

TSDL223

I HAVE WANDERED IN EXILE PETA WEBB

with

Lucy Farr – fiddle

Reg Hall – melodeon

Michael Plunkett – fiddle

1. **I have wandered in exile**
with Lucy Farr, fiddle
2. **Oxford City**
3. **The Moorlough Shore**
4. **The Blackbird of Avondale**
with Lucy Farr, fiddle; Reg Hall,
melodeon
5. **Blackwater Side**
6. **The Pride of Glencoe**
with Michael Plunkett, fiddle
7. **I am a poor girl**
8. **Moorlough Mary**
9. **The Lovely Banks of Lea**
with Lucy Farr, fiddle



TSDL223

Peta Webb, though a Londoner, developed her interest in traditional music in Oxford through the University's Heritage Society, and from the music-making of Irish immigrants in the local pubs. She plays dance-band fiddle, originally with Oak, now with Webb's Wonders, in an essentially English style – direct, rhythmic and undecorated – but her singing reflects concentrated listening to a variety of Irish sources, from the declamatory and whining styles of street singers and travellers, to the highly ornamented styles of introspective Gaelic singers.

As a revival singer, she feels a strong need to rework her material and sing it in a social setting before it becomes her own. However, the songs remain close to the way she learnt them, and she acknowledges the following traditional singers as the source of songs on this record:

Lucy Farr, Co. Galway: I have wandered in exile

Mary Doran, Belfast: Oxford City and Blackwater Side

Rita and Sarah Keane, Co. Galway: The Moorlough Shore

Frank Quinn, New York: The Blackbird of Avondale

Brigid Tunney, Co. Fermanagh: The Pride of Glencoe

Winnie Ryan, Belfast: I am a poor girl

John Docherty, Co. Donegal: Moorlough Mary

Mary Connors, Belfast: The Lovely Banks of Lea

Reg Hall

I have wandered in exile

So many people dispossessed and driven on to stony soil. So many people at odds with authority. Small wonder that themes of emigration, exile and estrangement are prominent in Irish sentiment and Irish song. Some of the songs are majestic, some maudlin, few written by exiles. The words of this one are more conventional than the handsome melody, a Re-mode ('dorian') sprig of that vast tune family of which *Nir ghabh se d'Eochail* (Petrie No. 1418) and *Youghal Harbour* (O Lochlainn No. 8) are prominent members.

Oxford City

A best-seller from the early nineteenth century broadside house of James Catnach, subsequently widely copied by their London and provincial rivals. The song, particularly favoured in the English

TSDL223

southern counties, came to enjoy lively currency in Scotland as far as Aberdeen, and through the length and breadth of Ireland. All versions of this melodrama agree closely as to plot, though singers have variously described the jealous lover as a sailor, a ploughboy, a serving man. American versions say he poisoned his sweetheart with 'burglar's wine'. The tune is best known as a vehicle for the ballad of *Lord Bateman*.

The Moorlough Shore

Another song of exile and estrangement, Moorlough is a hilly district near Strabane, Northern Ireland, for some reason much favoured by the unsophisticated poets whose work appeared on so many song-sheets for sale on fairgrounds and street corners. The tune is best known for its attachment to the 1916 political song *The Foggy Dew* ('As down the glen one Easter morn to a city fair rode I'), containing the sonorous line: 'While Britannia's Huns with their great big guns sailed in through the Foggy Dew'.

The Blackbird of Avondale

In Irish song, when a man encounters a handsome woman in mourning by the waterside, the chances are that the lady is a personification of Erin in distress, and we are in the presence of a political ballad; so it is with *The Blackbird of Avondale*. The song is from

song is from 1881, and the symbolic blackbird represents Charles Stewart Parnell, who was arrested and lodged in Kilmainham Gaol following Land League agitation. On broadsides, the ballad is usually sub-titled: 'The Arrest of Parnell'.

Blackwater Side

A widespread song particularly favoured by travelling people. In England, it's usually called *The False Young Man*. Some versions depict the cheated girl as saying: 'And when you said your heart was mine, and your head lay on my breast, you could make me believe by the fall of your arm that the sun rose in the west'. The broadside sometimes gives the story a happy end: the girl consults her mother, and acting on her advice, returns to the young man and marries him. He didn't deserve it.

The Pride of Glencoe

A great favourite throughout the nineteenth century. Such of London, Bebbington of Manchester, Forth of Pocklington, Walker of Durham, Gilbert of Newcastle, all published it as a broadside. Often they have as title: *Macdonald's Return to Glencoe*, and they set the action firmly in the period of the Peninsular War. Clearly an educated hand wrote the poem, with its classical reference to Mt Ida (Zeus's Cretan home). Presumably the song is Scottish in origin, and indeed

TSDL223

it was much enjoyed in the farm bothies of the Northeast, but over the last quarter-century, Irish singers have done most to keep it alive. The version sung here corresponds pretty closely to that in a popular songster, Manus O'Connor's 'Irish Com-All-Ye's and Ballads of Ireland' published in New York in 1901. The tune is related to a familiar Irish melody for *The Lark in the Morning*.

I am a poor girl

Unlike other pieces on this record, this song does not seem to have circulated much in England, though it is well known in the farm districts of the Scottish northeast and along the country lanes of Northern Ireland. It is mostly made up of commonplaces from a variety of nineteenth century broadside pieces, all spatched together; a verse from here, another from there, including *If I were a blackbird* and *Love it is a killing thing*. The tune is of the same family as that used for *The Blackbird of Avondale*.

Moorlough Mary

A local Strabane poet, name of Devine, wrote the words of this, with the ring of Gaelic poetry in his ears, hence all those internal rhymes and assonances. The song spread all over the North of Ireland on ballad sheets and singers seem to have fitted the words to pretty well any tune of the same metre that

came into their head. Paddy Tunney sings it, Colm O Lochlainn prints it, two versions appear in the *Journal of Irish Folk Song* (vols II and IX) and always the words are much the same but the melodies are quite different. Peta Webb's tune is a variant of the one used in Scotland for *The Bleacher Lass of Kelvinhaugh*.

Lovely Banks of Lea

Yet another song on the favourite theme of exile and separation, a song of regret decorated with conventional flowers like a Victorian memorial card. The tune, a subtle one with a 'dorian' feel to it, is close to the melody used in England (and Ireland?) for *Gathering Rushes in the Month of May* (or *Underneath your Apron*).

A L Lloyd

TSDL223

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