

Old-Time Songs for Singers, with Phyllis Elkind & Jen Larson Sunday May 22, 2022

Phyllis Elkind is a long-time member of FMSNY, where she met bandmates Evy Mayer and Don Friedman for Triboro, an Americana trio with two CDs to its name. She and Alice Backer formed CrossStitch, a duo focused on fiddle tunes and brother duets. Her most recent group is Grand Central Breakdown, an all-woman band, which plays bluegrass and country covers. Phyllis also has a passion for teaching. She has taught harmony for the past ten years at Jalopy Theatre, and do woo at the McBurney YMCA for six years.

Jen Larson is a Nashville-based vocalist and the Archives Manager for the Grand Ole Opry Archives. Jen draws deeply from the early country and bluegrass music catalogs; she has garnered critical praise for her work with the former band, Straight Drive. She has performed widely, with appearances at New York City's Town Hall for several live broadcasts of Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion", at the Wheeling Jamboree, Carnegie Hall, and many other regional and national festivals and concerts.

Lyrics

The Carter Family: "Storms Are On the Ocean" by A.P. Carter. Variant of "True Lover's Farewell" (Child #76), originating in the British Isles. Also called: "Fare You Well, My Own True Love" and the "Ten Thousand Miles." The first collected version in the US is by Belden in 1906. The Carter Family verses are found in Sharp No. 114 A. This was recorded on the first day of their sessions with Ralph Peer in Bristol, TN/VA, in 1927.

I'm going away to leave you love, I'm a-going a-way for a while
But I'll return to you some time, If I go ten thousand miles

Chorus: The storms are on the ocean, The heavens may cease to be
This world may lose its motion love, If I prove false to thee

Who will dress your pretty little feet, Who will glove your hand
Who will kiss your rosy red cheeks, When I'm in a far off land

Papa will dress my purty little feet, And Mama will glove my hand
And you can kiss my rosy red cheeks, When you return again

Oh have you seen those mournful doves, Flying from pine to pine
A-mourning for their own true love, Just like I mourn for mine

The Carter Family: "Will the Circle Be Unbroken" by A.P. Carter. Carter Family recorded it in 1935 as 'Can the Circle Be Unbroken'. It is from a 1907 song by Ada Habershon (words) and Charles Gabriel (music).

I was standing by my window, On one cold and cloudy day
When I saw the hearse come rolling, For to carry my mother away

Chorus: Will the circle be unbroken, Bye and bye Lord by and by
There's a better home a waiting, In the sky Lord in the sky

Lord I told the undertaker, Undertaker please drive slow
For this body you are hauling, Lord I hate to see her go

Well I followed close behind her, Tried to hold up and be brave
But I could not hide my sorrow, When they laid her in the grave

Went back home, Lord, my home was lonesome, Missed my mother, she was gone
All my brothers, sisters crying, What a home so sad and lone

Riley Puckett: "Blue Ridge Mountain Home" by Cliff Hess (ragtime pianist and composer – acted as arranger for and assistant for Irving Berlin for many years). Recorded by George Reneau (1924), a blind singer and harmonica player from Tennessee; by Riley Puckett in 1925, a version that is close to Reneau's. Doc Watson's version is also close to Reneau's, including the harmonica, but uses one set of lyrics for chorus. All three were students at schools for the blind.

When I was young and in my prime, I left my home in Caroline
Now all I do is sit and pine, For all the folks I left behind
I've got the Blue Ridge Mountain blues, - And I'll stand right here to say
My grip is packed to travel and I'm scratchin' gravel, On that Blue Ridge far away

I see two heads of snowy white, I see a window in the light
I seem to hear them both recite, Where is my wandering boy tonight
I've got the Blue Ridge Mountain blues, Where the pi-ing pine trees wave
And I'm goin' to wander to the folks down yonder, On that Blue Ridge far away

I know the day that I return, There'll be a shindig in the barn
People for miles around will swarm, There'll be some fiddlers too, gosh darn
I've got the Blue Ridge Mountain blues, - Want to see my old dog Trey
Gonna hunt the possum where the corn cobs blossom, On that Blue Ridge far away

I'm a-gonna do right by my Ma, I'm a-gonna do right by my Pa,
I'll hang around the cabin door, No work or worry anymore
I've got the Blue Ridge Mountain blue, - Where the pi-ing pine trees wave
And I'm goin' to wander to the folks down yonder, On that Blue Ridge far away

Roy Acuff: "Wabash Cannonball" by A.P. Carter. Originally from "The Great Rock Island Route, " 1882, by J. A. Roff. Rewritten in 1904 as "Wabash Cannon Ball," perhaps by William Kindt. The melody differs from the originals. Roy Acuff recording was in 1938. (Roy Acuff version of the lyrics from circa 1940)

