

sing yonder

traditional folk song
for beginners

vol. 1

simple contemporary settings for songs 1-10 in the Roud Index

This series of books is dedicated to:

Norma Waterson, 1939-2022

*whose influence permeates the recent evolution of folk music like
a seam of gold, one that we will be mining for generations*



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introduction to the 3rd edition:

Thanks to ten amazing sets of musicians (plus the twelve others who contributed to the crowdsourced Roud 2 - see endnote), there is now an accompanying compilation album for this book. To reflect this, I have added short sleevenotes from the artists to this edition. To listen to the album, visit singyonder.co.uk for details.

introduction to the 2nd edition:

Not a lot has changed apart from a few tweaks and corrections which were unavoidable now it's clear that there might be people other than my friends reading this, and the addition of the lovely reviews of some of those people on the back. Hello, and thank you. Also, a new dedication, reflecting the fact that we lost Norma just days after I went to press with the first edition. We who love this music owe her and her family so much.

introduction

Researcher and librarian Steve Roud has devoted his life to creating a comprehensive list of traditional songs in the English language, collated from a variety of historic sources, sequenced in a largely random order. In December 2021, for my own reasons, I started at Roud number 1, figured out how to play it in a way that worked for me, then wrote it down, with a few notes on its meaning and origin. Then I did another. And another. At which point I wondered whether it might be a useful resource. While this music has always appealed to me, sometimes, due to the great virtuosity of many popular modern interpreters, it can sound like it might be impenetrably hard to play. This is at odds with my personal relationship with music, namely a participatory one; at its core it is something to be done in a relaxed environment, preferably with friends, for the purposes of immediate joy. I know a lot of folk players feel the same way - the music eats its way inside us, then needs to burrow out and infect others like a parasitic worm*.

So here's my attempt to curate (and sometimes create) simple settings that are accessible—in both playing and understanding—to newcomers to the genre (and indeed to playing any kind of music), but still tell a version of the same story, in as faithful a way as you might find in folk music circles.

The songs are listed with chords for guitar, that instrument being the most prevalent comfort blanket for amateur singers like me, namely, enthusiastic but not especially brilliant ones. It's equally applicable to the ukulele, mandolin, autoharp, theorbo, or whatever noise-making device you might have lying around. As has always been the way with folk music, my main consideration in making these accompaniments has been whether or not they work for me. I hope they work for you. If they don't, don't worry. None of this is compulsory.

Karl Sinfield, January 2022

* No treatment yet exists. Sorry. No refunds.

a note on the settings

All the songs in this volume I had heard of before, though I knew some more intimately than others. My process to arrive at each arrangement was first to listen to every version I could find. This is much easier these days thanks to streaming platforms*, and I found I had numerous versions of each song at my fingertips. There might be the basis of something in there I can use almost unchanged, something might need a bit of simplifying or clarifying, or if nothing else, just the general feeling of the song will lead me to a new version of the melody and accompaniment. Also, I have tried to be as concise as possible with the story, and modernise the language where appropriate, since this project is about making the songs more accessible rather than being totally definitive or authentic to sources hundreds of years old.

A huge help in any folk research like this has been thanks to the heroic efforts of Reinhard Zierke and his Mainly Norfolk site, which provides a great resource for finding songs when the names vary (I have listed most of the alternative names underneath each song title to save you some time if you want to search for them yourself), and the site also includes a plethora of illuminating sleeve notes.

I have also suggested a few tracks for some further listening. These might be related to the setting in some way, or a contrast to the setting, or just something I think is interesting. I have tried to include a range of interpretations, old and new. But again, go out and find your own favourites, they all have something to offer.

Finally, this project has also hugely increased my knowledge and appreciation of these old stories (which to be honest is the reason I started in the first place), and the singers that have carried them for us for generations. I have included a list of some of the sources that have helped me on this journey at the end of the book.

recordings

This book is aimed at people with basic skills, so as well as vocal lead sheets for the music readers (available for a small fee from the Bandcamp page), I have made some very rough homemade "guide recordings" to accompany this book, and these can be found, along with the book in PDF format, at the website singyonder.co.uk.
DISCLAIMER: It should be apparent that I'm no great singer, and my guitar skills are conspicuously average. Thus, I am the perfect test bed for these simple tunes - if I can play them, anyone can. And if I can play them in a way that's vaguely tolerable, I'm sure you will make them sound amazing.

I have used simple open chords for each setting in this book (plus alternates are given), to make everything playable for people of all skill levels. Where I have used a capo in the recording to make the song work for my vocal range, or to give easier access to embellishments, that will be noted on the song page.

* My current favourite platform is Bandcamp, it is the fairest way to support musicians, and many traditional folk artists, especially the younger ones, are well represented there.

