John Jacob Niles (1892-1980) led a rich and creative life dedicated to the collection and dissemination of folk material and the composition of original art song. In the field of folk music, Niles gathered ballads, lyric folksongs, spirituals, worksongs, and rural hymnody of the Appalachian Mountains. This collection ultimately resulted in the publication of three major books and the composition of four hundred and eighty-five arrangements. As a performer, he concertized throughout Europe and America, presenting thousands of performances of original and folk-derived repertoire. Finally, as a composer, he completed a number of large works and over one hundred art songs.

As Niles was both collector and composer, preserver and creator, it was inevitable that these two vocations would overlap. It was precisely this overlap that disturbed critics and confused folklorists. Within the scope of this paper I have attempted to unravel the controversy surrounding Niles' original use of folk material.

To that end, I presented a survey of the literature, a biography, and an overview of the works to provide a general background. Then I examined in more detail four original songs in the manner of folk music and three original art songs from the Niles-Merton cycle to cast some light on Niles' particular stylistic traits.

This approach especially illustrated Niles' growth as a composer and performer. The early songs in the manner of folk music displayed an intuitive mastery of the union of text and tune, while the later Niles-Merton songs demonstrated increasing awareness of the intricacies of style and form. It is interesting to note that Niles' strongest and most enduring compositions were written both at the beginning and at the end of his life.

My study also clearly corroborated Niles' claims of authorship concerning his songs in the manner of folk music. These songs were, in every case, originally composed by Niles, but each work was also related to a fragment of preexisting folk material. I believe that the controversy surrounding Niles' authorship was due, in large part, to his personal performance style. In his concerts, Niles never clarified whether he was a folksinger, or merely a singer of folk songs.

In the preparation of this thesis it was necessary to organize the vast corpus of manuscripts, journals, published sources, and sketches housed at the John Jacob Niles
Collection of the Special Collections and Archives Division of the Margaret I. King Library of the University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky. Thus, I completed the Descriptive Thematic Catalogue, containing all the extant musical works of Niles, including complete compositions, fragments, and sketches (Appendix A). This catalogue is the cornerstone of the entire dissertation.

Within this catalogue organization is provided by PEN numbers, identification is achieved by means of musical and textual incipits, and information concerning manuscript descriptions, published sources, discography, medium, and text authorship are noted. It is my hope that the information presented in this form will facilitate future research concerning John Jacob Niles, American collector, performer, and composer.