



First Person

A. L. Lloyd

- 1 **Four Drunken Maidens** *acc. fiddle*
- 2 **St. James's Hospital**
- 3 **The Kelly Gang** *acc. concertina and fiddle*
- 4 **I Wish My Love** (*Adapted A. L. Lloyd*)
- 5 **Jack Orion** (*Adapted A. L. Lloyd*), *acc. fiddle*
- 6 **The Lover's Ghost**
- 7 **Rocking The Cradle** *acc. concertina and fiddle*
- 8 **The Drover's Dream** *acc. concertina and fiddle*
- 9 **Short Jacket And White Trousers**
- 10 **Sovay, The Female Highwayman** (*Adapted A. L. Lloyd*), *acc. concertina and fiddle*
- 11 **Reynardine**
- 12 **Farewell, Nancy** *acc. fiddle*
- 13 **Fanny Blair**
- 14 **Shickered As He Could Be** *acc. concertina and fiddle*

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Notes by A. L. Lloyd
Photograph by Brian Shuel

These are some of the songs that I like best, songs to which, for one reason or another, I have a particular relation. They come from the two traditions that I've grown up in - British and Australian. Most of them I've been singing for thirty years and more and they've altered their appearance somewhat along the road, without my noticing it; others I have quite consciously re-made to suit myself; this is particularly the case with one or two ballads that had disappeared from tradition and survived only in books, but which had such power or piquancy that they were worth bringing back into circulation again in one form or another (such as Jack Orion on this record). Why do I like these pieces? Well, most of them have their secrets and surprises, some of them may underline a joy or have power to mitigate distress, and there's a lot of life experience behind the best of them, and plenty of bite as well. The songs look squarely at life, and some of them wear a grin and others a long face, but behind the expression of most of them there's not only endurance but also a sense of victory. I don't know whether these songs are works of art, but they square up to life in a way that only the best works of art do.

A Bit of Autobiography

My parents started my musical education. My father - he'd been a trawlerman, dockworker, poultry-farmer (failed) and AA patrolman before his World War One wounds finished him - was a fair singer of comic pieces and familiar folk songs of the Barbara Allen, Bailiff's daughter of Islington kind. He entertained the neighbours, but my mother, who'd been maid-servant in the London house of a Greek millionaire and had a feeling for the finer things of life, thought this folksy style of singing sounded 'ignorant'. She was a sweet singer herself, and when (in the poultry-farm days) she burlesqued the performance of the Sussex gypsies around us, it always seemed to me - at the age of five - more beautiful than funny; I think she felt that too. Shepherding, unemployment, and the sea finished my song training. At fifteen I became an 'assisted migrant' (i.e., passage paid by charity) and spent the next nine years mostly sheep-minding on the plains of New South Wales. My conscious interest in folksongs began then; I liked what my fellow station-hands and the shearers sang, and I kept exercise books for copying songs in; not to 'collect', just to learn them. Returning to Europe in the 1930s, slump era, I passed some time shuttling between the Labour Exchange and the British Museum Reading Room. Nothing like unemployment for educating oneself; I learnt more than folklore then. A spell of labouring in the Antarctic whaling fleet didn't teach me many songs, but it gave me deeper insight into a number of songs I already knew, and not all of them about the sea, either. About 1952 I helped Ewan MacColl with a radio series called "Ballads and Blues" (we sang the ballads, Humphrey Lyttleton's band played the blues), and by the time the series was over the signs looked good for starting a folk song club (skiffle clubs abounded just then). The skiffle clubs faded, the folksong clubs multiplied: the 'Revival' was on. It seems to have been on ever since. Hence this record I suppose.

Four Drunken Maidens

A hosanna to a band of ribald and riotous girls, great models for Rowlandson, rocking on the Isle of Wight. Before the days of the Royal Yacht Squadron and the boardinghouse landladies, the little island was a prime place for smugglers of wines and spirits, who unloaded their contraband in secret coves, before conveying it across the Solent to the mainland. Excisemen prowled the streets with a bloodhound's nose for the hidden hogshead, but night after night, a chronicler tells us, 'the cellars of the Isle shook with the stamp and thwack of carousal'. Our delicious quartet of bacchantes fits well such a scene. The song belongs to the mid-eighteenth century, but it spread like wildfire, reaching the far north of England by the 1760s. The tune we use is the standard one in the southern counties, but the fiddle melody at the start and finish is the north-eastern version as it appears in the tune-book that William Vickers, a musician of the North Tyne village of Wark, wrote out for himself in 1770.

