

Vic Lukas: VL  
Tracie Wilson: TW

TW: This is Tracie Wilson, I'm interviewing Vic Lukas at his home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. It is June 18, 2007. This is part of the project for the Campus Folksong Club history.

VL: Okay, let's go, let's start.

TW: So, my first question is how did you become interested in traditional music?

VL: I became interested in traditional music because, having lived in foreign countries like Italy and India for a long time, I was very very very hungry for American music. What I now realize I was looking for was what I call blue notes. Somehow the twang of a steel guitar or some of the thing that you could hear, but I only heard them in occasional snatches. I remember hearing some Italian women imitating the Andrews Sisters doing "Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy from Company B" and I knew that they didn't know any English, they were just completely parodying it. But I loved the sound of that, whatever the boogie woogie part was, and I had heard Roy Acuff, and the Smokey Mountain Boys doing the Prodigal Son on an OK Records, a recording in 1947, and I got that from the United States information agency library, the cultural propaganda arm for the United States. We were in Italy at the time, and the powers that be decided that Roy Acuff, in his hillbilly band with the whiney Dobro guitar did not appropriately represent American culture. So, they were getting rid of the stuff and my dad brought it home. I didn't realize at the time that that could be considered to have some relation to traditional music, I didn't know who Roy Acuff was, but I knew that that sound really turned me on. Very very occasionally perhaps a classical piano player from the United State might pass through or I would hear them at a cocktail party and maybe they might play one to eight the bar boogie, you know, sort of as a part of it, and these things really really really fascinated me. That kind of started me out trying very hard, listening over short waves to American Armed Services broadcasts in Germany and later in India from Ceylon.

To hear American music and just hearing little bits and pieces of blues sorts of things, and boogie sorts of things. I was just incredibly hungry for American culture. When I got back to the United States, I was 13 and got dropped into an American high school. And not having spoken much American English, I sounded like an Indian kid, and it took me three months, and this was just when rock and roll was just beginning to come in. By 1954, there was Rocking 88, by 1955 Elvis was bringing black music to white kids, things like "Mystery Train," things like "That's Alright Mama" "Big Boy" Crudup's big hit. Things like Big Mama Thornton's "Hound Dog" of course that's a false guess there, because it was actually written by Leiber and Stoller of Chicago. But you know, Leiber and Stoller were really great blues men and they recorded and wrote a whole bunch of stuff for black groups, they were writing for the Coasters, and for the Ravens, and for Big Mama Thornton, and actually they're on a lot of the recordings playing piano, you know that boogie, bluesy piano. And so, all of these were things that were drawing me toward a sort of bluesy sound. Well, by the time I got out of high school there were beginnings, just kind of beginnings; Harry Belafonte had appeared on,

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I think it was the Ed Sullivan Show or he had his own special. That was perhaps the very beginning of the traditional folk boom.

But again, it was these occasional little bluesy kind of notes and little bits of American stuff, and we had a very eclectic record store. My parents were always really nice about letting me buy records, so I wound up taking chances on records that I had never heard of. I wound up with a Stinson recording of Sonny Terry and Blind Gary Davis, I wound up with some early jazz things from the RCA Victor recorded encyclopedia of jazz. The supermarket had ten inch record things which instead of plates, you'd go in every week and buy a record, and they had a few blues things by Sleepy John Estes, and these things just delighted me to no end. By the time I got to college, I was 16, because I was very bright and my parents thought I should go to summer school and I was always the advanced. Being a 16-year-old kid in the Greek dominated, fraternity-dominated college, the only people that would have to do with me socially were what I now recall as the outsiders. These were the blacks, the gays, some of the foreign students who didn't have big enough foreign constituents of their own, other anomalies like the 16 year old kid that was really bright but still had incredible blind spots about American history and American culture. And these were the people that took me in. One of the people who took me in was named Harry Babbitt, and Babbitt was a Bohemian and, for lack of a better word, a beatnik and he used to ramrod the folksong club, not the Campus Folksong Club, the folksong club which was just a bunch of like-minded people, and we used to get together in the basement of the Unitarian Church, and sing songs by Woody Guthrie. There were a few hillbilly songs that crept in, but mostly this was a matter of gut string guitars, minimal proficiency, and the first Carter Family record that I heard was introduced by a woman who was unabashedly lesbian named Nora Kurchie. And Nora was actually a very fine singer, and she actually had a recording of the Carter Family, and I heard that, and I was once again just completely blown away. And it kind of grew from there, and I just continued to occasionally was able to find a record by Big Bill Broonzy, and I took it to my fraternity, yes, I was in a fraternity, they wanted me for my grades, and I took it one Saturday morning because we used to take turns for work days on Saturday and you could bring a record.

