

Review of *Keep the Fire Burning* and *From Mountains High* from *The Call* online magazine

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LITURGICALLY SPEAKING: BEYOND KUM BA YAH...THE FOLK MUSIC LEGACY

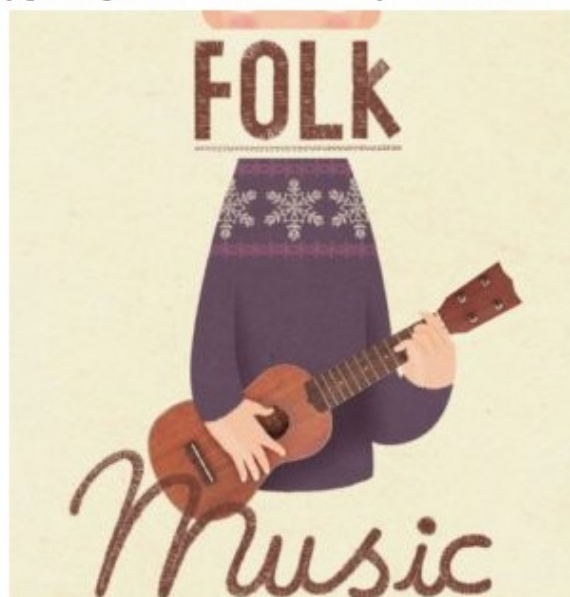
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The so-called folk mass grew out of Vatican II in the desire to comply with the newer ideas and directives for liturgy. In most cases it was a version of the liturgy that incorporated guitars and perhaps rhythm instruments, replacing organs and big choirs. The music was bright, simple to sing and play, and spoke to the hearts of the people. Faced with the dilemma of needing more songs in English to accompany the mass in the vernacular, there was a scramble to find songs that were in sync with our theology and could be used in a liturgical setting. Perhaps it was fortuitous that Vatican II occurred while the secular music was exploding with songs of peace, brotherhood, and justice which in those early years found their way into our Mass. Songs like “[Blowing in the Wind](#),” “[He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother](#),” “[Let It Be](#),” “[Bridge Over Troubled Water](#),” etc. were used in the absence of music specifically written for the liturgy.

For me, the Folk Music was the door that opened for my participation in music ministry. I am forever grateful for that. It distresses me to see the haughty comments made by many in the RC churches who would like to belittle the contribution of this music in liturgy, and who ridicule the entire genre. In preparation for this article I began googling for articles and information about the mass with Folk Music and was surprised at how little existed.

So, my friends, I would like to recommend two books to you for your summer reading enjoyment. If you remember fondly the Folk Years you will find a lot to love in these books. If you are new to Catholicism, or are too young to have experienced the radical change that happened resulting from the Vatican II Council, then it is also a must read if you want to more fully embrace the music and direction that started in the 1960's and is still evolving today. While these books are two separate volumes, they complement each other and are best read together to get the full scope of the story.



Both written by composer Ken Canedo, they are *Keep the Fire Burning* and *From Mountains High*. Ken is able to speak to this era in a very personal way as a composer of Catholic Liturgical Music. He witnessed and was involved in a lot of the early evolution of the change in the music. As a present artist working for Oregon Catholic Press (OCP), he also has access to firsthand interviews with so many of the artists involved in this movement.

In the first book, *Keep the Fire Burning*, we learn about the very beginnings of what Ken calls the Folk Mass Revolution. He traces the evolution of the publishing of this music from the earliest companies like the F.E.L. (Friends of English in Liturgy), to NALR (North American Liturgical Resources) to modern day publishers like OCP (Oregon Catholic Press). The church was not without its politics and shady dealings when it came to properly compensating composers and artists for their music. There was litigation to try to right the wrongs and all told some of the companies survived while others went bankrupt. This book goes beyond all that and brings back so many memories and names we may have forgotten. He interviews and provides back stories on so many of the early works, that I found myself mesmerized by the narratives. If the names of Ray Repp, Carey Landry, Medical Mission Sisters, Virgil Funk, Sebastien Temple strike a familiar note then you will enjoy flipping through the pages as Canedo unfolds the history.



I had the pleasure of meeting and speaking at length with Ken and he told me that the field was too large to cover in just one book. He wisely split the story in two. Book one, is more about the folk years 1960-1970s approximately. The story of the folk legacy goes on past 1970 and that is where he picks up in the second book *From Mountains High*.

In this book, we can read about the transition from folk to contemporary Catholic music and how it was accomplished. In this volume we hear from Dan Schutte, The St. Louis Jesuits, The Monks of Weston Priory, Bob Hurd, Tom Kendzia, Gregory Norbet, Marty Haugen, David Haas and more. These names are perhaps more familiar to modern Catholics as we will find many of their works in the present hymnals. Through Ken's extensive research we come to know the history of our contemporary worship music. To Ken's credit, he doesn't sugar coat the story and admits to the failures as well as successes.

If any of this is even a little interesting to you, I urge you strongly to get your hands on these books. They are an easy read, done in a very entertaining style. While I do have a personal interest in the Folk Movement, as that is from whence I came, I have more recently become aware of the impact this music had and still has for our congregations. At St. Francis of Assisi ANCC in Glen Ridge, NJ, we

used an old Ray Repp song during the Easter season a few years back. You may remember the song “[I Am the Resurrection.](#)” To our great surprise and delight the people sang it so enthusiastically and we received so many positive affirmations on using this song that it has become an occasional part of the repertoire as has another song from the past “[Hear Oh Lord.](#)” We use these sparingly but when we do, it is like the floodgates open and the folks sing many times without even having the words before them.

The Folk legacy is so much more than the early Kum Ba Yah type campfire songs. Perhaps Ken Canedo says it best in the final chapter of *Keep the Fire Burning*:



Ray Repp

This is the legacy of the Folk Mass: A Church united across all generations, gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist, in their language, in their song. Naysayers may criticize it all they want for the way it married the sacred with the secular, but the Folk Mass empowered Catholic people to sing, not as an audience but as a community who is one in the Spirit, one in the Lord.

The fire still burns.

PS – This just in: *From Mountains High* was just awarded third place in the Catholic Press Association for 2019 in the Liturgy category!

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