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*Reel-to-reel Recordings of American and British Songs, Ballads, and Instrumentals Performed by Toru Mitsui in 1963–1966, in Japan , and: Reel-to-reel Recordings of American and British Songs, Ballads, and Instrumentals Performed by Tsuyoshi Hashimoto & Toru Mitsui in 1961, 1965, and 1967, in Japan (review)*

Graham Blair

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the writer has read more about Newfoundland song than listened to it. An accordion plays a tune on the first track: it is all one tune, not several, and it is not “I’s the B’y,” as reported. The “tragic theme” of men going through the ice puts “Cold December Day” only tenuously in the same category as the much lighter weight “Tickle Cove Pond”; however, it would have been appropriate to mention that its air resembles that of another true masterpiece of tragic balladry, “The Rose in June,” a Scottish disaster-at-sea ballad that has been collected only in Newfoundland (by Peacock and by Goldstein) and recorded by revival singers Louis Killen and Ian Robb.

One gets the impression that the MMAp was under pressure to push this first product of their series out the door hastily. This may have caused the lapses in the booklet’s text editing, where, for instance, a song’s three last verses are printed twice. It may account for certain unfortunate production choices, such as not transcribing the spoken passages (if they’re important enough to have as audio, they should be there in print) and not providing a glossary to help the listener with arcane terms. It may also explain why aspects of the design seem not to have been thought through: song notes and song transcriptions appear awkwardly in separate sections of the booklet, and none have numbers that correspond with the audio tracks. Users must flip among a lot of pages to coordinate what they are reading and hearing.

In all, *It’s Time for Another One* may well serve nonfolklorist classroom teachers seeking a single product for a unit on folksong or Newfoundland singing traditions. The vintage audio component would certainly satisfy the needs of any scholar of traditional music. Younger listeners may find the modern interpretations more listenable than the older versions on which they are based. And while it is doubtful that any folklorist (let alone a traditional song scholar) needs this package as evidence “that ‘tradition’ is never static but always reshaped by new technologies, social circumstances, and aesthetics” (p. 1), perhaps it will, as Diamond hopes, continue to inspire “the traditional/modern discussion” among some of its listeners, as the inside back cover of the disc’s packaging states.

**Reel-to-reel Recordings of American and British Songs, Ballads, and Instrumentals Performed by Toru Mitsui in 1963–1966, in Japan, 2006.** Produced, compiled, and annotated by Toru Mitsui. Previous Records, CD (1), PR NONE-1.

**Reel-to-reel Recordings of American and British Songs, Ballads, and Instrumentals Performed by Tsuyoshi Hashimoto & Toru Mitsui in 1961, 1965, and 1967, in Japan, 2006.** Produced, compiled, and annotated by Toru Mitsui. Previous Records, CD (1), PR NONE-2.

GRAHAM BLAIR  
*Memorial University*

In the American popular imagination, Japanese performers of Western-derived musical forms have too often been cast as virtuosic masters of imitation—technically superior mimic men whose stylistic appropriations, being devoid of true feeling, can never be authentic, either from the perspective of lineage or of performance. Born in 1940, Toru Mitsui, who retired a few years ago from his post as professor of musicology and English at Kanazawa University, has edited a group of reel-to-reel tapes that confront this kind of assumption on a variety of levels, providing a very personal glimpse into nonprofessional music making in Japan at the height of the American folk revival. The material presented here is heavily weighted toward the folksong movement of the 1950s, when figures like Paul Clayton, Jean Ritchie, and, before them, Woody Guthrie and Cisco Houston (all identified as sources by Mitsui) brought American folk music and Anglo ballad traditions to young urban audiences through their recordings on Folkways Records. Although imported LPs were prohibitively expensive in Japan until the late 1960s, young folksong enthusiasts within range of American military bases were able to hear a wide variety of music programs by tuning into the Far East Network, which was broadcast for U.S. servicemen well into the postwar years. As a young man, Toru Mitsui would record Oscar Brand’s folk variety show on his family’s portable reel-to-reel tape recorder; then he would record himself playing

the songs he learned, making him among the first generation anywhere to use home recording technologies in this now-familiar way. It is rare to have public access to this kind of material, and for scholars interested in the spread of the American folk revival around the world in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it raises as many questions as it answers.

Made informally between 1961 and 1967, when Mitsui was in his early twenties, these recordings have been retrospectively annotated with the aid of diaries. They are presented on two compact discs, one featuring picking and singing sessions with college classmate and long-time friend Tsuyoshi Hashimoto, and a second devoted to solo performances of American and British folk material by Mitsui himself. In addition to Oscar Brand's radio broadcasts, Paul Clayton's 1957 *Cumberland Mountain Folksongs* (Folkways FA20007) and 1962 *Dulcimer Songs and Solos* (Folkways FG3571) figure prominently as influences on both discs, with credits also given to the likes of Mike Seeger's 1962 *Old Time Country Music* (Folkways FA23255) and Hermes Nye's 1957 *Ballads Reliques* (Folkways FA2305), the first folk record Mitsui had imported from the United States. Many of the ballads presented here, like "Sweet William's Ghost" and "Bailiff's Daughter of Islington," were familiar to Mitsui as texts since 1960, when he tracked down a reprint of Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) in the English Department library of the university where his father taught. Published folksong collections that included notation, such as Elizabeth Bristol Greenleaf and Grace Yarrow Mansfield's 1933 *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland* (Harvard University Press), which Mitsui ordered from the United States in 1962, were the sources of many of the ballad tunes, with one learned from an American folksong enthusiast who taught English in Osaka.