Oh, I didn't live in the chapter house, being only 16 my parents thought that I was too young to live in a fraternity, they're the ones who thought I should join. And you know, can you say outsider? To the young kid who isn't even allowed to live in the house but he's got good grades. And, I put on this Big Bill Broonzy record for Saturday workday, and somebody came up to me and said, "What do you want to hear some old nigger sing like that for?" Well, there ensued fisticuffs and general things, they tried to shave me, but I had an advantage in which there was a lot of them and only one of me, I could fight but they couldn't really hurt me because it was so clearly unfair. In the process, a lamp went through the plate glass window, and I didn't return to the frat house after that, but that was, you know, just another of the big steps. And I was attracted to the outsider-ness because partly of the somewhat radical politics. While in the foreign lands, getting American culture from the United States Information Agency, I had really bought that America is a democracy, we have freedom, everybody is equal, freedom even to this

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day the president keeps talking about freedom, the Iraqis have freedom, and well gee, 18,000 of them locked up, Abu Ghraib, troops on every street corner, people afraid to leave their houses, but let's not worry about that, they got freedom! I really really believed in freedom and to this day, I am disappointed that the freedom isn't really free, the democracy is actually a plutocracy, if not a kleptocracy. And I was therefore drawn to the politics of the beat generation, and that meant by and large the liberals, all the folk singing folks were liberal, some of them, and the beginning of the civil rights movement were coming in, and of course there was political folksong.

And as it happened within the pre-Campus Folksong Club, a pre-official thing, there was a whole lot of, well for lack of a better word, blues notes for whatever America had that was its own individual music was calling out to me, and I read the back of record jackets, and I listened to, there was a red vinyl Library of Congress recording, the only one that was owned by the University Library, which at that time was the biggest university library in the nation, but we had all of one folk record. But I listened to it over and over again, and it had Bozie Sturdivant's "Ain't no grave can hold my body down," one of the great vocal masterpieces of American music. It had other black folksong type things, and each was more wonderful than the last. I think I kept it just about on permanent loan and wore it out, tape recorders weren't available then. And after a while the Smith Anthology came out, and the University bought one copy of that, despite the fact that later we had however many whether it was 400, 500, or 1,000 members, we still didn't have much in the way of folk records and such as they were, were labor records and wound up in the library, the Labor and Industrial Relations Library. So, meanwhile there was a little bit more interest, things were sort of starting to grow, but I'm going to stop there with the question was, how did you get interested in traditional music. Well that was the long answer, and the short answer is because traditional music meant America to me, it meant all the things that America was supposed to be. It meant freedom, it meant poetry, it meant creativity at the peasant level, and it meant working men. My family was so not working class, that somehow this was important to me, and whatever my genetic makeup is, makes me a contrarian to some extent. And I just found that that particular kind of music, what little I knew about it, just every single bit of it just turned me on. I guess we'll stop there, for that do you need further elaboration?

TW: So, what year did you come back to the United States?

VL: I came back to the United States in, the best I can figure out was 1953, and started school at Urbana High School in the fall of 1953, and I graduated in 1957. And I started at the University of Illinois in 1957.

TW: So you started college in 1957 when you were 16?

VL: Yes, well actually, right. My birthday is December 21, so 1957 would have made me still 16, waiting to be 17.

TW: So, how did you end up at the University of Illinois?

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VL: I ended up at the University of Illinois because that's where my father worked, he was on the faculty at the College of Commerce, he was a professor, and he gained his expertise, he was a CPA, and he had worked for UNRA (United Nations Reconstruction and something Organization) but basically they administered the Marshall Plan as I understand it. And he was the chief accountant who had designed the accounting system for the Marshall Plan, and from his experience in that in 1947 we went to Rome, Italy where he was the administrative officer for the American Embassy, and then as is frequently the case in foreign service, we got transferred to India, and I kind of think that was 1951 or 1952, and I went to a year and a half of school in India, and then returned to the United States, having really hungered and thirsted for whatever this mythical American homeland. I mean I bought the whole thing, you cannot believe how strong my faith in these things really were. And I found myself interested in all things American, except oddly enough, American history.

