

Martin Simpson
Prodigal Son



01. **Batchelor's Hall**
(Dick Connette) Two Fourteen Music, BMI.
02. **Pretty Crowing Chicken** (Trad Arr: M. Simpson)*
03. **Lakes of Champlain** (Trad Arr: M Simpson)*
04. **She Slips Away** (M. Simpson)*
05. **The Granemore Hare** (Trad Arr: M. Simpson)*
06. **Mother Love**(M. Simpson)*
07. **Little Musgrave** (Trad Arr: M. Simpson)*
08. **A Love Letter** (M. Simpson)*
09. **Duncan & Brady** (Trad Arr: M. Simpson)*
10. **Never Any Good** (M. Simpson)*
11. **Good Morning Mr Railroad Man** (Trad Arr: M. Simpson)*
12. **Louisiana 1927** (Randy Newman) Warner Music.
13. **La Revolte** (M. Simpson)*
14. **Andrew Lammie** (Trad Arr: M. Simpson)*
15. **Kit's Tune / When A Knight Won His Spurs**
(M. Simpson)* / P.D. (Arr: M. Simpson)*

*published by Topic Records Ltd

TSCD567



Prodigal Son

In the mid 1960's John Cohen, the folklorist, photographer and member of The New Lost City Ramblers, went to North Carolina to record banjo players and collate the tunings that they used. He found himself surrounded by such a wealth of material that he recorded much more than the initial concept. **Pretty Crowing Chicken** is based on the performance by Frank Proffitt, which Cohen recorded. The song is a version of *The Lover's Ghost* aka *The Grey Cock*, beautifully sung by Proffitt, accompanied by his fretless banjo. The denouement of the song in this version contains the immortal line, referring to the cockerel crowing before day, "*This chicken proved falsehearted ...*". Proffitt's version can be heard on the CD, *High Atmosphere* on Rounder Records.

In 1963, Cohen had collected a wonderful selection of unaccompanied love-songs and ballads. Among these was *Pretty Saro*, sung by Cas Wallin of Madison County N.C. Dick Connette of the NYC group, Last Forever, used Wallin's performance as the basis for **Batchelor's Hall**. The recorded version by Last Forever, is sung by John Cohen's daughter, Sonya. Cas Wallin can be heard on the CD *Dark Holler, Old Love Songs and Ballads* on Smithsonian Folkways.

Lakes of Champlain is a New England version of the Irish *Lakes of Coolfinn*, which is often sung in England as "*The Lakes of Shilinn*". The Sussex traditional singer and anglo-concertina player, Scan Tester, has a last verse for this song, which I think is very beautiful:
"God bless his dear mother she has reason to mourn
God bless his dear sweetheart she has reasons to mourn
For every each other morning he did her salute
With pink and white roses and fresh garden fruit"
Scan's version, this time titled *The Lakes of Coalflin*, can be heard on the CD *O'er His Grave The Grass Grew Green* Topic (TSCD653). Nic Jones and Dave Burland both sang versions of the song and the New England version can be

heard on Margaret MacArthur's *Make the Wildwood Ring* CD on Front Hall Records.

I first heard **The Granemore Hare** sung by Dick Gaughan on his Trailer recording, *Kist O'Gold*. I found it deeply moving and really wanted to sing it – but I was too scared, so for years I played it as a lengthy instrumental and practised singing. When recording this version, I had played this and *A Love Letter* and was standing in the control room listening to Barry put cello parts on. After a while I realised that I was staring a hare in the face through the studio window. The hare stayed all afternoon in exactly the same position, occasionally having a wash and a snooze. I took this as serious encouragement. Joe pointed out that the nearest village was Greenmoor. A traditional version of this can be heard on the CD, *The Hardy Son of Dan* on Musical Traditions. The singer is Patsy Flynn and he calls it "*The Grangemoor Hare*".

When learning a version of a big ballad, there are often many choices to be made. There may be several recorded versions that you like, or a great tune with a dubious text, or vice versa, or no tune and little text. You might have to write or re-build and collate. In the case of **Little Musgrave** I had spent several years reading, listening and considering, when one day I remembered Nic Jones recorded version on his first album *Ballads and Songs*. I didn't go back and listen, I just started to play.

Duncan & Brady is an American ballad that was recorded by Leadbelly. The scenario is one of a classic New Orleans corrupt cop, who is on the make and meets more than his match. In the 1960s, both Spider John Koerner and Tom Rush used this song as a jumping off point for some very surreal expansion on the theme. I am struck by the portrayal of callous violence, brutality and indifference, all in 5 verses.