From the great Atlantic Ocean to the wide Pacific shore, From the queen of flowing mountains to the south
bell by the shore, She's mighty tall and handsome and known quite well by all, She's the combination on the
Wabash Cannonball

She came down from Birmingham one cold December day, As she rolled in the station you could hear all the
people say There's a girl from Tennessee she's long and she's tall, She came down from Birmingham on the
Wabash Cannonball

Our western states are dandies so the people always say, From New York to St. Louis and Chicago by the way
From the hills of Minnesota where the rippling waters fall, No changes can be taken on the Wabash
Cannonball

Here's to daddy Claxton may his name forever stand, And always be remembered 'round the courts of
Alabam' His earthly race is over and the curtains 'round him fall, We'll carry home to victory on the Wabash
Cannonball

Listen to the jingle the rumble and the roar, As she glides along the woodland through the hills and by the
shore Hear the mighty rush of the engine hear the lonesome hobos call, You're traveling through the jungle on
the Wabash Cannonball

Blue Sky Boys: "Sweet Evalina" Based on sheet music by Mrs. Parkhurst, 1863. Recorded in 1937.

Way down in the meadow where the lilies first blow, Where the wind from the mountain never ruffles the rose;
Lives fond Evalina, the sweet little dove, The pride of the valley, the girl that I love.

Chorus: Evalina, sweet Evalina, My love for you shall never, never die;
Evalina, sweet Evalina, My love for you shall never, never die.

She is fair as a rose, like the lamb she is meek, And she never was known to put paint on her cheek;
In the most graceful curls hang her raven black hair, And she never requires perfumery there.

Evalina and I one fine evening in June, Took a walk all alone by the light of the moon.
The planets all shone for the heavens were clear, And I felt round the heart tremendously queer.

Three years have gone by and I've not got a dollar, Evalina still lives in that green grassy holler;
Although I am fated to marry her never, I've sworn that I'll love her forever and ever.

Delmore Brothers: "Blues Stay Away from Me" *Written by Alton and Rabon Delmore, Wayne Raney, and Henry Glover. Wayne Raney says, "About four o'clock one morning in Cincinnati's Gibson Hotel, Alton and Rabon Delmore and I were getting ready for a recording session the next day. Alton knew a guitar riff he had learned from Henry Glover, a black songwriter on the King Records staff at the time. We decided to put words to it and a song was born. We recorded it the next day (1949). It hit #1 in 1950. It has been recorded by a remarkably large number of artists.*

Blues stay away from me; Blues why don't you let me be;
Don't know why, you keep on haunting me
Love was never meant for me; True love was never meant for me;
Seems somehow, we never can agree
Life is full of misery, Dreams are like a memory;
Bringing back, your love that used to be
Tears so many I can't see; Years don't mean a thing to me;
Time goes by, and still I can't be free

Delmore Brothers: "Gotta Have Some Lovin'" *by Alton Delmore. Recorded by Delmores in 1947. During this later period in their music, they start to mix hillbilly with boogie-woogie, and are early precursors of rockabilly and rock 'n' roll to come.*

Chorus: Gotta have some huggin', gotta have some kissin', Gotta have some lovin', all -- of the time
Don't disappoint me, but say you want me, For baby I've gotta have some lovin' all of the time

I know you told me, that you don't need me; But I think baby you've lost your mind
Someday you'll miss me you'll want to kiss me; But honey then I might not want to take the time

I keep on waiting my heart keeps aching, I miss the way we used to be
But though you left me, your love is with me, It's lonely waiting for the one you want to see

Now baby if you, don't want me near you, Just tell me and I'll, leave you be
I'll get me someone, that'll love me always, So I will pack my clothes and go you don't love me.

Lulu Belle and Scotty: "Remember Me" *Written by Scott Wiseman who says, "The song was written in 1939 when Lulu Belle and I spent a year at radio station WLW, Cincinnati. In our guest room at home when I was a child there was a fancy old cup and saucer which sat on the dresser. The phrase "Remember Me" was on the cup in fancy gold lettering. We children were not allowed to touch this memento of the sentimental Gay Nineties...Feeling a bit homesick and sentimental during the bustle of radio shows and road trips, I "made up" the song while riding in the car to personal appearance jobs. The lyric was not intended to apply to any particular person."*

Chorus: Remember me when the candle lights are gleaming, Remember me, at the close of a long long day
It would be so sweet when all alone I'm dreaming, Just to know you still remember me

The sweetest songs belong to lovers in, the gloaming, The sweetest days are the days that used to be
The saddest words I ever heard were words of parting, When you said, Sweetheart remember me

You told me once that you were mine alone forever, And I was yours 'til the end of eternity
But all those vows are broken now and we will never, Be the same except in memory

A brighter face may take my place when we're apart dear. A sweeter smile and a love more bold and free
But in the end fair weather friends may break your heart dear, If they do sweetheart remember me

Coon Creek Girls: "Row Your Boat" Words & music by Nelson Kneass 1854 (performed by Christy & Wood's Minstrels) and Row, Row Your Boat or the Old Log Hut by R. Sinclair, 1852. Sung by Lily Mae Ledford later in life.