Because American history was taught was bunch of dates, and I never could learn things like 1779, House of Burgesses, I mean that whole thing was completely meaningless. I still don't care much about revolutionary history, my bag is now at this point is starting at 1840 with minstrel shows, and I guess my particular period of major interest is the 30s and 40s. But my dad was on the faculty, I was right there in town, my parents were somewhat overprotective, I was too young to stay in the frat house, I was too young to go away to college, and I had a national merit scholarship, which was good at the University of Illinois, paid all of my hundred dollars a semester tuition. So for the first year I lived at home under the watchful guise of my parents which made me that much more of an outsider. Much more used to subterfuge, to have any type of social life at all. And then I got to stay in approved housing. They used to lock up the girls in dorms, 1 o'clock, that's a whole another kettle of fish, but I got a little bit of freedom because I didn't have to come home. Still just being that young, the social circle that I was able to join were folks that were interested in folk music, and I guess I really was more interested in that than anybody else.

TW: So how did you become a part of the Campus Folksong Club?

VL: Well, I've partially given you an answer to that. The folksong club, as led by Harry Babbitt, Nora Kurchie, I'm not sure that led is the quite the word, we didn't really have officers, but basically they would make things happen. It was a small enough group, there were maybe 10 of us, 15 including sort of peripheral folks. We also went to the international folk dancing, where again there were girls who would dance, from my point of view, who would dance in some form or fashion, with young kid, and that just didn't happen at the social dances. Campus Folksong Club we had this informal thing and we became friends, and it was through Nora Kurchie that I met some of the local black musicians. There was a place called the Porthole, which was a place for sailors, but the lesbian ladies were welcome, and they had a guy who was an entertainer there, kind of a la Pignite Markham but was also a musician, a cross between Pignite Markham and Screamin' Jay Hawkins and I'm not sure that either of them were well known at that

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point. And Count Demon, as the first one to take me to the Black blues club, which was the only place in town that would let me drink. And they were nice to me, because it's always been true, when I had been sincerely interested in people and their music then they're generally pretty nice to me. If I come on and pretend to know a lot about it, well that's a whole 'nother thing can happen. But mostly for musicians, if you care about the music enough, people are nice. Lots of people have been nice to me over the years, I have incurred a tremendous debt, I make a conscious effort to pay that debt off by helping other people when they come along, and sometimes that's a little difficult.

So that was the Campus Folksong Club. The Campus Folksong Club per se got started when Archie Green came to the campus, and I don't remember exactly how we met him, but I know that although Archie in his papers suggests that we first met when Dick Kanar and I approached him at the Chicago Festival the first year that he was emceeing it. My own recollection, and given my age and everything it is conceivable that my recollection is not good, but we already knew Archie, we already knew him pretty well by then. And Mike Flasher was the original organizer and was the president of the Chicago Folklore Society, I can't remember the exact name of the club, the organization that puts on the folk festival, and we had Simon Stanfield, who knew a bunch of the Chicago folks, and he was also a member of our circle of musicians and musician wannabes. And he knew Mike Flasher, and somehow I remember that we'd have some discussions with Mike, and we used to go up to Chicago to party, musicalize, blues club, and Mike Flasher was looking for a respectable folklorist that he wouldn't have to pay too much for, and we suggested Archie. And we already knew Archie, I feel very well by then, at least we maybe had known him for a year, I feel that we met him soon after his arrival. But I can't speak to that, you'll have to ask Archie about when he arrived, although I disagree that it was in 1961 at the Folk Festival. I feel that we met him soon after his arrival, I don't remember exactly how that happened. But we became very good friends because he understood; and of course his politics, he was very much a Woody Guthrie fan, a labor historian, he could point us toward some recordings, and he could dig up artists and he had a bunch of lore. He was the first 'respectable' person who had had any interest in us, anyone who was willing to see past the scuffy bunch of outsiders and beatniks and was able to help and guide us. Archie managed to get us a form of recognition as a campus society, and again I don't know exactly how he did that, but it was pretty miraculous. He wound up being our faculty sponsor, and the growth of the Campus Folksong Club, meanwhile by this time the New Lost City Ramblers had formed, I'm a little confused, I think the Kingston Trio was 1957, the Ramblers were 1959, I could even have those reversed, it is conceivable, but anyways, kind of both of those things happened right around then.