Saint James's Hospital

It's often said that a folk song has no fixed form; passing from mouth to mouth it's likely to take on various shapes adapted to sundry circumstances. Few songs illustrate this better than Saint James's Hospital, sometimes called: The Unfortunate Rake. It began life as the lament of a soldier 'disordered' by a woman; he seems to feel that the wounds of Venus, no less than those of the battlefield, entitle him to a funeral with full military honours. In the sea-ports the song was altered to concern a sailor, and it spread widely under the title of The Whores of the City. Later, the sexes got reversed, and a new version arose as The Young Girl Cut Down in Her Prime. In the U.S.A. a cowboy adaptation The Streets of Laredo, became one of the best known American folk songs. Incongruously, both the young girl and the cowboy ask for a military funeral. A late avatar of this persistent song is the jazz epic, Saint James' Infirmary, sometimes called a blues though it's more like a ballad. A memory of the original scene lingers in the title of Infirmary and the ceremonial funeral remains, but in underworld rather than military splendour. In World War II, a version called The Dying Marine became the unofficial anthem of the Royal Marine Commandoes. The tune we use here is the earliest reported, 'sung in Cork about 1790'.

The Kelly Gang

On Saturday October 26th 1878 four mounted troopers under Sgt. Kennedy rode out to arrest Ned Kelly and his gang on Stringybank Creek in the Wombat Ranges of Victoria, but the Kellys outwitted the police and shot three of them dead including the bold sergeant. Shortly after, with the district swarming with vengeful police. the bushrangers held up the town of Euroa and robbed the bank of £2,000. They crossed the Murray River into New South Wales and, dressed in captured policemen's clothes, they stuck up the township of Jerilderie robbed another bank of £2,000 and, (some say) declared a holiday for the schoolchildren in honour of their visit. Ned Kelly addressed a couple of public meetings, setting out the gang's grievances, and left at the local newspaper office a long defiant statement, the famous 'Jerilderie Letter' that has been described as 'one of the most powerful and extraordinary of Australian historical documents'. For nearly two years more the Kelly gang led the police a lively dance till after the spectacular gun battle at Glenrowan, Ned Kelly was taken, tried and hanged in October 1880. Our ballad was presumably made up at some time within those two years. A much longer version appeared in Bill Bowyang's Old Bush Recitations. The melody is familiar in Ireland as Mary from Murroo, but in New South Wales it's sometimes called The Cherry Tree.

I Wish My Love

A lost song re-found. It resides among the manuscript papers of eccentric old John Bell of Newcastle. a great pioneer collector of the folk songs of the English North-east, unjustly neglected. Many of his songs found their way, unacknowledged, into the celebrated Northumbrian Minstrelsy but this one was not among them. The song is something of a masterpiece but it seems to have dropped right out of tradition after Bell noted it, apparently in the opening years of the nineteenth century. In Bell's manuscript the piece is entitled A Pitman's Love Song. There's nothing in the text of the song that attaches to the miners' calling. Bell gives no tune for it, so I have fitted one. There's another verse to this piece, passionate and scatological. Rather to my own surprise I find myself too prudish to sing it, though I'm impressed by its intensity.

Jack Orion

In the roll-call of famous musicians the sonorous name of the Bardd Glas Geraint - Geraint the Blue Bard - occurs. He was a ninth century Welsh harper of such legendary eminence that when Chaucer wrote his House of Fame he set 'the Bret Clascurion' up in the minstrels' gallery alongside Orpheus and similar well-known string-pickers. That was in the 1380s, some five hundred years after the harper's time, but his fame endured for much longer in the English folk ballad named Glasgerion, that by chance came to be called Glenkindie when it spread to Scotland. The ballad of Glasgerion dropped out of tradition long ago but the story it tells is an engaging one (a modern and more democratic parallel is the well-liked Do Me Ama) and it seemed to me too good a song to be shut away in books, so I took it out and dusted it off a bit and set a tune to it and, I hope, started it on a new lease of life. Farm boys, tailors' apprentices, stable-grooms and other tricksters who overhear assignations and forestall the lover are standard stuff in folklore, but they don't usually come to such an unjustly sticky end as opportunistic Tom, the apprentice minstrel of our ballad. The fiddler Dave Swarbrick likes this one: does he see himself as Jack or Tom?

