



The FOLK PROCESS

by Faith Petric

Lyrics sent by our readers: new words to old tunes or snatches of a good song – different viewpoints, too

This is being written 12 days after my return from a little more than two months of performing at folk festivals and other neat venues in Australia. Now that I'm back, one of the questions I've been most frequently asked is: "Did you get any new songs?" Yes I did, several, AND some interesting variations of the older songs we share with Australian folkies.

Once you get there and hear them it seems so obvious: both countries having been first taken over by Europeans mostly from England, Scotland, and Ireland we sing variations of the same traditional songs.

The Sleepers Song Book, Songs collected from traditional singer Carrie Milliner and the Bobbin Family by Chloe and James Roweth has 16 songs including "Black Velvet Band," "Barbary Allen," "Little Rosewood Casket," "The Drunkard's Child," "I Never Will Marry," "I Don't Work for a Living" and others many in the US would recognize.

"I Don't Work for a Living" has a verse I'd not heard before, notes say it was added in Australia:

They say we're all born with a purpose,
They say we're all born with a gift
Some people like to be famous,
I suppose it's by hard work and thrift.
There's lots of us fighting and striving
For a seat down in old A.C.T.**
But I've got a seat in my trousers
And a missus to work for me.

CHORUS

The Roweth's collected another chorus from Don Kinder and sing it at the end:

I don't work for a living.
I get along alright without.
I live peacefully,
Labour disputes never worry me.
I love my family, and the missus
I adore,
I decided to make them all happy,
That's why I never go home
anymore.

As sung in the US and AU there are minor word differences in the two verses of the original by James Mullen and Edward Leroy Freeman; chorus and tune are the same. The Roweth's notes say "Every time we sing this song we meet someone whose father also sang it!"

** A.C.T. is Australia's Washington D.C.



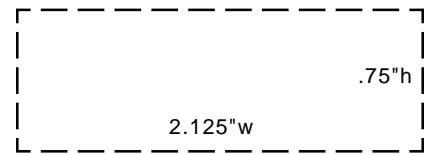
Another version of Barbara Allen, collected from Mr. Alf Dyer of Benambra, Victoria, January 1963 by Norm and Pat O'Conner and Maryjean Officer for the Folk Lore Society of Victoria has a verse which seems to explain why the young man involved was dying. Common as it is in old songs for heroes and heroines to die of nothing more than unrequited love, it's always troubled me and I'm comforted to find that this lad apparently committed suicide:

Go, go and look in yonder chair
And there you'll see a basin
And in that basin you'll see blood
That was shed for Barbara Allen.

In still another version I found the basin containing only tears. Blood suits me better. What brought on Barbara's death the next day, other than guilt, I've never found specified.



The Dying Stockman is one of the most popular of Australian folk songs. I've two versions with quite similar words but different tunes. They remind me strongly of both The Streets of Loreda and I've Got No Use for the Women (AKA Bury Me Out on the Prairie). One source says "The first appearance of The Dying Stockman was in the "Portland Mirror," 8th July 1885, where it was signed C.A.F. Apparently it was written one night at Gotton, Queensland, by Horace Flower and his friend Walter Kent as a parody of the popular English song The Tarpaulin Jacket." That song or where to get it are unknown to me. Try the tune of The Prisoner's Song or think up something better.



THE DYING STOCKMAN

LYRICS: Horace Flower and Walter Kent
SUNG TO THE TUNE OF YOUR CHOICE

A strapping young stockman lay
dying
A saddle supporting his head
And his comrades around him were
crying
As he leant on his elbow and said:

CHORUS:

Wrap me up in my stockwhip
and blanket
And bury me deep down below;
Where the dingoes and crows
will not find me,
In the shade where the
coolabahs grow.

Cut down a couple of saplings,
Place one at my head and my toe;
Carve on them a stockwhip and saddle
To show there's a stockman below.

There's some tea in that
 battered old billy**
 Place the pannikins all in a row,
 And we'll drink to the next
 merry meeting
 In the place where all good
 stockmen go.
 I hear the wail of a dingo
 In the gloom of the scrubs
 down below,
 And he rings the knell of a stockman
 Farewell, dear old pals, I must go.

If I had the wings of a pigeon
 Far over the plains I would fly
 I'd fly to the arms of my loved ones
 And there I would lay down and die.

** A 'billy' is a small pail carried by all swagmen, drovers and similar travellers and used for boiling tea after which it is swung in great circles causing the tea leaves to sink to the bottom and leave the tea clear. (Back in my childhood, we did the same with "cowboy" coffee, the swinger being careful not to spill a drop even at the top of the swinging arc.) As we entered a very modern home in Melbourne, my hostess said to her husband "Terry, will you swing the billy?" Whereupon he took the electric kettle, added water and set it to boil. The phrase was obviously a routine way of making the request. Soon we had tea.



