup>342</sup> The source for these dates is The Online Discographical Project.

Inauen, Arnold. „Von Mine Berge“(Tobler). (3215) Columbia A510.  
 Weber, Mia. “Lied Aus ‘Das Süsse Maedel’” (1424) Columbia A510.

Jones and Spencer. “Louie and Lena”, Zonophone 397, 1905.

Kamplain, Frank. “Silver Moon” (Ernest). (78996) Columbia A-2378.  
 Keefe, Matt. “Sleep, Baby, Sleep”. (77064) Columbia A-2378.

Keefe, Matt. “Mountain High” (Keefe). (39494) Columbia A 1604. 1914  
 Keefe, Matt. “The Strolling Yodler” (Keefe). (39495) Columbia A 1604.  
 1914

Kamplain, Frank. “Emmett’s Cuckoo Song” (Emmett). (78969)  
 Columbia A 2904.

Kamplain, Frank. “Emmett’s Lullaby” (Emmett). (78974) Columbia A 2904.

LaMar Pete. “Sleep, Baby, Sleep”. (586) Columbia A573.

LaMar Pete. “Medley of Emmett’s Yodles”. (588) Columbia A573.

McDonald, May. “Hush, Don’t Wake the Baby”. Victor 16077-A.

McDonald, May. “Roll on Silver Moon”. Victor 16077-B. 1908.

Murray, Billy and the Haydn Quartet. “Meet me down at the Luna, Lena”.  
 Victor Talking Machine 4369, 1905.

Reverelli, Minna. “Old Vienna Yodelling Dance” (Minna Reverelli). (B1 291)  
 Parlophone D.P. 167.

Reverelli, Minna. “The Cuckoo in the Wood” (Minna Reverelli). (B1 294)  
 Parlophone D.P. 167.

Wilson, Frank. “The German’s Arrival”. (2561) Victor 17257-A.

Watson, George P. “Hi-Le-Hi-Lo”. (4663) Victor 17257-B. 1913.

Watson, George P. “Emmett’s German Yodle”. (38121) Columbia A575.

Watson, George P. “Emmett’s Lullaby”. (38122) Columbia A 575. 1909.

Watson, George P. “Emmett’s Favorite Yodel” (J.K. Emmett). Victor 20247-A.

Watson, George P. “Alpine Specialty” (Popular Yodels). Victor 20247-B.

Watson, George P. “Cuckoo Song” (J.K. Emmett). Victor 17012-A.

Watson, George P. “Papa’s Baby Boy”. Victor 17012-B.

Watson, George P. "Du, Du" (Old German Air). Victor 4801 (single sided disc).

Watson, George P.? "Snyder, Does Your Mother Know You're Out?" (79041) Columbia A-572.

Watson, George P.? "Hi Le Hi Lo" (591) Columbia A-572.

Watson, George P. "Snyder, Does Your Mother Know You're Out?" Concert Cylinder B-184, 1899.

Watson, George P. "Santa Claus Yodel". Edison 2-minute cylinder, 1902.

Watson, George P. "Lauterbach". Victor 4673, 1905.

Watson, George P. "Sauerkraut is Bully". Gold Moulded Cylinder 4023, 1905.

Watson, George P. "Roll on Silver Moon". Victor 4836, 1906.

Watson, George P. and Len Spencer. "The Happy German Twins", 1906.

Weber, Mia. "Lied von Süsse Maedel" (01424=1) Columbia A 0510. 06/??/03.

Inauen, Arnold. "Von Mine Berge" (03215=3) Columbia A 0510. 05/??/05.

Wright, Edward Sterling. "In de mornin'" by Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Edison Blue Amberol Cylinder, number 2235, 1914.

## Other Recordings

Allen, Rosalie. *The Hillbilly Yodel Star of the 1940s*. Cattle Compact CCD 226, 2000.

*American Yodeling 1911-1946*. Trikont US-0246-2, 1998.

.Bowie, David. *The Man Who Sold The World*. EMI 7243 521901 0 2, 1999/1972.

Britt, Elton. *The RCA Years*. BMG Collectors' Choice Music CCM-031-2, 1997.

Brown, Herschel. *Complete Recorded Works, 1928-1929*. Document DOCD-8001, 1996.

Carter, Wilf. *Cowboy Songs*. Bear Family BCD 15939 HI, 1997.

Carlisle, Cliff. *Blues Yodeler and Steel Guitar Wizard*. Arhoolie Folklyric CD 7039, 1996.

Cranberries, The. "Zombie" (Dolores O'Riordan), *Stars: The Best of 1992-2002*, Island Records 04400632772, 2002.