The Lover's Ghost

One of the most persistent of the great ballads is the piece often called The Grey Cock, though curiously enough Francis J. Child, in his enormous collection, never found a full set of it. Several good versions have turned up since Child's time - the best one was recorded in Birmingham in 1951 - in the old form as the tale of the ghostly lover returning to stay with his sweetheart till cock-crow, or in the modern form of a single night-visit, as in the well-known I'm a Rover and Seldom Sober. The suggestion of the bird with its golden beak and silver wings that decorates the best versions of the ballad is a borrowing (via Ireland?) of an oriental motif of the jewelled bird of Paradise who crows on the frontier of the other world. The same creature is described in some detail in Rimsky Korsakov's Chanson Hindoue. Our version, more formally lyrical than usual, and presenting the woman as the ghostly revenant, is one that the great Irish collector Patrick W. Joyce learnt as a boy in the 1830s in his native village of Glenosheen, Co. Limerick.

Rocking The Cradle

It seems to have begun life in Ireland, originally perhaps as a lullaby purporting to be sung to the Christ Child by disgruntled Joseph (in mystery plays and carols Joseph is often presented as a dour peasant very suspicious of the parentage of his wife's baby). It has undergone many changes, as a cowboy song in U.S.A. and a mildly bawdy piece among students everywhere in the English-speaking world, besides flourishing in a number of variants (mostly deriving from the same broadside print) among folk singers. Our version here is substantially that sung by an outstanding Australian traditional singer, Mrs. Sally Sloane, of Teralba, N.S.W. Mrs. Sloane has a large stock of family songs, many of them inherited from her grandmother who came to Australia from Co. Kerry in the 1840s, but Rocking the Cradle is not one of those, for she learnt it in her young days from a neighbour in the small-farming country around Parkes. She begins the song: 'I am a young man cut down in my blossom'. I altered it to 'I am a young man from the town of Kiandra' because I knew a Kiandra fellow whose plight was similar to that of the man in the song.

The Drover's Dream

Some Australian bush-songs are as rough as a chaff-bag. Not so this bemused wool-gathering piece of Whimsy that has drifted sleepily all over the Australian continent from the south of Victoria up to Darwin. Old Bill Harney, a walking repository of Australian folklore, used to tell of a young drover who fell asleep on his night-watch. When he woke up, the sheep were gone and his mates were saddled up ready to search for them. The boss drover leaned over him with a kindly smile and said: 'Don't bother to get up, son. Your cheque's in your boot!' The song requires no glossary, though it's worth mentioning that the maniacal bird called the kookaburra or laughing jackass is the bitter enemy of small reptiles such as the frilled lizard. The tune will be recognised as an amiable variant of the old American Civil War song Tramp, Tramp, Tramp, composed by George F. Root, who also wrote The Battle-cry of Freedom.

Short Jacket and White Trousers

'In pulling off my britches to myself I often smiled to think I lay with a hundred men and a maiden all the while'. So sings the heroine of The Pretty drummer-boy one among the innumerable songs of girls dressed as boys and entering the army or going to sea. It happened in real life too, notably in the eighteenth century, but not so often as it occurs in song. No doubt it's a common dream of groups of men far from feminine company, the fantasy that, by some miracle, one of the bunch might be a girl in man's clothing. Not only soldiers and sailors but also American loggers and Australian shearers have songs about this charming but rare situation. Sometimes the escapade ends badly for the girl (as in The Handsome Cabin Boy) but as often as not the masquerader manages to carry off her impersonation with fine aplomb. I don't find Short Jacket and White Trousers in any of the English printed collections but Firth of Pocklington (Yorks) published a broadside of it beginning 'I am a maid in sorrow to complain', a bit longer but perhaps not as good as our version here.

Sovay the Female Highwayman

Another girl who dressed in men's clothes, high-spirited this time to a dangerous degree. The heroine of this piece has been called 'the kinkiest girl in folk song'. It's not quite clear whether her name is really Sylvie or Sophie, but of her forthright and adventurous character there can be no doubt. Lucy Broadwood found this 'an exceedingly favourite ballad with country singers', and every collector of prominence has found versions of it. The good Dorian tune here is akin to the one Sharp published to the words of The Flash Lad (he called it: The Robber) in his Somerset series, Vol. V, and is substantially the same as H.E.D. Hammond's Sovie tune from Long Burton, Dorset. In a couple of places I've added a pinch of spice to the rhythm, which seems to me to suit the character of both the song and its heroine.

