

I'm On My Journey Home: Vocal Styles and Resources in Folk Music

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"I found myself for the first time in my life in a community in which singing was as common and almost as universal a practice as speaking." So wrote English folklorist Cecil Sharp in 1917 after he had ventured into the southern Appalachian Mountains for the first of his famous trips in search of folk songs. Before Sharp, few folklorists had bothered to go into the field, into rural America, to encounter directly the living folk-song tradition. Sharp's astonishment at finding a community of singing reminds us of the pervasiveness in American tradition of that most basic musical instrument, the voice.

The folk of rural America used their voices in wonderfully inventive and diverse ways. They hollered in the fields and sang work songs on their boats; they made their way through long, lonesome ballads; they taught their children with rhymes and chants and entertained them with nonsense songs, imitations, and bizarre mouth sounds; they listened to the music of auctioneers and street cries and square-dance callers; and they celebrated their God with all manner of joyful noise. They were unhampered by formal musical training or dogmatic European notions of harmony, rhythm, and diction. They created their own notions of good singing and in doing so created a bewildering variety of individual and area singing styles. It is the main purpose of this album to demonstrate the scope and variety of such singing styles and vocal resources.

The concept of singing style is fairly new to students of folk music. "Style" may be defined simply as the combination of details of intonation, rhythm, pronunciation, and melody that make one singer's rendition of, say, "Barbara Allen" different from another's. If you take away song text and basic melody from a performance, what is left is singing style. In some kinds of formal music, this is rather little; in most kinds of folk music, it is usually a great deal. It was hard to document singing style before the advent of recording, and most early folklorists contented themselves with tracing and documenting the verbal texts of folk songs. Scholars today are getting away from this preoccupation and beginning to study the history of song melodies as well; yet only a handful of ethnomusicologists have taken their work a step further, into the area of singing style.

In fact, there is not even an accepted standard vocabulary for the study of folk-singing style. One can agree on some general distinctions between basic singing styles, such as the *tempo-giusto* (strict-tempo) style and the *parlando-rubato* (free, speaking-rhythm) style. But many folk performers do things with their voices that have little or no relationship to formal music, and it is difficult and misleading to describe those things with terms borrowed from formal music. The style of traditional singers may include how they release their words; how they approach their pitch (do they slide nasally up to it?); whether their voices are tense or relaxed; whether their timing is metrical, semi-metrical, or nonmetrical; whether the mouth is wide open or partly closed, and how this affects the formation of vowel sounds. Style includes the way some singers ornament the melody with devices such as vibrato, scooping (slurring up to a note), sliding down to a note, and feathering (adding a hook to a note by use of a glottal stop). In various forms of ensemble singing, style can include the extent to which the voices are synchronized, notions of harmony and counterpoint, and the overall texture and blend of the voices. And these are only some of the aural aspects of style, only some of the features accessible to record listeners. Equally important elements of style include the way a singer presents a song to his audience: the facial expression, the gestures, the subtle body movements that help him communicate his interpretation. The immediate social context in which the song is sung—a work situation, an educational one, or a family gathering—also forms part of style. In fact, after years of studying folk music, folklorist Alan Lomax has arrived at a definition of folk-song style that includes factors like the behavior and life style of musicians, the vocal timbre and pitch favored by different cultures, the meaning of the song texts, the social functions of the music, and the whole relationship between musicians and their audience. Not all folklorists agree with Lomax's broad definition of style, and in any event the obvious restrictions of recording as a documentary tool make it necessary here to restrict the definition of style pretty much to auditory elements.

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This album is a loosely structured survey of different types of vocal styles and resources found in rural Anglo-American lower- and middle-class communities. Some of the modes of performance, such as hollering and solo ballad singing, have almost died out; others, such as Sacred Harp singing (New World Records 80205-2, *White Spirituals from the Sacred Harp*), formal duet singing, and square-dance calling, are flourishing as never before. All the modes, though, are important to understanding the dimensions of folk vocal styles. The album is divided into three major sections: a survey of nonstandard vocal effects that shows how much music infuses the everyday communication, instruction, and recreation of the folk community; a survey of solo singing; and a survey of various forms of ensemble singing, from duets to quartets to larger groups. The selections contrast with or parallel each other and serve both as examples of a particular style and as good solid performances. Many have never before been issued on LP, and the performances deserve wider exposure regardless of the context. To that end we have included in the performance notes information about the singers and about the songs, even though such information often has no direct bearing on matters of style. It is hoped that the album can be seen as either a survey of vocal styles or an informed sampler of good folk music.

When possible, we have tried to use examples of unaccompanied singing, to allow the listener to concentrate fully on the voices. This has meant, especially with group singing, the inclusion of a disproportionately large number of religious songs; this simply reflects the fact that nearly all unaccompanied group singing in rural America for some decades has been in churches or at singing conventions. And in a sense the kind of song is irrelevant to matters of style. In other cases, such as yodeling and duet singing, it was virtually impossible to find examples without guitar accompaniment; duet singing has become practically grafted to the guitar, especially since the popularization of duet styles in commercial country music in the thirties. Most of the selections come from the Southeast; this area has been documented more fully than any other, and it affords the anthologist a wider variety of choice in material as well as an opportunity to create a full cross section of regional styles rather than a spotty one of national styles. The few non-Southeastern selections are offered for contrast as much as for anything else.

The material has been drawn from three types of sources: older (pre-1945) Library of Congress recordings made on discs by field workers around the country and deposited in the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress; older commercial recordings made for the Southern market by major record companies in the twenties and thirties, recordings that, though not done by trained folklorists, still captured a great deal of traditional material, some of it years before the Library of Congress's work; and more recent field tapes done by folklorists and students and deposited in academic archives around the country. One selection ("Been a Long Time Traveling Here Below") was taken from a limited-edition LP, and another ("Turkey in the Straw") is a field recording from an out-of-print LP. —*Charles Wolfe*

Charles Wolfe, a native of the Ozarks, has written extensively on folk music and popular culture and is the author of *Grand Ole Opry: The Early Years (1975)* and *Tennessee Strings (1977)*. He has also produced numerous albums of folk music.

Track 1

Hollerin'

Leonard Emanuel, vocal. *Recorded 1975 in Sampson County, North Carolina, by Bill Nowlin, Bill Phillips, and Mark Wilson. Originally issued on Rounder LP 0071.*

Track 2

Whooping

"Red" Buck Estes, vocal. *Recorded July 4, 1962, at Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, by D. K. Wilgus. Western Kentucky University Folklore Archives.*

The first six selections form a survey of vocal resources of the folk community. Such resources are a type of protomusic and emerge from the work and play functions of the rural community. This body of vocal effects is characterized by the use of the voice in diverse musical ways, but to ends other than formal song. It includes utilitarian functions such as auctioneering, dance calls, educational or mnemonic devices, and some forms of hollering; it includes examples of sheer entertainment such as imitations, whooping, nonsense songs, and recreational hollers. Much of this protomusic is wordless, and the voice is treated as a purely musical instrument (for example, hollers, eeping, some nonsense songs); some mixes words with nonsense syllables; and some retains more of the characteristics of chant. Yet the term "protomusic" should not suggest that this sort of vocalization preceded formal singing in the development of the community; most of it existed contemporaneously with formal singing, which should suggest the extent to which music permeates nearly every aspect of Southern folk culture.

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Hollering, one of the purest and most basic forms of vocal response, was very much a part of the daily life of rural America. Sadly, it has only been in recent years that folklorists have begun to study hollering, and they have found generally that it is rapidly vanishing from the rural South.

Why did people holler? Sam F. Hudson has written in the notes to *Hollerin'* (see Discography) that the countryman in earlier days

sang loudly as he followed his plow, or moved about his broad fields, or walked the footpaths that were so common in that day. He frequently hollered, and for the same reason that birds sing. His holler expressed his mood. It was also a means of fellowship with his neighbor who might be as much as a mile away. A man's holler was as distinctive as his face, and every man was known by his holler. When a neighbor heard his neighbor he instinctively answered him. So neighbors hollered to and for each other and enjoyed that kind of fellowship.

Hollering also had more specific functions. Certain types were known in communities as distress hollers and, in a society lacking telephones or radio, could bring neighbors as readily as an alarm bell or fire whistle. Different types of farm animals were routinely summoned by vaguely imitative hollers or calls, and hunting was often done to various forms of hollers. Some neighbors kept track of each other's well-being by hollering to each other in the morning; if a neighbor didn't answer a holler, he was checked on. People lost in the woods hollered for help, and certain falsetto hollers could be heard for miles.

