

**Věra Thořová, Jiří Traxler,  
Zdeněk Vejvoda: LIDOVÉ  
PÍSNĚ Z PRAHY ve sbírce  
Františka Homolky. I. díl  
[Folk Songs from Prague in  
the Collection of František  
Homolka, 1st Volume.]**

Prague: Institute of Ethnology  
of the Academy of Sciences  
of the Czech Republic, 2011,  
508 pp. Studies, critical edition,  
photographs, appendices.

Intellectual interest in urban, concretely Prague, songs of the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries appears and reappears at the latest in 1925 with the extensive article by Karel Čapek, “Songs of the Prague People.” In the ’30s Emil František Burian collects them and writes a bit about them; in the ’60s a thin book of the Club of Friends of Poetry, *Songs of the Prague People* (Václav Pletka – Vladimír Karbusický, 1966) follows this interest with the reprinted (rather abbreviated) Čapek text, a selection of 34 songs and a brief commentary. Two years later Karbusický elaborates this in a monograph *Between Folk Songs and Hits* (1968); Josef Kotek (1994) also includes this topic in his two-volume *History of Czech Popular Music and Singing of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. However, interest focuses on a relatively small part of the urban song repertoire, which Kotek aptly characterizes as satiric to lascivious “*Songs of the Prague People*,” which *constantly resist esthetic regulation and, in the humorous singing of joyful society, represent some sort of panoptically interesting museum of bygone days* (p. 130). Let’s emphasize that

exactly such an esthetically (and ethically) distinctive image is and was strengthened by the use of “old Prague songs” in today’s and recent public space, e.g., at the turn of the millennium by the popular group Šlapeto, who cheerfully also sang (along with some mentioned by Čapek) “Little hands, don’t worry. You are not going to work,” or “People, I love beeeer.”

In the introduction of his text, Čapek complains about the absence of academic publication of a hundred pages of Prague songs and that the book will be from the pen of “an associate professor of folklore at Charles University.” This reviewed publication is (after nearly 90 years), to a certain extent, the fulfillment of Čapek’s wish. All three authors are experienced folklore scholars from an academic institution – and their experience (and thoroughness) is apparent here.

What they submit is, on one hand, an edition of 490 songs, collected in Prague in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the teacher František Homolka (1885–1933) in the framework of the initiative “Folk-songs in Austria.” Besides, there are six thematically connected studies and gradually thorough indices (incipit, indices of performers, localities, melodies), photo documentations and notes.

The introductory study, “Singing of Urbanized Society” (pp. 10–19), attempts to bring some systemization to extremely complex stratified material. The author (I consider the anonymousness of the studies a certain defect; from my own experience I judge that even if co-authors consult a text, basically only one formulates it) attempts to systematize it, on one hand, by means of the limitation of existing and implementation of new terms, some of

which seem to me conceptually incompatible. An example would be the pair “song – singing,” (píseň – zpěvnost) where the former is understood as a subset of the latter (p. 16). In the absolute majority of the literature the term song until now, however, is understood as structural, thus as a certain musical form (which understandably has its own social context), while the term singing aims toward an activity, that is, a process – whose result can but need not be a song. In my opinion it is about the consequence of a mixture of discourses: of older folkloristics – with its need for fixation and categorization (whose classic example is the index of tune incipits), with newer ethnomusicological discourse aiming to describe phenomena – including the musical ones – in their synchronic and diachronic changeability. Some formulations also correspond to this, e.g., when the authors write in the introduction that Homolka recorded *a traditional repertoire in a state of contamination (!) by semi-folk and urban folkloric elements* (p. 6). Anthropology, including anthropology of music, starting from cultural relativism, does not have room for contamination as a concept, while folklore studies, mainly if they consider the folk song as canonically cut and dried, understands every non-canonical influence as contamination.

As a second means of systematization of material some categories – functional, according to the social context, genre – are used here. From this systematization, then, come the next three chapters: “Song Repertoire of a “University Realm” (pp. 20–29), “Songs as Goods” (pp. 30–45), and “Czech Social Song of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century” (pp. 46–55). The next two chapters – “The Initiative of Folk Song in Austria”

(pp. 56–73) and “The Collector František Homolka” (pp. 74–84) – closely relate to the edition of songs itself.