We Initially had some more traditional concerts, we had Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry. I can't remember whether we had Pete Seeger again, we'd had Pete Seeger as the unofficial version. I think Pete Seeger charged all of fifty bucks. I think that we were prevented from actually having Pete Seeger return under the Campus Folksong Club, the official version, because I believe he was a little too left wing for the really rather right wing, Illinois campus state university place. The more radical things were left to the Chicago Pier campus, where the preponderance of the black students who went

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up there. Archie was able to direct us more toward traditional music, and away from what he referred to as 'interpreters' of traditional music, meaning the more commercial or second generation people. He was able to show us that there was a great deal beyond the Kingston Trio, that there was a great deal beyond Joan Baez, that there was a great deal beyond Harry Belafonte. And I just rode along with Archie at that point. Also I mentioned Dick Kanar, there was something else that had happened, which I had taken a trip across the United States with Dick Kanar, and I had been trying to figure out exactly which year, there was a summer in Chicago, and about a half of a year traveling by thumb. The best I can make out must have been in 1960. There was a hiatus from the University once I had a degree and I'm a little confused about that. But during that time I lived in Chicago and made a lot of contacts in Chicago with the folk community including Simon, I've mentioned Mike Flasher, people like Mike Bloomfield showing up for hootenannies and with Dick Kanar, I was in a partnership with a coffeehouse in Chicago called The Red and the Black. It was on Clark St somewhat close to the Loop, it was in a block that was close to the College of Complexes, which was a radical comedy club run by Slim Brundage the janitor who was a Wobbler, left-wing, sort of used himself as an entertainer. There was a guy who was running a little bookstore in front of the College of Complexes that was running for the beatnik candidate for president. Next to that was a strip show that was run by the mob, and then there was the Red and the Black. And the Red and the Black paid very little rent, in fact, no rent at all. We were largely open late at night, we had folksingers, sometimes it was me, sometimes it was other Chicago folks. But mostly we were open late at night, and when the other clubs would close like standup comedian staff would come by our place, and basically do freebies, because we tried to project an image of being real in this seedy, not really in the mainstream of the entertainment district. There was, we somehow had an association with the strip joint that Tiny, the bouncer for the strip joint, also acted as the bouncer for us. We had a specific gentleman of Italian extraction that we had to buy our coffee from, but other than that we got strictly left alone. So a lot of the folksingers would come late after the other places closed, it wasn't a moneymaker, it really wasn't a money maker.

And after that, wound up going back on the road trip, and then going back to school and then meeting Archie and the Campus Folksong Club took off from that point. But by the time I met Archie I was run radical, not necessarily by politics politics, but radical, just plain radical. Some of that frankly had to do with, no one ever talks about this, I was a young adolescent with raging hormones, being already an outsider of sorts, regular avenues of romance were not easily available, and I somehow formed the idea by a gross misreading of the back cover of *On the Road* that talked about infamous yobbio obsessions. I thought that beatnik girls were easy, not that this was ever proved, mind you, but that was good deal of motivation to get into that culture. And of course being with the outsiders, a large percentage of the women that were part of our group were in fact lesbians. And of course that didn't occur to me, nor did I actually catch the gay overtones of *On the Road*. Kerouac's writing was completely lost on me for some reason. Did I answer your question?

TW: Oh, well I think so. My next question is, what role did the club play at the U of I?

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VL: It played several roles for several different people. For the academics, for Archie it was an academic steppingstone. It was a way for him to be able to acquire, he didn't actually teach as a formal class, but he acquired students, and I proudly number myself among those. It was a way of bringing greater recognition, greater resources, hopefully influencing the library for the academic side of things and bringing an academic librarian and discographer's view of traditional music. It was a way also, Archie has never made any bones about, he taught us a great deal of morals, radical morals, unionist morals, working man morals, but it was more than that. He really had some distinct ideas about what was right and what was wrong, and civil disobedience and what was civil and what was crime. He made it real clear to us what it meant by "This machine kills fascists" on Woody Guthrie's guitar. But that's what I think Archie had in it, plus I think he's a born teacher, and genuinely loves to teach. If anybody will show the slightest bit of interest in what he has to say, he will teach. I'm reminded of the quote from the student in Chaucer that was written across our high school. Gladly would he learn and gladly would he teach, or anyway, look up the quote. That is Archie, it also provided for some of the rest of us a way of getting to see and mingle with and find and interact with the genuine folk. I keep using the word folk, and I use it in several different senses. The American traditional musicians, and Archie was of course most interested in labor and more interested in hillbilly music was his particular specialty, and so without the Campus Folksong Club we would not have been able to experience the Blue Sky Boys, we would not have been able to experience Glenn Ohrlin the cowboy singer, we would not have been able to bring Flatt and Skruggs to the campus, we would not have been able to bring Ralph Stanley to the campus. Archie has a very long list of people in his article that he mentions, frankly my memory, I have to look at his article to remember all of the people that came, if you need a source. When I look at his list, I can think of a couple of other, without his list I can't even think of them. But he brought all of these people for the outsiders this provided a form of legitimacy, we were able to have our performances at the height of the club, we could have 500 or 600 people at our folk sings, hootenannies, or open mic, however you want to call it, performances.

