

Who's Going to Shoe Your Pretty Little Foot?

Who's Going to Glove your Hand ? Tom Paley & Peggy Seeger with Claudia Paley

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Peggy Seeger and Tom Paley, both New York born, are brilliant representatives of those young city folk who have listened to absorbed, and extended the traditional instrumental techniques of the American countryside. In the U.S.A., country players found ways of handling guitar, banjo and autoharp such as the original makers never dreamed of. By folklore standards, all these instruments are of relatively recent tradition in North America. It's true that African slaves brought with them a plucked-string, membrane-bellied instrument that is the grandfather of the modern banjo. It's also true that Spanish-style guitar had been long familiar in the Mexican-border country. But the characteristic five-string finger-style banjo-playing only began to show itself in the Southern uplands during the latter half of the 19th century, and the modern style of folk guitar-playing did not fully evolve until the instrument became common among country professional players (medicine-show musicians and rural vaudeville artists) in the 1920s. Likewise the autoharp remained a polite parlour or schoolroom instrument until professional semi-folk-musicians such as 'Pop' Stoneman and Maybelle Carter developed its resources in the period between the two World Wars. Country professionals have brought great virtuosity to these instruments. Indeed in the hands of some admired players, the banjo in particular is made to display more brilliance than musicality.

Not so with Peggy Seeger and Tom Paley, who maintain a fine balance between great skill and musical sense.

WHO'S THAT KNOCKING AT MY WINDOW?

(The Drowsy Sleeper) Undoubtedly of British origin, this broadside is one of a huge complex of related pieces all with differing circumstances and different endings. On the whole, most of the American versions seem to follow the pattern set down here, with its borrowed theme from the Silver Dagger and its implied unhappy outcome. P.S.

LOVE HENRY An American variant of the Child ballad Young Hunting. This text shows some rather delightful and entirely American peculiarities of grammar and syntax. Another version is better known under the title Henry Lee, but the melody is more ordinary than the present one. T.P.

THE LASS OF ROCH ROYAL (Child 76) and WHO'S GOING TO SHOE YOUR PRETTY LITTLE FOOT?

Here is an excellent example of how a ballad contributes to (or becomes) a song, or how elements of a ballad may be isolated out to become independent pieces. The Lass of Roch Royal hardly exists in full form any more in the United States, the present text being a collation of two North Carolina versions. They are the only ones I have found in print that even suggest the full story. It could hardly be affirmed that the shorter, lyrical piece is actually a fragment of the longer traditional ballad, as the verses they hold in common have now become "floater" verses to be found in at least a dozen other songs. P.S.

PRETTY POLLY One of the best known of the widely popular "murdered girl" ballads, Pretty Polly is also a fine banjo tune and has received a measure of attention from modern "blue grass" musicians. Other songs of this genre include Down in the Willow, The Jealous Lover, The Knoxville Girl and The Banks of the Ohio. T.P.

ENGLEWOOD MINE The company store was often as great a source of income to the coal owner as was his mine. To the miner, however, it was a chain binding him to the coal community through everlasting debt. Often it was the only store in the town and, if the miner was paid in scrip or “company money” (non-negotiable outside the community) trading here was compulsory. Prices were always higher than at independent retail stores, and the miner, if not in debt, was only a step ahead of it day by day. The coal owners used the company store as a weapon against the miners, as a means of sustaining his bondage to them, and the devious business methods they used produced in the men a lasting hatred of the institution, a bitterness that often found its outlet in song and poetry. This song was written by Isaac Hanna of Englewood, Illinois in 1895. It has been slightly reorganised, a refrain has been added and (since no melody was given) a well-known Anglo-American tune was fitted to it. P.S.

BUCK DANCER'S CHOICE I learned this lively guitar piece about 1950 from an old recording by Sam McGee. It has been taken up in recent years by many “country-style” guitar pickers in the cities and frequently shows up now almost unrecognisably transformed, and no doubt I, too, have altered it a bit, not having heard the original for many years, but I believe I preserve the feel of the original. T.P.