Hollering existed throughout the country, though most of the collected and recorded versions have come from the Southeast. Related to these sorts of hollering were older urban manifestations like the street cries of vendors or the calling of trains in depots. Riverboat captains listened to hollers to help them navigate (one such holler gave Mark Twain his name), recruits listened to their drill sergeants, and cattle on trail drives listened to cowboys. Many examples of Afro-American hollers are to be found in nineteenth-century writings,

and Harold Courlander in *Negro Folk Music USA* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963) reports melodic calls from Nigeria, Haiti, and Cuba, and notes that work and hunting cries have been reported from Africa, Asia, and the Philippines. Hollering is probably a universal form of folk expression. It is much more prevalent in less urbanized countries than it is at present in the United States. One attempt to preserve the Southern hollering tradition in this country is the annual hollering contest held in Spivey's Corner (Sampson County), North Carolina, and celebrated in *Hollerin'*, an excellent collection of field recordings.

Unlike yodeling, in which the performer begins in full voice and leaps up to falsetto, most hollers begin in high falsetto and develop from there. Possibly because of the difficulty in controlling the falsetto pitch, most hollers are built around long slow notes that often have a lonesome, blues-like quality. Hollering should also be distinguished from hooting, a related falsetto style in which the mouth cavity is more strictly controlled and tunes can more readily be executed. There are relatively few people alive today who are still skilled in the varieties and styles of hollering. One of the best is Leonard Emanuel, onetime champion of the Spivey's Corner contest, whose skill has won him appearances on national television as well as places in folk festivals. In the second example of his heard here, Leonard creates a rather stylized virtuoso holler characterized by rapid shifts between natural and falsetto voice. He uses his voice almost as a musical instrument, creating a holler that becomes a musical composition of sorts. Such "trademark" hollers are quite common in Sampson County today, and at one time may have been considerably more widespread across the South.

The Kentucky whoop by "Red" Buck Estes, recorded at a Fourth of July celebration at Mammoth Cave, is a more recent and more complex example of hollering. Here there is even more integration of melody into the holler, and, after a statement of a descending melodic motif, Estes even uses words:

Just see that boat coming round that bend

[hollers]

If I never see my honey no more,

Ohhh, what'll I do?

These common-property blues lines, and the fact that Estes privately referred to his holler as a "nigger whoop," suggest that it might have been derived at least in part from black sources. In the absence of representative field research on hollering in the upper South, it is hard to tell how characteristic Estes' hybrid form might be. That he was a guest performer at a local celebration suggests that his community looked on his hollering as something rare or special.

Track 3

Eephing

Jimmie Riddle, vocal. *Recorded August 8, 1971, in Montreal by Mike Seeger and Almeda Riddle. Collection of Mike Seeger.*

Track 4

Ringing the Pig

Lindy Clear, vocal effects. *Recorded 1956 in Shipps Park, Virginia, by Mike Seeger. Collection of Mike Seeger.*

The use of the voice as a folk instrument to create humorous paramusical effects is demonstrated in these two brief selections. Though folklorists have understandably emphasized vocal music as manifested in song, there is a bewildering variety of wordless vocal music that is still very much a part of rural traditions.

Eephing (or hoodling) is one of a number of vocal percussive effects still found in the mid-South; it is explained by Jimmie Riddle on the recording. Dick Burnett, a blind minstrel from southern Kentucky who

began touring in 1912, featured in many of his numbers an imitation of a jew's-harp, a sound he created by tickling his throat and altering his mouth cavity. "Ladies on the Steamboat," a 1927 recording on which Burnett does this, has been reissued on Rounder 1004, *Ramblin Reckless Hobo*. Homer and Wilbur Leverett, gospel singers from Missouri, have also recorded examples of the imitation jew's-harp as well as songs created by tapping the cheeks and changing the mouth cavity. Other forms of "mouth music" documented in the South include clicking the tongue, rapping the teeth ("doing a tap dance on the teeth," in Jimmie Riddle's words), blowing into cupped hands, and humming on and blowing into instruments both common (like the tissue-covered comb) and uncommon (like a blown-up rubber glove). Indeed, during the twenties mail-order houses like Sears Roebuck did a nice business selling all sorts of people such voice instruments as the Humanophone and the Nosehorn.

Jimmie Riddle learned his eeping from people around his native western-Tennessee home town, but there is no indication that the practice originated or even flourished there. It has been reported in Arkansas, Kentucky, and Mississippi and might have been transmitted by professional country-music comedians who began to flourish in the thirties as members of medicine shows, Toby shows (so called after their stylized red-haired clown), and country-music tour shows. Indeed, Jimmie Riddle himself today does most of his eeping on the syndicated country television show *Hee Haw*. He and his partner Jackie Phelps in the late sixties perfected a routine that involves a combination of eeping and "hand jive," the rhythmic slapping of hands on the legs and torso. Eeping has also been found among Afro-Americans. It is customarily performed informally in relaxed social situations.

Some modern Nashville professionals have integrated eeping into mainstream country music: Roger Miller uses eeping techniques in some of his wordless vocal breaks, and Mac Davis has used it as a background to his "Poor Boy Boogie" (Columbia PC-31770). Jimmie Riddle has recorded "Wildwood Eeph" and "Yakety Eeph," each a tour de force of mouth music, on Decca 32735.

Imitation as a vocal form has a much longer pedigree than eeping and like eeping has moved from the informal social situation to the professional stage. In folk and country music, imitations have traditionally been not of other performers but of barnyard fowl, farm creatures, wild birds, and nostalgic elements like old cars, steam-locomotive whistles, and steam engines. Audiences in the early days of professional country music were often adequately entertained by simple imitations. In the twenties Garley Foster, of the influential band the Carolina Tar Heels, billed himself as "The Human Bird" and used his imitations to popularize his music; in the thirties young Roy Acuff invented a lonely train whistle for a song called "Wabash Cannonball" and parlayed it into a Grand Ole Opry institution. Imitators were a successful part of the folk-and-country concert scene as late as the sixties, when Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul, and Mary was entertaining folk revival audiences by doing imitations of a toilet flushing.

Imitations featuring a blend of voice and instrument have also been a staple of Southern folk music for years. The annals of commercial "old-time" records from the twenties and thirties are full of examples of what the companies liked to call "descriptive novelties": imitations of fox chases, hen cackles, coon hunts, donkeys and mules, and Model T Fords. Most featured the vocal effects interacting with an instrument, usually a fiddle or harmonica. A complete discography of such performances would be immense, but some especially noteworthy examples are Tennessee fiddler Whit Gayden's "Tennessee Coon Hunt" (Victor V-40315, 1929), Henry Whitter's "Fox Chase" (an extremely influential harmonica piece that Whitter recorded several times in the twenties), and harmonica player Kyle Wooten's "Red Pig" (Okeh 45526, 1930), which makes an interesting comparison to Lindy Clear's porcine doings on this album. Library of Congress field workers have also picked up dozens of such pieces and have found the tradition still thriving in black communities as well as in white ones. Deford Bailey, the popular black harmonica player in the early days of the Grand Ole Opry, specialized in a "Fox Chase" number that he was still performing in the mid-seventies.

Lindy Clear (“Cousin Mort”) for years traveled with the Stanley Brothers, a noted bluegrass act, providing entertainment such as he does here for comedy relief. His vast repertoire included imitations of dogfights, trains starting, and cranking a Model T Ford. Introducing this particular imitation, Carter Stanley explained:

Most of the time, you know, hogs are awful bad to root in the dirt. You put them in a pasture field or anything, they’ll root under the fence, and in order to prevent that, people, they put rings in their nose to keep them from rooting because if they root with the rings in their nose it hurts and they just naturally don’t do it. So let’s call up about a two-hundred-and-fifty pound shoat and ring him. . . .

Track 5

Spelling from the Old Blue-Back Speller

Ben Rice, vocal. *Recorded December 1936 in Springfield, Missouri, by Sidney Robertson [Cowell]. Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 3213 B2.*

A utilitarian function of vocal music in rural society involved the use of songs, rhymes, and chants as mnemonic devices in education. Such songs and chants were catchy and thus were helpful to younger students, who had to simply memorize certain basic rules of spelling, geography, and arithmetic. Such techniques could also be transmitted to a rural society in which most communication was still oral. Since the late forties a number of examples have been collected by the Library of Congress, almost all from older informants who could still remember such chants from their youth—a testimony to the mnemonic effectiveness of the devices.

Ben Rice, a storekeeper from Springfield, Missouri, here does a highly metrical yet relaxed chant based on the common vowel sounds. Other forms of this chant exist, as well as similar chants for the consonants. Related to this is the nineteenth-century rural practice of formal spelling, wherein the speller pronounces each syllable of the word as he spells it. Done rapidly, this technique can sound like a humorous form of double-talk and in the nineteen-twenties was used to this end by hillbilly musicians like Eck Dunford and Uncle Dave Macon.

Track 6

Tobacco Auctioneering

Two unknown auctioneers, vocals.

