Skipping from Folk to Pop (and Back): An Investigation of Values Inherent in Children's Music in the West in the Late 20th Century

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"There's as many kinds of folk songs as there are folks, and that's a *lot* of different kinds."

- Pete Seeger[1]

As a children's music educator, I have become aware of a fascinating difference between two essential types of kids' music: songs which can be sung with groups of children, and those which cannot. When I began teaching in February of 2010, I drew immediately from Raffi, whose music I grew up with, as well as a record by Canadians Lois Birkenshaw-Fleming and David E. Walden, called *The Goat with Bright Red Socks*; both have songs that can be taught to, and sung with, a group. Soon thereafter, looking for new material, I began buying all kinds of kids' music, based mostly on suggestions from parenting blogs or garnered from friends in conversation or via Facebook. As these CDs started to arrive and as I started listening to the digital downloads I had purchased, I noticed something striking: while the level of musical sophistication and the production values were excellent in the newer music by people like Peter Himmelman, Justin Roberts, and They Might Be Giants, by and large the songs were simply not suitable for singing with *groups* of children. The cause of this, I surmised, was threefold: a) the lyrical content was too involved and did not involve enough repetition; b) it was difficult to incorporate actions into them; and c) the music itself was too complex harmonically, melodically, and possibly rhythmically.

At the same time as I was doing my own research, I was handed a stack of CDs by my employer, music they had obtained (mainly from Kindermusik) and come to see as "ideal" for use with classes of kids. This music, being marketed specifically to children's educators such as myself, was of a very distinct type: cheaply produced, very often with midi backing tracks and groups of school children singing in unison, and almost always made up of only the most "standard" children's songs, though stripped of any "offending" language. The purpose of these songs, it seemed, was simply to get children to enjoy music and to learn how to sing and create rhythm: music for music's sake.

Thus I was presented with a dilemma: I couldn't use the songs I enjoyed listening to, and the ones that might have been useful I found completely unpalatable. The search was on, then, for material I could use that would satisfy both my musical tastes and my needs as an educator. What I eventually found was a huge wealth of simple, pithy, lyrically rich music from the 1950s, almost all produced by musicians associated with that decade's so-called "folk revival".

These songs, rich with cultural history, were ones that taught ideas and dealt with issues, songs that were a vehicle for imparting knowledge and the wisdom of generations. It was unapologetically political, highly moralistic (though often deeply metaphorical), and unafraid to broach subjects Peggy Seeger refers to as the "birth-love-work-death" cycle (Peggy Seeger 1978). In the liner notes for *Old Mother Hippletoe: Rural and Urban Children's Songs,* Kate Rinzler says, "children were the young ethnographers of their society, observing and judging critically the implications for culture stability and culture change in a changing world." (Rinzler 1978:1)

My research primarily concerns music created for younger children, from preschool to elementary-aged kids. Thus, for the purposes of this paper I generally avoid in-depth discussions of so-called "pre-teen" or "tween" artists like Hannah Montana or Justin Bieber, though these do inevitably surface in larger discussions since straightforward generalizations by age are impossible. That said, however, since the majority of kids' music falls into the binary of folk vs. pop, it is from those two starting points that any discussions around meaning or ideology must grow.

I must also acknowledge my own taste and utilitarian preferences in my choice of focus. As I am still in the throes of my teaching job, and am still compelled to bring new songs to class every week, my children's music listening is constantly being railroaded back to that music I find readily useable.

The children I teach all attend private daycare facilities on a half- or full-day basis at least one day a week, most of them more, and some for all five. Similarly, the children I am in contact with through my daughter's (kindergarten) class are all in a specialized arts- and community-based program within the school, which requires ten hours of volunteer time per family per month. These factors, and their economic implications, highlight for me the fact that I am largely dealing with an educated middle-class group, the majority of whom are, with the exception of the school I teach at in Mississauga, also white. Apt here is Richard Middleton's assertion that taste is a function of social power (Middleton 1990:247), and that decisions about what music we enjoy are as much rooted in a need for positional validation in terms of class and power as they are simple reflections of that from which we derive pleasure. Naturally then, class divisions affect the types of music the children are exposed to, the types of music they enjoy, and also, inevitably, the types of music I choose to sing with them.