JUST AS THE TIDE WAS FLOWING There doesn't seem to be a fully assimilated text of this song in print, other than the four verses given by Frank Kidson in *Traditional Tunes*. Kidson claims it is of broadside origin. Only fragments have been collected in oral tradition, chiefly in Southern England, and it is hardly reported from America. The two verses here are from Newfoundland. P.S.

KICKING MULE Although Simon Slick, as this is sometimes called, is found chiefly in collections of Negro material, Professor White (author of *American Negro Folksongs*) writes: “... I have always regarded it as probably a descendant from old minstrel or vaudeville days or perhaps an independent composition for white corn-shuck-ings or other gatherings. The form and diction both make a Negro origin seem decidedly doubtful.” It is quite popular now among young instrumental groups in America. P.S.

THE HEARTLESS LADY (Child 200) The old ballad of the gypsies, coming to charm the lady away from her Lord, has come a long way to make this charming piece, complete with nonsense chorus so characteristic of the American versions. As it is one of the most widespread of Child ballads, and so well documented in most folksong collections, little need be said here of it. The text is a collation, from Randolph's *Ozark Folksongs*, and the tune is mine. P.S.

THE FIDDLING SOLDIER I am acquainted with several American versions of this song as well as one from Britain (*The Nightingale*), but this is my favourite. My wife, Claudia, joins me here in singing it. T.P.

TITTERY NAN Only one collection, *Folksongs of Old New England*, contains this small local piece. Elizabeth Linscott, author, writes: “... a popular and widely known ballad in Maine ...” probably founded on fact.” Although the husking, or the yearly shucking of the maize, was primarily a community job of work, it was in fact a social gathering, complete with singing, dancing, storytelling, courting games and feasting. A whole folklore exists around and is interwoven with this autumn event and small happenings are recorded in small songs, like *Tittery Nan*. P.S.

LOVING REILLY This broadside is part of an extended trilogy of William Riley and Colleen Bawn: (1) The Courtship (2) The Trial (3) Reilly's Answer, Releasement and Marriage with Colleen Bawn. The first and second instalments are commonly found often overlapping, in tradition but the third and happy ending rarely occurs. Joyce quotes in *Old Irish Folk Music and Songs*: "... the event commemorated in this ballad occurred towards the end of the 18th century and the scene is near Bundoran beside the boundaries of the three counties, Donegal, Sligo and Fermanagh ... The penal laws were then in force and it was very dangerous for a young Catholic Irishman to run away with the daughter of a powerful Protestant local Squire." My source: Sharp, *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians*. P.S.

THE CUCKOO This song, too, has been taken up by singers in the American "Folk Revival", some of whom perform it with a guitar. Songs are often affected in melody, tempo and style, by the instruments used to accompany them, and this version of The Cuckoo bears such strong marks of the 5-string banjo and the particular tuning employed (D-G-C-D-G) that I find it difficult to consider any accompaniment other than banjo. The text is a folk-lyric including verses common to several otherwise quite dissimilar songs such as *Rye Whiskey*, *The Roving Gambler* and *Down the Old Plank Road*. T.P.

IF HE'D BE A BUCKAROO Although specifically American in origin, this piece uses a classic bawdy song technique, i.e. the use of work terminology (such as the hondo or lariat) as sexual symbols. A good bawdy song can be a work of art: subtle, humorous and full of frank enjoyment; clever in construction and choice of symbols; discriminating in choice of subject. Such songs as this are rare in America, where the subject of sex in folksong is more often given the obvious, ham-fisted for-men-only treatment characteristic of pornography: unfunny, obscene and indiscriminate. The bawdy differs from the pornographic as the seduction differs from the rape. Lomax lists the song in *Our Singing Country* (my source), under the heading *Men at Work*. P.S.

THE GIRL ON THE GREENBRIAR SHORE I believe this song to be of British origin, but I am not acquainted with any British versions. It has been suggested to me that a *Girl on the Greenbriar Shore* may have been a prostitute, or at least a girl of loose morals. T.P.

Brian Shuel's photograph on the front of the sleeve shows Tom Paley with guitar and Peggy Seeger with autoharp. Just above Tom's head part of a dulcimer can be seen.

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