

High Voice

15 EASY FOLKSONG ARRANGEMENTS

FOR THE PROGRESSING SINGER

EDITED BY RICHARD WALTERS

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Singers on the CD: * Tanya Kruse, soprano, ** Steven Stolen, tenor, *** Stuart Mitchell, tenor
Pianists on the CD: Catherine Bringerud (tracks 3, 9-11, 13), Christopher Ruck (tracks 1, 2, 5,
6, 14, 16-18, 20, 21, 25, 29), Richard Walters (tracks 4, 7, 8, 12, 15, 19, 22-24, 26-28, 30)

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NOTES ON THE SONGS

The Ash Grove

This Welsh tune, known as “Llwyn On,” must date before the early 18th century, as it appeared in altered form in John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728). It was first published, without words, in 1802. Some lyrics appeared by 1809. The song text has been attributed to John Oxenford, although there are several different sets of verses, including parodies added after the melody was published. “The Ash Grove” is clearly a nostalgic place associated with friends of childhood, perhaps even being a cemetery.

Barbara Allen

The song, first mentioned in Samuel Pepys’ Diaries in 1666, originated somewhere in the British Isles; both English and Scottish origins have been cited. Some speculation has been that William in the song is a knight. We can only guess why Barbara Allen broke William’s heart. There have been countless versions of the song found in England, Scotland, Ireland, US and Canada, a natural mutation that is common to old folksongs.

Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes

The words are from the poem “To Celia” by the great English poet and playwright Ben Jonson (1572-1637). The origin of the tune is unknown, but it dates from the late 18th century, after 1770. This melody has been attributed to Mozart, but that is unlikely and has not been substantiated. This is a tender, heartfelt, intimate expression of love. A performer should sing smoothly and sincerely. An alternative version of this song has a lyric by Jane Taylor (1783-1824), with music ascribed to Dr. H. Harrington (1727-1816).

Greensleeves

This English song, popular for centuries, was first mentioned in the “Stationers’ Register” in 1580, which licensed Richard Jones to print “A new Northern Dittie of the Lady Greensleeves.” Legend has it that Henry VIII wrote this while courting Ann Boleyn, but that is almost surely false. This same melody was later set to different words by American William Chatterton Dix in the the 19th century, called “What Child Is This.” Lady Greensleeves is probably a secret, illicit mistress.

How Can I Keep from Singing

This American tune is possibly by Robert Lowry, published in 1869 in his “Bright Jewels for the Sunday School,” although the melody is more likely of folk origin. The text has been sometimes attributed to 19th century writer Anna Warner (author of the first verse of “Jesus Loves Me”), although this credit is not conclusive. This sturdy tune is sometimes still used as a hymn. “Singing” in the context of

the song could be a joyful expression of faith, or it could be a metaphor for speaking out in the face of injustice. Such was the context of folk singer/activist Pete Seeger’s recording of the song.

I Gave My Love a Cherry

This mountain song from Kentucky (probably from the early 19th century) is also known as “The Riddle Song.” In the final verse, where the riddle is solved, the line “a chicken when it’s pippin’ ” refers to the undeveloped bird in the egg (“pippin’ ” is a dialect rendition of “peeping”). This is a tender love song that should be performed with graceful, earnest emotion.

I Know Where I’m Goin’

This ballad is probably of Scottish origin, although it might be English. A possible interpretation would be of a young woman living at home. Her parents have forbidden her to see Johnny. She longs for the nice things she knows that poor Johnny cannot provide her, but is consumed by love for him. Against her parents’ wishes, she knows she’s going to secretly steal away to be with Johnny. This song has been recorded by various artists, including Judy Collins on her first album in 1961.

Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier

The music for this American Revolutionary War song was adapted from the 17th century Irish song “Siul a Ruin,” translated from Gaelic as “A blessing walk with you, my love.” The song is also known as “I Wish I Were on Yonder Hill,” “Buttermilk Hill,” “Shule Agra” and “Sweet William;” the lyrics for each of these vary greatly. According to one theory, the tune “Shule Agra” arose out of the Glorious Revolution in Ireland in 1688. Beyond heartbreak and worry, the young woman in “Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier” has been left alone by a sweetheart or husband gone off to war, leaving her few options for employment in 18th century America. Her line “I’ll dye my dress, I’ll dye it red” hints that she is desperate enough, at least momentarily, to consider harlotry as an avenue of survival.

Loch Lomond

Loch Lomond is the largest lake in Scotland, located in the west of the country. This tune is of Scottish origin, an old Jacobite air based on an older folk tune “Robin Cushie” (“Kind Robin Loves Me”) found in McGibbons’ Scots Tunes Book I (1742). The words are attributed to Lady John Scott (1810-1900). The version we are familiar with today probably first appeared in print in Poets and Poetry of Scotland (1876). The chorus refers to two Jacobite soldiers captured by the British—one who was to be hanged, and the

other who was to be set free to return to Scotland to warn all Scots what would happen if they fought for their freedom again. The Jacobite to be hanged said to the other "you take the high road, and I'll take the low road and I'll be in Scotland afore ye," meaning the high road is the road of the living, and the low road is for those whom have passed into the spirit world through death. He believed that in this way he would be with his wife before the free man. Ben Lomond is the large hill situated next to Loch Lomond. "Greetin' " is Scottish for grieving in the line, " The woeful may cease from their greetin'."

