

'Bombers' & Other Modern Story Songs

Rusthall Records: MBRRCD01

Sleeve Notes

(expanded in places for this web site edition)

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Full credits appear on the back cover and the CD facing page

The 'Introduction to the Series', added here as a postscript, explains the mixed programming nature of these CDs. Total time = X mins, Y secs.

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1. Nobody Loves a Fairy When She's Forty - 2.18 - ? LeClerq

Age-ist, Size-ist and (for daring to assume that only females can be fairies) Sex-ist, but a typical Music Hall and Revue number of the kind introduced to me by my Grandmother and Aunt, Elsie and Peggy Ball, and other relatives of Devonport, Plymouth, who provided me with an unselfconscious popular musical culture with their home-made self-entertainment. This 1928 ditty is from the singing of 'Two-Ton' Tessy O'Shea. I play this on the ukelele - banjo at home.

2. Over The Lancashire Hills - 3.57 - ? Marston

Nostalgia of the best kind. A salute by Stuart Marston to the passing of the Music Hall and Variety shows in British cities which lasted from Victorian times to the early 1960's. "Damp crowded buses... a fire glows in the front room... window frames shake in the gust.." recall daily bus journeys and post-war prefabricated Council houses in a time of necessarily hasty house building. Learned from the singing of Simon Nicol of Fairport Convention.

3. The Hair of the Widow of Bridlington - 4.00 - ? Thackray

Not only the Douglas Adams (H-H Guide...) of English popular song for his similarly highly innovative characteristics. Aspects of Jake's work embrace elements of other writers: W.S. Gilbert of G & Sullivan (whose collaboration so influenced the great American writers of early and mid-20th century writers of popular song and Musicals - not least Cole Porter), Noel Coward, Flanders & Swann, Tom Lehrer and George Brassens's particular form of the French Chanson.

4. Hain Stopped Play / 'Tis My Delight of a Summer's Day - 5.42 - ? Ball/Trad/McColl

This mini-saga, although touching on two particular events, is essentially an allegory for the 1960s, perhaps the most self-deluding decade in British history. Not just self-indulgent and frivolous: I feel its revolutionary re-statement of the Human Condition, putting Hope and wishful thinking over Experience, heralded the slippery slope towards our present discontents: social disorder, the licence to misbehave with impunity, decades of disastrous educational policies, the replacement of our historic Common Law by the fidget of collectivist, liberal-progressive, even paranoid Government legislation with the predictable sire-ing of an 'Holier-than-thou' blame / sue culture and the disappearance of ancient freedoms, especially that of speech and open debate. End of earnest, possibly pompous, political 'credo'.

This story focuses on the then-growing, now endemic power of intolerant minorities to bully and dominate tolerant, long-suffering majorities in a 'tail wags dog' way. The following list of teacherly references I was hoping to leave for the listener to spot, or not, but have been advised to name them, as the lesser of two evils. (Try skipping the following on the first hearing).

The Rt. Hon. Peter Hain, ** New Labour M.P. and Government Minister, when a Young Liberal, organised successfully the campaign to stop the tour of the 1970's S. African cricket