Recorded early 1960s in North Carolina by Barbara Currin Smetzer. Archive of Traditional Music, Indiana University, Item FTL 112.

Auctioneers, still a highly visible part of rural life, are respected both for the amount of money they can bring from a sale and for their skill in auction calling, or “auctioneering.” Many auctioneers, like many fundamentalist preachers, begin with a stylized form of speech, move to a monotonic chant, and on occasion conclude by breaking into song. Like preachers, the auctioneer uses his vocal performance to generate a momentum in which the participant is caught up; like preachers, the auctioneer uses response from his audience to sustain or increase this momentum. Unlike preachers, though, the auctioneer will often use nonsense syllables strung together in rapid succession to fill the gaps between responses (in his case, bids). Rural auctioneering, another instance of the vocal music of everyday life, is a remarkable example of how highly metrical speech can merge into song. Auctioneering has also been a real part of American popular culture as well: A generation grew up listening to Lucky Strike cigarettes radio commercials featuring a tobacco auctioneer.

The Southern auctioneering style heard here was often passed on by traditional oral channels, though some auctioneers did attend formal schools of auctioneering, such as the one in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The spiel of the auctioneer, supplemented by his customary costume of string tie and white hat, has given him a certain hero status in the South, not unlike that accorded successful musicians. In 1964 country singer LeRoy Van Dyke recorded a pop hit, “Auctioneer” (Decca DL7-5346), that details the story of a poor boy who makes good as an auctioneer.

In a study based in part on the auctioneering sample heard here, George List has noted that some cultures have three distinct terms to describe sound communication: speech, chant, and song. In some cases, though, distinctions are made not so much along melodic as along functional lines. List writes:

“Auctioneering” . . . is not usually considered “song” or even “chant.” Nevertheless, “auctioneering” often takes the form of a monotonic chant in which the monotone and the few auxiliary tones used are quite stable. On occasion, types of melodic cadences are also used.

By no means does every auctioneer develop his chant into the kind of distinct melody heard at the end of this example (“Grab you a honey an’ a-pat her on the head,/She don’t like chicken you can feed her corn bread”), but many auctioneers do modulate into different keys as the bidding reaches different levels. Furthermore, this caller employs a blues-like approach, sliding in and out of pitch with ease. That two auctioneers are present—one to encourage the crowd, one to maintain the chant—suggests that in some parts of the South today the auctioneer is emerging as a performer as well as a tradesman.

Track 7

Turkey in the Straw

Neil Morris, dance calls; Charlie Everidge, mouthbow. *Recorded 1959 in Timbo, Arkansas, by Alan Lomax. Originally issued on Prestige 25006.*

The square-dance call is a combination of recreational and utilitarian modes of vocal music: Listening to a good caller perform in front of a band adds to the enjoyment of the music, and heeding his instructions makes dancing less chaotic. In the nineteenth century, square-dance calls were usually handled by the fiddler—more often than not the sole source of music at a dance—and were probably often little more than a series of concise instructions. Most dancers were expected to know the basic patterns, and calls were given only when it was necessary to change patterns. Such instructional shouts can be heard in some of the earliest recorded string-band music. Even early examples of Northeastern and Midwestern dance fiddling contain such shouts, which suggests that this older form of dance calling was by no means confined to the Southeast.

A second type of dance call might be characterized as a semimelodic phrase delivered in more of a chant or monotone than the earlier instructional shout. Whereas the earlier shout might be simply a terse “Fall back two” or “Step it home,” this semimelodic phrase might involve something like “Cir-rrr-cle once and pro-o-menade.” This type of call can be heard on early records by some of the famous barn-dance string bands of the twenties, such as those of Dr. Humphrey Bate (WSM’s *Grand Ole Opry*) and Tommy Dandurand (WLS’s *National Barn Dance*). There is some evidence to suggest that by this time, as string-band music was rapidly commercializing, such calls were becoming less functional and more ornamental. With some of the earlier records with instructional shouts, it was possible to dance the sets as instructed by the caller; with later records, the calls come too fast to be properly executed. By this time, too, the calls were becoming more integrated into the string-band performance, and a call often coincided with the start of an instrumental chorus. Dr. Humphrey Bate’s band never played for an actual square dance, but added the calls to their performances to enhance the rural, good-time atmosphere.

Soon this ornamental value was developed even further and the dance calls began to take even more melodic forms, to the point where they were fully sung in complete couplets. The caller became increasingly important, and his function increasingly a mixture of the practical and the aesthetic. As early as 1928 fiddler Clark Kessinger recorded a number (“Forky Deer”) featuring entire couplets sung parallel to the fiddle phrasing. Duncan Emrich in his *American Folk Poetry* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974) prints transcriptions of four square-dance calls recorded in Texas and New Mexico in the thirties. Many of the texts of such calls contain material not directly related to dance instructions (for example, the text of Neil Morris’s call printed below) but designed, like the auctioneer’s spiel, to generate enthusiasm. Folklorist Vance Randolph has collected a wide variety of “pornographic” dance calls from the Ozarks that seem almost exclusively designed for this purpose.

In square dancing today the caller has fully emerged as the most important element. Records issued by the American Square Dance Society list selections only by caller; the musicians are in most cases anonymous—a complete change from the first square-dance records, in which the band was identified at the expense of the caller. And the square-dance calling on many of these modern records is highly melodic and virtually continuous throughout the performance. At many modern square dances around the country the caller is the only live performer and does his calls to recorded music.

Such dance calls are types of vocal expression on the borderline between speech and song. They have certain affinities with related folk forms like the *cante fable* and the talking blues. The former, which dates well back to European origins, is simply a story that involves the singing of certain passages; the instrumental music and the vocal sections are quite separate, though both are considered part of the performance. The form still exists in American folk music, and has recently been popularized by Arlo Guthrie in “Alice’s Restaurant.” The talking blues, “invented” in 1926 by the North Carolina singer-guitarist Chris Bouchillon and popularized in the forties by Woody Guthrie (Arlo’s father and a songwriter and performer who greatly influenced folk music of the late fifties and the sixties), involves highly rhythmic chanting or speaking against standard guitar runs. The relationship between speech and music has fascinated formal composers such as Janaček and Bartók, the latter of whom based some of his musical rhythms on his native speech. Neil Morris’s dance call is not as sophisticated as many modern calls, yet is more melodic than the earlier instructional shouts. It is tense and rather high-pitched (as are many calls) and displays a free and loose rhythm that contrasts markedly with the regular beat of the accompaniment.

The mouthbow is an ancient instrument that looks something like an Indian bow and works on a principle similar to that of the jew’s-harp. One end of the bow is placed against the cheek, and the string is plucked. The player obtains pitches by varying the size and shape of the cavity of the open mouth. Though known to both Anglo- and Afro-American folk traditions, the mouthbow has been popularized in recent years by Charlie Everidge’s most famous pupil, Jimmy Driftwood. Everidge recalls that such bows were often played at square dances in the Ozarks in the teens and twenties. The instrument’s tonal limitations make the melody here sound a little different from the traditional “Turkey in the Straw.”

Sixteen hands and circle right,
For the train’s a-comin’ and I want to ride.
Promenade your partner
Around, around, around, around.

First gent pass right by the left,
And two hands swing
Across the hall, and cheat and swing.
Back around your partner and do the same.

On your right, see the fight,
And not go home till broad daylight.
Back around your partner, do the same.

On your left, your left hand,
Your little miss and my old man.
Back around your partner.

Everybody swing and everybody whirl,
And you all promenade the left-hand girl.

Same gent and a different girl
Across the hall and cheat and swing.
Back around your partner and do the same.

(Repeat stanzas 3 [twice], 4 [twice], 5, and 6.)

Track 8

Risselty Rosselty

Ray R. Denoon, vocal.

Recorded 1936 in Springfield, Missouri, by Sidney Robertson [Cowell]. Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 3204 B2.

The nonsense song—which uses meaningless words or syllables as a major part of the text—has a venerable folk lineage that can be traced back to British and Continental origins. The nonsense sections are pure vocal music in which the sound of the voice is an end in itself; there is no message to distract the listener from appreciating the basic vocal style. Such wordless song sometimes appears in American folk music as “chin music” or diddling, where the voice imitates the fiddle in traditional instrumental dance numbers.

Some superb string-band examples of this practice can be heard in a series of 1928 recordings by the Mississippi band Carter Brothers and Son (reissued on County LPs 520 and 528 and on New World Records NW 236, *Going Down the Valley*). In well-constructed nonsense songs, in which the nonsense lines have rhyme and rhythm, the voice becomes almost an instrument, and the effect is not unlike the scat singing of jazz performers like Louis Armstrong, Jon Hendricks, and Ella Fitzgerald. An important difference is that the jazz singer usually improvises his singing, whereas in the traditional nonsense song the syllables, though perhaps quite complicated, are rigidly fixed. Also, in most traditional nonsense songs the nonsense lines function as the chorus or refrain, while the verses are coherent, if wildly humorous or surrealistic, lines. To some extent the nonsense song may be seen as a transitional form between wordless vocal resources—like the holler, the auctioneer’s call, or the musical imitation—and the textual song.