We were able to meet a whole bunch of other people among the student population that perhaps weren't outsiders exactly, but were interested. It provided a focus of and a stage for us that wanted to perform. And once again those raging hormones, it did provide a wider streams of ladies who might actually tolerate us. And if it sounds like I'm hammering away at that, that was a major motivation, nobody talks about it. But I've talked to other folklorists and other musicians, most of them will admit that's mostly how a whole lot of us got into it one way or another. Freud has a theory that all artists are completely driven by sex drives, whether this is true or not, I couldn't say, but I certainly feel there is an element of truth to that. So there was the academic side, there was the performance and bringing the people side, in other words these were the public face, the ones that are usually talked about. Well I've constantly in this conversation stressed the outsider-ness, well I also had a music house and this provided a forum for us to meet people like Jack Elliott, Jim Queskin, more or less modern, at the time, practitioners, Dave Van Ronk. I don't think we had Dave Van Ronk there, but this

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opened part of that society up to us, and I now get a little confused between what was Campus Folksong Club official and what wasn't, on that trip I mentioned before we mentioned Archie and before it became official, I wound up going to the Village. There weren't that many of us that were interested in traditional music in that way. So I wound up, I could expect that if I went to see Dave Van Roth and he would put me up for a night get me a couple of gigs, which he did, opening for him at the "Café Wha?", and that's not as grand as it sounds, since my function was to get rid of people to turn over the crowd, which I did very effectively. None the less, went out to the Ash Grove in Los Angeles and spent a week at Theodore Bikel's house, where he was also, he was gone, he was in a movie some place, but Jack Elliott was on the bill and he had the keys to the house, so he put up me and the other artists from the Ash Grove that particular week were Lightning Hopkins and Hugh Romney, who's better known now as Wavy Gravy; Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters fame, but he was just doing stand up comedy under the name of Hugh Romney at the time, Acid had not yet reared its seductive head. So partly it made contact, and then there was my music house. And there was a constant stream of musicians coming in and out, and we had a scene. The scene attracted more musicians, so that meant that people like Mike Melford who is still a lawyer in that field, but was a mandolin player, excellent mandolin player who produced a whole bunch of records for Flying Fish with Nashville session men, giving them basically solo albums with their choice of Nashville session men. Bluegrass albums, he produced a whole string of albums for John Hartford. Once we had a scene like that, musicians who were there all along came out of the woodwork.

I refer again to John Hartford, and the Bray Brothers, who were a bluegrass band, there were local boys, but we had no way of finding them, but once the Campus Folksong Club came into being they heard about us, one way or another we were able to make contact. We had a platform also to be able to offer gigs to people, this in turn made them receptive to research, receptive to visits, so I guess I could sum it up, we made contacts, is the short version of that. But then there was still the general campus shenanigans, which was again, my house was a music house, but it was also quite the zoo. And Fritz would, I can remember scenes like Fritz sitting in his room, which also doubled as a dining room and his bedroom, typing Russian translations about some kind of roundworm for a Russian professor, he was translating, either an English book into Russian or a Russian, I think it was a Russian book into English on worms.

TW: Fritz knows Russian?

VL: Yeah, oh yeah, he knows Russian. He was also a fireman on the Illinois Central Railroad, so when he wasn't typing, he was doing that. And the other times he was editing the Autoharp. Which was our mimeographed, or as Archie called it, 'hctographed' publication. There were sort of perpetual jam sessions, perpetual music party, perpetual stream of musicians flowing through my house. The reason I say my house it was in my name, I paid the rent, and I had a lot of roommates. But basically I had to be responsible.