side, this just after they had defeated a good Australian team 4-nil in a 5-Test series. # Graeme Pollock and Eddie Barlow (South African Batsmen) # The 'DON': Don Bradman, deferential sobriquet for the 20th century's outstanding batsman, and arguably the most dominant figure over his contemporaries in any sport, anywhere at any time... a few Olympians come very near e.g. Mark Spitz (swimming) and Steven Redgrave (rowing). # A Hart is a five + year old stag and Hartfield a village in the Sussex Weald. # The Long Room, the famous gallery at Lord's cricket ground, London. # Songs, tunes and poems: # 'At Lords' (O my Hornby and my Barlow long ago) # Moving On Song (Ewan McColl, opening tune) # Lincolnshire Poacher # William Blake's poems, (from his 'Songs Of Innocence and Experience') 'Tyger' and 'The Lamb'" ... did He [God] Who made the Lamb [Innocence, Christ] make thee [the Tyger, harm, Experience]"? # A Nightingale sang in Berkeley Square (by M. Sherwin - although the 'demo' / riot occurred at the U.S. Embassy in Grosvenor square 1968) # Firelock Stile (Harry Cox / Trad.) # A Sussex hunting song (Sportsmen arise / Innocent Hare) # 1960s Slogans: e.g. 'only doing my own thing / make love not war / we want it Now / let it all hang out' (40 years later, it does, it does!!). ** No doubt Peter held the high moral ground in this anti-apartheid initiative, as a student... curious then that when in political power, faced with the genocidal, racist Mugabe (Honorary Knight), he left the weighty diplomatic matter of England's recent tour of Zimbabwe to... the Cricketers this time around. ("if Youth only had the Wisdom, if Age only had the Strength" perhaps that's it.) Moral: "Liberal societies wishing to preserve their hard-won Freedoms may need to take Illiberal steps at times" - Jo(seph) Grimond, leader of the Liberal Party 1956-1967, New Statesman magazine circa 1968. P.S. The manufacturer of my friend 'Excalibur', kindly repaired his toe-end after this bruising single-wicket match.

5. The Poor Sod - 1.53 - ?? Thackray

One of Jake's pastorals set as usual in rural Yorkshire. They include the comical, scandalous, the hilarious, the charming, the descriptive. This one is darker.

6. Caravan - 3.39 - ?? Ellington / arr. Joseph / Tom Ball

Tom acknowledges the strong influence of the British Jazz pianist Julian Joseph in this arrangement of a famous Jazz 'standard', especially in the rhythmic intro' and tune announcement before he begins to improvise. Tom is an hospital doctor who, when they let him out, gigs in London.

7. Litany to the Holy Spirit - 2.37 - ?? Herrick / Hurford

Robert Herrick (1591 - 1674) and Thackray (1938-2000) share characteristics. One was a clergyman, the other contemplated 'taking the cloth'; both are generally associated with light verse celebrating women-folk, sympathetically observed (but not excluding in Jake's case the downright lewd, in the other a "cleanly wanton-ness"); yet both use their facility for language and image in the service of a range of topics including the Sacred. A litany is a series of short prayers. I like this combination of poignant 17th century English with Peter Hurford's 20th century setting. From the singing of Tom when a choirboy: I even replicate his dodgy high note on the first word of each verse.

8. Bombers - 5.07 - ?? Ball / Trad. Arr. Ball

In June 1982 the following coincidences struck me as having a pattern, and to lance the irritation I reached for a pen, although I kept this "anthem for doomed youth" to myself until a few weeks ago.

During the Falklands War (April - June of that year) Irish terrorists chose the occasion to murder-by-bomb Soldiers of the Queen (Royal Green Jacket Bandsmen, the Household Cavalry's Blues and Royals) and their horses at jamborees in Hyde Park and Regent's Park # At the outset of W.W.2, Irish terrorists were bombing the people of Coventry only months before the centre of that city and our family home in Devonport were erased by Goering's Luftwaffe. # Eamon de Valera, Prime Minister ('Taoiseach') of the Republic of Ireland (Eire), on the death of Hitler, presented his condolences in person to the German Embassy shortly before the Allies formally celebrated Hitler's suicide and the end of the war on V.E. day. # Almost 40 years later, unlike the rest of E.U. countries, the Commonwealth, the Falkland Islanders themselves (no self-determination for them) and eventually the U.S.A., Charles Haughey's Government of tender conscience was unable to allow the legal right of, and moral case for Mrs. Thatcher to launch the Task Force. # Argentinian leader General Galtieri, and Adolf, famously terrorised their own people. # Holyhead is a ferry port for Irish Sea crossings # 'Janner' (Johnny) is the Royal Navy nickname for West-Countrymen; the folk of neighbours Devon and Cornwall call each other 'Cousin Jan and Cousin Jack' # There is a Kentish version of this as befits the county known as 'Bomb Alley' in the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, as the main landing-ground of the V.1. Flying bomb and V.2. Rocket campaign (2nd phase of) and the location of the atrocity visited upon the Royal Marines at Deal Barracks in the 1990s by Irish terrorists (they do love their music: they sang to Bandsmen again) # Col. H. Jones was a 'Janner', but 'Sergeant' (the other Falklands V.C.) 'sailor', 'soldier' or 'airman' are alternatives.

