

# 15 EASY FOLKSONG ARRANGEMENTS

FOR THE PROGRESSING SINGER

EDITED BY RICHARD WALTERS

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# PREFACE

As many of you already know, I have been compiling vocal anthologies for young students, teenagers, college students, and other pre-professional students for Hal Leonard Corporation since 1991. This new publication, *15 Easy Folksong Arrangements*, was developed by my editor, Richard Walters. It is my pleasure to respond to a request to write the Preface for this valuable book.

This collection of fifteen folksongs, set in all new and interesting arrangements, comes in high and low voice editions. The high voice range does not go above an F, and the low voice was set lower than many volumes, never going higher than a D in the female songs. Most of the songs for males do not go above a C in the low volume. Care was taken in retaining a reasonable tessitura for each arrangement. The varied choice of songs is cross-generational in appeal, as the texts are timeless, expressive reflections of humanity. The singing of familiar, meaningful tunes from our cultural heritage is also an added plus in the art education for beginning singers. The melodic patterns of these songs, combining simplistic rhythms and constantly flowing vocal lines, lend themselves to the teaching of basic fundamentals of voice for singers in early stages of study.

The intent of this book is to provide a supplemental first year volume for male and female students to accompany a basic anthology such as the *Easy Songs for Beginning Singers* series, which I compiled for all four voice parts. It is also a “stand alone” song book for adults and special interest singers. As a beginning book, the melody lines are often included in the accompaniments for the first verses. The accompaniments are interesting, yet not florid or fancy, and they provide a solid foundation for the singer. Student pianists will find these accompaniments very accessible to play.

The companion CD is a learning aid only. The professionally sung track presents one interpretation as a listening guide, and not as a model to be imitated. The accompaniment track is made available to assist in practice when preparing the songs for performance.

This worthwhile book could be used for school programs and contests, voice classes, studio recitals for non-majors, in the classroom, for singing at home, and even for group sing-a-longs at camp. Though vocally modest, some of the arrangements will probably appeal to more advanced singers as well as beginners. I expect to use these editions with several young singers in my studio, and will not be surprised to learn that other teaching colleagues will do the same.

Joan Frey Boytim  
*May, 2004*

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.