One of my biggest thrills in Australia was getting to know Maurie Mulheron a bit better and having the opportunity to read his script of the musical "One Word, WE", the songs and story of Pete Seeger and friends." (Maurie's song "Right That Time" is in *Sing Out!* Vol. 43, #2). Originally written in 1995. The most recent continuous production of WE has been at the New Theatre in Sydney where it played for two months to sold out houses. The theater itself was born in 1932 as the Workers' Art Movement, has stayed in continuous production since and is Australia's oldest theatre company. It is noncommercial and independent but has strong links with the union movement and survived attempts to crush it during the 1950s.

When they approached theater management about putting on ONE

WORD, WE, the producers weren't all that optimistic but offered to give any profits to support the theatre which is always in need of funds. The always sold-out houses Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights were a great surprise and joy, encores were always demanded, friends who hadn't seen each other in years met there, greeting, embracing, and weeping. Nine encores were demanded at the final show and one of Australia's biggest folk festivals, The Woodford, has asked to have it performed there January 2002.

It's not just about Pete, only six of his songs are included in the 39 sung during the show. There are songs of Malvina Reynolds, Lee Hays, Holly Near, Lorre Wyatt, Huddie Ledbetter, Tom Paxton and others. The program says: "The show, therefore, is not really just about one singer, It's about a tradition. A tradition dating back centuries in which singers and song writers, and 'friends', have used their skills to galvanize others to action and to provide spiritual nourishment when things looked bleak".

Why do I go on so about this in a Folk Process column? It seems appropriate, a strong measure of the process taken by folk songs to other times, places and significant uses. Again a program note: "... a reflection of the struggles of workers in the second half of the century." Did Australian audiences know "our" songs you ask? A reviewer commented that is was "a theatre swelling with a singing audience."

Now for a couple of the more conventional Folk Process illustrations:

Woody Guthrie's So Long, used at the end of the show has a verse taken from an old Weavers' album and a second written by Maurie:

*I've sung this song but I'll sing
 in again
 Of the people I've met and the
 places I've seen
 Of some of the troubles that
 bothered my mind
 And a lot of good people that
 I've left behind, so it's*

So long it's been good to know you (2X)
What a long time since I've been home
And I've got to be drifting along.

We've told you a story of some
singers, their songs,
And we've sung of the bad times,
the scoundrels, the wrongs
But tonight we don't want you to
leave here and mope
We'd like you to join this conspiracy
of hope, singing

The Times They Are A-Changin' was
used with this verse added by Maurie:

It's 35 years since we first sang
this song
35 years and still things seem wrong
There's hunger, grief, war and there's
hate
The wealthy few still decide our fate
But don't give up hope, keep rattling
those walls
For the world still needs changin'

☪☪☪

While I got a lot of questions about
the ascension of the present
president of the US – (“How did THAT
happen??”) I was able to counter with
news of the WTO, World Bank and such
demonstrations and report receiving
stacks of song protesting the fraud. Most
had a very short shelf life but here's one
with more lasting flavor. It's in the cur-
rent issue of the San Francisco Folk Mu-
sic Club's newsletter (Vol. 37 #3). The
author writes: “Banks of Marble” written
by Les Rice in 1950 opens the ‘Rich and
Poor’ section of *Rise Up Singing* on page
180 but it doesn't get sung much any
more in my area so I'm including the
melody along with some extra lyrics
which I wrote after the battle of Seattle
against the World Trade Organization.”

BANKS OF MARBLE

LYRICS: Ray Frank

SUNG TO THE TUNE OF:

Banks Of Marble

Music: Lew Rice

I see the working women
Unpaid throughout the world
Their work used and forgotten,
As they raise the boys and girls.

CHORUS:

But the World Bank's made of
marble
With a guard at every door
And the vaults are stuffed with
silver
That the women sweated for.

I see the kids hauling water,
For miles and miles they roam,
While the 'dozers are rolling,
Destroying their fields and homes.

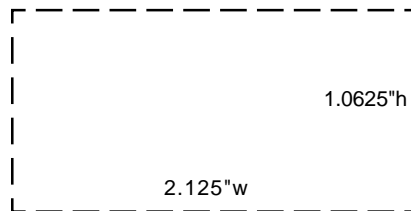
Last line of CHORUS:

That the children sweated for.

I see the people's efforts,
Trying to lend a hand,
I see corporations profit,
By destroying the land

Last line of CHORUS:

That the people sweated for.



☪☪☪

Australia and the US have a lot more
in common than traditional songs.
They're about the same size and share
most of the same problems: increasing
unemployment, attacks on labor
unions, pollution – you name it they
got it. But of the folks I was around
few smoke and there are attempts to
protect the environment there – much
as it is practiced by many in the US.

GREEN LIKE ME

LYRICS: Paul Spencer

SUNG TO THE TUNE OF:

Solidarity / John Brown's Body

By Ralph Chapin / Traditional

I'm an ethical consumer, that's
the '90s thing to be.
So it's hydrocarbon aerosols
instead of CFCs
And now that Macca's uses those
recycled paper trays
My care for the environment can
last for days and days.

I was going to start a compost
but I couldn't stand the smell,
So I put it in the garbage with the
glass and cans as well.
I know I should recycle but I just
don't have the time
To be sorting through the garbage
can with a hectic life like mime.

You say I shouldn't drive to work
but go by bus or train
And have me waiting half an hour
each morning in the rain?
My mobile phone would get all wet,
my hairspray would dissolve.
I'd be environmental if discomfort's
not involved.