An old song goes:

The Blackbirds and Thrushes sang in the green bushes
The Larks and the Linnets they flew overhead
And all she sang, this Maiden complaining,
O Jimmy will be slain in the war I'm afraid

(from the singing of Shirley Collins)

...and another:

As I was a-walking back from the Royal Albion

Who should I meet but one of my shipmates...
(from the singing of Cyril Tawny)

the basis for the 2nd part of the instrumental passage is a tune version of the ancient and chilling ballad "The Cutty Wren / Hunting the Wren".

The violin quote from the Welsh air 'Llwyn On' (the Ash grove) is deliberate as is the quote at the outset from the Irish song 'The Bold Fenian Men'.

9. Pub Piano Medley - 7.20 - ??

'Spread a little happiness'* from 'Cinders', a 1927 British Musical (Grey Ellis, Int. Music Pub's) # Love Letters in the Sand (Kenny / Coots 1931) # On The Sunny Side of the Street (Fields / McHugh 1929) # The Boys in the Gallery (Ware, for Marie Lloyd 1885) # Slow Boat to China (Loesser 1948).

Piano accompaniment for pub / social sing-songs and folk songs was taken over by the guitar from the 60s but it's beginning to be re-acceptable now. Another benefit of holidays in Plymouth, and of being played to sleep by my father Dick Ball during and after the Blitz. I prefer to make music with others, so on such gigs I provide a choice of 500 lyrics on song-sheets. * In order to avoid the original rather dated "...feeling blue" and "Bluesday", I've had to change the rhyme scheme.

10. La Pique - 3.03 - ?? Traditional

This Nelsonian story reminds me, in its second verse, of a fortnight spent as a sea-cadet aboard the 'flash' ship of the 1950s Navy, H.M.S. Vanguard, the last British battleship ever built. The fiddle dance tune later in the piece is an idea Tom got from the 'Rogues in Rosin' Duo.

11. The Parson and the Student - 6.29 - ?? Ball / Trad.

This, and track 4, began life as a series of haphazard couplets in response to matters described above and to an event described in the spoken intro to the ballad. Two separate tales have sprung from the original musings and I hope there isn't much left of a 'join'. I should add that my response to the vicar's 'experience' was also influenced by the darkness which falls in Melbourne by 7/8 o'clock all year, and by the need to have a change most days, as a non-TV-owning non-party-going bachelor, from switching the light on and off.

"...before posters of Mao, Marx, Marcuse and Che": Left-wing youths all over the Western World in the 60s - especially during 1968 - would be found toting & quoting Mao Tse Tung's Little Red Book, biblically; the American Marxist, Marcuse, politicised the campuses of the U.S.A. and the European Continent, and Che Guevara was worshipped (literally an icon; posters everywhere) as a Freedom Fighter, whereas he was more a nasty little megalomaniac. # In the Sequel to the encounter: 'Jonnick' is a Cornish word for the Devonshire 'vitty' i.e.

fitting / fair; and “Canterbury” (the Archbishop of) at the time was that holy man Michael Ramsey who, comfortably ensconced in Oxford Academia, greeted his first appointment to a Bishopric with “the good Lord has called me to Durham, and it’s bloody” # Tunes used: The ‘Butcher and the Parson’ and ‘At Thorney Moor Woods in Nottinghamshire’. Moral: Don’t let the Bishops get you down, vicar (and hang on to your ‘Parson’s freehold!’).

12. Blue Moon - 2.37 - ?? Hart / Rodgers

Two keyboards and bass on the go during Tom’s solo - from the ‘Pub. Piano’ repertoire.

