



Hoodling AKA Eepling

Last month's WZ was about kazooing, and this month's is about hoodling. I wonder how long I can go with the double o theme in music. Let's see. There's tooting, oompa, boombass, Ry Cooder, Michael Cooney, hootenanny, Doodles Weaver, tooba, float...

Anyway, I was looking around on YouTube for traditional music (loosely defined). As I'm sure I need not tell anyone, but probably already have anyway, on YouTube there are some great rare bits of folk music footage, or if not footage, at least audio recordings with later-added still shots to make the whole thing YouTube-able. There are good cuts of Mississippi John Hurt, from whom so many pickers learned the style of picking where the thumb alternates on two strings to form a bass for a melody which is picked with two or more fingers on the higher strings. There are some recordings -- though no footage I've found -- of Joseph Spence, the great Bahaman guitarist. There are films of Leadbelly, of Lightnin' Hopkins, Hedy West, Woody Guthrie, and so forth.

This particular day I was looking for Appalachian singers like Almeda Riddle. I don't know where I first heard her acapella singing of old ballads but I know it was back in the sixties, probably on a Folkways recording. On YouTube I was delighted to actually find a few songs and some footage of her singing them. A reference was made in one of these videos to the collection called the John Quincy Wolf Folklore Collection in the Regional Studies Center of Lyon College in Batesville, Arkansas. The bio page (www.lyon.edu/wolfcollection/biography.htm) of this site explains that Wolf was born in Batesville in 1901 and died in 1972. He was the head of the English department at Southwestern College in Memphis, and taught poetry. He loved Ozark folk music and Memphis blues, and helped such folk musicians as Almeda Riddle, Bukka White, and Gus Cannon bring their music to a larger public.

The collection website (www.lyon.edu/wolfcollection/index.html) is a wonderful and straightforward presentation of recordings of the music and some interviews of many musicians. The interviews and lyrics are all transcribed, and the songs are playable as mp3s. This is marvelous news to an old coot like me who can't read music worth a darn.

Here and there some of these singers referred to something called hoodling. I'd never heard the word before. There is a song called Hoodling Song here, sung by James Clifton Ferrel, which not only is about hoodling, thematically, but also demonstrates it:

www.lyon.edu/wolfcollection/songs/ferrellhoodling1271.html.

Of course I Googled for *hoodling* (a first for me) and found that it is more commonly known as *eepling*. That sounds much more like the actual art than "hoodling". Here is how the Urban Dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com) describes eepling:

A series of sounds made using vowels, wheezes and oral 'fart' sounds and set to rhythm. First popularized in Appalachian culture in the 1880's, it was an imitation of the sounds made by various farm animals and is considered the earliest predecessor of beat-boxing.

(*Beatboxing* is that Rap practice of imitating electronic drum machines --called beatboxes -- using mouth sounds. Search for "beatbox" on YouTube.)

The *oral 'fart' sounds* might be more politely described as that lip-buzzing a trumpeter makes into his mouthpiece. There are variations aplenty of traditional eepling, but the main idea is pretty much this: Start with a vowel sound. Like *eee*. Then do a lip-buzz. Then a vocalized gasp; a sort of sounded inhalation, like when you are surprised by a moose in the herb patch. So: *eee-buzz-gasp*, *ee-buzz-gasp*, with the buzz and the gasp quite close together. Sorta sounds like *eee-buzza*, *eee-buzza* with the "a" of "buzza" being the gasp. For variation, you change the vowel sound: *eee-buzza*, *ooo-buzza*, *eye-buzza*... One advantage of this (or disadvantage, if the whole sound drives you nuts) is that you can go on forever, because you inhale

with the gasp. So you never have to stop to take a breath, forever eepling.

Roger Miller used to eeple (if that's the proper verb) during the instrumentals of some of his songs. I think some of the vocal goofing that Doodles Weaver did for the Spike Jones Orchestra could be construed as eepling. But the most prodigious eepler (eeplish?) was a man named Jimmie Riddle, who played harmonica and piano for Roy Acuff's Smokey Mountain Boys. Riddle put eepling on the map when he became a regular on TV's Hee Haw, that down-home comedy hootenanny of yore. On the Hee Haw site (www.heehaw.com/Cast-JimmieRiddle-JackiePhelps.htm) it explains that Jimmie learned eepling from his live-in uncle, Ralph Boone. On the TV show, he teamed up with Jackie Phelps, a hamboning practitioner. *Hamboning* is another strange method of percussion, accomplished by slapping your own poor body rhythmically. You can see these two cats do their thing by searching YouTube for Jimmie Riddle.

Incidentally, I couldn't find out whether Jimmie Riddle was related to Almeda Riddle or not. On the New World Records CD *I'm On My Journey Home: Vocal Styles and Resources in Folk Music*, there is a track of Jimmie eepling, which was "...recorded August 8, 1971, in Montreal by Mike Seeger and Almeda Riddle." So if they weren't related, at least they knew each other.

One other question: could eepling have developed into playing the jug? The lip-buzz of eepling sure lends itself to jug-ging. You can picture some old eepler polishing off a jug of white lightnin' at a hoodle session, and finding the empty jug a good eepling amp.

At the end of all my Googling, I found a wonderful brief NPR story about Jimmie Riddle. It's called "Jimmie Riddle and the Lost Art of Eepling" by Jennifer Sharpe, and as of this writing, can be listened to at:

www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5259589

Nice to find one more way to make music without spending a dime. To finish with another double o or two, toodle-oo, hoodlers!