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The Campus Folksong Club also provided for the audiences in general, hey cheap entertainment, for whatever reason our concerts attracted a whole lot of people, and as the club moved forward we were able to have bigger and better concerts, and the students whether they were actually interested, by this time folk was very fashionable. Many of them were interested in going beyond Dylan, the Kingston Trio, the commercial things. There was a large number of student musicians of various sorts, well now they all have rocks, you know rock bands, here in town there's five or six student bluegrass bands, at least a half dozen old time bands, and I can think of some that aren't students. We have three or four active jam sessions sort of on a once a month basis, different places, we camped together at music festivals, none of this was in existence. And so for the student musicians, we were really the only easily accessible stage. Some of them sang practically opera; I didn't like that much, many of them went in for what I call the folk strum. Think of Dylan's guitar style, which does not involve mostly individual strings, I'm talking about early Dylan. There were many people who were taking all of their stylings and everything from the more commercial things, which of course with no one but a student zealot, you know, could dislike that, but we disliked it majorly. We also were able to, with the Campus Folksong Club, we were able to increase the availability of records. We viewed, toward the later years, we viewed, I viewed, personally viewed Dylan, I still do, as the anti-Christ for taking perfectly good traditional songs, putting his paltry words to them, performing them in the most extricable possible way with his ghastly voice untraditional method of playing. And besides which, when he first came out I drove all the way to the University of Indiana to see him perform because I had heard this was the greatest folk thing, he came out sang two songs badly, barfed, and left the stage and that was the end of that. You know, I've never forgiven him for that. He's employed friends, and you know he'd done a lot since, I recognize that much of his song writing is great. But part of it was, if that's what people think are folk, they're not going to be buying the Folkways Records, they're not going to be the few traditional reissues that were beginning to come out. Archie made a deal with a guy named Kokoefer, who had a little record store, but we would up, I believe, having to guarantee that if he got in things from Folk Legacy or from Arhoolie or from Folkways that we would basically if they didn't see, we'd buy them. So he didn't want to take a risk on them. Well this is what it took. And I, personally, feel that if it hadn't been for Dylan, the commercial things, there wouldn't have been anywhere near the difficulty that we had. But this was another function that the folksong club performed. And then it just provided a social center for the zoo side of things, a sort of a musical animal house. And I guess that's it for functions of the folksong club.

TW: Okay, did the political climate of the 1960s have an impact on the club and how its members perceived themselves?

VL: Yes, indeed. I think we've already touched on Archie Green, and his liberal politics and his activism as a unionist and interest in labor. We, by virtue again of having been started out with this group of outsiders, and with Woody Guthrie for many of us, perhaps not so much Archie, but for many of us Woody Guthrie was, as opposed to Dylan,

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Woody Guthrie was the similar one that was real and that one that we should be listening to. And of course there's some radical politics there. Pete Seeger was one of the first folk singers I'd heard and once again he and the Weavers, and I looked into it a bit, and the Almanac Singers before him with, again you know, majorly liberal politics. I've talked a little bit about wanting to reach a, I really believe that the teenage rebellion of the fifties was not a teenage rebellion, if anything it was a teenage revolution. Rebellion is an exploitative term that is used by winners against the losers, we didn't have the American rebellion. You have the Nat Turner rebellion, can you think of any rebellion that's been successful that is called a rebellion? It's called revolutionary. 'I have a new idea, a new product, what a rebellious idea!' Uh uh, this is revolutionary, that's the sales term. I think we were the proto-civil rights movement. Because the same people wound up, not only did we reach across to look into Black music but these are the same people and the same singers that rode the freedom buses, these are the same people that were at the Chicago police riot in 1968, democratic convention in Chicago, these are the people who went, I mean not necessarily each of the names I've mentioned but overall, the people that were singing the folk songs, singing the people's music, were the people who were working for social change. These are the same people that Nixon had the FBI looking into. These are the people who, and I quote, I just saw a documentary on the hippies, they had a quote about the FBI project to discredit the civil rights movement. People who espoused brotherly love, people who espoused equality of the races, and people who are anti-war. These were enemies of America, that's parts of the charter for this project. Brotherly love, this is anti-American, this is un-America. But there was a whole lot, some of it was just plain students wanna be students and wanna piss off their elders, students wanna have fun and wanna play drinking games and sex games and whatever games they are, there's a certain amount of that, that you know is the baseline, but above and beyond the baseline, we genuinely cared, and we cared a whole lot. And people since have remained politically active, some people from the Campus Folksong Club, not necessarily my closest friends were not so much political, we were musicians, and that's particularly what our bag was, not that we didn't do the other things. But I truly believed then, and I truly believe now that the best political activism I can do is to sing songs and make people aware of what I consider to be a real tradition, and to try to make the values that are promoted at the surface of folk music actually coming to being.

As far as the rest of the politics, there was university politics. It basically took a revolution and took a, at that time fire brand like Archie who had some vestige of academic respectability, at least more than any of the rest of us did, to be able to make it happen, and to be able to bludgeon the University into allowing us to have gathering space, allowing us to be on campus, allowing us to even have something called a folksong club, and there were various incidents. But the Campus Folksong Club, while they may look back with pride, just like you know everybody loves Martin Luther King, a whole lot of folks claim to like Martin Luther King. And speaking of that rebellion business, you know the word rebellion, really pisses me off, teenage rebellion, we don't talk about Martin Luther King's Negro rebellion do we? Sometimes he's referred to as a revolutionary, but we all respect his work, and it's certainly not a rebellion. So why not those of us who musically went ahead and prepared, why not call Pete Seeger, who

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popularized, he's ever credited with writing but he didn't, he makes no claim to it, "We Shall Overcome"? He's the one who brought it up to the front, sometimes Guy Carawan is credited with that, but between the pair of them it was one or the other. Which is now an anthem, close to a national anthem. And yeah, we sang, "We Shall Overcome", and we did this before it became so heavily associated with Martin Luther King and his movement. We were having black people on our stage when Martin Luther King was in jail writing his letters from Birmingham. And, trust me, that was a big political act. We were the only, I think I mentioned this, the only campus group that had to have armed, hire off duty armed guards from the police department to be, to look at our events, whether they were large or small. And I can't imagine why that is, but I think that our politics were a bit unpopular.

