

Spain: Lomax Remembered

During his epic fieldtrip to Spain in 1952-53, Alan Lomax did not cover quite all the different regions of the country but he did collect examples of the traditional music of most of them: Andalusia, Aragon, Asturias, Belears, Castile, Catalonia, Extremadura, Galicia, Murica, Navarro, Pais Vasco, and Santander. And, as Judith Cohen points out in her introductory essay to the *Spanish Recordings* series in *The Alan Lomax Collection*, the Lomax Archive in New York houses, in addition to his tape recordings, "his field notes and photographs, records of payments scrupulously made to the people he recorded, and copies of scores of letters he somehow found time to write thanking people for their help".

In 1960, in his invaluable article "Saga of a Folksong Hunter", first published in *Hi-Fi Review* (May 1960) and reprinted in the booklet accompanying the sampler CD for the *Collection*, Alan penned the following reminiscences of his Spanish expedition (pp 52-53 of the reprint):

For a month or so I wandered erratically, sunstruck by the grave beauty of the land, faint and sick at the sight of this noble people, ground down by poverty and a police state. I saw that in Spain, folklore was not mere fantasy and entertainment. Each Spanish village was a self-contained cultural system with tradition penetrating every aspect of life; and it was this system of traditional, often pagan mores, that had been the spiritual armor of the Spanish people against the many forms of tyranny imposed upon them through the centuries. It was in their inherited folklore that the peasant, the fisherman, the muleteers and the shepherds I met found their models for that noble behavior and that sense of the beautiful which made them such satisfactory friends.... It was never hard to find the best singers in Spain, because everyone in their neighborhood knew them and understood how and why they were the finest stylists in their particular idiom....The Spain that was richest in both music and fine people was not the hot-blooded gypsy South with its flamenco, but the quiet, somber plains of the west, the highlands of Northern Castile, and the green tangle of the Pyrenees where Spain faces the Atlantic and the Bay of Biscay....Seven months of wine-drenched adventure passed. The tires on my Citroen had worn so smooth that on one rainy

winter day in Galicia I had nine punctures.... I had seventy-five hours of tapes with beautiful songs from every province, and rising to my mind's eye, a new idea - a map of Spanish folk song style - the old choral North, the solo-voiced and oriental South, and the hard-voiced modern center, land of the ballad and of the modern lyrics. Spain...was on tape.

Judith Cohen writes:

After Alan Lomax's death at age 87, July 19, 2002, David asked me to write a few words about his work in Spain: last year (35.3-4) I wrote a longer piece about this, so this will just be a short reminiscence for this special issue.

When the news of Alan's death reached me, I was in Spain, having just spent two weeks in the Azores Islands, at the invitation of the Islands government, and having heard both in the Islands and on the Portuguese mainland how much people wished Lomax had done fieldwork in Portugal too. I immediately sent messages to people in the folk music world in Spain, by email or in most cases, by text message on my home-away-from-home in Spain, my cellphone - and forwarded text messages which arrived on it to my regular e-mail, with the result that I can reproduce them for you here (now, what would this type of cellphone have done for Lomax's logistically difficult fieldwork in 1952...) So, to let people from the Spanish folk music world speak for themselves, here are a few of the messages which arrived:

(on the cellphone)

> Subject: Mensaje recibido de 606261683
> Date: Sat, 20 Jul 2002 16:06
> from J.S. (Madrid-Extremadura) UNA PENA LO DE LOMAX. PERO NOS HA DEJADO UNA GRAN HERENCIA A LOS AMANTES DE LA MUSICA TRADICIONAL.
("How sad, about Lomax. But he's left a great heritage to all of us who love traditional music.")

(on the cellphone)

> Subject: Mensaje recibido
> Date: Sat, 20 Jul 2002 16:48

> from M.A.B. (Granada) "Gracias por el mensaje. Rezare por el. Ayer entrevistaste a Juan Maya en el Sacromonte ..."

(Thanks for the message. I'll pray for him. Yesterday I interviewed JM in Sacromonte...) [refers to a Gypsy whose mother had sung for Alan Lomax in 1952, i.e. continuing Lomax's work]

E-mail:

Date: Sat, 20 Jul 2002 10:09:46 +0200

> from JG (Guadalajara-Galicia)

> Asunto: Re: Ha muerto Alan Lomax

> Si lees esto Judith, por favor, transmite mi más profundo pésame a los familiares. No hace mucho, le leíste personalmente algunos de nuestros mensajes de agradecimiento por su estupenda labor.....Estupendo el trabajo de Galicia, el de Aragon y el más reciente de Extremadura. Me hubiera gustado conocerle. Descanse en paz.

("If you read this, Judith, transmit my deepest condolences to his family. Not long ago, you yourself read to him some of our messages of appreciation for his fantastic work....the CD's of Galicia, Aragon, and most recently Extremadura, are great. I would have liked to meet him. May he rest in peace.")

