

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Dulcimer Maker: The Craft of Homer Ledford.** By R. Gerald Alvey. Photographs by Jerry Schurman. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1984. Pp. 230, illustrated. No Price.

Reviewed by Carl Rahkonen

A recent trend in folklore and ethnomusicology has been the in-depth study of a single informant, with the implicit idea that a researcher can learn as much from one person, as he can from many. R. Gerald Alvey's **Dulcimer Maker** seems to verify the argument. It provides an intimate and personal look into the life of the dulcimer maker, Homer Ledford. From the opinions of this one informant, one can learn more about the dulcimer, dulcimer making and the music of the dulcimer than if many informants had been used.

The book is divided into three main sections: The first section, "Homer Ledford: The Man and the Craftsman," gives the reader a view of Homer as a person and as a skilled craftsman, and provides the necessary background information on Homer's life, influences, and training for the sections which follow. The second section, "The Anatomy of the Ledford Dulcimer," gives the details of how Homer builds his dulcimers and will be useful for those interested in building or caring for their own dulcimers. The third section, "The Ledford Dulcimer in Context," gives a folkloristic analysis of Homer's world view and craftsmanship.

Alvey identifies three "systems of culture" which exist in modern industrialized society: folk culture, popular culture and elite culture. He then makes some good points regarding the interrelationships of these three systems of culture. The key to his analysis is determining the degree of influence of each system of culture on Homer's development as a craftsman. All have contributed to some degree, but the folk cultural system

is predominant.

Of particular value is Alvey's discussion of innovation, change and tradition, and how each is a part of the folk cultural process (pp.143-144). In any traditional artifact, there are certain "essential elements" which remain stable and "non-essential elements" which change. The result is an underlying continuity in the midst of an infinite amount of variability. Homer has been able to change some of the non-essential elements and still produce traditional dulcimers. But, when he builds an instrument changing some essential element, it can no longer be considered a dulcimer and must be called something else. Homer has built hybrid instruments which cross the guitar and dobro with the dulcimer, which he has called **dulcitar** and **dulcibro**.

Alvey includes a very insightful discussion of function and aesthetics in Homer's craft. While function is the predominant consideration in the structure of the Ledford Dulcimer, Alvey notes significantly that "every change Homer has made in his dulcimer has had an aesthetic as well as practical or functional motivation" (p. 152). I agree when Alvey says, "The fact that folk craftsmen respond to, or even have ... aesthetic notions has for too long been denied" (p. 150). This is definitely an area in our discipline which warrants further investigation.

**Dulcimer Maker** is a significant landmark in the study of musical instrument building. It is an excellent example of the value of in-depth study of a single informant. I recommend this book highly to anyone interested in material culture, folklore or ethnomusicology.

**Dust Tracks On the Road: An Autobiography.** By Zora Neale Hurston. Edited with an Introduction by Robert Hemenway. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. Pp. 348. Cloth \$22.95, Paper \$8.95. 1984.

**Moses: Man of the Mountain.** By Zora Neale Hurston. With an Introduction by Blyden Jackson. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. Pp. 351. Paper \$6.95. 1984.