

The First Annual Youth Traditional Song Weekend

Original post: CDSS Blog, January 2013 (<https://www.cdss.org/community/blog/the-first-annual-youth-traditional-song-weekend/>)

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The YTS staff (l-r): Lissa Schneckenburger, Ken Schatz and Ian Robb; photo by Natty Smith

Braving mist and melting snow, 133 people traveled to the first annual Youth Traditional Song Weekend, held January 11-13 in Charlton, Massachusetts. Youth Trad Song (see previous blog post) was inspired by the successful Youth Dance Weekend and organized by a committee of nine traditional singers from New England, New York, Philadelphia, and North Carolina. The intent was to provide a youth-focused (though not youth-exclusive) weekend of learning, connecting, community-building, and enthusiastic participatory singing.

Thanks to generous support from the Country Dance and Song Society, the Folk Song Society of Greater Boston, the Folk Music Society of New York, the Folklore Society of Greater Washington, the New England Folk Festival Association, and private donations, Youth Trad Song was able to provide scholarships to keep the event affordable and attract singers from farther-flung communities. The product was a vibrant weekend with adults (and some teenagers) from all generations, from as close as New England and as far as Minnesota, California, and Georgia.

The three fabulous staff members Ian Robb, Ken Schatz, and Lissa Schneckenburger led three workshops each, with subjects including harmony, New England ballads, work songs, “New Songs that Sound Old,” and starting your own song session. They also took part in a staff panel entitled “Where Do My Songs Come From?” before lunch on Saturday, performing and discussing their songs.

artwork by Natty Smith and Christian Woodard

Space was built into the schedule for attendees to lead workshops, sharing what they are most passionate about and learning from each other. Attendee-led workshops ranged far and wide, including song swaps and workshops on particular genres (“Ballads and Songs You Don’t Get to Sing in the Pub,” “Southern Appalachian Ballads,” and “Occupational Songs” were just a few), discussions (on topics like building online traditional song communities and what to do when things go wrong while singing a song), and a few traditional dance workshops (Molly dancing and flatfooting). The workshops have already spawned further song sessions, discussion and even a Google+ Hangout singing session (“experiment in live online a cappella harmony singing”).



Attendees found themselves surrounded by people with a likeminded passion for unaccompanied singing of folk songs. The event kicked off with a roughly 130-person version of “Country Life,” and from the moment the last chord ended, there was singing happening everywhere—there were at least three singing sessions in the bathrooms and chair-stacking shanties

during cleanup. It was thrilling to be surrounded by so many wonderful singers and songs, and inspiring to witness both formal and informal discussions about the style, history and philosophy of traditional songs.

You can check out some post-event comments and conversations on the [Youth Traditional Song Weekend Facebook group](#). As Steven Levine from Minnesota said, "I think that perhaps the best, strongest legacy of YTS is how much I believe that the weekend left us with renewed and passionate enthusiasm for supporting and encouraging our own local singing communities."

The organizing committee is excited to announce that the weekend was a huge success and the second annual Youth Trad Song Weekend will be held in January of 2014.

Natty Smith, in addition to being on the Youth Trad Song Organizing Committee, is a newly-elected CDSS board member, and also sits on the Pinewoods Camp, Inc. board.