In this article, I will deal with two primary areas of focus: 1) the history of children's music from the 1950s to the 1980s, touching briefly on the 30 years since then,

attempting to explain some of its stylistic shifts from folk to pop; and 2) an analytical approach to determining the differences between children's folk and children's pop, from both a technical and a socio-cultural standpoint.

A Brief History of Children's Music

Music intended specifically for children has likely been around for aeons, but with the advent of recording technologies, it began to take on a special significance, as works by Prokofiev, Poulenc, and Britten, some Tin Pan Alley songs, nursery rhymes, and Disney's "Silly Symphonies" (Disneyshorts 2011) became some of the first and most notable pieces recorded for children. Further, in the arena of *popular* music on record, recordings for children really started with the folk movement of the 1950s.

The world's first economically viable record clubs were Young People's Records (YPR) and Children's Record Guild (CRG) (Bonner 2011), established in 1946 (Truitt, "Timeline" 2011), both of which catered to children (and their financially viable parents). Under these labels, many 78s were released, running the gauntlet of folk, jazz, and classical recordings all aimed at children (Bonner 2011). The first of these was a single called "Train to the Zoo", recorded in 1949 by a folk quartet (ibid.) which was to become that great cornerstone of the folk scene, The Weavers (ibid.). Not long after, in 1952, as the baby boom continued, Victrola sold six million "kiddie player" record players designed specifically for 45s (Sanjek 1988: 246), so that even by then children were beginning to be recognized not only as a distinct group, but also as a target-worthy consumer demographic.

Through the 1950s, children's music began to be recorded with greater frequency: Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Ed McCurdy, Ella Jenkins, Burl Ives, and Canadian Alan Mills[2] all released albums for kids, though these were mostly considered side-projects to the artists' primary careers in ("adult") folk. In 1959, the first song ever to win a Grammy for Best Children's Recording was a distinctly commercial-sounding Top 40 Christmas song penned by Ross Bagdasarian called "The Chipmunk Song" (Truitt, "Timeline" 2011).

By the 1960s, while people like Doc Watson, Lead Belly, Jean Ritchie, and Sam Hinton were still releasing folk records for children, other segments of the music industry had begun following suit, including some notable forays by electronica pioneer Bruce Haack, and the emergence of Disneyland Records, which had been set up in 1956 (Johnson 1971: D-2).

In 1969, Peter, Paul and Mary released the children's album *Peter, Paul and Mommy,* including what in 1963 had already been a number 2 hit, "Puff the Magic Dragon" (Bowman 2011). This was a significant development, historically, because it marked the first time that a charting popular group had recorded an album for children (Truitt, "Timeline" 2011), setting the stage for similar moves by popular artists from then on.

By the 1970s, two main things were affecting children's music: 1) television had a prevailing influence on it, and 2) children's folk had a second resurgence. Sheldon Posen argued that the children's folk revival that sprang up in Canada in the 1970s was made possible by a culture that valued "society, togetherness in diversity, mosaic, nature, and so on ... and resulted in sociocultural legislation and changes in consciousness ... a warm, fuzzy, folk-festival worldview." (Posen 1993) Canadian parents, now "upwardly mobile" yuppies, were eager to share their own childhood experience of folk music with their children, and had the income to support that desire. The irony, of course, was that this pushed folk from a countercultural music of protest and resistance into what became a *popular* art form – a music of nostalgia and safety (ibid.). Bert Simpson, a senior associate at the Troubadour Music record label, told me that at the height of Raffi's career, he "was selling a million albums a year, touring 50-60 cities a year ... [and though] by nature he ... doesn't really fit in [to popular culture] ... he'd be the first to recognize that his children's music [had become] a part of [it]" (Simpson 2011).

Television, Cross-Branding, and the FCC

In 1974, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) set out a number of regulations for advertising in children's television programming. These included three main points:

1. "Bumpers" must be used before showing ads during kids' TV shows, making clear that the ads were not part of the program being broadcast.
2. Shows and co-branded or related products could not be aired within the same time span.
3. The prohibition of product-placement; products had to be "confined to identifiable commercial segments". (Singer and Singer 2001: 385)

By 1980, however, there was a strong anti-government push toward the complete deregulation of such advertising within the US, so that in 1984 the Reagan administration removed the guidelines, opening the floodgates for a panoply of advertising on children's television (Consuming Kids 2008). This caused what might be considered a pivotal shift in children's development: whereas they had traditionally "mimicked [adults] in their play, enacting scenes [of typical adult life]" (Rinzler 1978:1), it began to take on a different tone and shape, felt by some to be a direct result of the exponential increase of the presence of TV in their lives. Simpson was working as a schoolteacher at the time and said about that decision: "[It was] a disaster for children ... in the 1970s when the FCC began to deregulate Saturday-morning TV ... I, as a teacher, noticed almost immediately the way children's recess play changed. Within two or three years ... children's play became an imitation of television shows" (Simpson 2011).