E-mail:

> Subject: Re: sobre Lomax

> Date: Mon, 29 Jul 2002

> From: J.A.T. (Castilla La Mancha)

>Ya me he enterado de la muerte de Lomax, trasmitelos mi mas sincero pésame

> a sus familiares....Referente a lo de La Solana, no te preocupes, pues la gente ya la tengo localizada....

("I heard about Lomax's death, transmit my sincere condolences to his family...as for La Solana, don't worry, I've now found the people...") [referring to people whom Lomax recorded in 1952, continuing his work...]

E-mail:

> Date: Tue, 30 Jul 2002 15:30:44 +0200

> From: B.M.C. (Galicia)

> Hola judith ...

> Lamento muchísimo su muerte y me gustaría que hicieras llegar a su familia nuestras condolencias, pues aún sin conocerlo personalmente somos muchos los que sentimos esta noticia.

("I'm really sorry about his death and I'd like you to send our condolences to his family, since even

without knowing him in person, many of us are really sad to hear this news...")

As part of the work preparing the CD liner notes, I asked the people working on each region to try to locate the original singers and musicians from 1952 or their heirs, for many reasons: first to acknowledge them and send them copies of the CDs, and also to interview them and learn more about the musical situation of that time and the changes today. These past two years I've ended up in Spain a lot with a number of research grants and lectures or concerts, so have been able to accompany my colleagues on many of these village trips.

Those who remember Alan Lomax are, without exception, positive and affectionate in their reminiscences of him. One recalled that the money he had sent from the BBC for the songs they used allowed her to feed her children, as a recent widow, that winter. A man on the tiny island of Formentera recalled bicycling around the island at 14, telling people to come and sing for Lomax's recording session the next evening. Several referred with some amusement to his appreciation of their local wine (about which he wrote quite rhapsodically on some occasions.) Lomax's own diaries describe the village people with insight, respect and affection, but his descriptions of those in the "official" world are not always so gentle. He got along well with certain musicologists, local priests, doctors and others - but had much to say about Franco's dictatorship and those who worked for it, and much to say about the Guardia Civil who followed him around - you can read about these in my earlier article.

This past summer, I sang at a small folk festival in a town where Lomax recorded a singing family; the daughter now performs *jotas* and that day happened to be singing, in full costume, for a wedding. She immediately wrote down the address of the Lomax centre to send them her condolences and thank them for having sent her copies of her father's original recordings. The next day, people who had come to talk to me after my concert invited me to go to a lovely medieval town an hour south of there and look for some other people Lomax had recorded. We met the only one who still lived there, and he told us cheerfully, "Oh, I remember. We didn't sing the last verses of the MAYOS because, you know, all those off-colour words while Franco and the Guardia Civil were

around... I'm getting over bronchitis now but come back in a month or so and I'll sing you all the verses we left out..."

Alan Lomax would have loved it. And we thought of him in June, presenting the Extremadura CD in the village where many of the songs on it were recorded, with a couple of the same women, 50 years later, singing and playing tambourine, and an 82-year-old three-holed flute-and-drum player (who is also still a full-time shepherd) playing tunes he learned from a musicologist whom Alan Lomax had recorded playing them... the women put down their tambourines and danced.

Alan Lomax's impressive academic and other professional accomplishments are described in many places, including recent obituaries in *Sing Out! Magazine* (46/3 2002:24-5), *The New York Times*, and the *Folklife Center News*. In the latter (FCN24/3,2002:12), a note tells us that he was made a "Living Legend" by the Library of Congress, one of 80 persons selected for their "...individual creativity, conviction, dedication and exuberance". It strikes me that we're fortunate in this world to have many individuals who work with the first three of these, but real exuberance is perhaps in shorter supply. Lomax's exuberance continued to the end: I was fortunate to spend Christmas 2001 with him and Anna, and Anna's son Odysseus. As a present, I made Alan a video of extracts of encounters I'd had with people who'd recorded for him half a century earlier all over Spain, ending with a village he had jotted down as one he'd like to visit but never managed to reach, known for its women singer-drummers. Weakened from strokes and their effects, severely limited in his use of spoken language, when these strong-voiced women appeared on the screen, 87-year-old Alan Lomax suddenly sat up straight, pointed his finger at the T.V. and exclaimed perfectly clearly, "Who ARE they? They're wonderful! I have to go record them, NOW!" I wrote to tell the mayoress of the village (500 inhabitants) about this, and when I was in the village in August and told them about his death, they mourned as if he HAD been there.

Anna Chairetakis Lomax and her small, dedicated staff at ACE (Association for Cultural Equity) are continuing and developing Alan Lomax's work. Look for the recordings continuing to appear on Rounder, not only from Spain but also from Italy, France, Britain, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, and, of course, the United States....