While the first disc opens with three up-tempo instrumentals featuring Hashimoto's Earl Scruggs-inspired banjo picking (recorded in 1961 when the pair formed a short-lived bluegrass band), the pace slows considerably as we are presented with a mixture of folksongs in various styles accompanied by a range of instruments, including mountain dulcimer, mandolin, autoharp, and finger-picked guitar. In addition to older ballad material, there is a

Woody Guthrie-inspired version of "Lonesome Road Blues" (here titled "Blowin' Down This Road"), complete with a melancholic harmonica intro, and a rendition of Leadbelly's "Good-night Irene," based on the Weavers' 1950 hit version. Mitsui's recordings without Hashimoto are dominated by English and Scottish popular ballads—now-familiar pieces like "An Outlandish Night" and "The House Carpenter"—punctuated by the occasional instrumental, including a banjo treatment of "Cripple Creek," played in the older clawhammer or frailing style, and dulcimer renditions of "Soldier's Joy" and "Sourwood Mountain."

A personal archive made public, the discs offer sound quality that varies considerably across their forty-four tracks; the singing is uneven and frequently apprehensive, and the performances are presented sour notes and all. But rather than detracting from these recordings, their informality is what makes them important. However culturally distanced Mitsui and Hashimoto might be from the origins of the ballads and folksongs that they played together, a genuine affinity for this music is evident throughout these recordings, and, perhaps because they lack the pretense of public performance, a sincerity comes through that is often not present in the commercially available materials they draw upon. Mitsui is most well known in the English-speaking world for his work on popular music, particularly that dealing with technology and the intercultural dimensions of informal music making, such as *Karaoke around the World: Global Technology, Local Singing* (Routledge), a volume he edited in 1998 with Shuhei Hosokawa. This alone would explain the release of this very personal material. It is less well known, however, that Mitsui is considered to be Japan's foremost country music scholar. Although he has published numerous works in this area, including the first book-length treatment of bluegrass music, *Burugurasu Ongaku* (Traditional-Song Society, Aichi University, 1967), which was updated and expanded in 1975, these have never been translated.

Like many of his academic counterparts in North America, Mitsui first became engaged with this music in his college years by performing it. From 1958 to 1961, before getting into more traditional ballad material, he and Hashimoto were comembers of a "country-

and-western" band that played a mixed repertoire that included early country and bluegrass, and they have both maintained an active interest in traditionally informed American music since that time. Mitsui rediscovered these tapes in 2000 when he decided to bring his old reel-to-reel recorder to a class he was teaching on the interactive development of music and technology. It occurred to Mitsui that these recordings, now over forty years old, might have historical significance "as an example of the intercultural reception and interpretation of music," as he phrases it in the liner notes (p. 5). Listening to this material, I was struck by the fact that, Japanese accents aside, these recordings could have been made by any number of the musicians I have come to know through Canada's various bluegrass and old-time music scenes, many of whom are in their mid-twenties—the same age that Mitsui and Hashimoto were when they made these recordings over forty years ago. Though they came out of a Japanese context, these recordings, and the explanations provided by the liner notes, anticipate now-familiar patterns of urban music making, where people who have learned mostly from commercial recordings—or from other people who have learned from such recordings—get together in a park, at someone's home, or under the auspices of a local club to play this music on a nonprofessional basis. The musical culture that has developed around bluegrass and old-time music is driven by a certain postindustrial romance, often expressed as a somewhat naive yearning for days gone by, when things were simpler and people made their own entertainment. Rather than criticize this romanticism, I would suggest that it is an inextricable part of these urban musical practices; though these practices may be guided by an ethos that points to an idealized past, they constitute traditions in their own right.

Mitsui has made this point elsewhere in relation to Japan's thriving bluegrass and old-time music traditions, and it is within this context that these recordings assume their greatest significance. In a chapter titled "The Reception of the Music of American Southern Whites in Japan," written for Neil Rosenberg's 1992 volume *Transforming Tradition: Folk Music Revivals Examined* (University of Illinois Press), Mitsui details

Japan's long engagement with American forms of traditional music. Perhaps surprisingly, this engagement dates back to the mid-1930s, when hillbilly records featuring the likes of Vernon Dalhart, Riley Puckett, and the Shelton Brothers were first pressed by domestic labels. A decade later, when the U.S. military moved in and began broadcasting "barn dance"-style radio shows over the Far East Network, a generation of post-war Japanese youth were able to pick up the signal from nearby military bases and hear hillbilly, bluegrass, early country, and American folk music on their home radios. While the educated sons of the old, titled nobility were among the few who could afford instruments and imported LPs in the 1950s, this would change with the coming of the mainstream American folk music revival in the early 1960s.

As was the case in North America, popular interest in commercial acts like the Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul, and Mary was short-lived in Japan. Among a small group of urban college students, however, a lasting interest in tradition-oriented revival performers like Doc Watson and the New Lost City Ramblers contributed to the development of various informal music scenes that increasingly focused on bluegrass and old-time music. These continued to grow, to the point where they now span several generations and form the basis of numerous major festivals. Mitsui's recordings, made during this movement's infancy, are valuable contributions to an understanding of this period, and they underline the fact that Japanese urban youth began engaging with this music at the same time as their North American counterparts. In concluding his contribution to *Transforming Tradition*, Mitsui asks if Japanese musicians can legitimately be considered a part of the musical tradition of the American rural South. But the question goes only halfway. American folk music has been traveling for a long time, just as the English and Scottish popular ballads traveled for a long time and over great distances before they settled in the dark hollows of the Appalachians and became identified with mountain folk. The question really should be how long and how far does this music have to travel before we stop locating it in the American South, as if that is where it authentically belongs.