ROUD 1

The Raggle Taggle Gypsies

AKA: The Gypsy Laddie, The Gipsy Laddies, The Seven Gipsies, Seven Yellow Gypsies, Seven Little Gypsies, Harrison Brady, Black Jack Davy, The Dark Eyed Gypsy, Gypsy Davy, Johnnie Faa, The Gypsy Countess, The Blackguard Gypsies, The Whistling Gypsy, The Egyptian Laddie

Summary:

An age-old tale of inter-class passion. Said to be based on an event in the life of Margaret Kennedy, wife of the Earl of Cassilis, who was allegedly seduced away from her life of luxury by King of the Gypsies, John Faa, in Scotland in the 16th century. In some versions, the amorous traveller is hanged for his crime of having a lifestyle that was fleetingly attractive to a bored wealthy person.

Setting notes:

Probably the most prevalent version of this was made famous by Celtic institutions like The Dubliners and Christy Moore, and is a core part the Irish ballad repertoire. I found myself more drawn towards the slightly more irregular pulse of the Waterson/Carthy version, which itself is based on a field recording of singing carpenter Walter Pardon, recorded in Norfolk in 1975. This is a simplified version of Martin Carthy's accompaniment. It may sound a daunting prospect on first listen, but once you get into the swing, it is quite manageable, and ultimately enjoyable to play and sing at the same time. The only complication being the varying lengths of the final lines of some of the verses. I find if you are playing with others, you can squeeze the words in to the same rhythmic framework for each verse, thus enabling everyone to stay together. That might require a bit of practice as it's a bit of a mouthful to fit in all those syllables. For playing alone it's easy to vary the rhythm to suit the words, which gives the song an extra dimension and helps ameliorate the characteristic repetitive nature of the ballad. This deviation from the rigid metre is something that can often be found in early source recordings, and would have been historically one of the defining aspects of traditional folk song.

Suggested further listening:

"Raggle Taggle Gypsies", Walter Pardon, *A Country Life*

"Black Jack Davey", The White Stripes, *Seven Nation Army*

"Seven Yellow Gypsies", Shirley and Dolly Collins, *The Power of the True Love Knot*

"The Gypsy Laddie", John Kirkpatrick, *Shreds and Patches*

"The Raggle Taggle Gypsies", Waterson:Carthy, *Broken Ground*

ROUD 1: THE RAGGLE TAGGLE GYPSIES

D G D
Three gypsies come round to my door,
G D A
And downstairs ran my lady-o.
D G D
And one sang high and one sang low
Bm A D
And one sang Bonny Bonny Biscay-o.

Then she took off her silken gown
And dressed in hose of leather-o.
The dirty rags all around my door;
And she's gone with the rattle-taggle gypsies-o.

Twas late at night my lord returned
Enquiring for his lady-o.
The servants one and all replied,
Well she's gone with the rattle-taggle gypsies-o.

Go harness up my milk white steed,
Go fetch to me my pony-o.
And I will ride and seek my bride
Who's a-gone with the rattle-taggle gypsies-o.

So he rode high and he rode low,
He rode through woods and copses too,
Until he came to a wide open field
Where he has spied his lady-o.

Why did you leave your new wedded lord
And your house and lands and money-o
To go and seek a roving life
All along with the rattle-taggle gypsies-o?

What care I for my new wedded lord
And my house and lands and money-o?
Tonight I'll seek a roving life
All along with the rattle-taggle gypsies-o.

Last night she slept in a goose-feather bed
With the sheets turned down so bravely-o;
Tonight she'll lie in the cold open field
All in the arms of the rattle-taggle gypsies-o.

What care I for a goose-feather bed
With the sheets turned down so bravely-o?
Tonight I'll lie in the cold open field
All in the arms of the rattle-taggle gypsies-o.

Alternate chords:

G	C	G
C	G	D
	G	C
	Em	D
		G



Album Version:
"The Rattle Taggle Gypsies" by Jim Causley

This recording of The Rattle Taggle Gypsies is an amalgamation of the version in Sing Yonder with other versions I have absorbed in folk clubs over the years. The piano pulse I hope gives the flavour of an eager pony desperate to run free! I'm playing accordion too and the funny tinny noise is not a bee trapped in the bellows but actually me playing my accordina which is a French free-reed instrument invented in the 1950s.

(Key of F - capo on 3rd fret)



ROUD 2

The Unfortunate Lass

AKA: The Unfortunate Rake, The Unfortunate Lad, Young Girl Cut Down in her Prime, Bad Girl, Bad Girl's Lament, The Trooper Cut Down in his Prime, The Streets of Laredo, The Devil's Nine Questions, When I Was on Horseback, The Dying Soldier, Bright Shiny Morning, St James' Hospital, Jack Combs, The Buck's Elegy, The Royal Albert, Annie Franklin, A Broken Heart, The Sailor Cut Down, The Royal Albion, Disordered, The Streets of Port Arthur, One Morning in May, Bright Summer Morning, The Flowergirl and the Flashlad, The Whore's Lament, The Young Royal, As I Was a-Walking Down By The Black Hospital, On The Banks of the Clyde, Beat The Drum Slowly

Summary:

One member of a huge family (see above*) of songs telling of a fatal misfortune, normally venereal disease, befalling the titular protagonist. This version is the tale of a woman who is dying of syphilis, told in the format of a conversation with her mother.