Andrew Lammie or *Mill O Tifty's Annie* is a very big ballad indeed. Seemingly based on the life of Agnes Smith, daughter of William Smith, a close relative of the Laird of

Inveramsay. According to F.J. Child who numbers this ballad 233 in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Agnes' gravestone is dated January 19th 1673. Mill of Tiftie was a mill and house standing a mere half mile North East of the castle of Fyvie, so the Lord would have regularly ridden by the door. I first heard this sung by Ray Fisher and compiled these lyrics from various sources. Just in case we thought honour killing to be a shocking new event, here it is in our high society.

Ry Cooder produced a series of albums early in his career, which are amongst the most excellent personal explorations of American Roots Music ever. Every so often one of his songs will surface and **Good Morning Mr Railroad Man** made itself irresistible to me. Frailing the banjo in waltz time is great fun! The railroad hobo is far from extinct in the US, a society which has very wide cracks though which to fall.

Alas, the reaction to Hurricane Katrina showed the cracks to be even wider than could be imagined. Randy Newman's **Louisiana 1927** was written forty odd years after the event which had spawned an extraordinary outpouring of song at the time. Such classics as Charley Patton's *Highwater Everywhere*, Memphis Minnie's *When The Levee Breaks* and Kokomo Arnold's *Wildwater Blues*, clearly express the devastation and personal suffering caused by the 1927 flood and it's chaotic aftermath. Few would have imagined that a modern day response would also be so callously and criminally mis-managed. The song has taken on a new line, "... six feet of water in the streets of the Lower Nine..." refers to the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, a traditionally poor and predominantly black neighbourhood, which seems to have been the victim of deliberate and malign neglect since Katrina. I originally recorded this song on my first album, *Golden Vanity*, 1976.

There are a number of my own tunes and songs here, which are, perhaps, less easy to write about than traditional songs. **She Slips Away** was my response to sitting with my mother the afternoon before she died.

I have told my workshop students on many occasions that the best way to keep your playing fresh is to always try and play something new, whenever you pick up the instrument. I wrote **Mother Love** just sitting in the dining room and playing the atmosphere... Kit told me, with tears in her eyes, that I was playing what she was feeling as she looked at Molly in her arms

Kit's Tune was written on a series of mornings, waiting for the kettle to boil. Molly had not yet been born, so mornings could still contain some luxury. Kit reminded me around this time of the hymn, **When A Knight Won His Spurs**. I learned it in Junior school and loved it and it was a joy to find it again. I always play this hymn for Enrique Almendros, the great Spanish musician and founder member of the group La Musgaña, who has been so seriously affected by a stroke of some years ago.

A Love Letter is just that – it took me 50 years to write it.

After a day of teaching and playing at **La Rivolte**, a villa in Grasse, France, where I have taught workshops for some years, I found myself unable to stop playing. I sat on the terrace and started to play this, which Kit pointed out is pretty much a Bourée – a French dance. I had been expanding on the harmonisation of an Irish Air, so I was a little surprised and very pleased.

Finally, I wrote **Never Any Good** after a conversation with my brother, Simon.

This record is dedicated to the memories of my Father, Henry William Simpson 1899 – 1982, and my Mother, Mary Beryl Simpson 1921 – 2007.

Martin Simpson
Sheffield, April 2007

1	<i>Batchelors hall</i>	4.45
2	<i>Pretty Crowing Chicken</i>	2.53
3	<i>Lakes of Champlain</i>	4.36
4	<i>She Slips Away</i>	3.18
5	<i>The Granemore Hare</i>	5.55
6	<i>Mother Love</i>	1.52
7	<i>Little Musgrave</i>	5.54
8	<i>A Love letter</i>	3.14
9	<i>Duncan & Brady</i>	2.41
10	<i>Never Any Good</i>	5.23
11	<i>Good Morning Mr Railroad Man</i>	3.27
12	<i>Louisiana 1926</i>	4.19
13	<i>La Rivolte</i>	1.52
14	<i>Andrew Lammie</i>	9.18
15	<i>Kit's Tune/When a Knight Won his Spurs</i>	5.18

Produced by Martin Simpson

Martin Simpson – Acoustic, resonator, lap-slide, electric guitar, 5 string banjo & vocals

Alistair Anderson – Concertina, & Northumbrian pipes

Jackson Browne – Vocal

Andy Cutting – accordion

Barry Phillips – Cello

Kate Rusby – Vocal

Danny Thompson – Bass

Kellie While – Vocal

The members of Danú appear courtesy of Shanachie Records

Nancy Kerr & James Fagan appear courtesy of Fellside Recordings

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