TW: How would you describe the impact that your involvement in the club had on you then and later in life?

VL: Well the later in life is easy; I have stayed with music ever since, I continue not quite the same zoo, but my life is a daily whirl of interest in traditional and actually other, I'm interested now in early music, I like vaudeville, I'm interested in early swing, I am interested in minstrel music and the history of minstrel shows, I'm interested in black and white string bands, I am interested in vintage country music, think Hank Williams, Lefty Frizzell, vintage things as well as the older string band. And my life is completely devoted to listening and understanding music. I play but I have never been gifted with really being a brilliant musician, I work, I am passionate, and I work very very hard at it, but I am not a great musician. But I have been privileged throughout, from the Campus Folksong Club, I have been privileged throughout to have had doors open for me to meet truly great artists, to meet people whose lives are an inspiration, and to be able to reach in and experience a little bit of that American that I longed for so much. And I now realize it comes in slightly different forms, and some of that liberal America and some of those blues notes come from the most died in the wall conservative religious bigots that you could imagine, I mention no names. But you know underneath all that there's a great deal of the real and vibrant America and I have now learned to look across that a little bit.

As far as how it affected my life then, well, I wound up my whole social life partly as an outsider but I found a focus and a place to be, a way of being an outsider insider with this. I made lifelong friendships, many of the people that you've interviewed, in fact all of the people that you've interviewed so far. I'd lost track of Jarvis, but I am still in touch with these people, these are my frat buddies, if you will. I don't remember the names of anybody from the Greek Letter organization I used to belong to, but I remember these people. We correspond by e-mail, we exchange jokes. When I have come here I see people, I just took a friend, Rich Olsen, who was part of our group of people, he was a harmonica player for, who played in the Vic Lukas Blues Band, and later in the, let's see, what'd we call it, the Third Barner Church of the Unfulfilled, a blues band. I've stayed in touch with Mike Melford, mandolin player par excellence, I did documentary photography. I had the great privilege of meeting and filming Dink Roberts, one of the very last of the black banjo players, you know left from

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the previous tradition. I'm just trying to differentiate, there's now a new black banjo movement, the Chocolate Drops, and other people are picking up on it. Just by way of a distinction. I have through that also made a number of contacts and good friends among folklorists and similar people, particularly in this community where there seem to be a whole lot of us. And I feel that my life has been affected for the better, and I am grateful to each of my musical friends who has helped, I am grateful to the people who were nice to a passionate young kind who didn't know anything, I am grateful to Archie for being willing to put up with, well basically a bunch of carousing outsiders, students who no doubt were in some ways an embarrassment to him. I feel that the Campus Folksong Club is the best thing that happened in my life at the time, well, there were girls, there was a social scene, there was a place to be, there was ways of feeling proud, there was a performance venue, there were contacts outside, and I cannot imagine what I would be or who I would be without those things, and its just never stopped.

TW: So my last question is, what else should we cover, from your perspective? What other things did we not touch on?

VL: Well, I think that it's important to touch on, there was a divide, some of which was spoken some of which was not, between the academic people and the musically oriented people. By academic, Archie was not a player I don't believe, Judy McCulloh plays, Doyle was a faculty and played autoharp, and the students that got recorded were the PG&MS, Philo Glee and Mandolin Society, I'm sure you talked to Doyle and have heard about that. And then there was the Green Fields of Illinois recording, which was a field recording, and thereby, this was the matter of digging up a bunch of field people, well folk as I use it, and putting out some recordings of them. But this perhaps exemplifies at the same time, the people that we had to overlook for that recording, the Bray Brothers who were a magnificent and legendary bluegrass band, and John Hartford, who later took up a career, but was a part of those, and certainly these folks had just as much claim to tradition, as much claim to musical skills, but they weren't of quite such academic interest. And we would up with many of our, there were artists that we did not record who were great musicians and had an equally valid claim, but they didn't smell quite as good from the academic point of view. We didn't have many electric artists, I believe we had Muddy Waters, but we didn't have anybody else electric. We did not have other contemporary blues bands, we certainly didn't have the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, it was partly a matter of the things that we didn't do. I can understand, in view of the University's looking down on the whole folk music thing, and being pretty doubtful about the outsiders and the communists and all the rest of it, perhaps contemporary, or close to contemporary things might not have gone over that well. We did actually have the Bray Brothers for a concert.