Most traditional nonsense songs have been classified as children’s songs (for example Almeda Riddle’s excellent “Chick-A-Li-Lee-Lo” on NW 245, *Oh My Little Darling*), and young children, for whom so much language is meaningless, doubtless delight in wordplay so full of assonance, consonance, and rhythm. Children’s authors like Dr. Suess often capitalize on this delight. Yet the nonsense song has been commercialized surprisingly little throughout the twentieth century. The late thirties and the forties saw a certain number of popular hits like “Flat Foot Floogie,” “Three Little Fishies,” and “Chickery Chick”; the fifties yielded Johnnie Lee Wills’s “Rag Mop,” David Seville’s “Witch Doctor” (“Oo ee, Oo ah ah, Ting tang, Walla walla bing bang”), and any number of early rhythm-and-blues songs like the Silhouettes’ influential “Get a Job,” with its “Sha da da da” refrain.

“Risselty Rosselty” is a remarkably widespread song, and versions very similar to this one have been collected in southern Missouri, in Nebraska, and in Oklahoma. It is a variant of “The Wife Wrapt in Wether’s Skin” (Child 277), an old British ballad that combines the features of the shrewish-wife plot with various nonsense refrains. (A wether is a castrated sheep—an appropriate symbol for the song.) Many versions in the South use nonsense refrains like “Badoo,” “Dadoo,” or “Gentle Virginia” (which makes no sense in its context). An eighteenth-century British version contains the refrain “Riftly raftly, now now now,” and an 1844 version from Scotland contains the stanza

There was a wee cooper who lived in Fife,
 Nickity nackity, noo noo noo,
And he has gotten a gentle wife,
 Hey Willie Wallacky, how John Dougall,
 Alane, que Rushety, roue roue roue.

It is easy to see how, through oral transmission, these nonsense words could be translated into the ones sung by Ray Denoon. His version was preceded by several commercial recordings, including one by Chicago radio personality Chubby Parker (1926) and one by a Knoxville string band, Ridgel’s Fountain Citians (1930). With his family, Colonel Ray Denoon had a popular radio show in Springfield, Missouri, in the mid-thirties. He recorded several numbers during Sidney [Mrs. Henry Cowell] Robertson’s field trip there for the Library of Congress in 1936 and was an informant for Vance Randolph two year later. By 1940 he had moved to the West Coast, where his son, Big Jim Denoon, achieved fame as a country singer, recording for labels like 4-Star. Ray’s style here is relaxed, though the nature of the nonsense song forces him into a highly regular beat. He comes in on pitch, uses little vibrato, and releases his phrases rather abruptly, creating a clipped effect similar to that in early recordings by the old-time singers Ernest “Pop” Stoneman and Charlie Poole.

Oh, I married me a wife in the month of June,
 Risselty rosselty, now now now,
And I took her home by the light of the moon.
 Risselty rosselty, hey don dosselty,
 Nickelty nackelty, rustico quality,
 Willowby wallowby, now now now.

Similarly:

Oh, she swept her floor but once a year,
She swore her brooms was all too dear.

Oh, she combed her hair but once a year,
And ever’ rake, she give a tear.

Oh, she churned her butter in dad’s old boot,
And for the dash she used her foot.

Oh, the butter come to a grisly gray,
And the cheese took legs and run away.

Oh, the saddle and bridle is on old Jeb,
An you want any more you must sing it yourself.

Track 9

Bold McCarthy, or The City of Baltimore (Laws K26)

Bill Cramp, vocal.

Recorded March 22, 1966, in Oakland, Maine, by Dr. Edward Ives. Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History.

In the South and Midwest the traditional Anglo-American solo singing styles have been considerably modified throughout the generations, but in the Northeast they still remain remarkably pure and well preserved. New World Records 80239-2, *Brave Boys*, documents more fully this rich Northeastern singing tradition, but one sample of that tradition may be in order here to act as a sort of control against which one can measure the kind of modifications made by Southern and Midwestern singers.

Bill Cramp sings “Bold McCarthy” in what might be called an Irish style, even using an Irish accent. He follows a fairly regular meter within the lines but pauses between the lines, a practice not uncommon with traditional singers accustomed to performing without accompaniment. The style is generally relaxed and partakes of some of the *rubato-parlando* manner characteristic of British tradition and that of the Northeastern United States. The last line is spoken, not because the singer ran out of breath but because he was following yet another convention of Northeastern singers. This convention is another interesting interface between speech and song. It is rather seldom found in the South or Midwest, and when found it usually serves comic effect.

“Bold McCarthy” is a British broadside ballad (that is, a ballad once printed and sold on broadside sheets) that has gone into tradition in the Northeastern United States and in Canada (variants from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick have been collected and published). The song is quite typical in its longer stanza lines and in its “come-all-ye” opening formula. The “come-all-ye” address was usually intended to identify that part of the audience that would be most interested in the song—in this case “all you trueborn Irishmen” who want to hear about a tough Irish hero. The date of the song is uncertain: the *City of Baltimore*, one of the largest ships then afloat, was a screw steamship operating between Liverpool and New York in the eighteen-fifties, but the melody of this version of the song is very similar to that of “The Schooner *Kandahar*,” which dates from the eighteen-nineties.

Bill Cramp was born in 1881 and was a chipper eighty-five when he recorded this song. Folklorist Dr. Edward Ives recalls: “Bill was a good singer, he always thought of himself as a singer, and other people thought of him as a singer. He knew a hell of a lot of songs.” “Bold McCarthy” is some of Bill Cramp’s best singing, and one of the best examples of “north-woods” singing.

Come all you trueborn Irishmen, a story I will tell
Concerning Bold McCarthy, in Liverpool he did dwell.
'Twas down by the western dock one day McCarthy chanced for to stray,
And on the *City of Baltimore* he stowed himself away.

Oh, this young man being bound away to leave his native land,
Oh, this young man being bound away for to leave his native shore,
He'd rue the day that he stowed on the *City of Baltimore*.

Every morning early the mate he called us to,
It's every morning early the mate he put us through.
“Where is that Irish son-of-a-gun?” the mate so loudly did say;
“Oh, here I am,” McCarthy says, “so what do you want today?”

“It’s sure I am an Irishman, and the same I’ll never deny,
Before I be cut down by you here on this deck I will die,
And if you are a man of courage it’s me you’ll stand before,
I’ll fight you fair upon the deck of the *City of Baltimore*.”

The mate he being a cowardly man before him would not stand,
But with the captain there in hand at McCarthy he ran;
McCarthy being a smart young man soon left him in his gore.

The second mate and bosun they ran to his relief,
But with the captain there in hand McCarthy soon made them retreat;
His Irish blood it began to boil, like a lion he did roar,
“I can lick any man that is on this ship, the *City of Baltimore*.”

The captain being a Scotsman, from Scotland he came,
And hearing what McCarthy done, those words to him did say;
He took McCarthy by the hand, saying, “Do not fight anymore.
I make you head officer of our ship, the *City of Baltimore*.”

Track 10

Sweet Wine

Mrs. Goldie Hamilton, vocal.

Recorded 1939 in Hamiltontown (Wise County), Virginia, by Herbert Halpert. Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 2827 A1-2.

When British folk-song collector Cecil Sharp entered the southern Appalachians in 1916 in quest of old British songs surviving in the American South, he found that about half his informants were women, and of the half-dozen singers he singled out as having especially large repertoires, four were women. In later folk-song collections from the mid-South, well over half the informants have been women. Recent research suggests that in many rural Southern communities in the nineteenth century, traditional music-making was related to sex role. In some communities fiddling was seen as a masculine skill, like shooting; vocal music was more of an art and often passed down through the women. Doubtless more men sang than women fiddled, but there does seem to have been some correlation between women and certain vocal styles. More research needs to be done in this area to further explore whether there is a distinct feminine folk vocal style. Goldie Hamilton’s high-pitched, almost keening style heard here makes an interesting contrast with other traditional women singers such as Almeda Riddle (New World Records 80294-2, *The Gospel Ship*), Sara Cleveland (New World Records 80239-2, *Brave Boys*), Sarah Ogan (NW 245, *Oh My Little Darling*), and Texas Gladden (New World Records 80294-2, *The Gospel Ship*).