Crosby, Bing and the Andrews Sisters. "Yodeling Ghost". *Their Complete Recordings*, MCA Records 11503.

Dido. "White Flag". *Life for Rent*. Arista UK (BMG), 50137, 2003.

Fugs, The. *Electromagnetic Steamboat: The Reprise Recordings*. Rhino RHM2 7759, 2001.

Gorman, Skip. "Night Herding Song". *Hills of Home*. Rounder CD AN 17/17, 1995.

Grandpa Jones. *Yodeling Hits*. Monument HA-U 8119, 1963.

Griffin, Rex. *The Last Letter*. Bear Family BCD 15 911 CI, 1996.



- Haggard, Merle. "Okie from Muskogee". *16 Biggest Hits*. Legacy Recordings, 69321.
- Hamblen, Stuart. *Inspired by Jimmie Rodgers*. Cowgirlboy Records LP 5024, n.d.
- Hillbilly Blues*. ASV CD AJA 5361, 2000.
- Hollerin'*. Rounder CD 0071, 1995.
- Ho'opi'i, Sol. *Master of the Hawaiian Steel Guitar*. Rounder CD 1024, 1991.
- Isaac, Chris. *Wicked Game*. Reprise 7599265132, 1991.
- Johnson, Tommy. *Complete Recorded Works*. Document DOCD-5001, 1990.
- Kalama's Quartet. *Early Hawaiian Classics*. Arhoolie Folklyric CD 7028, 1993.
- King Rockabilly*. Ace CDCHD 777, 2001.
- The Legendary Singing Cowboys*. Sony Music Special Products, A23462, 1995.
- McBride, Janet. *50 Years of Yodeling with Janet McBride*. Brookhurst Records CD005, 2002.
- Memories of Jimmie Rodgers*. Bear Family BCD 15938 AH, 1997.
- Memphis Rocks: Rockabilly in Memphis 1954-1968*. Center for Southern Folklore/Smithsonian Collection RD 051, 1992.
- Miller, Emmett. *The Minstrel Man From Georgia*. Columbia 483584 2, 1996.
- Montana, Patsy. *The Best of Patsy Montana*. Sony Music Special Products, A 52035, 2001.
- Owens, Tex. *Cattle Call*. Bear Family BCD 15 777 AH, 1994.
- Puckett, Riley. *The Riley Puckett Story (1924-1941)*. Roots RL-701, n.d.
- Reeves, Goebel. *Hobo's Lullaby*. Bear Family BCD 15 680 AH, 1994.
- Rimes, LeAnn. *Blue*. Curb CURCD 028, 1996.

Roberts, Kenny. *Jumpin' & Yodelin'*. Bear Family BCD 15908 AH, 1996.

Rodgers, Jimmie. *The Singing Brakeman*. Bear Family BCD 15540 FI, 1992.

Rogers, Roy. *The First Classic Recordings of Roy Rogers*. Cattle Compact CCD 209, 1998.

Sex Pistols, The. "My Way". *Kiss This*. Virgin CDV 2702.

*Singing Cowboys, The*. Pegasus PGN CD 836, 2000.

Twitty, Conway. "Lonely Blue Boy". *Conway Twitty, The Hits*, Universal Ims E249357, 2001, rec. 1959.

*Ultimate Yodeling Collection, The*. Castle Pulse PLS CD 630, 2003.

Velvet Underground, The. *The Velvet Underground*. Polydor 531 252.

Whitman, Slim. *Rose Marie*. Bear Family BCD 15768 FI, 1996.

Williams, Hank. *40 Greatest Hits*. Polydor 821 233-2, 1988.

Zappa, Frank. *200 Motels*. Ryko RCD 10513/14, 1997, orig. rel. 1971.

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*Brats*. James Parrott, d. Hal Roach/MGM, 1930.

*The Bride of Frankenstein*. James Whale, d. Universal, 1935.

*The Emperor Waltz*. Billy Wilder, d. Paramount, 1948.

*Mars Attacks!* Tim Burton, d. Warner, 1996.

*The Nutty Professor*. Jerry Lewis, d. Paramount, 1963.

*O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Ethan Coen, d. DeLuxe, 2000.

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Walt Disney, d. Walt Disney, 1937.

*Son of Frankenstein*. Rowland V. Lee, d. Universal, 1939.

*Toy Story 2*. John Lasseter, d. Walt Disney/Pixar, 1999.

*Way Out West*. Stan Laurel, d. Hal Roach, 1937.

*Yes Sir, Mr. Bones*. Ron Ormond, d. Spartan, 1951.