Through the '70s and the '80s, TV dominated

children's entertainment, influencing consumer trends through co-branding with toys, clothing, cereals, music – just about anything that could be sold to children based on their growing attachment to TV series or characters. At the same time, a small group of musicians and educators began recording children's folk anew, so that slowly a divergence in musical styles began to appear. On the one hand, new music was being written for children's television and film and simultaneously released on LP and cassette; this was imbued with the sounds of Top 40 radio and Broadway musicals; on the other hand, a new squad of folkies was revisiting and reinventing the music handed down to them by the revivalists of the 1950s.

During this time, busy young professionals with families were increasingly turning to television as a form of cheap child care and a chance at respite, leaving their children in the innocuous safety of after-school cartoons and specials, and "educational" shows like Sesame Street, Polka Dot Door, and Mr. Rogers.

As the '90s began and the children's market was overwhelmed with even more TV and film-based music, including that of commercial successes like Barney, Elmo, or the Simpsons, along with a slew of blockbusting animated Disney films like *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *The Lion King* (1994), folk music again went into decline.

Pop and the Death of Folk

Sheldon Posen believes folk music is dying. He told me, "What makes folk music folk music is the context that it happens in ... Those contexts are disappearing ... and when the occasions go the repertoire goes" (Posen 2011).

What does it mean to say that "folk music is dying"? Do people truly no longer sing together? Clearly they do, but the repertoire is changing, and rapidly so. Synthesizing from the definitions of a number of the folk experts I spoke to, the folk aesthetic is primarily about community, but it is also about passing on learned truths through song. Our 21st-century experience of "everyday life" in North America is radically different than it was even a hundred years ago, so that many of the realities reflected in the folk music of the early 20th century are no longer relevant[3] to our daily existence. By this token, *traditional* folk may indeed be dying as we lose touch with the accumulated knowledge and wisdom that was so critically important in learning how to survive the harsh existence of our forebears.

In another sense, however, folk's "ongoing kaleidoscope" (Posen 2011) may allow for its re-invigoration with new songs – or indeed, new interpretations of old songs – that do resonate with the North America of today. In fact, the idea of community expressing common experience through song does continue to manifest itself in the new songs that children sing together, in the experience of concert-goers who sing along at shows with other members of that fan-based community, or even through the common experiences and shared repertoire of children in our schools' music classes. Losing songs, though painful and possibly tragic, is *not* losing a whole genre.

The music children know and can sing to today is, for the most part, Top 40 radio. In my own teaching practice I have encountered children who can sing the chorus, word-for-word, to songs like "Low" by T-Pain, or K-Naan's "Waving Flag". The changeover of children learning music from pop culture rather than community seems to have begun at a similar time as Simpson's observation of children's play, suggesting some degree of implication of those 1980s FCC changes.

Beyond the influence of television, however, something more fundamental may be at work in the way children are, and are not, being introduced to music. Ironically, while "music educators [have been] particularly committed to the use of folksongs" (Posen 1993: 2), the advent of formal music education has contributed to the reification and commodification of music, setting up a paradigm of specialization and elitism wherein the public (North American parents specifically, in this case) believes that music should be left to the "experts". If you ask people whether they sing, for instance, more often than not the answer is a variation of "Oh, I don't have a great voice." Ruth Crawford Seeger noted this in 1948, saying "feeling that active participation in good music is beyond [a common person], he hides his voice away and says he cannot sing" (R. Seeger 1948: 25). Yet she urges, "*it is the song which is important* ... often an 'untrained' voice ... will convey to the child a greater enjoyment of the song itself" (ibid.). Adding to the reification of singing, is it possible that television shows like *Ed Sullivan*, *American Bandstand*, and more recently *American Idol* (and all of its clones and spinoffs) and *Glee*, have actually done much to buttress this construct in the minds of the public? One main result of this trend has been a sharp decline in the tradition of singing with others, with a closely correlated decline in traditional folksong. Today, outside of religious institutions, singing is reserved for music classes, recitals, and concerts – venues for the *formal* appreciation of above-average musical gifts – and it has all but disappeared from our daily lives. As the "occasions" disappear, then, one wonders how or whether, without change, folk music as a tradition can survive much longer in North America.