Setting notes:

So much to choose from here, as this song has interpretations all the way from its earliest known broadside printings in the late 18th century as The Buck's Elegy, to songs commonly known as the The Unfortunate Rake, St. James Infirmary Blues, The Streets of Laredo, and a myriad stops in between**. For me the song works better with the female protagonist; many of the male interpretations have an English stiff-upper-lip stoical swagger about them, which for me inhibits some of the emotion of the piece, whereas this is just pure, desperate sadness, evoking a life needlessly wasted through shame due to a cruelly patriarchal society. The tune for this setting is a simplified combination of many similar settings of this version of the song.

Suggested further listening:

"The Trooper Cut Down in His Prime", Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, *The Unfortunate Rake*

"The Unfortunate Lass", Eliza Carthy, *Rough Music*

"Bad Girl's Lament", Sara Hulse, *Callicoon Country Fair: Delaware River*

"The Unfortunate Lass", Lucy Ward, *Adelphi Has To Fly*

"The Bad Girl's Lament", Wade Hemsworth, *The Unfortunate Rake****

* The temptation to make up my own name for this setting, and thus cause future archivists an even greater headache, was enormous. I resisted it. You're welcome, future archivists.

** Fans of Scottish transplant Eric Bogle might recognise the last verse, which was borrowed for the chorus of his sadly perennially relevant anti-war classic "And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda".

*** If you just can't get enough of dying soldiers/women/cowboys etc., seek out this Smithsonian Folkways album, which has twenty versions of this song for your morbid delight.

ROUD 2: THE UNFORTUNATE LASS

Dm C Dm
 As I was out walking one fine summer's morning,
 Dm F C Dm
 As I was out walking one midsummer's day;
 Dm C Am Dm
 I met a young female, all dressed in white linen,
 Dm C Dm
 Aye, dressed in white linen and as cold as the clay.

Alternate chords:

Am		G	Am
Am	C	G	Am
Am	G	Em	Am
Am		G	Am

Oh mother, dear mother, come sit down beside me,
 Come sit down beside me and hear me sad case;
 For I've loved a soldier who has lately deserted
 And he's gone and he's left me in shame and disgrace.

Oh daughter, dear daughter, why didn't you tell me?
 Why didn't you tell me all of it in time?
 I could have bought salt, aye, and pills of white margery
 You're a true-hearted girl, cut down in your prime.

Come doctor, dear doctor, and fill up your bottles,
 Come fill up your bottles and make them quite dry;
 For me bones they are aching and me heart it is breaking
 In shame and disgrace I'm afraid I must die.

Have six jolly sailors to carry me coffin,
 Have six jolly soldiers to sing me a song;
 Have six bonny lasses carry bunches of roses
 So that you can smell me as we roll along.

Then play your fife lowly and play the drum slowly,
 Sing out the dead march as you go along;
 Take me to the graveyard and throw the sods on me,
 I'm a true-hearted girl but I never done wrong.



Album Version*: "The Unfortunate Lass" by Hevelwood

Using Sing Yonder as my primary source, I found a melody that fit the chords in the book. Next, I removed the chords and replaced them with a deconstructed soundscape that centres the voice. At the heart of this tragic song, I hear a young woman processing her unjust demise with rage and defiance. This arrangement frames the agitation of her lament with clipped, unpredictable patterns and rhythms. She closes by demanding to be remembered, a 'true hearted girl who's never done wrong', as the piano chords warp and distort in response to the strength of her conviction.

(Key of F, use chords above)

* Bonus versions of *The Unfortunate Lass* are exclusively available on the Bandcamp download album. See endnote for details

ROUD 3

The Seeds of Love

AKA: Sprig of Thyme, Old Thyme, Bunch of Thyme, The Willow Tree, Flowers and Weeds, Stand You Up, Plenty of Thyme, The Red Rose Bud, Thyme 'Tis a Pretty Flower, Keep Your Garden Clean, Come All You Garners Gay, Come All You Pretty Fair Maids, Green Willow Green Willow, The Maid's Lament For the Loss of Her Maiden-head, Dead Maid's Land

Summary:

Telling of the stages of a woman's life in the form of flower metaphors, this song is packed with folklore and symbolism, and what I imagine passed for smutty innuendo three hundred years ago.

