

Delkiow Sevy: “The Only Living Remnant” of the Cornish Language. Narratives on Cornwall’s Musical Celticity During Its Music Revival

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Cornwall’s ‘Celticity’ is currently one of the most prominent narratives amongst Cornish cultural activists; a concept which was introduced by the Cornish language revivalists at the beginning of the 20th century and which gained new importance when the Cornish Music and Dance Revival started in the 1970s. Cornwall’s ‘revived’ Brythonic language *Kernewek* seems herein to play the most important role, and is therefore eagerly embraced by the Cornish traditional music scene, which uses it as a cultural resource and as a means to perform Cornwall’s otherness to England.

However, the relationship between Cornwall’s lost language and its traditional music is highly debatable: Apart from a few instruments and musical terms in the Old Cornish-Latin glossary *Vocabularium Cornicum* of the 12th century, there are only a few references to music in the Medieval Cornish Mystery plays and only five song texts in Late Cornish that appear in manuscripts of the 17th century. In all three cases, no tunes are included. The most prominent example of the Late Cornish songs is *Delkiow Sevy* (Late Cornish) or *Delyo Syvy* (Unified Cornish), ‘Strawberry Leaves’, a song which is better known in the English context as *Where Are You Going to, Fair Maid* or *Rolling in the Dew* and similar.

This paper takes this song (Roud No 298) as a case study, and by comparing its appearance in various historic Cornish, English and Scottish manuscripts and prints, both texts and scores, as well as historic and contemporary recordings and performances, analyses how this song has developed within the Cornish music revival context and is now uncritically described as “a rare survival of a traditional Cornish language folk song” in the Cornish music revival discourse.