One of the characteristics of southern-Appalachian singing style that Sharp commented on in his 1917 collection, and one that distinguished Appalachian singers from English ones, was

the habit of dwelling arbitrarily upon certain notes of the melody, generally the weaker accents. This practice, which is almost universal, by disguising the rhythm and breaking up the monotonous regularity of the phrases, produces an effect of improvisation and freedom from rule which is very pleasing.

Mrs. Hamilton’s very free meter and her spare ornamentation of the melody with slurs and glides reflect this practice.

“Sweet Wine” is a lyric song, not a ballad: a subjective response to an emotional situation as opposed to an objective narrative with a clean sense of progression and chronology. The extreme stylistic freedom of the ultimate form of folk lyric expression, the blues, suggests a relationship between style and song type: perhaps a tighter, more formal style for ballads, a looser, freer style for lyric songs. Yet the performance of “Barbara Allen” (Track 11) is just as loose and expressive as that of “Sweet Wine.” As a lyric song, and as one performed by a woman, “Sweet Wine” is also noteworthy in that its persona in at least two stanzas is clearly male; songs reflecting a woman’s point of view are quite rare in tradition, despite the number of female traditional performers.

As I rode out one cold winter night,
A-drinking of sweet wine,
A-thinking of that pretty little miss,
That miss I left behind.

Oh, who will shoe your feet, my love,
And who will glove your hand?
And who will kiss your red ruby lips
While I roam the foreign land?

My father will shoe my feet, my love,
My mother will glove my hand,
And you may kiss my red rosy cheeks
When you return from a foreign land.

Do you see yonder little dove,
A-flying from pine to pine,
A-mourning for his own lost love,
Just as I am mourning for mine?

Track 11

Barbara Allen

I. N. (Nick) Marlor, vocal.

Recorded November, 1936, in Boyd’s Cave, North Carolina, by Sidney Robertson [Cowell]. Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song L54.

Nick Marlor’s lengthy rendition is a fine example of a strong old-time mountain vocal style applied to a classic ballad. Marlor was from Madison County, North Carolina, in the Great Smoky Mountains, an area that folk singer and collector Bascom Lamar Lunsford called “the heart of folk music in the United States” and that even today maintains a strong tradition of old-time singing. Both the song and the performance are typical of the southern-Appalachian singing tradition.

Marlor’s style is high-pitched, loud, and tense, and displays a variety of ornamental and dramatic devices that make his performance a tour de force of Southern-mountain techniques. One technique noticeable throughout the performance is feathering, defined by ethnomusicologist Judith McCulloh as “a sudden or forceful raising of the soft palate against the back wall of the throat and/or a sudden closing of the glottis at the very end of a given note, generally accompanied by a rise in pitch.” Marlor does this, for example, at the end of “blooming” in stanza 1 and at the end of “dwelling” in stanza 2. Feathering is characteristic of many traditional singers (for example Barry Sutterfield and Goldie Hamilton on this recording, as well as Almeda

Riddle and Roscoe Holcomb) and was absorbed into the styles of many early country singers and of modern bluegrass singers like Lester Flatt. In fact, Marlor's high, tense, loud style is suggestive of modern bluegrass singing (see New World Records NW 225, *Hills and Home*). Marlor sings his song in a very free meter, with many turns and irregular catches. For example, in stanza 1, when he repeats the line "Sweet William on his deathbed lay," he changes the emphasis of the line completely: the first time, he holds a note on the syllable "Will-"; the second time, he emphasizes the "-iam" syllable. Marlor uses vibrato to emphasize certain phrases, and this effect often seems related to dramatic qualities of the line: in stanza 1, for instance, the vibrato is most evident in his repetition of the words "deathbed lay," an appropriate place for melodramatic emphasis. Such use of tone allows the singer to highlight passages that he or his audience can respond strongly to.

The appeal of "Barbara Allen" has been as long lasting as that of any identifiable folk song. The ultimate source of the ballad is unknown, but as early as 1666 the English diarist Samuel Pepys was describing how in "perfect pleasure" he heard an actress sing "her little Scotch song of Barbary Allen." Printed versions in Scotland date from 1740, and by the early nineteenth century the song was being widely printed in cheap, popular American songsters and on innumerable broadside sheets. Though the basic plot remained pretty constant, different American variants added new details: in some versions Barbara curses her lover and thus brings about his death, in some he curses Barbara; in some Barbara blames her parents for the tragedy, and in some Barbara's mother dies with her. The motif of parental conflict, typical of versions found in the American Southeast and present in this one, is not found in the British versions.

Nothing much happens in "Barbara Allen," and the heroine's motivations are often cloudy. Scholars have been puzzled why a song with a story line so slight should continue to exercise so much appeal. But the song does have sentiment and pathos, a hauntingly beautiful melody, and an inexorable, almost Greek-like movement toward the final tragedy.

Oh, don't you remember the month in May,
When golden flowers were blooming?
Sweet William on his deathbed lay, (*repeat*)
For the love of Barbary Allen. (*repeat*)

He sent his neighbor down to the town,
And sent him [to?] her dwelling;
"Oh, better never will I be
Till I get Barbary Allen."
"Oh, better never will you be,
For you'll never get Barbary Allen."

So slowly she got up her bed,
And slowly she went to him,
And all she said when she got there, (*repeat*)
"Young man, I think you're a-dying." (*repeat*)

"Oh yes, I'm sick and mighty sick,
And feel very much like dying,
And better never will I be
Till I get Barbary Allen."
"Well to say, 'I will I never be any better,'
For you'll never get Barbary Allen."

He turned his deathbed plumb to the wall,
He busted out to crying,
“Adieu, adieu to the ladies all around, (*repeat*)
Be kind to Barbary Allen.” (*repeat*)

Oh, don’t you remember those long summer days,
When you’d went to the town a-drinking?
You drunk the health to the ladies all around, (*repeat*)
And slighted Barbary Allen. (*repeat*)

She had not got very far from the town,
Till she heard them death bells rattle;
She looked to the east, and she looked to the west,
Till she saw the corpse a-coming.

“Go set me down that gentle little lad,
And let me look upon him.”
They motioned up to where she screamed,
For to think she was so hardhearted.

“O mother, O mother, O mother,” she cried,
“You would not let me have him;
O mother, O mother, O mother,” she cried,
“You would not let me have him.

“Go dig my grave in yon churchyard,
And dig his in another,
And on my breast lay a red rose bush,
And on his lay a green brier.

“And let them grow as high as the house,
Till they can’t grow no higher,
And make them tie in a true love’s knot, (*repeat*)
Both live and die together.” (*repeat*)

The young man died a Saturday night,
And Barbary died on Sunday,
And the old woman died for the love of both, (*repeat*)
And she died on Easter Sunday. (*repeat*)

Track 12

Late One Evening (Laws M32)

Barry Sutterfield, vocal.

Recorded April 15, 1962, in Marshall, Arkansas, by Judith and Leo McCulloh. Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University.

The Arkansas style of Uncle Barry Sutterfield provides a distinct contrast to the style of Southeastern solo-ballad singer Nick Marlor. Both sing long traditional ballads that have respectable Old World pedigrees; but where Marlor allows his style to be partly dictated by the song’s content, Sutterfield sings with a minimum of

emotional involvement. For instance, Sutterfield does not use vibrato to underscore passages, and his entire approach is less forceful and dramatic than Marlor's. Sutterfield's style is certainly more metrically regular than Marlor's but is still far removed from the even meter—often one note for each syllable—of the *tempo-giusto* style. Perhaps the most noticeable stylistic characteristic of Sutterfield's style is his fondness for ornamenting the melody with feathering (see notes for Track 11), especially at the end of the second and fourth lines of a stanza. He also uses scoops (upward slurs), often in the middle of a one-syllable word (such as “young,” stanza 1). Such ornamentation seems hardly related to the word's meaning; more often than not it is a function of the word's phonetic aspects.

“Late One Evening” probably originated as a broadside ballad in England; it entered British tradition under titles such as “Bramble Briar,” “The Merchant's Daughter,” and “In Bruton Town.” The song apparently came to America in the eighteenth century, and versions have been collected throughout the mid-South and in the Midwest. It lacks the typical ballad form: there is no refrain, no question-and-answer, no series, no incremental repetition (several lines repeated with slight additions or changes). The text does contain a number of commonplace phrases, such as “mountains over,” “lonesome valley,” and “dead and gone.”

The ballad's story can be traced all the way back to the fourteenth century and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, where it is called “Isabella and the Pot of Basil.” In the full story version the heroine, after discovering her dead lover, plants his head in a flowerpot—a grisly detail that has fascinated numerous writers, including Keats, who retold the story in “Isabella,” one of his finer poems. Why the ballad omits this bizarre coda to the tragedy is not known, but the omission is found in the earliest known English versions.

