

Ballads

Hedy West

*accompanying herself on banjo and guitar. Bill Clifton
also accompanying on tracks one, six, seven & twelve.*

- 1 The Foggy Dew
- 2 Girl I Left in Danville
- 3 The Unquiet Grave
- 4 Beaulampkin
- 5 Down in Adairsville
- 6 The Sheffield Apprentice
- 7 Lucy Wan
- 8 Little Sadie
- 9 The Cruel Mother
- 10 Love Henry
- 11 The Texan Rangers
- 12 George Collins

First issued by Topic in 1967
Recorded by Bill Leader
Notes by Hedy West and A. L. Lloyd
Photo by Janet Kerr



The American South, has proved to be the best country for the preserving and developing English-language folk balladry in our time. Not that the ballad tradition there is a unified one, by any means. Several strata of ballads are to be found, showing a variety of musical and poetical influences. The 'classical' folk ballads of English and Scottish origin are there, in relatively pure or much-altered form. Likewise a large number of later British broadside compositions. Added to these is a body of native American balladry, some of it drawing on a mixture of Anglo-American and Negro tradition. On top of this is a whole range of treatments of both music and poetry, extending from the free elaborate manner of authentic folk performance to the simplified, regularized, more impulsive style of rural professional performers, such as appeared in medicine shows, country vaudeville theatres, on gramophone records for rural sale, and on transmissions from small southern radio stations. Few performers are really at home with all these various manners of performing American ballads. Among that few, Hedy West is in the foremost rank, as this record brilliantly shows.

THE FOGGY DEW.

What's the difference between a 'ballad and a song? Little enough: we call a song a ballad when it's fairly long and has a strong story-line. *The Foggy Dew* is not all that long, and as it generally survives its narrative is modest, yet it just about sneaks into the ballad category. In the older versions of the piece, the plot is fuller. A young man fancies a girl who lives under the same roof, but he can't get at her. He bribes a neighbour to dress like a ghost and frighten the girl into his bed. In this form, the song is usually called: *The Bugaboo*. The title and tag-phrase of 'foggy dew' which gave rise to wild interpretation, were only applied quite late in the song's history. Said a Kentucky singer: 'It's a good song, just the words ain't so nice. It's just about the bugaboo, and everybody know about that'. Though common in the English countryside, it is relatively rare in American tradition, mostly circulating in the Appalachian and Ozark Mountains. Cecil Sharp found this version in Callaway, Va., in 1918. Part of the charm of this text lies in the young man's fairness in resisting a double sexual standard.

THE GIRL I LEFT IN DANVILLE

A characteristic piece of late American balladry, loose-limbed and drifting. It seems inconsequential enough but clearly had a firm grip on country folk especially in the South, for it has given rise to a whole family of related pieces concerning a wanderer-cowboy, hobo or railroadman - who won't be detained by the small-town girl. The song had wide circulation during the first three decades of this century, and was recorded by numerous hillbilly performers in the late '20s and early '30s. The present version is a reworking of a variant sung by Dorsey Dixon (b.1897), a South Carolina mill-hand and balladeer, best known as the author of the country classic *Wreck on the Highway*.

THE UNQUIET GRAVE

There's widespread and ancient belief that excessive grieving over the dead disturbs their rest. The Greeks and Romans thought so, and the idea is as common in the Far East as in Western Europe. In Ireland as in Rumania it was thought that inordinate tears would burn a hole in the corpse, and in several ballads the dead complain that they cannot sleep because the tears of the living have wet their winding sheet. This ballad, of a restless ghost who confronts and reproaches the mourner, is probably a fragment broken off some longer, more complicated narrative. Though it's been relatively common in England till recent times, it seems very rare in America, and has turned up only in a scattered handful of versions from Newfoundland, Virginia and North Carolina (which is where the present version comes from, collected by the indefatigable Frank C. Brown).

BEAULAMPKIN

The song has many titles *Lamkin*, *Bold Lamkin*, *Bold Lantern*, *Bolakin*, *False Linfinn*, even *Young Alanthia*. The grisly old story of the mason who builds a castle, is cheated of his fee, and exacts a murderous revenge with blood everywhere relates distantly to the ancient legend - which has been the subject of marvellous ballads in Eastern Europe - of the master-builders who make a human sacrifice in the foundations of new buildings, or who use human blood in mixing the cement. The vivid story has been memorable to singers all over the eastern states and the mid-West. This version is from North Carolina, again from Brown's collection.

DOWN IN ADAIRSVILLE

This is one of the two songs that Hedy West's great aunt Jane Mulkey, of Pickens County, Georgia, would sing after long coaxing. In America it's usually called *The Butcher Boy* or *In Jersey City*. In England it's more familiar under the title *Died for Love*. It is in fact a sequence of verses lifted from four or five separate ballads and strung together to make a lyrical sequence. It has been a huge favourite among folk singers in Britain and America for two hundred years, reprinted over and again in broadsides and songbooks. One of its sundry re-makes is the student song: *There is a Tavern in the Town*. In various versions, the faithless lover appears as a farmer's boy, butcher boy, sailor boy, rambling boy, gambling boy, and even (in Essex) a postman boy. Singers who recorded the song include the crooner Rudy Vallee, who claimed authorship.

THE SHEFFIELD APPRENTICE

A rich lady falls in love with a servant. But he is in love with her maid, and refuses to renounce his sweetheart. The rich lady frames him as a thief and brings him to his execution. Fielding used the plot in his novel *Joseph Andrews*, and ever since it has been a standby of popular literature. The nineteenth century broadside and song-book press reprinted the song over and again, and it spread the length and breadth of the British Isles and the United States. Versions of it still turn up not uncommonly in tradition. The set sung here is a combination of two versions collected by Cecil Sharp in North Carolina some half-a-century ago. Variants of the tune have carried a score of texts including *The State of Arkansaw*, the outlaw ballad *Cole Younger*, and the song of the murdered mineworkers' union organizer *Harry Simms*.