Messages and Intentions

While the current popular music-makers for children and the folkies of yore may share a similar philosophical approach, there are certainly differences, aesthetically and otherwise, between children's pop and children's folk. To begin with, the musicians making pop music for kids tend to on the whole have established their careers in the pop world[4] and then turned their attention to producing a kids' record. Sometimes this is a singular

effort (as with Barenaked Ladies' *Snacktime!*), or else it marks the start of a new (and sometimes parallel) ongoing musical direction, as in the case of Peter Himmelman. Either way, this shift tends to retain the sound of the artist pre-children's record, being positioned more as an extension of their existent body of (pop) work than a complete reinvention of their approach or sound.

Acknowledging the complexity of genre definition, there are some overarching characteristics that make "pop" different from "folk": its message (in the McLuhan sense) is different; its format is different; its structures are far more complex; and pop songs do not lend themselves well to being sung by a group of youngsters, at least not with the same ease that folk tunes do. And whereas folk was a music of common human experience, the themes in pop do not usually bespeak the same universality.

Musical Analysis

In my interviews, Tom Paxton, Peggy Seeger, Sheldon Posen, and Bram Morrison all agreed that there was no real distinction between folk music and *children's* folk music, save perhaps for some of the "bloodier murder ballads" which could be "left for later" (Paxton 2011). But at least in the case of the American folkies, clearly decisions *were* made about repertoire that involved more than just leaving out inappropriate themes, and an overview of some of some of the main folk albums of the era[5] reveals four main areas of possible analysis: syntactic content, thematic content, melodic content, and speed of song.

Syntax

Syntactically, the lyrics of early children's music use a simple vocabulary, generally avoiding words with more than two syllables, referencing subjects with which children would likely already be familiar, and limited mainly to things which would have been commonplace in their lives: family and home life, toys and games, various types of animals (see Appendix A for a detailed syllabic and thematic breakdown of 13 common songs). The heavy themes dealing with the realities of human existence are veiled and subtle, buried within narrative frameworks by whimsy or absurdity, and often with mention of animals.

Themes

I have created three main thematic categories of children's folk song:
1. Animals ("Groundhog", "Froggy Went A-Courtin'", "The Grey Goose", "The Fox", "Little Bird")
2. Gibberish ("Risseldy Rosseldy", "Bought Me A Cat", "Toodala", "Little (Saka) Sugar", "Pig Latin Song")
3. The absurd ("There Was a Man and He Was Mad", "I Know An Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly", "The Foolish Frog").[6]

Melody

Bram Morrison, outlining the structure of folk in general, said, "you tend to get simpler melodies, and words that are easily remembered and repeated, and that lend themselves to people singing together" (Morrison 2011). Upon an analysis of the five songs my daughter sings and/or asks for the most from the two Seeger albums in constant play at our house[7] (hardly a scientific poll, but possibly representative of other youngsters), I have drawn some general conclusions about the melodic content of children's folk. The genre's melodies rarely move by more than a third, and when a fourth or fifth *is* in play it is always either in relation to the tonic or to the 5th degree of the associated chord (down to it as in "Little Bird," mm23-24, up from it as in "Jim Along" mm7-8, or up to the tonic as in "There Was a Man and He Was Mad", mm1-2 and 3-4, or "Who's That Tapping at my Window?", mm 1,5,9, and 13). In the vast majority of cases, the melody is highly repetitive, and generally does not use accidentals outside its home key. If it does, as in the case of "All Around the Kitchen," they are merely indicating a related tonality, blues inflections (flat-3 or flat-5), or in this case A melodic minor rather than A minor aeolian. Moreover, the total range of a typical children's folk song usually stays within a 6th, though occasionally moving as far as a 7th or an octave, and often using a 5th interval to or from the 5th or tonic. In what I am loosely terming "adult folk", on the other hand, melodies are less restricted, making more frequent jumps, regularly spanning more than an octave overall, and sometimes stretching as far as an 11th or a 12th. A few typical examples might be "House of the Rising Sun" (11th) (Siegmeister 1964: 106-07), "Wildwood Flower" (10th) (ibid., 118-19), "A Lazy Farmer Boy" (10th) (Dunson and Raim 1973: 38), and "Sugar Baby" (10th) (ibid., 82). Of course, nothing is ever so cut-and-dried, and "adult" folk songs are often included on children's records; "Mole in the Ground," for instance, which appears on Pete Seeger's *Birds, Beasts, Bugs & Fishes*, is also included in the *Anthology of American Folk Music*, and has a total range of a 10th.

