Bronson Says Folk Music Reflects Nation's Character, Temperament

By RICHARD BEST

Bertrand H. Bronson, holder of degrees from Michigan, Harvard, and Oxford, lectured Thursday on one of his specialties, folk music.

His title, "All This for a Song," was, he explained, the reply of a minister of state to Queen Elizabeth I when informed that Her Majesty had awarded 100 pounds to a poet for a composition.

The University of California professor introduced his extensive treatment of folk songs by stating that the oral tradition speaks of a nation's character, its forms of speech, its temperament and methods of storytelling.

Specifically Bronson dealt with the folk ballad "Barbara Allen," which is known in many differing versions. In order to identify the original tune, he placed the essential information on IBM cards and processed it.

IT WAS FOUND that for this song there are four groups of tunes originating in various sections of Britain. The ballad does not contain much action; there is morality; no usual form of romance. The theme is the concept of love as a destructive power, yet still necessary for life itself.

Folk songs such as "Barbara Allen" have no obligation to survive, but they survive because they give joy to men of all time.