Barry Sutterfield was born in 1891 on Big Creek in north central Arkansas and has lived all his life in that area. His great-great-grandfather, Peter Moore Sutterfield, was born, raised, and married in England and came to the United States early in the eighteenth century. Barry's great-grandfather was born in South Carolina, and the family settled first in Alabama and then in Tennessee before moving to Arkansas. Uncle Barry is known in his community as a singer, though none of his singing has ever been issued on records before.

Late one evening a couple set talkin',
Two brothers listenin' to what was said,
Saying, “This courtship must now be ended,
And lay this young man in his grave.”

They rose up so early next mornin',
And off for a-hunting they did go;
Insisted upon this young man a-goin',
So he went along with them.

They rode those hills and the mountains over
And over a many of a path unknown.
They rode till they came to the lonesome valley,
And there they killed him dead and gone.

A-late that evening as they were 'turning,
Their sister inquiring of her own true love,
Saying he'd got lost in a game of huntin',
And there were said no more of him.

She went to bed and dreamed of her lover
A-comin' to her bedside alone,
Sayin', "They have killed me and treated me cruel,
They've wallowed me in a gore of blood."

She rose up so early next mornin'
And dressed herself in her silk so fine,
Sayin', "I'll ride those hills and the mountains over
Or seek that lost of my own true love."

She rode those hills and the mountains over
And over a many of a path unknown.
She rode till she came to the lonesome valley,
And there she found him dead and gone.

His beautiful cheeks were almost faded,
His lips as soft as any bride's.
She turned him over and over,
Sayin', "Darlin', you're friend of mine."

A-late that evenin' as she were returnin',
Her brothers inquiring, "Where have you been?"
Saying, "Keep your seat, you fasiscal [deceitful] rascals,
Together both of you shall hang."

Track 13

Hanging Johnny

Captain Leighton Robinson, lead vocal; Alex Barr, Arthur Brodeur, and Leighton McKenzie, vocals.

Recorded 1939 in Belvedere, California, by Sidney Robertson [Cowell]. Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 4231 A1.

A survey of traditional vocal ensemble styles can logically begin with the sea shanty, probably the closest thing to a work song in Anglo-American folk music. Shanties were essentially work songs for sailors in the square-rigger days and were designed to enliven the hauling away on the ropes. Like hollering, auctioneering, spelling chants, and dance calls, the sea shanty, at least in its original form, served utilitarian rather than aesthetic ends in the folk community. "A shanty," old sailors would say, "is another hand on the rope."

Like many work songs, the shanty is based on a call-and-response pattern. The shantyman, or leader, was distinguished only by virtue of his singing ability or a certain prestige among his shipmates; he seldom took any special role in the work the shanty accompanied. The style of the performance was measured primarily through his solo leading. In his classic *Songs of the Sailor and Lumberman* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) William M. Doerflinger writes:

Every shantyman, of course, had his own individual style of singing, his vocal flourishes, variations, and embellishments. He often used soaring grace notes and "hitches"—shrill breaks in the voice on one or two notes in each stanza. He created unusual effects by stressing and holding certain notes unexpectedly. Shantyman were masters of the art of somehow accommodating extra syllables in a line without stumbling or losing the tune. Their melodies suggested the surge and rise and fall of the sea itself.

Captain Robinson here demonstrates some of these characteristics. His voice is smoother and more regular than Doerflinger's description suggests, but his meter is strict, as befits any work song. His voice is rather relaxed, and there is some sliding to and from pitches. The chorus is typical of the most basic kind of ensemble singing, simple unison. The Library of Congress recorded numerous examples of authentic shanty singing from old sailors whose careers extended well back into the nineteenth century; some of the best can be found on two Library of Congress LPs, *American Sea Songs and Shanties*.

A version of "Hanging Johnny" is reprinted in Doerflinger, along with a note by an old sailor, Captain Dick Maitland, about the song.

This is about as doleful a song as I ever heard, but there's a time when it comes in. For instance, after a heavy blow, getting more sail on the ship. The decks are full of water and men cannot keep their feet. The wind has gone down, but the seas are running heavy. A big comber comes over the rail; the men are washed away from the rope. If it wasn't for the man at the end of the rope gathering in the slack as the men pull, all the work would have to be done over again.

Captain Robinson was for years a fixture around the San Francisco area. He began recording his rich repertory for folklorists in the early twenties, when he made cylinders for Robert W. Gordon; he recorded for the Library of Congress in 1937 and 1951. One of Robinson's pals singing with him here is Arthur Brodeur, a noted Chaucer expert who for years taught at Berkeley.

Oh, they call me Hanging Johnny.
Away, Johnny.
Oh, they call me Hanging Johnny.
Oh, hang, boys, hang.

Similarly:

And they said I hanged me daddy.
Me daddy and me mammy.
And they say I hang for money.
But I never hanged nobody.
So we'll hang and swing together.
We'll hang for better weather.

Track 14

Bright and Morning Star

Walter and Lola Caldwell, vocals with guitar.

Recorded 1934 in Ashland, Kentucky, by Jean Thomas. Library of Congress Archive of American Folk Song 294 B.

The next three selections represent different forms of duet singing styles commonly found in the rural Southeast. Duet singing was considerably facilitated by the introduction into Southern folk culture of the guitar immediately after World War I. It has remained the most popular form of secular ensemble singing, and during the thirties duet styles totally dominated commercial country music.

Aside from unison, the most basic form of duet singing is in octaves, much as Walter and Lola Caldwell do here. In spite of the regulating influence of the guitar, the Caldwells manage to stress certain syllables at unorthodox places. Their style is tense, and they often slide into pitches. The two voices are not quite synchronized: Lola Caldwell especially ornaments her singing, using some degree of feathering. This particular style of octave singing could be cited as further evidence of a relation between singing style and sex role.

“Bright and Morning Star” is a rare sacred song that has been infrequently collected or studied. Harvey Fuson in his *Ballads of the Kentucky Highlands* (London, 1930) prints a variant under the title “The Sons of Levi”; like the Caldwells’ song, it was found in eastern Kentucky. Much of the song’s imagery and biblical background are from the Book of Joshua.

Chorus

We are the trueborn sons of Levi,
We are the trueborn sons of God,
We are the roots and the branch of David,
The bright and glorious morning star.

When Joshua and I crossed the Jordan,
Two leaves of corn we lifted high,
To the high priest and the grand master,
We bore the ark of God and son.

(Chorus)

Come all ye knights, ye knights of Molite,
And learn to do as I have done,
You might have been a guard much brighter,
When in the new Jerusalem.

In the tent [*unintelligible*] the ark was resting,
And there we did receive the word,
One day would come and ram horn sounded,
They found it out before the ark.

(Chorus)

When Moses planted the rod of Aaron,
And in one night that rod did bud,
When Moses smote the Egyptian water,
That very night it turned to blood.

Track 15

The Black Sheep

Darby and Tarlton: Tom Darby, vocal and guitar; Jimmie Tarlton, vocal and Hawaiian guitar.

Recorded April 16, 1930, in Atlanta by Frank Walker and Dan Hornsby for the Columbia Phonograph Company. Originally issued on Columbia 15674-D (mx # 150247-2).

One of the earliest professional duets to succeed in country music was the team of Darby and Tarlton. The duet singing on “The Black Sheep” is more complex than the simple octave singing heard on “Bright and Morning Star,” but it is far from sophisticated. The voices are very relaxed and not at all synchronized, each going pretty much its own way. In the first stanza, for instance, the high voice (Tarlton’s) comes in late with the harmony in every line and at the end of the stanza goes into a wordless falsetto behind the lead singer. (The practice of the lead singer starting a line before the harmony singer joins in is still fairly common in old-time Southern singing.) Substituting a wordless hum for the last words of a line is relatively common in blues tradition, which both these singers were thoroughly familiar with. There may also be a relationship between Tarlton’s fondness for falsetto and the high-pitched whine of his Hawaiian-guitar playing; certainly his vocal and instrumental styles complement each other.

Darby and Tarlton were extremely successful and influential during their brief recording career, from 1927 to 1933. Their recording of “Birmingham Jail”/“Columbus Stockade Blues” sold almost two hundred thousand copies in 1928, an astounding sales figure in a time when a country record seldom sold more than twenty thousand copies. Jimmie Tarlton, born in South Carolina in 1892, was the son of a sharecropper and spent most of his formative years traveling around the South, absorbing a variety of styles and traditional influences. About 1902 he began to play “Hawaiian” or bottleneck guitar, in which the guitar is tuned to a triad and melody and chording are accomplished by running a smooth object up and down the strings. He met Tom Darby in 1927, and the pair decided to affiliate professionally. Darby, from Columbus, Georgia, had traveled a good deal less than Tarlton and had learned from the traditional sources of family and friends around his home. A piece showing the team’s instrumental versatility is “Mexican Rag” on New World Records NW 235, *Maple Leaf Rag*. Tarlton was rediscovered in the early sixties and made a brief comeback before urban audiences during the folk revival.