Down by the river the old log hut stands, Where father and mother once dwelt
And the old door latch that was worn by their hand; - And the church where in prayer they knelt

Chorus: Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream
For all that is past is over you know, And the future is but a dream

Time in its rapid remorseless flight, Has furrowed our brows with care
And the icy touch of its withered hand, Has silvered our locks of hair

Tall grass has grown o'er the masters' grave, But the river keeps rolling on
And the birds and the bees from the blossom and the trees, Keep singing this same old song

Jimmie Rodgers: "In the Jailhouse Now" by Jimmie Rodgers. Recorded in 1928. Thought to date back to the 1860s. Rodger's version is based on earlier jug band songs recorded by black artists in the 1920s and vaudeville songs performed by blackface artists in the first decade of the 20th century.

I had a friend named Ramblin' Bob, who used to steal, gamble and rob,
He thought he was the smartest guy in town,
But I found out last Monday that Bob got locked up Sunday,
They've got him in the jailhouse way down town.

Chorus: He's in the jailhouse now, He's in the jailhouse now
I told him once or twice, To quit playin' cards and shootin' dice,
He's in the jailhouse now. (Yodel)

He played a game called poker, He knuckled with Dan Yoakum,
But shootin' dice was his greatest game
Now he's downtown in jail, Nobody to go his bail,
The judge done said that he will pay the fine.

I went out last Tuesday, Met a girl named Susie,
I told her I was the swellest man around
We started to spend my money, Then she started to call me honey,
We took in every cabaret in town.

Chorus: We're in the jailhouse now, We're in the jailhouse now
I told the judge right to his face, We didn't like to see this place,
We're in the jailhouse now. (Yodel)

Charlie Poole: "Baltimore Fire" by Charlie Poole. In 1929, the band was due in New York for their ninth recording session in four years. They had recorded over 90 songs, and needed material. Charlie or someone in the band found a 1905 songbook called Mowry's Songster, which had this Baltimore fire song, a re-write of an 1873 published song, The Boston Fire, about the 1904 fire that wiped out the downtown area of Baltimore. The song accurately describes the fire.

It was on a silver falls by a narrow, That I heard the cry I ever shall remember,
The fire sent and cast its burning embers, On another fated city of our land.

Chorus: Fire, Fire, I heard the cry, From every breeze that passes by, All the world was one sad cry of pity,
Strong men in *anguish* prayed, Calling loud to Heaven for aid,
While the fire in ruin was laying Fair Baltimore, the beautiful city

Amid an awful struggle of commotion, The wind blew a gale from the ocean,
Brave firemen struggled with devotion, But their efforts all proved in vain.

In addition to the lyrics, we decided to also provide some background to the genre and the bands - so as to take up less talk time in the workshop.

What Is Old Time Music?

In the 1920s, as radio began to be popular, the recording industry needed to find new audiences. Ralph Peer had been successful with Mamie Smith and 'race' records – of and for African Americans – and he and others looked to the rural South for new audiences.



Ralph Peer travelled to Atlanta and recorded Fiddlin' John Carson singing "The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane" in 1923. It was a hit.

Other early recording stars included Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers, Vernon Dalhart ('Death of Floyd Collins' sold over 300,000 copies), Riley Puckett, Charlie Poole, and Uncle Dave Macon. In 1927, Ralph Peer went to Bristol, TN, to find and record new talent. He found, among others, the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers. These sessions also marked the use of improved technology, including an electric microphone that replaced the use of the acoustic horn. This allowed for clearer and more subtle musicality. Voila — 'brother duets,' known for subtle attention to vocal details.

There came to be several names for this new category of commercial music. Peer listed them in the record catalog as '**Old Familiar Tunes**'; another record company listed them as '**Old Time Tunes**.' In 1926, Variety had a front page article in which it described the music as '**hillbilly music**'. This was considered a put-down.

In the 20's and 30's, the music included a wide variety of styles: fast square dance tunes, vaudeville songs, sentimental parlor songs, gospel, narrative ballads, and songs in the verse and chorus format. For the latter, the Carter Family was one group who transformed the ballads they'd grown up with into this more commercial format, ensuring that songs were short enough to fit on the side of a 78 record.