Setting notes:

One of the most popular songs of late 19th/early 20th century England, evidence suggests that it derived from a 17th century poem by Mrs Fleetwood of Habergham Hall. Debate has raged, and continues to, but perhaps *The Seeds of Love* is a more modern version of the earlier *Sprig of Thyme* antecedent, or maybe they are different songs altogether*. Anyway, it's famous for being the first song Cecil Sharp collected, so it has a special place in the English folk firmament. I have taken a fairly standard traditional setting; it has the overall feel of an English folk ballad, in contrast with the more music-hall style of the *Sprig of Thyme* variants. Using the chords shown here it is quite easy for an intermediate guitarist to add flourishes that echo the *Seeds of Love* melody in a hopefully pleasing way. I have tried to show an example with the supplemental chords shown opposite. It all works perfectly well without them though, so feel free to choose your own route round the garden.

Suggested further listening:

"The Seeds of Love", Bella Hardy, *The Liberty to Choose*

"Bunch of Thyme", Eliza Carthy and Norma Waterson, *Gift*

"Keep Your Garden Clean", Jean Ritchie, *Mountain Hearth & Home*

"Dead Maid's Land", The Devil's Interval [\[Youtube video\]](#)

"The Seeds of Love", Edgelarks, *Henry Martin*

* Don't quote me on any of this. In oral traditions, often we will never know the exact timeline of when songs and tunes are created and handed around, especially when we are peering back hundreds of years into the past. Still it's interesting to think about, and gives rise to my personal answer to the question "What is folk music?" - folk music is old music that people like playing, but love arguing about.

ROUD 3: THE SEEDS OF LOVE

D G D
 I sowed the seeds of love,
 D G A
 It was all in the spring,
 D G G/F#* Em
 In April, May and in June likewise
 A G G/F#
 While small birds they do sing.
 A D
 While small birds they do sing.

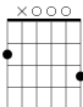
My garden was planted well
 With flowers everywhere;
 But I hadn't the liberty to choose for myself
 The flowers that I loved dear.
 The flowers that I loved dear.

My gardener he stood by
 And I asked him to choose for me.
 He chose me the violet, the lily and the pink
 But those I refused all three.
 But those I refused all three.

In June there's the red rosebud,
 And that's the flower for me,
 For often have I plucked at the red rose bud,
 Till I gained the willow tree.
 Till I gained the willow tree.

Come all you false young men,
 Don't leave me to complain;
 For grass that has often been trampled underfoot,
 Given time, it will rise again.
 Given time, it will rise again.

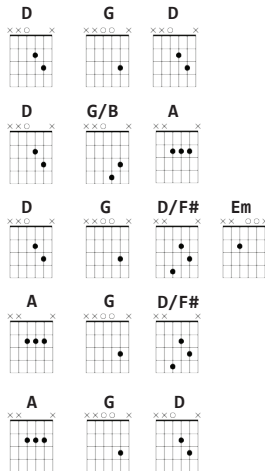
* G/F#



Alternate chords:

G C G
 G C D
 G C Em Am
 D C Em
 D G

Advanced version -
 just use D, G & B
 strings.



Album Version: "The Seeds of Love" by Lizzy Hardingham

It was my absolute pleasure to be asked to contribute to this record. I chose Seeds of Love as I'd heard Bellowhead do an adaptation of the song and wanted to learn more about the song and how it was originally collected. Using Sing Yonder was easy and informative and I couldn't recommend it any more highly!

(Key of F# - use capo on 4th fret)

ROUD 4

Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender

AKA: Lord Thomas, Fair Annet, Sweet Willie and Fair Annie, The Brown Girl, Fair Ellen, Lord Thomas's Tragedy, Three Lovers, The Legend of Fair Eleanor and the Brown Girl, The Nut-brown Bride, The Bold Forester (Lord Thomas), The Dun Broon Bride

Summary:

Thought to have originated as a 17th century folk tale, a young man's wedding dilemma* turns into a tragedy of epic proportions, presumably as a cautionary tale against pursuing riches over beauty.

Setting notes:

A very popular song in Britain and arguably even more so in the US, versions of this story also turn up in Scandinavian folk music. I based this arrangement on a version of the tune that was collected in the Appalachian mountains in the early 20th century. It's not the tune that Sharp and Karpeles collected in their book *Eighty English Folk Songs* that drew songs from that region, but it is close to the one sung by the great singer and dulcimer player Jean Ritchie, on her 1961 album *British Traditional Ballads in the Southern Mountains, Volume 1*.

Suggested further listening:

"The Dun Broon Bride", Lucy Pringle & Chris Wright, *The Speaking Heart*

"Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender", Carolyne Hughes, *I'm a Romany Rai*

"Lord Thomas", Mance Lipscomb, *You Got to Reap What You Sow*

"The Brown Girl", Hedy West, *Hedy West*

"Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender", Paul Brady, *Unfinished Business*



Album Version: "The Dun Broon Bride" by Burd Ellen

The text I sing comes from the first version of this ballad I learned. It's after the singing of Gordeana McCulloch, a voice I greatly admire. I learned from a live recording of her and wanted to evoke the same spirit in my own recording. So this is in the key of my heart and the room, to Jean Ritchie's wonderful tune, live in the rafters of 500 year old Bishop's House in Sheffield.