By contrast, when we consider kids' pop, while smaller melodic movements are by and large the norm, they are often framed by unexpected harmonic movements (see, for example, the predominance of major chords where might normally be minor ones, or the movement from A-flat major to A major in the bridge section, Figure 1), and melodically they are much more involved, seeming in general to favour variety of melodic movement over repetition, which is also true, more broadly, in the case of "adult" pop vs. "adult" folk.

Figure 1: Harmonic overview (by tonal centre) of Justin Roberts' "I Chalk" (from the 2006 album, *Meltdown*):

verse/chorus I & II	bridge	key change	last verse/chorus
AM, C#M to DM, AM	A-flat M to AM, EM, F#m to B	D#M to EM	BM, D#M to EM, BM

Speed & Other Factors

Pete Seeger tells the story that, when Moses Asch, while running Folkways Records, asked him to record songs for children, Asch had him slow them down in take after take until eventually they were "painfully slow" (Posen 2011). Only then did Asch feel they were suitable for a children's audience. So certainly there are noticeable differences beyond simple production values between the folk music of the '50s and '60s and today's more pop-oriented music. In her 1948 book *American Folk Songs for Children*, Ruth Crawford Seeger asserts that folk songs for children need to be sung simply, without virtuosity or complicated arrangements (R. Seeger 1948: 25). This simplicity will help children learn and absorb the songs, so that they might then make them an inextricable part of their lives, both as a foundation for further musical exploration and in understanding the intended thematic ideas. In my teaching practice, I have also found that there is a noticeable difference in kids' engagement, depending on the speed at which I play songs. Coming from a tradition (jazz) of virtuosity, my inclination is always to try to play things faster and with more chords, in an effort at mastery, but when I consciously approach songs at a slower tempo, the children listen more readily, sing louder, and maintain their focus for longer; a slower, more deliberate pace is more effective. By contrast, kids' pop is often very upbeat and energetic, a trait which is entirely desirable in terms of engaging kids in a non-folk, non-sing-along context. Getting kids moving and excited by the music, while possibly also learning words that are more socially conscious than ever, is certainly laudable.

Test Folk: Animal Fare

I have asserted that new children's music tends to value "music for music's sake" over the bestowal of wisdom or knowledge. The cultural and ideological differences between folk and contemporary are evident in the following comparison of a song in each style about animals. Taking just one among many possible examples, I have elected to weigh "Here Come the Geese" (Barenaked Ladies)[8] against "The Grey Goose" (Lead Belly).[9]

Both songs share a central motif, use a simple binary strophic form, forego four-line stanzas in order to accommodate extended ideas, employ a narrative framework to convey a message, and are drawn from albums by artists who are not primarily known as children's entertainers. Whereas the Lead Belly song has been recorded many times by a variety of artists, as far as I'm aware "Here Come the Geese" has been recorded only by The Barenaked Ladies, once in studio for the 2007 album *Snacktime!*, and once for a live disc (*SNACKTIME! LIVE at Massey Hall December 7th, 2008*).

On a musical level, the two songs have both notable differences as well as interesting similarities. Using the Lead Belly version of "Grey Goose" found on *Lead Belly Sings for Children* (which in turn is taken from *Lead Belly Legacy, Vol. 1*) and the studio album version of "Here Come the Geese," the clear differences are in the instrumentation and length of song (see Figure 2). On a purely metronomic level, "Here Come the Geese" is around 140bpm (consistently), while "Grey Goose" starts at around 160bpm and ends just shy of around 200bpm; this difference partly accounts for the differences in length of track, and also speaks to the use of technology: click track and multitrack recording in the former, and single-take recording in the latter. There are differences also in musical shape in terms of build and peaks, narrative arc, the number of voices featured (a solo singer vs. a five-piece band), and harmonic movement, though the two are closer on that count than is typical of pop vs. folk.