Reynardine

A vulpine name for a crafty hero. Mr. Fox is a disquieting figure in folk tales. A girl tosses her glass ball into his garden, and when she goes to retrieve it, he holds her prisoner. One thing she must not do if she is ever to regain her freedom : that is, to look under the bed. But she cannot master her curiosity, and one day when the coast seems clear, she looks under the bed, and there, grinning at her, is Mr. Fox. In another tale Mr. Fox is an elegant witty lover with a cupboard full of bones and tubs of blood. The dread uncertainty is whether he is man or animal. Similar unease broods within this song. Some commentators have thought it concerns a love affair between an English lady and an Irish outlaw, and have set its date in Elizabeth's time. Others believe the story is older and consider Reynardine, the 'little fox', to be a supernatural, lycanthropic lover. It was a favourite ballad in both Ireland and England in the nineteenth century. Bebbington of Manchester and Such of London were among several publishers who issued broadsides of the song, and it is widely scattered in North America from Arkansas to Nova Scotia. Mr. Gale Huntington found a version scribbled in the back of the logbook of the New Bedford whaler Sharon in 1845. The (very explicitly) Mixolydian tune I use is but one of several attached to the song.

Farewell Nancy

Treading on the heels of the class of ballads in which girls dress as sailors and brave the hazards of deck and foc'sle are the numerous songs in which the girls wistfully volunteer to accompany their sweethearts on long voyages incognito only to be told that the life and the work is too rough for delicate creatures. Many of these ballads, like Farewell Nancy, are as pretty and as formalised as the popular engravings of the early nineteenth century, showing jolly tars with curls and dancing pumps innocently sporting with long-lashed maidens, porcelain pure. The song has generally been reported from the southern counties, but it must have been well-known in the North too, for Bebbington of Manchester published a successful broadside of it in the 1850s. In Ireland it's known as Adieu, Lovely Mary, and in North Carolina they have a version in which Nancy sees her young man swept overboard, and she dies of regret. Our version here is substantially the one that Sharp noted rather tentatively from a 74-year old Somerset woman with lovely tunes but an uncertain voice.

Fanny Blair

Cecil Sharp noted this extraordinarily handsome and elusive tune in Somerset, from an old singer who made a terrible jumble of the words. Taking lines from other sources, Sharp produced a text of his own in which Fanny Blair appears as an eighteen-year-old girl accusing a young man of robbery. Versions have since come to light, including a broadside published by Walker of Durham, and a copy written in the log-book of the whaling ship Java in 1839, from which it is clear that Miss Blair was in fact eleven years old and that her accusation, seemingly false and malicious, was one of sexual assault. The nymphet is a rare figure in our folk song, yet Fanny Blair is not alone; in the ballad of Leesome Brand is another sister to Lolita, a girl of the king's court, of whom it's said: 'This lady was scarce eleven years old When on her love she was right bold; She was scarce up to my right knee When oft in bed with men, I'm told.' Past times had young delinquent problems too.

Shickered As He Could Be

What ancient tale of trickery and revenge lies behind this jokey song, common all over Europe and turning up frequently in America and Australia? In the ballad books it's called Our Goodman, but singers usually give it some such title as Five Nights Drunk. In Australian, 'shickered' means drunk: the term comes from Yiddish. A man comes home to find another man's horse, sword, cloak etc. where his should be. Like an epic hero he asks in formula fashion: Whose horse is this? Whose sword? Whose cloak? Each time the adulterous wife insists that his eyes deceive him, and that the objects are really a cow, a spit, a bed-sheet, etc. Only at the end of the ballad does the husband's rival appear, as a head on the pillow. No struggle takes place: there is no retribution; a joke's a joke and that's that. Yet somehow in the form and atmosphere of the song, there's a sense of something beyond the joke, something that suggests important things had happened before the song begins and that perhaps terrible events may occur after the song has ended. What is now a comic song may be but a portion of another ballad, an old and tragic tale of adultery and revenge whose most formal, most memorable passage has broken off and now lives on as a burlesque. The Australian version here is brief, cut to the bone, shorn of its 'classical' trimmings of horse and cow, cloak and bed-sheet, etc., but acquiring native accessories of stockwhip and mousing-snake. The latter may need explanation: in parts of the outback mice are plentiful but cats are few. So some people take snakes as household pets, to keep the mice down: they snuggle in comfort, drink milk from a saucer, work by night.

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