But I always felt there was both a social and a musical divide between the academics who didn't play on one hand and the musicians on the other, who I felt had a wider view. And I still hold that view to some extent. Although now, there are far more academics who are also musicians, we see them with the earlier versions of that were Mike Seeger, although academic, hmm, no Ph.D. Mike Seeger is a consummate

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musician, and Tracy Schwarz in the second incarnation, is a great folklorist, married to Ginny Hawker, lovely lady. They lived on the bus with the Stanley's, traveled with Maybelle Carter, but they don't have a Ph.D. So they're, not as valuable. And letting them actually write something, they have to write in the Old Time Herald but they don't write in academic journals, peer reviewed, they don't have a union card, I feel strongly about this. I think that there's a big divide between academe and I believe that it has, to some extent vanished but I believe it's still there, and think we kind of come back to those who can do, and those who can't teach or write about it. My dad was an oriental art collector, he knew a great deal about art, he was also a rug collector, he became an expert in that, because an appraiser, and he was actually a pretty renown expert and collector in that stuff. I was always told that I should not take any music classes because there wasn't any money in it. I was not allowed to take an art class when I was in high school or in college, I was not allowed to take a music class, same thing. When Rowan, my daughter, announced that she wanted to study art in college, his answer to that was 'What we'll have to nip that in the bud won't we?' Perhaps by telling you that, maybe you're seeing a little bit, that maybe playing into the rest of the academic verses the artist and I know that that's a tension which has gone on forever. And actually art, the real truth is it's a symbiotic relationship, art can't get anywhere without somebody to comment on it and say it's okay. You remember the Wizard of Oz? You remember when Dorothy and the Tin Man and all those go to the wizard, and he says I want a heart, and he says you don't really need a heart, you need something that goes tick tock, and gives him a clock. And then to the Cowardly Lion he says you don't need courage, what you need is a medal. And the Scarecrow wants a brain, he says you don't want a brain, you want a diploma, and gives him a diploma. I had a dream about that, that I was also among those, and I said to the wizard I want to be an artist, and the wizard said to me no, I wanted the talent to be an artist, he says no you don't need talent, what you need is a manifesto. And that's the academic side.

Well another thing, I won't go into any detail about it here, but suffice it to say that among the musicians, the drug revolution that came to being was also definitely a part of the non-academic folksong club, I don't think Archie was even aware of it. But let me put it this way, the people in the Campus Folksong Club were among the first to become interested in LSD. We were among the first to exhibit any noticeable student interest in marijuana. All of which was partly, you know the student culture was moving that way, it's not a matter of we invented it or any different, but at various parts the student or musician element of that was at the vanguard for the University, and I think that this has persisted, in some ways, a great deal. I think that one of the unspoken things that only can be talked about after a lot of people are dead or until the climate changes, but while it's commonplace to talk about the role of drugs in jazz. It is not common to talk about the role of drugs in folk music, but they're there just as much as they were. In fact the same folk, marijuana prohibition was invented for two reasons, look into the history of it. But the short version is, to prevent the danger of, there's a quote that I can't quite remember, but this is close, this is not actually it: "To stop rampaging Negroes out after our women," and the quote is very close. Another one had to do with the Mexicans and the immigration issue, and if you look into the actual history, you will discover that it

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had very little to do with health and a great deal to do with providing employment for Harry Anslinger's treasury agents when prohibition went away, they had 2,000 T[Treasury]-men that had to be kept busy doing something. And basically it had to do with anti-civil rights and anti-immigration sentiment; it's still there.

Of course as radicals you can imagine associations with beatnik, San Francisco, centers like Chicago, blues clubs, clearly these were a part of the landscape, and nobody ever talks about it, the academics didn't, we didn't talk to the academics about it, didn't want to embarrass them, they probably didn't do that. To this day I have no idea whether Archie surmised, I can tell you that he certainly has plausible deniability, nothing was ever said that I know of, nor was there any misbehavior or anything in public that could discredit either Archie or the folksong club. A lot of things were perhaps attributed to drink that perhaps might have been attributed to other things, but drinking was respectable and legal, well sorta legal. So that's just something for future people to think about. So I guess that's it. So now turn it off and I'll tell you some other things.