Figure 2: A Comparison of "Here Come the Geese" and "The Grey Goose"

Here Come the Geese		**The Grey Goose**	
track length:	03:13	**track length:**	01:28
musical shape:	slow build, peak at 1:43, wind down	**musical shape:**	uniform/steady; slight increase in speed from start to end
narrative arc:	story peaks *with music*, as the geese come into view in a "V"	**narrative arc:**	story peaks at 1:14 with "the last time I seen him"
voices:	4 (harmony and counterpoint)	**voices:**	1
instruments:	grand piano, bass, drums, electric guitar (x2)	**instruments:**	guitar (12-string)
chord progression:	I-IV-V-IV (repeats entire tune)	**chord progression:**	I-V-V-I (repeats entire tune)

Thematically, while on the surface the two songs are both about geese (albeit in different contexts), they deal with ideas that reveal how radically different the worlds of their respective writers are. “Here Come the Geese” is a song filled with wonder at the beauty of nature with references to idyllic picturesque urban landscapes. Its aim seems to be to draw a child’s attention to the natural world as it can be found in the city. The words “patio,” “playground”, “meadow”, “benches”, “hillside”, and “boulevard” all imply leisure, while the “shopping mall” reference points to a specific (possibly socio-) economic class of city-dweller. As well, the fact of taking a child for a long walk to watch the geese speaks to a flexibility of schedule more in line with the (upper) middle class than with the working class. By contrast, narratively, “The Grey Goose” contains an element of magic-realism: the goose was “six weeks a fallin’”, and “six weeks a-haulin’”, among other time-bending elements. The story is said to be an allegory for the resiliency of Blacks over slavery (Rinzler, quoting Alan Lomax, 1978: 2), while it is also an indictment of the sin of working on the Sabbath (Wells 2009:1978). Specific references place “Grey Goose” in a historical social context: the sanctity of Sunday morning, hunting for food, wives doing the “feather pickin’” (gender roles), life on a farm (“hogpen”), and access to a sawmill all place it in the early 20th century, and the fact of hunting and manual labour makes it a working-class song. Between the two, there is certainly a socio-economic divergence, and “Grey Goose” is a much more overtly political song, though it may be unfair to conclude that “Here Come the Geese” is music just for the sake of music, since it is still imparting a message that could be said to align with social (environmental) consciousness, and a love of the natural world that is under some threat by the current generation of children’s technophilia.

In the case of this particular pairing, cultural, ideological, and economic shifts do begin to emerge, and understanding that these songs were all intended to be enjoyed by as many children as possible, folk through its many retellings in song and pop through its cultural ubiquity and, in this case, the popularity of the Barenaked Ladies, we begin to see the changes in our attitudes and values as we wish to impart them, not just about child-rearing, but also about religion, work, and gender roles.

What is quite clear to me from all of my listening[10] is that the new approach to children’s music tends to be more complex, in a number of ways, than the kids’ folk of the 1950s through the 1980s. Aside from my discussion of structure and instrumentation, one of the most interesting developments in recent years is a subtle shift in target audience to *include* parents, whose tastes have begun to be considered and incorporated. Perhaps this is most notably manifested in the way in which the lyrics draw adults in with sophisticated humour and pop culture references that are lost on younger listeners. The first single from *Snacktime!,* “7-8-9”, is a typical example, full of puns and clever references about the number nine: “the cat’ll have to live with eight lives now,” “Pluto’s not a planet now, so eight’ll do fine,” and “vampires will have to think of some other method / cause without their K-9s(sic) /how will they suck?” Kids love the song because it’s fun and they understand the main joke about seven eating nine, but adults engage with it on a more acculturated and informed level. In television, this has been an intentional strategy since at least the Simpsons began in the 1990s, if not the Muppets (1970s), and possibly earlier still. It is notable because, among other things, it recognizes parents as the actual consumers: “the amount of adult spending that American kids under 12 now directly influence ... (is) an astronomical $700B ... marketers and advertisers have realized that the real money related to the children’s market is in their purchasing influence” (Consuming Kids 2008).