[A longer sleevenote, including the full lyrics used on the album version, can be found on the track's Bandcamp page.]

(Key of E, use Alt. chords, capo on 4th fret)

* This is one of a myriad of examples of poor decision-making in romantic situations that occur all too often in traditional folk song.

ROUD 4: LORD THOMAS AND FAIR ELLENDER

Dm F Am
Oh, mother dear mother come riddle to me
Dm C
Come riddle it all as one
Dm F Am
Should I marry Fair Ellen
Dm C Dm
Or bring the brown girl home?
F C
The brown girl she has house and land
Dm C
Fair Ellender she has none
Dm F Am
So therefore I charge you with my blessing
Dm C Dm
Go bring the brown girl home

Alternate chords:

Am	G	Em
Am	G	
Am	C	Em
Am	G	Am
C	G	
Am	G	
Am	C	Em
Am	G	Am

He got on his horse and he rode and he rode / He rode 'til he came to her hall
And no one so ready as Fair Ellen / To rise and welcome him in
What news have you brought, Lord Thomas? / What news have you brought unto me?
I've come to ask you to my wedding / A sorrowful wedding to be

Oh mother, dear mother, should I stay? / Fair child, you do as you please
But I'm afraid you'll never return / To see your mother no more
She turned around all dressed in white / Her sisters dressed in green
And every town that they rode through / They took her to be some queen

They rode & they rode 'til they came to the hall / She pulled on the bell & it rang
And no one so ready as Lord Thomas / To rise and welcome her in
Then taking Fair Ellender by the hand / And leading her through the hall
Saying fifty gay ladies are here today / But here is the flower of all

The brown girl she was standing by / With knives ground keen and sharp
And between the long ribs and the short / She pierced Fair Ellender's heart
Lord Thomas he was standing by / With knives ground keen and sharp
And between the long ribs and the short / He pierced his own bride's heart

Then placing the handle against the wall / The point against his breast
Saying, this is the ending of three lovers / God sends us all to rest
Oh father, oh father, go dig my grave / Dig it large and wide and deep
And place Fair Ellender in my arms / And the brown girl at my feet

ROUD 5

The Three Ravens

AKA: Twa Corbies, Three Old Crows, Two Crows, Blackingstone Ravens, Three Crow, Billy Maggee Maggar, Johnny Mee-kee--mee-coy, Bally-wally-wiggle-dum-daw, Three Black Crows

Summary:

An ancient medieval story, first written down in 1611. The body of a fallen knight, presumably slain in battle, is viewed hungrily by three ravens. Before they can eat him, he is tenderly spirited away and buried by a passing pregnant doe, who then also dies.

Setting notes:

The tune and accompaniment here is a simplified hybrid of the tune sung by Jon Boden and Fay Hield on Jon's Folk Song a Day project (collected by Frank Kidson from Mrs Holmes of Stoney Middleton, Derbyshire), with some of the driving rhythm of the Scottish settings normally called The Twa Corbies, but I have taken a few liberties with that version as well. Some versions of the song* do not have the magical doe, but a pregnant woman, who sometimes dies, and sometimes lives on in a state of woe. I have stuck with the slightly more prevalent and seemingly older version with the aforementioned mystical ruminant**.

Suggested further listening:

"The Three Ravens", Susanna, *Go Dig My Grave (feat. Giovanna Pessi, Ida Hidle & Tuva Syvertsen)*
"Three Ravens", The Demon Barbers, *Disco at the Tavern*
"Three Ravens", You are Wolf, *Hawk to the Hunting Gone*
"Three Ravens", Jon Boden, *A Folk Song a Day: September*
"Three Ravens", Hannah James and Toby Kuhn, *Sleeping Spirals*
"Three Old Crows", Fred Jordan, *Songs of a Shropshire Farm Worker*
"Blackingstone Ravens", Jim Causley, *Devonshire Roses*

* I might get tired of making this statement in the course of this project, but the Ewan MacColl version is a good example of this.

** There is often a final verse where we are invited to contemplate how wonderful this man was whom we know nothing about. It seemed superfluous to me, and it also has the archaic "leman" as the last word of the song. I know folk audiences often love a bit of etymology in their inter-song patter, but generally speaking it's best not to leave everyone else totally confused. Thus I have left it out, and, ended with everyone dead. The tradition prevails.

ROUD 5: THE THREE RAVENS

Dm
There were three ravens on a tree
 C Dm
 Down, down

Dm
There were three ravens on a tree
 C
 Down

Dm F
There were three ravens on a tree
 C Dm
They were as black as they might be
 Dm F C Dm
 With a down down derry down down

The one of them said to his mate...
Where shall we our breakfast take...

Down in yonder greeny field...
There lies a knight slain neath his shield...

His hounds they lie down at his feet...
So well they do their master keep...

His hawks they fly so eagerly...
There is no fowl come near him nigh...

Down there comes a fallow doe...
As great with young as she might go...