“The Black Sheep” is one of a number of nineteenth-century popular sentimental songs in the Darby and Tarlton repertoire.

In a simple country village, not so very far away,
Lived an old and aged man, his hair was turning gray;
He had three sons, three only ones—both Jack and Tom were sly;
Poor Ted was honest as could be, he never told a lie.

His brothers began to ruin poor Ted within the old man’s eyes;
Soon the poison began to take, poor Ted was much despised.
One night the old man said: “Be gone, you’re heartless to the core.”
And these words the black sheep said while standing outside the door:

Chorus

“Don’t be angry with me, dad, don’t drive me from your door;
Know that I’ve been foolish once, but I won’t be anymore.
Just give to me another chance, just put me to the test,
You’ll find the black sheep loves his dad much better than the rest.”

(Repeat)

Track 16

Hey Hey, I'm Memphis Bound

(Alton and Rabon Delmore)

The Delmore Brothers: Alton Delmore, vocal and guitar; Rabon Delmore, vocal and tenor guitar.

Recorded January 22, 1935, in New Orleans. Originally issued on Bluebird B-5857-A (mx # BVE87662-1).

The Delmore Brothers, from northern Alabama, set the tone for much of the duet singing of the thirties. They represent the second generation of professional country duet singers, and a comparison of their performance with that of Darby and Tarlton (Track 15), made just five years earlier, shows how rapidly the duet singing style developed. Here the two voices are almost totally synchronized, where those of Darby and Tarlton are only roughly in phase. The Delmores also sing at precisely standard intervals, and they release their words much more sharply and clearly than do the earlier singers. Both Delmores were skilled and literate musicians who had received thorough musical training at Southern church singing schools and worked long hours to perfect their flashy precision style. They were able to create a distinctive vocal texture by trading the lead within a song or even within a line: When Alton found his part getting out of his range, he would let Rabon sing that phrase and he would take Rabon's part. The Delmores pioneered this technique, which is common in country duet singing today. (For another selection by the Delmore Brothers, see New World Records 80270-2, *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?*)

"Hey Hey, I'm Memphis Bound" is also characteristic of the kind of harmony falsetto and yodel the brothers specialized in. Jimmie Rodgers, who became nationally popular in the late twenties as "America's blue yodeler," was a major influence on the Delmores, and their integration of yodeling into blues-like songs can be traced to him. (Rodgers's technique, an important influence on both folk and professional singing styles from the Depression on, is illustrated by two selections on New World Records NW 287, *Country Music: South and West*.) Duet yodeling in country music probably started with the Memphis singers Reece Fleming and Respers Townsend, who were the Delmores' immediate precursors.

There is little evidence that "Hey Hey, I'm Memphis Bound" went into folk tradition. Many of the song's motifs and phrases were probably drawn from commonplace blues stanzas. Certainly the traveling or rambling motif is one of the most common in Afro-American blues. The Delmores were successful with such white-blues forms from their earliest professional days in 1933 to the death of Rabon in 1951; in the late forties Delmore songs like "Blues, Stay Away from Me" formed vital transitional links between country music, blues, and the emerging rock 'n' roll.

Hey hey, I'm Memphis bound,
Goin' there to see the town,
Gonna catch me a freight train,
Gonna ramble, gonna ramble around.

(Yodel)

Hey hey, I'm on the road,
Can't you hear the whistle blow,
Blowin' for the same old crossing
That she blowed for before.

(Yodel)

Hey hey, I'm feeling fine,
Feeling like a drink of wine,
I hope it don't make her lonely,
That gal I'm leavin' behind.

(Yodel)

Blues, blues, you'll never get me;
You'll never get a hold on me,
I'm a happy-go-lucky rambler,
Just as happy as a king could be.

(Yodel)

Hey hey, I'm telling you
What you better never do,
You better not start to roamin',
Cause it'll get a hold on you.

(Yodel)

Sing, sing this lonely tune,
Sing it to a southern moon,
Sing it to a dark-eyed maiden,
I'm goin' to see her soon.

(Yodel)

Track 17

Don't Put Off Salvation Too Long

Southland Ladies Quartette, vocals.

Recorded c. 1930 in Richmond, Indiana, for the Starr Piano Company. Originally issued on Challenge 426.

One of the most potent modes of Anglo-American rural music in the twentieth century has been the gospel quartet. Though not folk music by the strictest definition (most gospel quartets sang from printed texts), white gospel music is solidly rooted in the nineteenth-century heritage of the singing convention, shape-note hymnody, and a well-worn vocabulary of commonplace phrases and images. The gospel-quartet singing style began to emerge in the early twentieth century as an outgrowth of the burgeoning gospel publishing industry. Publishers were finding a lucrative market for their inexpensive books of newly written sacred songs modeled after the pop music of the day. To help promote their songs, some publishers hired quartets to go into rural America and demonstrate the songs by giving concerts. Gradually the quartets gained popularity in their own right, and by the thirties singing groups, like country singers, were struggling to professionalize and commercialize their music.

Many rural Southern churches frowned on the use of instruments in church, and others could not afford instruments; thus the a-cappella style of the older forms was preserved in much quartet music and in religious music in general. (Indeed, white church music is about the only unaccompanied folk vocal style readily found in the South today.) Most gospel quartets were either all male or consisted of two men and two women. In the former case the second tenor usually sang lead, the first tenor sang the alto part one octave up, and the baritone and bass filled in the rest. In mixed quartets the women usually sang the soprano and alto parts (with the soprano carrying the melody) while the men sang the tenor and bass parts. In this all-female quartet the bass is apparently being sung an octave up.

Little is known about the Southland Ladies Quartette—they apparently recorded only two numbers—but their singing is obviously more formal than much of the other traditional singing on this album. Their pitch and their timing are strictly coordinated, and they make an effort to project “good diction.” Nonetheless, there are some hints of traditional style in their performance, such as their scooping into pitches.

“Don’t Put Off Salvation Too Long” is an invitational hymn, a call-to-the altar song designed to encourage reluctant churchgoers to step forward and make a “decision for Christ.” A 1942 edition of Stamps-Baxter’s *Modern Favorite Songs* gives authorship credit to J. R. Baxter Jr., and V. O. Fossett, but the song is certainly older than that and was probably purchased by Stamps-Baxter when they bought out the smaller Central Music Company during the Depression. The original owners were probably L. B. Leister and Ramsey. The song’s saccharine nineteenth-century-style lyric is typical of material in convention songbooks.

The Savior is tenderly calling,
Don’t put off salvation too long;
The nightshades for you may be falling,
Don’t put off salvation too long.

Chorus

Oh come to the Savior no longer delay,
Don’t put off salvation too long;
Find pardon and favor with Jesus today,
Don’t put off salvation too long.

While loved ones are earnestly praying,
Don’t put off salvation too long;
The angels in Heaven are saying,
“Don’t put off salvation too long.”

(Chorus)

It may be too late if you tarry,
Don’t put off salvation too long;
Your burdens to Jesus now carry,
Don’t put off salvation too long.

(Chorus)

You may not be living tomorrow,
Don’t put off salvation too long;
Just lay at His feet all your sorrow,
Don’t put off salvation too long.

(Chorus)

Track 18

Been a Long Time Traveling Here Below

Grandpa Isom Ritchie’s church congregation, vocals.

Recorded c. 1967 in Lick Branch (near Ary), Kentucky, for the Lick Branch Community Center. Originally issued on A Day with Grandpa Isom, an unnumbered LP produced by the Lick Branch Community Center.

Singing by the entire church congregation has been the most visible form of larger-ensemble singing in rural music. Such singing is a unique form of participatory worship, and the surging mixture of different voice textures and styles has influenced formal composers as diverse as Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, and Virgil Thomson. Congregational singing, however, is done less and less in Protestant churches today; as churches grow and prosper, choirs, song directors, and “special numbers” (some with taped background music) are eclipsing such singing, except in the smaller backwoods churches.

Grandpa Isom Ritchie was not known in his community as a preacher but rather as a good storyteller, song leader, and singer of old ballads as well as sacred songs. Here he is heard “lining out” a hymn to his fellow worshippers. In lining out the leader sings or chants each line of the song before the congregation sings it. The practice dates from when poor backwoods churches lacked songbooks and the preacher or song leader was expected to remind the singers of each line of the song. There are some obvious changes of meter and accent between Grandpa Isom’s lining and the congregation’s response, and in one case (the end of stanza 1) the congregation does not sing the same phrase Grandpa Isom lines out. The congregation is loosely coordinated (in contrast to the selections by the Southland Ladies Quartette [Track 17] and the Stamps-Baxter School of Music [Track 20]), and the members generally sing in unison; the style is tense and melismatic.