Loose Ends, Further Work, and Conclusions

One area I have so far barely addressed is the change in cultural values that has taken place since the 1950s, and the ways in which that shift can be traced through children’s music. For example, some songs that were once sung for and with children would today be deemed unacceptable, antiquated, or even possibly offensive. An investigation of the gradual rejection of these kinds of values as reflected in children’s music would be fascinating. More subtly, in 1957 and 1968 folk artist Jean Ritchie released a couple of albums for kids full of charming, fun songs, but that are rife with what she calls “kissing games”.[11] It might seem odd to us these days for an adult to endorse these kinds of games for children. I’m very interested in also investigating whether there is a new Puritanism at play here, possibly influenced by the rise of a powerful Christian right-wing faction in both the U.S. and Canada, one which simultaneously stifles certain expressions in the arts, and gives way to (perhaps even, as Foucault argued, having a causal relationship with?) a tidal wave of hyper-sexualized media that targets an ever-younger demographic. Interestingly, there are places where Ritchie explains her inclusion of certain songs as social statements against puritanical ideas, like dancing as a sin (Ritchie 1968: 3), which she considers pushing the envelope, but which may appear naive and short-lived from our current perspective.

The last decade and a half has seen a renaissance of sorts in children’s music. With the rise of globalization and its resultant cultural “melting pot”, “musicians are exploring many different styles of music within the children’s genre ... and they are often writing for a wider audience” (Roberts 2011). For artists producing children’s music, there also seems to have been a backlash of sorts against the treatment of children as consumers. Peter Himmelman, one of the best known

contemporary kids' musicians, explained in an email, "My goal with kids' music is to extend the period of wonder. That point before children become prematurely affected by commercialism, sexuality ... and a slowly creeping malaise. Most of my songs have to do with taking a mundane thing ... and investing it with the feeling of mystery I feel it deserves" (Himmelman 2011). Indeed, Himmelman's thoughtfulness, and his desire to create music that will foster children's emotional and intellectual growth, seems to be fairly typical of the new wave of popular children's music makers. Justin Roberts even suggested that a National Public Radio audience is probably the same demographic as that which buys his records (Roberts 2011), indicating that a well-educated, left-leaning group of socially and environmentally conscious parents may have become the primary market force in the children's music industry, the same demographic as would likely have been the dominant consumers of folk music. Thus has a shift taken place: where parents of children in the 1980s reached back to the folk music of their youth to feed to their offspring, in choosing music for their *own* children, the next generation of parents, one step divorced from that which influenced their own childhood icons (Raffi, Sharon, Lois & Bram, Fred Penner, et al.), have latched onto a new hybridized form of music with multiple influences from all over the global village, but one which still espouses the values and ideals represented in folk.

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Notes

[1] Seeger, Pete. “Pete Seeger at 70.” Interview with Jim Lloyd. Folk on 2. May 3, 1989, BBC Radio 2.
[2] This is by no means an exhaustive list, though they are arguably the most well-known of the period.
[3] Or at the very least, they are “differently relevant”.
[4] In another blurring of lines, after the release of their first kids' album, *No!*, They Might Be Giants signed on with Disney Sound to release their next three children's records.
[5] Woody Guthrie, *Songs to Grow on for Mother and Child*; Pete Seeger, *Birds, Beasts, Bugs & Fishes*; Peggy & Mike Seeger, *American Folk Songs for Children*; Alan Mills, *More Songs to Grow On*; Lead Belly, *Sings for Children (Best of)*.
[6] Here I am differentiating between gibberish and the absurd thus: gibberish uses made-up nonsense words, while absurdity deals with the impossible (for example, grass, cows, and barn doors are among some of the characters who go down the road to join the singalong in Pete Seeger's version of “The Foolish Frog”).
[7]See Appendix B: “All Around the Kitchen”, “Jim Along Josie”, “Little Bird Little Bird”, “The Mad Man”, and “Who's That Tapping at the Window?”.
[8] Lyrics for “Here Come the Geese” may be found at http://www.songlyrics.com/barenaked-ladies/here-come-the-geese-lyrics/
[9] Lyrics for “Grey Goose” may be found at http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/smithsonian_folkways/SFW45047.pdf
[10] At this point, I have more than 700 kids' songs in my collection, all of which I have listened to at least once, and some hundreds of times each.
[11] *Children's Songs and Games from the Southern Mountains* (Folkways, 1957) and *Marching Across the Green Grass and Other American Children's Game Songs* (Asch, 1968).