She lifted up his bloody head...
And kissed his wounds that were so red...

She got him up upon her back...
And carried him to an earthen lake...

She buried him before the prime...
She was died herself fore even-time...

Alternate chords:

Am
 G Am
Am
 G
Am C G Am
Am C G Am



Album Version: "The Three Ravens" by Angeline Morrison

This song, a conversation between carrion crows about whose bones they should next pick clean, unfolds into a magical tale of the ideal knight and his devoted beloved, with possibly some shape-shifting (or at least some transformational metaphor). The scope of the narrative and its surprising elements are powerful in such a short song. I added handclaps and joyous, joining-in backing vocals as an homage to the way the song keeps on expanding and bringing new layers of delight.

(Key of C - use Alt. chords)



ROUD 6

Long Lankin

AKA: Cruel Lincoln, Lamkin, False Lamkin, Bolamkin, Beaulampkin, Lambkin, Lammikin, Lambertkin, Gil Morrice, Bold Rankin, False Linfinn, False Lanky, Squire Relantman, Proud Lamkin, Young Alanthia

Summary:

A grisly revenge tale about a stonemason named Lankin who, having built a magnificent castle for a lord, did not get paid for his work. Later, the stonemason sneaks into the house, assisted by a treacherous maid, to kill the lord's child in a gruesome fashion. The song usually ends with the execution of the maid and the stone mason.

Setting notes:

The roots of the story seem to come from around Northumbria, possibly based on real events said to have happened around the building of Balwearie Castle in Fife in the 15th century. Some versions outside of the Scots tradition omit, or more likely have lost, the first verse with the backstory of the unpaid stonemason, and we are left with a horrifying ghost story, which like many such tales was used for generations as a bogey-man story to frighten children into behaving. I decided to use the whole story here, and abridged a version of the words sung by Alasdair Roberts on his *Too Long in This Condition* album, with an added first verse to complete the story. Historically it has been sung to quite a wide variety of tunes. I started with the Ben Butcher source recording, added a bit of Bert Lloyd, and topped it with a garnish of some as yet undiscovered 1970s folk horror film soundtrack that only exists in my imagination.

Suggested further listening:

"Beaulampkin", Martin Simpson, *Golden Vanity*

"Long Lankin", A.L. Loyd, *Bramble Briars and Beams of the Sun*

"Cruel Lincoln", Shirley Collins, *Lodestar*

"Long Lankin", M.J. Harris and Martin Bates, *Murder Ballads*



Album Version: "Long Lankin" by Henry Parker

This bogey-man ballad leapt out to me from the first edition of Sing Yonder. The fine detail in the language creates a truly horrific scene, the pricking of pins and three blood-stained rooms seem lifted from the darkest of folk-horror films; a terrifying tale to keep those doors bolted from the terrors outside. I followed the minor key chords supplied in the book and arranged a melody that I felt captured the lyric and atmosphere of this cautionary tale.

(Key of F# - use capo on 1st fret)

ROUD 6: LONG LANKIN

Dm Gm A Dm
Long Lankin was a mason, good as ever hewed stone
Dm C A Dm
Built the Lord a fine castle, and pay he got none

Alternate chords:

Am	Dm	E	Am
Am	G	E	Am

Said the lord to the lady, as he mounted his horse:
Beware of Long Lankin that lives in the moss.

Let the doors be all bolted and the windows all pinned,
And leave not a hole for a mouse to creep in.

The doors was all bolted and the windows all pinned,
Except one little hole, where Lankin crept in.

Oh where dwells the lord, says cruel Long Lankin,
He's away in fair London, said the false nurse to him.

Where's the heir of this house? said Long Lankin.
He's asleep in his cradle, said the false nurse to him.

We'll prick him, we'll prick him all over with a pin,
And then the fine lady will come down to him.

So he pricked him, he pricked him all over with a pin,
And the nurse held the basin for the blood to flow in.

O nurse, how you slumber. O nurse, how you sleep.
You leave my little son, to cry and to weep.

I've tried him with apples, I've tried him with a pear.
Come down, my fair lady, and rock him in your chair.

My lady came down, all a-thinking no harm.
Long Lankin stood ready to catch her bare arm.

There's blood in the kitchen. There's blood in the hall.
There's blood in the parlour where my lady did fall.

Her maiden looked out from the turret so high,
And she saw her master from London riding by.

O master, O master, don't lay the blame on me.
Twas the false nurse and Lankin that killed your fair lady.

Long Lankin was hanged on a gibbet so high
And the false nurse was burnt in a fire close by.



ROUD 7

Sovay

AKA: The Female Highwayman, Sylvia, Cecilia, Silvy Silvy, Sylvia's Request and William's Denial, Sovie Sovie, Lady Turned Highwayman, Sally Sally, Shillo Shillo, Young Caley, The Buxom Blade, Gold Watch and Chain, The Diamond Token, Silvery Silvery

Summary:

A folk song with a twist: no-one dies. What makes this even more remarkable is that the story is perfectly set up for tragedy. A young woman disguises herself as a highwayman in order to try and trick her husband into parting with his engagement ring. He does not, she is satisfied with his level of commitment, and they presumably live happily, though if their courtship was anything to go by, dangerously ever after*.