In the academic world, Alan Lomax had fervent admirers, and he had equally fervent detractors, even enemies (remember Rudyard Kipling? "You have no enemies, you say?/Alas, my friend, the boast is poor..."). But among the people I've met in Spain who were the sources of the music he wrote about, the reactions were not academic at all, but human and affectionate. In the end, that is the most important legacy one can hope to leave.

See: www.alan-lomax.com/
www.rounder.com/rounder/artists/lomax_alan/
www.nytimes.com/2002/07/20/obituaries/20LOMA.html

The Spanish Recordings

Rosaleen writes:

According to the Rounder website, three volumes of "The Spanish Recordings" series of *The Alan Lomax Collection* have been issued in the US. No record store in Edmonton had - or has - any of these in stock, so I tried to order them all through Rounder's Canadian distributor. The message came back that only two of the CDs were available in Canada: "Galicia" and "Extremadura". By hook or by crook, we'll get the missing CD sooner or later, and we'll review it and any new ones that come along in a later issue. But here, in the meantime, are reviews of the two we have.



The Spanish Recordings: Galicia
Rounder 82161-1761-2 [2001]

The Spanish Recordings: Extremadura
Rounder 82161-1763-2 [2002]

These two CDs represent the fruits of Alan Lomax's field-collecting between June and December 1952 in Galicia and Extremadura. The 30 items from Galicia and 42 from Extremadura include panpipe melodies, street music on bagpipe and tabor, dance tunes, work songs, and *romances* (these last constituting traditional narrative ballads sung by a small group or by one vocalist, usually unaccompanied). All but one of the *romances* on these recordings were discovered in Extremadura, described by Judith Cohen and Maria Gutierrez in their Introduction as "the home of the Hispanic ballad." Both discs feature a variety of instruments, some more familiar than others, ranging from woodwind through stringed instruments to percussion. Both recordings are accompanied by a booklet containing meticulous notes and evocative, informative introductory and concluding sections.

The booklets are excellent, both in organization and in content. Judith Cohen's preface to the Galicia booklet is followed by an introduction by Luis Costa of the University of Vigo, Spain, who also transcribed and annotated each song, with additional notes and English translations by Judith Cohen. For the Extremadura booklet the introductions, notes and transcriptions are shared by Judith Cohen and Maria Gutierrez (who was five years old when Alan Lomax came to her home province of Extremadura to collect and record). Judith Cohen is again responsible for the English translations. Credits to other collaborators are faithfully recorded at the end of each booklet. To include transcriptions and translations was a splendid idea, enabling the listener to follow the Spanish text or the translation as she or he chooses. The translations alone must have involved an enormous amount of painstaking, difficult work.

The value of these recordings – much of the material is previously unreleased – can hardly be overestimated. In the Galicia booklet Luis Costa praises Lomax's breadth of vision in recording such a wide and representative sample of "the people's music" and comments: "The importance of several of the recordings on this CD is exceptional – in some cases because socioeconomic changes have caused the total disappearance of a tradition (for example, the stone-cutters' song or "Donde vai, San Xoan"); in other cases (such as the *desafio*, where different singers take turns improvising satirical or insulting verses and sing them at each other amidst much collective mirth) because the spontaneity of a

performance and its total integration into the lives of the people would be nearly impossible to reproduce today." Similarly, in her introduction to the Extremadura booklet, Maria Gutierrez places song genres in their traditional contexts linked to the cycle of the seasons and the work appropriate to each.

And then there is the beauty and variety of the songs themselves, culminating in the majestic a cappella intoning of the *romances* by singers such as José Canal, a teacher, local theatre director and journalist who facilitated Lomax's visits to the Caceres area where many of the Extremadura songs were collected, and Juan 'the Shepherd' Campos Barquilla, whose ballads include a narrative whose origins go back to the 12th century French epic *The Song of Roland*. Some of the longer *romances* are given in shorter versions than those actually collected by Lomax so that a greater variety of songs could be included. In these cases the text is still fully transcribed in the booklet with a note showing which verses have been omitted.

Other songs feature the strong, high-pitched voices of women, singly or in a group, accompanying rural tasks such as flax-beating or crushing, grape-trampling and ploughing, or linked to a festive setting like a wedding, Christmas or Easter. Men, similarly, have songs to accompany stone-cutting or driving mules. Rhythms vary from the long-drawn-out, sometimes decorated style of some of the slower songs to spirited dance numbers – in fact, there are quite a few dances featuring the medieval *gaita y tamboril* (3-holed flute and tabor) combination characteristic of the Northern Caceres area of Extremadura, used in sword/stick dances and to accompany other dances such as the *Quita y Pon*, *fandango* and *jota*. In Galicia the *gaita* is a bagpipe (*gaita gallega*), and the Galician *muineira* (mill dance) also uses tambourine and voice to mark the rhythm.

These CDs will delight and fascinate many. They represent a fitting tribute to each culture, revealing both the life-styles of Galicia and Extremadura at a particular moment in time and some of the historical and ethnic antecedents which make that life-style so musically and spiritually rich.

Rosaleen Gregory