Now it's great to save the forests
but I think it's fair to say,
If someone's job is threatened
then the forest must give way.
We can't live without money, just
look at those who do
From their hair and clothes it's
obvious they haven't got a clue.

It's not that I hate ferals or people
who are weird
In fact I have friend who has two
earrings in one ear.
It's just they tend to smell a bit,
or so the rumours go.
But I'm just being prejudiced
'cause I really wouldn't know.

I took some re-used bags once
when I did the weekly shop.
But I felt a little foolish so that
practice had to stop.
I still buy all the packaging I used
to buy before
But now that I feel guilty that
counts as doing more

What do you mean inactive? I'm PC
up-to-date.
I buy dolphin friendly tuna and I
think Greenpeace is great.
I use unleaded* petrol in my brand
new Commodore
And I'm boycotting my French class
and the local French bread store.**

* Leaded gas is still sold in Australia.
** There was a brief boycott of French prod-
ucts relating to the testing of nuclear weap-
ons in the Murora Atoll in the South Pacific.



The Folk Process column Vol.45 #1 had a series of new verses to “Passing Through” composed by school children in Irvine, California. Here are a couple more from a California adult. It is hoped that others may be inspired to compose a verse in tribute to their hero/ines.

PASSING THROUGH

LYRICS: Michael Sands

SUNG TO THE TUNE OF:
Passing Through

By William Blakeslee ©

I was there when Lincoln said,
lying dying on his bed
“From this war we’ve learned a
thing or two:
While we have slavery, then none of
us is free,
Freedom’s sweet although we’re
only passing through.”

I heard Darrow in a court as he
pleased for a life
“Does justice mean that we can
murder too?
Be the crime great or slight, still
two wrongs don’t make a right,
Live is sweet although we’re only
passing through.”



It feels just right to end this column with a one-size-fits-all contribution from a branch of the Canadian Raging Grannies, the full title of which is “All Purpose Comprehensive Rant About Everything That Is Wrong With The Whole World.”

IT AIN’T NECESSARILY SO

LYRICS: Salt Spring Raging Grannies

SUNG TO THE TUNE OF:

It Ain’t Necessarily So

By George Gershwin ©

CHORUS

It ain’t necessarily so
It ain’t necessarily so
The corporate media
Would like to mislead ya
It ain’t necessarily so.

(Environment)

Saltspring’s not gone to the dogs
Trees are just unemployed logs
We mustn’t get madder
Just ‘cause Texada
Is trashing our watershed bogs.

Don’t worry about greenhouse gas
The doom and gloom won’t come
to pass
Remember the looting
We get from polluting
All goes to the governing class.

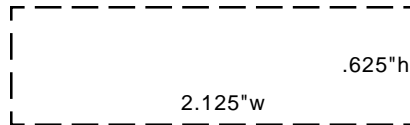
CHORUS

(Food)

Genetically modified food
Is certified legally good
Ignore all the rumours
Just be good consumers
Don’t ask all those questions —
it’s rude.

Hormone-laced beef is just swell
Just look at our own NHL
No need for inspection
Of bovine injection
Don’t you want to be macho as well?

CHORUS



(Big Business)

We always promote human rights
We worry, and can’t sleep at nights
But sooner or later
The gangster dictators
Who buy our arms must see the light.

Our banks are the best ever seen ...
The profits they make aren’t obscene
We like the adoption
Of enormous stock options
For CEOs fleeing the scene.

Drug Company profits are small
They’re lobbying hardly at all
When they hear generics
They go into hysterics
For fear that the share price will fall.

Africa’s dying of AIDS ...
But drug barons got to get paid
They say they feel saddened
But they hold the patent
Take an aspirin, sit in the shade.

Free Trade’s the best way to go
Only subversives say no.
We’ll follow the factories
South and drink daiquiris
Viva Low Wage Mexico! Chorus

(Schools)

Our school rooms are all well-supplied
Whoever denies it has lied.
They depend for kids’ readers
On corporate leaders
Who peddle their Pepsi inside.

CHORUS

(Health)

Health care’s our most sacred
trust
We’ll give you some time to adjust
In a matter of urgency
Camp in Emergency
And sit till you’re gathering dust.

Chorus

(World Trade Organization)

Quebec’s got a Big Business Fair
It’ll be just like Tinananmen Square
They admit it’s a pity
To barbed-wire the city
But people might try to get there.

Chorus

(Defenses)

Women should man submarines
‘Cause women are fighting machine
If the ship isn’t celibate
The brass won’t think well of it
Unless there are separate
latrines. Chorus

(Finally)

We sing cause we don’t want to
curse ...
We’re alive, and we don’t need a
hearse
But if there’s a screw up
We plan to wake you up
Or everything’s sure to get worse.



“The Folk Process” welcomes all submissions, but because of the volume of correspondence, we can’t personally acknowledge or return them. Send your submissions to “The Folk Process” in care of Sing Out!, P.O. Box 5460, Bethlehem, PA 18015-0460, or via e-mail to folkprocess@singout.org.