Setting notes:

Folk song collectors found this to be most popular in the south of England, but it also gained a lot of favour in the eastern seaboard of the North America, possibly due to its gun-slinging content. The words I have used here are Martin Carthy's fine and succinct collection/collation. The tune is a simplified version of Carthy's, via Bert Lloyd, via an older Dorset tune. All quite simple and rolls along very pleasingly. You might notice that it's very close to the tune often used for the most prevalent Scottish version of "The Three Ravens" (Roud 5), normally known as "Twa Corbies", it also bears a lot of comparisons to an old anonymous Breton tune "Al Alarch"**.

Suggested further listening:

"The Female Highwayman", Lucy Ward, *The Liberty to Choose*

"Sovay", Bert Jansch Conundrum, *Thirteen Down*

"Sovay, The Female Highwayman", A.L. Lloyd, *First Person*

"Pretty Sylvia", Jeff Davis, *Song Links*

* Unless they are involved in a different folk song at a later date, which given the poor decision-making herein, seems quite likely.

** Again, please note, I'm being careful not to make any outlandish suggestions about what came first here. If you feel the urge to create some high drama in the folk community, you can take this information and run with it, but you might be disappointed, as I find people are mostly very nice.

ROUD 7: SOVAY

Dm C Dm
Sovay, Sovay all on a day,
Dm C Dm
She dressed herself in man's array
Dm C Am
With a sword and pistol all by her side
Dm F C Dm
To meet her true love, to meet her true love, away did ride.

Alternate chords:

Am	G	Am	
Am	G	Am	
Am	G	Em	
Am	C	G	Am

As she was riding all over the plain
She met her true love and bid him stand:
Your gold and silver, kind Sir, she said,
Or else this moment, or else this moment, your life I'll have.

And when she'd robbed him of his store
She said, Kind Sir, there is one thing more:
A golden ring which I know you have,
Deliver it, deliver it, your sweet life to save.

Oh that golden ring a token is;
My life I'll lose, the ring I'll save.
Being tender-hearted just like a dove,
She rode away, she rode away, from her true love.

Now next morning in the garden green
Just like true lovers they were seen;
He spied his watch hanging by her clothes
Which made him blush, made him blush, like any rose.

Oh what makes you blush at so silly a thing,
I thought to have had your golden ring;
'Twas I that robbed you all on the plain,
So here's your watch, here's your watch and your gold again.

Oh I did intend and it was to know
If that you were me true love or no.
So now I have a contented mind
My heart and all my heart and all my dear is thine.



Album Version: "Sovay" by Bird in the Belly

We based our interpretation of this song on the singing of Martin Carthy which was adapted by A L Lloyd. Production wise, we punctuated the song with lush romantic flute solos to [hopefully] invoke images of Sovay riding on horseback on the plains.

(Key of D - use Alt. chords with capo on 2nd fret)



ROUD 8

The Bows of London

AKA: The Two Sisters, Binnorie, Three Pretty Maids, The Wind and Rain, The Berkshire Tragedy, The Cruel Sister, Swans Swim so Bonnie O, The Swan Sings, Pastime with Good Company, Minorie, The Miller's Melody, There were Three Pretty Maidens, The Bonnie Mill-dams of Balgonie, The Miller's Daughters, Bow Your Bend to Me, Old Man in the North Country

Summary:

A folk tale that has travelled the world, and an early example of magical realist meta-fiction. A young girl is murdered by her sister, her body is recovered and the component parts made into a haunted fiddle that can only play this very song, the song that names her sister as the culprit of her demise. The bows of the title refer to the bends in the River Thames.

Setting notes:

Many versions omit the magical elements of the story, preferring to paint a simpler picture of a tragic love triangle. I was always a fan of the magical version; it's so unnecessarily gruesome. I found many of the earlier medieval settings difficult to sing and play with conviction. Some versions I really liked, especially the "Wind and Rain" group of songs, but they felt a little too Americana for this collection. One of my favourites is the one sung by Phil and Cath Tyler on their album *The Ox and The Ax*, but it requires vocal and guitar gymnastics that are outside my skill level, and therefore the scope of this collection.

A few years ago, inspired by seeing Martin and Eliza Carthy perform it with just voice and fiddle, but my main gig being supplying background music in noisy pubs, I made this arrangement. I started with the first version I ever heard: Stick in the Wheel's "Bows", and tried from there to add some contemporary flavour and a strong rhythm intended to attract the attention of enthusiastic ale-drinkers*. There are, unusually for a folk song, two verse melodies that you can switch between, to give a wider palette of emotion. (I await the knock on the door from the folk police.)