LUCY WAN

Horror of incest lies deep in men's feelings. Primitive people are haunted by fear of it, and it makes the subject matter of some of our most ancient ballads. It lies behind the story of the ballad that scholars call *Edward* (disappointing name) as well as *The Two Brothers* and perhaps also *The Cruel Brother* (Child II). But it is in *Lucy (or Lizzie) Wan* that the theme shows clearest. The ballad is powerful but rare, on both sides of the Atlantic. One family in Kentucky, another in Vermont, a third in Florida seem to have preserved the song in America. The version here is the Kentucky one, recorded by Cecil Sharp in 1917. A variant of the tune is used for the hymn *Oh, tell me where the dove has flown*.

LITTLE SADIE

The song is a combination of Negro and Anglo-American tradition, like much gospel music and some hillbilly stuff. It belongs to the same family of outlaw ballads as the well-known *Coon-can Game* or the Mississippi Negro ballad recorded by John A. Lomax, beginning;

'Late las' night I was a-making my rounds,
Met my woman an' I blowed her down'.

Violence and murder in the ballads has exercised the same fascination as it does in the gutter press; on the other hand, violence in the ballads is usually only one element contributing to a larger picture of a person or a situation. Hedy West sings and accompanies the song in the way she learnt from Hobert Bailey, an unemployed miner of the Cumberland Plateau of eastern Kentucky, an area of concentrated poverty and neglect. The tune, pentatonic, three-lined, with 'fifth transposition', is one of the evergreen commonplaces of Southern mountain melody, and close variants have been used for *Died for Love* and *Pretty Polly*.

THE CRUEL MOTHER

This ballad was already circulating as a printed broadside before the end of the seventeenth century, but chances are it was an old song by then. It is related to another song concerning a legend of Mary Magdalene who was supposed to have borne three children - one by her father, one by her brother, one by the parish priest - and murdered them all. Jesus imposes on her a number of penances, and when they have been suffered, a place is prepared for her in heaven. Whether the Christian ballad is a re-working of *The Cruel Mother*, or *The Cruel Mother* is a secularization of the Magdalene legend, would be hard to say. In its Christian form, the ballad is known all the way from Finland to Catalonia, by way of Czechoslovakia. In its 'Cruel Mother' form it's not nearly so widespread. *The Cruel Mother* is thought to have come to America with the first wave of British migrants before 1650. The version here was collected by Cecil Sharp in North Carolina in 1918.

LOVE HENRY

Young Hunting is the scholars' name for this story of love, jealousy, murder and magical talking birds. As often happens, the American versions are much revised, simplified, sometimes corrupted, compared with the British, versions. That's not to say that Americanization of ballads necessarily means decline (it doesn't necessarily mean improvement either). Many of the changes come about naturally with the historical development of recognizable American characteristics of mood, outlook, personality. Stressing her proper pride in Americanized song (as proper as the British singers' pride in his own tradition), Hedy West expresses a fond romance of hers: that people can begin from similarity to expand their tolerance of differences to an appreciation of those differences. The ballad has been not uncommon in Scotland, very rare in England. In the U.S.A. its circulation has been limited almost entirely to the Southern states, but in more or less hillbillyized versions it has been carried widely by rural professional minstrels attached to medicine shows and such, notably through Virginia, Tennessee, Mississippi and the Ozarks. Cecil Sharp collected this Virginia version in 1916.

THE TEXAN RANGERS

One of the many songs Hedy West's 83-year-old great-uncle Gus still sings. He learnt it from an uncle of his. Like other ballads of Western plains origin, it was brought to the eastern mountains by traders, gamblers, or men like Hedy's grandfather, discontented with the West and returning to their earlier homes. It is still quite common in the traditions of the Mid-West and South, and being frequently printed it has entered the tradition of the North-east also. The Texas Rangers were formed originally 'to protect the settlers from the Indians' (more fairly put, that meant: to prevent the Indians from protecting their land against the settlers). Later the Rangers became a kind of police force to deal with local outlaws. Originating in the mid-nineteenth century, the ballad first concerned Indian fighting, but gradually, as in the version sung here, it acquired a Civil War setting. As with many of the earlier Western ballads, this one contains a number of phrases and elements borrowed from British broadside songs.

GEORGE COLLINS

Literally poisonous girls are a strong feature of folklore, and this ballad originally involved one of them, a water-fairy in love with a mortal, made pregnant by him, and eventually jilted. She takes a farewell kiss of him, and the kiss kills him. His mortal sweetheart dies of grief. In America, as so often happened, the supernatural elements dropped out of the story, and more matter-of-fact circumstances replaced them. So matter-of-fact indeed, that versions of this once-powerful piece of Scandinavian-Shetland-Scottish seal-and-mermaid folklore became a comic stage burlesque under the title of "Giles Scroggins". The present version comes from A. K. Davis's *Traditional Ballads of Virginia*. Davis pays special tribute to the fine poignant tune, and quotes another collector who reports he 'frequently heard it sung in the Dismal Swamp region of Virginia'. Says Davis: 'It would be appropriate to that region'.



Digital remaster ©2009 Topic Records Ltd.
©2012 Topic Records Records Ltd.
The copyright in this sound recording and
digital artwork is owned by Topic Records Ltd.
All rights reserved.



TOPIC TSDL163
www.topicrecords.co.uk