As far as the edition is concerned, it is actually only about a part of Homolka’s collection: the whole thing contains about 3,000 transcriptions. The greatest part is transcriptions from Libeň (incorporated into Prague in 1901), collected from roughly 260 singers in all age categories and thus representing the broadest repertoire spectrum. Further transcriptions are from Kobylisy and other peripheral parts of Prague. This volume contains four categories: love songs, comic and dance songs, military songs, and sung trumpet tunes. In the planning is the publication of a second volume that is to contain ballads, legends and shop songs; folk-like songs; ritual songs and children’s folklore (p. 6)

It is understood that, for a similarly extensive publication, it would be possible to write a review of almost any imaginable length. We limit ourselves here only to the question of how much published material corresponds to the cheerful, or even lascivious image of “old Prague songs,” in whose creation a whole list of people from Čapek to Šlapeto and beyond participated. According to the part of the Homolka collection published until today it is possible to judge that there is only a little. A great part of the songs are similar to those that can be found in a rural environment or their variants, including textual motifs referring to places outside of Prague (“Why does this Jizera river hum so sadly” – p. 170, etc.). To what extent is that fact influenced by auto-censorship and/or the interior criteria of the collector and to what extent by field reality is now difficult to judge. In any case, the world of

Homolka's singers is much more common, full of unfulfilled (and rarely fulfilled) loves, streams, potatoes and sheep... and is far from our imaginary world where "Little hands, don't worry. You are not going to work" holds good.

*Zuzana Jurková*

**Marta Kolářová (ed.):  
REVOLTA STYLEM. Hudební  
subkultury mládeže v České  
republice. [Revolt in Style.  
Music Youth Subcultures in the  
Czech Republic.]**

Praha: Slon 2012, 264 pp.  
+ photographs.

*Revolt in Style* is a much awaited contribution bridging the gap in the literature on subcultures from an insider's perspective, an occasion to celebrate and comment on its achievements. Marta Kolářová, a researcher at the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, known for her studies on the alter-globalization movement and radical women's activism, set up a team of four significant scholars/active participants in musical and social movements.

The book opens with the editor's goal being to question the specificity of subcultures in post-socialist society in the era of globalization and the usefulness of traditional approaches. After defining subcultures via Jenks, Gelder, Thornton, Bennett, Williams, etc., Kolářová discusses the Chicago School studies of Bohemians and delinquents, Talcott Parsons, and the Birmingham school of

cultural studies' romantic approach to subcultures as resistance to hegemony, with the milestone Hebdige's essay on the symbolic destruction of the social order. Because of Kolářová's interest in gender issues it does not come as a surprise to have the volume enriched by a feminist critique of subcultures as subversive towards society, but not so to the gender regime. The legacy of the Birmingham School and its armchair class approach is dealt with by the leaders of post-subculture studies such as Muggleton. The rave subculture of the 1990s required a new theoretical paradigm of resistance and thus researchers switched their terminology to youth lifestyles, scenes, neo-tribes and Maffesoli's discourse on nomadism. Kolářová follows the developments in the field up to the re-emerged politicization of Reclaim the Streets! EarthFirst! or political anarcho-punk. The former Soviet block subcultures are seen as a life-style choice, not a class issue. Czech writings on subcultures include Vaněk's study of pre-1989 punk of 2002 and Smolík's Youth Subcultures of 2010, which, however, fails to connect Czech subcultures with theory. Kolářová's team focuses on classic subcultures in the contemporary Czech Republic with the aim to interpret their values, politics, structure, lifestyle and relationship to the mainstream and commodification, using "views from the inside," thick description and memory work. In-depth interviews, participant observation in clubs and concerts, lyrics and internet debates, symbols, values, drugs, politics, religions, ideologies, and hierarchies were processed through Atlas coding with the aim to describe and interpret data on the background of existing theories.