Ritchie was related to the famous Jean Ritchie family of eastern Kentucky and lived near Hazard (Perry County) in the mountains of that part of the state. (More examples of hymn lining and congregational singing, recorded in the same area, can be found on New World Records 80294-2, *The Gospel Ship*). Grandpa Ritchie died soon after making this recording.

A variant of the first stanza of “Been a Long Time Traveling Here Below” can be heard in “I’m a Long Time Traveling Away from Home” on New World Records NW 245, *Oh My Little Darling*. The second stanza of the present hymn is Isaac Watts’s “Ninety-Fifth” and can be found in *The Social Harp* (1855), a classic collection of Sacred Harp songs.

Been a long time traveling here below, (*repeat*)
Been a long time traveling away from home,
(To lay my armory [armor] down)
To lay my body down.

When I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies,
I’ll bid farewell to every fear
And wipe my weeping eyes.

Track 19

I’m on My Journey Home

The Denson Quartet, vocals.

Recorded October 20, 1928, in Atlanta by Frank Walker and Dan Hornsby. Originally issued on Columbia 15526-D (mx # 147332).

When nineteenth-century Southern congregations did have songbooks, they were often in shape notes, which indicate pitch by the shape of the note as well as by its position on the staff. Shape-note singing was called “fasola” singing for two reasons: The old singers often started songs by singing note names instead of words, and instead of the modern scale names for notes (do re mi fa sol la ti) the older singers recognized only four names (fa sol la mi) and sang the scale as fasol la fa sol la mi fa. For a more complete discussion of Sacred Harp singing and for examples recorded in northern Alabama, see New World Records 80205-2, *White Spirituals from the Sacred Harp*.

The “fasola” parts of Sacred Harp performances are more splendid examples of pure vocal music, like hollering, diddling, or nonsense songs, where the singing is divorced from textual meaning. While Sacred Harp singing is customarily done by large congregations (at some regional gatherings numbering in the hundreds), there exist a few rare recordings of the style by smaller groups, in which the different parts can be more clearly discerned by the novice listener. Such is this Denson Quartet recording. The voices are tense, synchronized, and pretty much coordinated in pitch. There is a strong, bluesy feel and drive to the performance, accented by one singer’s tendency to bridge phrases by slurring down into the next pitch.

The text appears to be a composite from two separate sources. The first stanza and the chorus can be found in the 1971 edition of *The Sacred Harp* under the title “I’m on My Journey Home,” which was apparently composed around 1859 by Sarah Lancaster, from Harris County, Georgia. The second and third stanzas were taken from “Jerusalem” (or “Jesus, My All, to Heaven Is Gone”), composed by an English preacher named John Cennick around 1743 and arranged and popularized for American audiences by “Singing Billy” Walker in 1832. Both source songs have been a part of the Sacred Harp canon for more than a hundred years. The words “Jesus, my all, to Heaven is gone” appear in a number of Sacred Harp songs and have become almost a commonplace line.

The Denson family has been active in composing, arranging, and performing Sacred Harp material since 1844; George Pullen Jackson called them the “deans of the Sacred Harp.” Heard on this recording are R. E. (Bob) Denson (treble), Whit Denson (alto), J. C. Brown (bass), and Mrs. Nancy Brown. Whit Denson was a third-generation Denson who led a number of Sacred Harp groups on important early recordings in the twenties and was noted for his very smooth, almost sweet alto voice. J. C. Brown was a Birmingham promoter who helped stage Sacred Harp singings in the twenties. Bob Denson and his cousin Mrs. Ruth Denson Edwards are still active in Sacred Harp singing and helped revise the 1971 *Sacred Harp* songbook.

Oh, who will come and go with me?

I am on my journey home.

I’m bound for Canaan’s land to see,

I am on my journey home.

Chorus

Oh, come and go with me, (*repeat twice*)

For I’m on my journey home.

(*Repeat*)

Jesus, my all, to Heaven is gone,

I am on my journey home,

He whom I stake my hopes upon,

I am on my journey home.

(*Chorus*)

His track I see and I’ll pursue,

I am on my journey home,

This narrow way till Him I view,

I am on my journey home.

(*Chorus*)

Track 20

I Am O'ershadowed by Love

Members of the Stamps-Baxter School of Music, vocals.

Recorded November 29, 1929, in San Antonio, Texas, by the General Phonograph Corporation. Originally issued on Okeh 45396 (mx # 403386c).

Another type of large-ensemble style is represented by the formally trained students of the Stamps-Baxter School of Music. In the nineteenth century what music education many rural Southerners had came from singing schools, where a self-styled singing master would come into a community and conduct a singing class for two or three weeks. Pupils were taught how to read notes (often shape notes), mark time (by slapping their hands on the desk), and sing parts. At first these classes were supported mainly by subscription, but by the turn of the century some were being sponsored by local churches or by gospel music-book publishers like Tennessee's James Vaughan, Arkansas's Hartford Company, or Texas's Stamps-Baxter Company. The Stamps-Baxter School in San Antonio was in effect a singing school for singing-school teachers; most of its singers got there because they were among the very best in their communities. Thus the assembled voices of the school, as heard here, had a remarkably polished and arranged sound. It is uncertain how many voices are here—probably as many members as could crowd into the recording room—but there are at least fifty, and they are almost certainly being conducted.

Toward the end the singers engage in some rarely recorded vocal calisthenics, singing a stanza through with “bings” and “bums” replacing the words. The use of such exercises was fairly common for singing-school teachers: it was helpful in teaching timing and note reading to untrained singers who found it difficult to keep their eyes on the notes and words at the same time; it was useful in teaching the afterbeat, a favorite arranging device of gospel quartets; it was a good way to limber up the voice; and it delighted children in the audience and broke up the monotony of a singing.

“I Am O'ershadowed by Love” is one of the better songs by J. R. “Pap” Baxter, a giant of modern gospel music. Baxter came from a rural Alabama background. For years he worked with the gospel pioneer A. J. Showalter in publishing and toured with his own quartet. He had recently gone into partnership with V. O. Stamps when this recording was made.

All around me every moment is the wondrous love of God,
Thrilling my soul,
Keeping me whole,
And it lights a path to glory showing where the Master trod,
I am o'ershadowed by love.

Chorus

O'ershadowed by God's wondrous love,
I'm on my way to hands above,
And when I reach that home so fair,
His love will still be with me there.

I can tread the pilgrim journey knowing love is helping me,
Thrilling my soul,
Keeping me whole,
I shall still be marching onward till that city I shall see,
I am o'ershadowed by love.

(Chorus)

Friend, you ought to know the pleasures that His love to me now gives,
Thrilling my soul,
Keeping me whole,
I shall share His joy and glory where the soul forever lives,
I am o'ershadowed by love.

(*Chorus*)

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**I'M ON MY JOURNEY HOME: VOCAL STYLES AND RESOURCES IN FOLK MUSIC
80223-2**

1. *Hollerin'* 0:30
Leonard Emanuel
2. *Whooping* 2:22
"Red" Buck Estes
3. *Eephing* 1:06
Jimmie Riddle
4. *Ringing the Pig* 0:57
Lindy Clear
5. *Spelling from the Old
Blue-Back Speller* 0:53
Ben Rice
6. *Tobacco Auctioneering* 3:14
Two unknown auctioneers
7. *Turkey in the Straw* 1:47
Neil Morris, dance calls;
Charlie Everidge, mouthbow
8. *Risselty Rosselty* 1:36
Ray R. Denoon
9. *Bold McCarthy, or
The City of Baltimore* 3:15
Bill Cramp
10. *Sweet Wine* 2:44
Mrs. Goldie Hamilton
11. *Barbara Allen* 5:59
I. N. (Nick) Marlor
12. *Late One Evening* 3:29
Barry Sutterfield
13. *Hanging Johnny* 2:07
Captain Leighton Robinson, lead vocal; Alex Barr, Arthur Brodeur, and Leighton McKenzie, vocals
14. *Bright and Morning Star* 3:51
Walter and Lola Caldwell, vocals and guitar

15. *The Black Sheep* 3:08
Darby and Tarlton: Tom Darby, vocal and guitar; Jimmie Tarlton, vocal and Hawaiian guitar
16. *Hey Hey, I'm* 2:38
Memphis Bound
(Alton and Rabon Delmore)
The Delmore Brothers: Alton Delmore, vocal and guitar; Rabon Delmore, vocal and tenor guitar
17. *Don't Put Off* 2:34
Salvation Too Long
Southland Ladies Quartette
18. *Been A Long Time* 2:16
Traveling Here Below
Grandpa Isom Ritchie's church congregation
19. *I'm On My Journey Home* 3:17
The Denson Quartet
20. *I Am O'ershadowed by Love* 2:54
Members of the Stamps-Baxter School of Music

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