Scarborough Fair

This folksong is from England, dating from the 16th or 17th centuries. It may have been adapted from an older ballad, "The Elfin Bride." Scarborough Fair was a huge 45 day trading event starting every August 15 which drew people from all over England and Europe. There have been many different variants of the words and melody. Herbs were significant to medieval people. Parsley was thought to soothe bitterness; sage was thought to give strength; rosemary was a symbol of faithfulness; thyme represented courage. The key to understanding the cryptic meaning lies in verse five: "Love imposes impossible tasks... though not more than any heart asks." Simon & Garfunkel recorded a famous version of the song (with a slightly different melody) for their album *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*, which became a popular hit in 1968.

Shenandoah

This famous folksong, a very symbol of Americana, may have originated as a chanty (a song sung by sailors), possibly sung by early American river men or Canadian voyageurs. Its date is unknown, but it is possibly from the late 18th or early 19th centuries. Two verses first appeared in print in an article by W.J. Alden in *Harpers* magazine in 1882. There are many different interpretations of the mysterious lyrics. Shenandoah was an Indian chief who lived on the Missouri River. Shenandoah is also the name of a river and region in Virginia. Whatever its specific meaning, the song is certainly about homesickness for people and places left behind.

Soldier, Soldier, Will You Marry Me

This American folksong of the 18th century is probably an adaptation of an English tune. This is a flirtatious, comic character song. A performer needs to understand clearly which character is singing: the maiden, the soldier, or the narrator. Make a distinct difference for each of the voices in your singing. Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) wrote a poem "Soldier, Soldier," along the same sentiments, which was set to music in 1898 by Percy Grainger. Except for subject matter, it is unrelated to the old folksong.

The Streets of Laredo

This song, also known as the "Cowboy's Lament," is based on the Irish songs "A Handful of Laurel" and "The Bard of Armagh." Other American songs borrowed the same tune. The lyrics for "The Streets of Laredo" were first published in *The American Songbag* in 1927, edited by poet Carl Sandburg. The song has been recorded by many artists in various styles. The dying young cowboy, who probably led a rough, rowdy and lonely life, becomes sentimental as his death quickly approaches, revealing a surprisingly poetic character. A singer should be sensitive to telling the story of the song.

The Water Is Wide

This song originated in the British Isles (either of English or Irish origin). It was first published in 1724 with the title "O Waly, Waly." The most familiar version of this folksong was collected in Somerset by Cecil Sharp. The song shares some verses with a longer ballad, "Lord Jamie Douglas," although it is possible that "O Waly, Waly" existed first. "The Water Is Wide" and "O Waly, Waly" share a similar melody, and have some verse overlap. "The Water Is Wide" version became more common in the 19th century. The song is about the broken heart of someone who was deceived by a false-hearted lover, who apparently left without warning and sailed away. The most famous setting of the tune was by English composer Benjamin Britten (1913-1976).

When Johnny Comes Marching Home

This American song of the Civil War was credited to Union Army bandmaster Patrick S. Gilmore (1863), written under the pseudonym Louis Lambert. The words were written to the tune "To the Army and Navy of the Union" (composer unknown). The song was sung by both the North and South as they awaited the return home of their soldiers during wartime. It is similar to the Irish song "Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye," about a maimed soldier, though it is not known which song came first. The singer of the song could be any person who cares about Johnny. (Johnny was a common name in the 18th and 19th century, essentially meaning every man.) For women singers, it may help to consider Johnny as a departed husband or lover, which adds urgency to the performance.

The Ash Grove

Welsh Folksong ("Llwyn On")
arranged by Bryan Stanley

Allegretto

mf

The piano introduction consists of two staves. The right hand plays a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a half note D5. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords in the right hand and single notes in the left hand.

mp

2nd time (9) 1st time (9)

1. The ash grove how grace - ful, how plain - ly 'tis
ev - er the light through its branch - es is

The first system of the vocal and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a whole rest, followed by a melodic phrase. The piano accompaniment features a steady accompaniment pattern. A repeat sign with first and second endings is present.

speaking, The harp through it play - ing has
break - ing, A host of kind fac - es is

The second system of the vocal and piano accompaniment. The vocal line continues the melody. The piano accompaniment continues with the same accompaniment pattern.

1 2 , mf

me; When - me.

The final system of the vocal and piano accompaniment. The vocal line concludes with a half note. The piano accompaniment ends with a final chord.



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