With time, there was a demarcation among the different veins of music within this new branch of the music industry. The categories changed over time and continue to change. Today, old-time music usually means upbeat, instrumental music. Unlike bluegrass, which has improvised solos and an emphasis on singing, old-time music's tunes are often played in unison by fiddles, banjos and mandolins. If there is singing, it is brief and rarely harmonized.

The Carter Family



From southwest Virginia, A.P. Carter, his wife, Sara, and his sister-in-law Maybelle formed the original Carter Family. Sara sang lead and played autoharp or guitar; Maybelle sang high harmony and developed a distinctive guitar style; A.P. sang low harmony at times, and lead occasionally. He was the source of much of their material which he collected and arranged. They recorded 290 songs before officially disbanding in 1941.

The Blue Sky Boys

Brothers Earl and Bill Bolick were two of the most popular duet singers in country music in the 1930s. During this time, they made nearly 100 recordings, and their music influenced brother duet groups like the Louvin Brothers. They retired in the late '40s because they didn't want to adapt to the more honky-tonk style that was then popular.



Riley Puckett

Riley Puckett was born in 1894, in Alpharetta, GA. A mishap as an infant left him blind. Puckett made his radio debut on WSB, in Atlanta, in 1922 and cut his first recordings in 1924. He had a successful career as a solo act and as a member of The Skillet Lickers. He is known for his smooth singing style and his guitar playing, with catchy bass-note runs that bridge chord changes, sometimes in a crooked timing. His influence can be heard in the songs of Doc Watson and many others

The Delmore Brothers

Alton and Rabon Delmore grew up in poverty, in Alabama. They started recording in the 1930s. Over the course of their careers, they wrote more than 1,000 songs. Some of the most popular were "Brown's Ferry Blues," "Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar" and "Fifteen Miles from Birmingham". They had a big influence on the Louvin Brothers who were from the same part of Alabama.



Roy Acuff

Known as "The King of Country Music", Roy Acuff had a long and multi-faceted career in country music. A one-time promising baseball player, he turned to singing in the early 1930s, and with his emotional, full-throated vocal style, he and his band the Smoky Mountain Boys joined the Grand Ole Opry in 1940. Acuff subsequently sold more than 30 million records and performed around the globe in a career that lasted more than 50 years. In 1962, he became the first living inductee to The Country Music Hall Of Fame, and also during his lifetime Acuff also received Kennedy Center Honors, a National Medal of Art, and a Lifetime Achievement Grammy award.

Coon Creek Girls

This all-female string band was Lily Ledford, on claw hammer banjo, her sister Rosie, on guitar, and – all also taking on flower names – 'Violet' Koehler on mandolin, and 'Daisy' Lange on bass. They were in the Renfro Valley Barn Dance show for 15 years. In 1939, they performed in the White House for the Roosevelts and the King and Queen of England.





Charlie Poole

Charlie Poole was a singer and banjo player who led the North Carolina Ramblers, a string band that recorded from 1925-1930. Their first recording, "Don't Let Your Deal Go Down Blues," in 1925, was a big hit, selling over 100,000 copies. The band was paid \$75 for the session. Poole developed a unique fingerpicking style, a blend of melody, arpeggio, and rhythm - distinct from clawhammer used in old-time; and Scruggs' style used in bluegrass.

Lulu Belle and Scotty

Husband-and-wife country stars, Myrtle Cooper and Scott Wiseman, AKA "Lulu Belle and Scotty" had prominent music careers that included years of performing on the WLS Chicago Barn Dance, recording, and even appearances in movies. Cooper got her start on the WLS Barn Dance in 1932 as a comedian and singer, and met Stoneman soon after when he was hired to be on the program. They married in 1934 and became known as the "Hayloft Sweethearts." Their most enduring songs were written by Stoneman, "Remember Me" and "Have I Told You Lately That I Love You." In 1971, Stoneman was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in Nashville, TN.



Jimmie Rodgers



James Charles Rodgers, known professionally as the "Singing Brakeman" and "America's Blue Yodeler," is widely considered to be the "Father of Country Music." Rodgers' first recordings were made in 1927 by Ralph Peer, a talent scout for the Victor Talking Machine Company, who traveled the South holding open auditions for RCA Records. He recorded Rodgers as part of the legendary "Bristol Sessions," a pair of recording dates in Tennessee where the Carter Family and numerous other "hillbilly" acts were also recorded. Although his span of active years in the music business was relatively brief (1927-1933), Rodgers left an indelible legacy of recordings inspired by early jazz, yodeling, and African-American blues that influenced artists including Hank Williams, Bill Monroe, and Merle Haggard. When the Country Music Hall of Fame was first established, Rodgers was honored as its first inductee.