13. Sydney and Bristol Bound - 4.28 - ?? Ball / Trad / Internet.

...and back again for the final verse. The story felt unbalanced without one more verse so this remained unperformed in public for 31 years, bar one outing, until a certain Sydney-based rugby tournament occurred in Nov. 2003*. “...a poster scrawled upon a wall said ‘Come walk tall in Australial’” (note the Bristolian ‘L’) was in fact a newspaper recruiting advert., in 1974. This would have had the ring of truth for me, years earlier, for the opportunities and encouragement afforded me by young Australian friends (some of them saluted in this story) to explore and develop the study and performance of English language folk song and balladry perhaps more effectively than would have been possible in the U.K., at that particular time (a specially happy compensation for having spent 9 months and much cash in Canada brushing up my French ready for the Paris posting which changed at a month’s notice).

“New Chums”: old term for newly arrived immigrants from the British Isles # “Bewts”: a nickname for Australians, floating around in the 1960s - possibly from the frequent use they make of this unremarkable adjective, or from its unorthodox use, e.g. “the Mona Lisa is a bewt picture” - pronounced ‘be-yute’, spelt there as ‘beaut’(iful).

An Internet pictorial joke, of the mettlesome kind, informs the last verse: although used to the growing repudiation of the British background by a large minority there, we were all ‘taken aback’ even mystified by the depth of hostility and scorn directed at the distinguished England squad during the World cup, the adolescent spitefulness of it all being an eye-opener, for the first time visitors especially. All was made worse by the apologies and confessions, of toe-curling embarrassment, printed (after the host-nation had been shafted in the Final) in otherwise distinguished journals like the Sydney Morning herald and the Melbourne Age. # Tunes used: Up to the Rigs of London Town: & Won’t you come down to Yarmouth Town. # The idea for verse 11 and the last line of V. 10 I owe to Charles Causley’s tribute to Sydney in his poem ‘H.M.S. Glory at Sydney’. The Cornish poet and balladeer arrived there after a year at sea in 1944.

14. Ginnie - 3.21 - ?? Huw Williams

I collect the recordings of the Huw and Tony Williams duo and am a devotee of Huw’s compositions: this one is ideal for a piano player. I replicate his arrangement (for rhythm guitar) as best I can, helped by the transcription by Martin Alcock in the Fairport Convention Songbook no. 1

15. Anglican Alphabet - 3.37 - ?? Ball / Trad.

A Hymn of Praise for the church-going and for the Liturgy or 'Use' (Order/content of a service) in the Prayer Book of Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556). In a remarkable record of unity and continuity these Services in his Book of Common Prayer comprised in essence the only 'Use' followed by the Church of England from the 1550s to 1970 (except for Cromwell's Republican interregnum) and the dominant form of public worship in many places around the world up to about 1990. Whereas during those 440 years all but 2 references in this Alphabet would have been "understood of the people", so implacable have been the Modernists / Liberals in their desire to expunge pre-1960s linguistic and doctrinal sensibilities that few new church-goers of the last 15 years would know 'their' Alphabet*

'R is for Rubric: the occasional directions for the conduct of a Service, originally printed in Red e.g. (Q) "In Quires and Places where they sing, here followeth the anthem" (this because the Low / Evangelical / purist wing of this very Broad or Comprehensive Church of Christ is concerned about the possible extra-biblical nature of some anthems). 'Series Three': one of a set of 'modern' service innovations from 1968. I was right in 1971 to be nervous of writing this affirmative line (balanced by a conditional one two lines later!) and in my suspicion that these experimental and alternate 'Uses' would carry the 'cuckoo in the nest' function of replacing a specifically religious and numinous / Awe inspiring register of language by a prosaic or 'flat' tone of voice, the language of the street. The resulting act of cultural etc. vandalism leaves us with a 'dumbed down' liturgy, supposedly more accessible (like the abysmal content of many a post-'O' Level school English curriculum and syllabus), but shorn of the transcendental power and sheer memorability of Cranmer's Prayer Book. # Tune: the Sailor's / Canal Boatman's Alphabet.

* The Eastern Orthodox Churches have retained the same liturgy for 1000 years - and are packing them in!

16. I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free (Film 95) - 2.49 - ?? Giltrap / Simone

Signature tune of the long running T.V. film review series, '95, '96 et seq.

17. Song of Village Cricket - 3.18 - ?? Ball / Williams

A tribute, if a jokey one, to Honorary Groundsmen and Umpires everywhere, but written for John Rhodes of Hartfield C.C. and in memory of 'Spud' Eackett and (for the last verse) 2nd XI umpire Jack Simmonds both of Hampset C.C., Bath. I offer this merry little number to the Barmy Army, but perhaps use only the repeat ('get it right') use of the chorus tune each time, chaps: the first, punning, use of the chorus-tune might be a bit too demanding after a few beers!

Huw Williams tune 'Strike it Right' is used with permission.

18. Ode and Morris Dance - 1.54 - ?? Ball / Trad.

This birthday verse for my son Fred, away boarding for a year, eventually introduces The Nutting girl jig. It describes such a 13 year-old, typical for the hair and the enthusiasm for ball-games (not least for rugby-tackling), less typical for his 'Fithel' (fiddle) playing, ballad chanting and poetry reading. The style is slapstick-Chaucer in imitation of his character-sketches of the pilgrims in his Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.

INTRODUCTION

The 'keynote' guiding this compilation is VARIETY of topic, mood and style of music and lyric. Amateurs and semi-professionals do not feel confined to one type of music but take what they like, and as long as the technical and interpretive requirements of the different forms are studied and respected, an acceptable level of public performances can be achieved.

Of course there is the likelihood of being a 'Jack of all trades, Master of none' but that is an easy compromise for the all-rounder using music-making chiefly for recreation. BBC radio fell in with this approach to popular culture until 1968 when its mixed-programming policy, the 3rd Programme apart, gave way to specialist channels, Radio 1, 2 and 4. Under the previous, Reith-ian* policy, the Home Service (R. 4-ish) and the Light Programme (R. 2-ish) over-lapped in a deliberately informative way so that you would find yourself listening at times to music, talks, drama, etc. outside your normal fare, and being provided with points of reference held in common by the national audience in contrast to the later disjunction.

NOVELTY is an ingredient. Here is unpublished material, items out of print or deleted, and attractive numbers like tracks 2 & 14, deserving of a wide audience, but which remain known only to a minority because of the lack of 'air-time'. Several tracks are longish story songs (i.e. 'ballads' in the literary and folk-song meaning, of 'narrative'), three of which deal in political matters, and polemical in their restricted and particular point of view. This is normal, if occasional, in the ballad tradition. As well as the ubiquitous 'boy meets girl' encounter, the old stories take in the full range of human activities. Along with many others, I wish to re-state this form of expression in contemporary terms, in my case by combining modern narrative & lyric with old, forgotten, yet strong melodies. To carry a long story more acceptably in today's circumstances I often use more than one tune per ballad (4 or 5 in tracks 4 and 8) plus occasional spoken lines.

The Folk-Music movement, though laughed to scorn by the Press and ignored by the general public (most especially in England, by the English) is responsible for inspiring much valid and entertaining new writing, providing an alternative, for those who would seek it, to commercial 'Pop & Rock' much of it limited to a minimalist fare of trite, even base 'love'-lyrics wedded to a predictable rhythmic thump-thump.

There is more than one reference to A.D. 1968 in these notes / songs, I suppose because I see it as one of the C20th's mood-setting cut-off points, like 1914, '29/30 and '39.

*John Reith, architect of Public Broadcasting Service in the U.K. from 1922-38.

The recording is dedicated to my Aunty Peg, along with thanks to sons Tom, Fred and Jan who enabled me to learn much about piano accompaniment, late in life, during our 'combo' work for exam, concert, festival and church services.

Thanks to Gray Cooper for coaxing a novice through the 'red-light' syndrome during recording sessions.

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