Suggested further listening:

"Bows", Stick in the Wheel, *From Here*

"Two Sisters", Julie Murphy, *Black Mountains Revisited*

"Two Sisters", Phil and Cath Tyler, *The Ox and the Ax*

"2 Sostre", Vox 11, *Takeoff*

"Två Systrar", Garmarna, *Förbundet*

* It's not always successful, I'm sorry to say.

Alternate chords:

Am	Dm
Am	E7 Dm

ROUD 8: THE BOWS OF LONDON

Em
There were two little sisters a-walking along, hey hey to the grinding Am
Am B7 Em
Two little sisters a-walking along, by the bonny bonny bows of London

The eldest pushed her sister in...
Pushed her sister into the stream...

Well she pushed her in and she watched her drown
Watched her body floating down

She floated up and she floated down
Down till she come to the miller's dam

Out and out come the millers son
Father dear here swims a swan

They laid her out on the bank to die
A fool with a fiddle come riding by

He took some strands of her long yellow hair
He made some strings from that yellow hair

He made fiddle pegs from her long fingerbones
And he made a bridge out of her nose-bone

He made a fiddle out of her breastbone
The sound would pierce the heart of a stone

But the only tune the fiddle would play, was oh the Bows of London
The only tune the fiddle would play, was the bonny bonny Bows of London

So the fool's gone away to the king's high hall
There was music and dancing and all

And he laid the fiddle all down on a stone
It played so loud it played all alone

It sang yonder sits my father the king
Yonder sits my father the king

Yonder sits my mother the queen
How she'll grieve at my burying

Yonder sits my sister Anne
It was she who drowned me in the stream



Album Version: "The Bows of London" by The Shackleton Trio

The dark imagery and obvious links to our instrumentation drew us to learn 'The Bows of London'. Our rendition borrows melodically from various versions, and we chose to condense some of the verses from the text as it appears in the Roud Index. This was a great fun song to work on together and to record live.

(Key of Bb, use capo on 3rd fret)



ROUD 9

The Cruel Mother

AKA: Greenwood Sidey, The Lady of York, There Was a Lady Dressed in Green, The Sun Shines Fair on Carlisle Wall, Down by the Greenwood Sidey O, The Rose and the Lindsey O, The Cruel Mither, Fine Flowers in the Valley, Rose o Malindie, She's Leaned Her Back, All Alone and Lonely, Old Mother Lee, The Trajedie O Twa Bairns of Newark, Three Little Children Sitting on the Sand, Babes in the Greenwood, The Rose O' Balindie, The Duke's Daughter's Cruelty, Lily of the Lowlands

Summary:

A particularly grim tale of a mother's infanticide, and the subsequent meeting with the wandering spirits, who, unmoved by her tenderness towards them, condemn her to eternity in hell. Seemingly a popular story in 17th century England, when infanticide was sadly a common concern for the authorities of the day.

Setting notes:

The story of this song contains a lot of ancient folklore - some of it in common with folk beliefs of Scandinavia, leading some to speculate that it might have been brought over to England by invading Norsemen. The earliest it can be definitively traced back to is the 17th century broadside ballad, where it had the somewhat cumbersome title (spoiler alert): "The Duke's Daughter's Cruelty: or the Wonderful Apparition of Two Infants whom she Murdered and Buried in a Forrest, for to Hide her Shame". Wherever it comes from, it's desperately bleak, even by folk song standards. But as great sadness can often inspire great art, there's a plethora of beautiful interpretations to choose from. There are a number of interesting variations in the repeated refrains; I have stuck with the one most prevalent in England: "All alone and a-lonely / Down by a greenwood sidey". For the tune I have gone back to the singing of Cecilia Costello, one of England's finest traditional singers, for inspiration. The magnificent recording she made in 1951 has a lovely spoken introduction by Cecilia that is worth seeking out.

Suggested further listening:

"The Cruel Mother", Lizzie Higgins, *O'er His Grave The Green Grass Grew*

"The Cruel Mother", A. L. Lloyd, *English and Scottish Folk Ballads*

"Cruel Mother", A Different Thread, *Some Distant Shore*

"The Lady of York", Will Hampson and Bryony Griffith, *Lady Diamond*

"Cruel Mother", Fay Hield, *Wrackline*

"The Cruel Mother", Alasdair Roberts, *No Earthly Man*

"The Cruel Mother", Jon Wilks, [*Youtube Video*]

ROUD 9: THE CRUEL MOTHER

Dm C
There was a lady that lived in York
Dm
All alone and aloney
Dm F C
She proved a child by her own father's clerk
Am Dm
Down by a greenwood sidey

She leaned her back against the oak...
She thought three times that her back would be broke...

She leaned her head against a thorn
There her three fine sons they were born

She pulled out her long penknife
And there she took away their three lives

Years went by and one summer's morn
She saw three boys, they were playing bat and ball

Oh my fine boys if you were mine
Sure I'd dress you up in silk so fine.

Oh mother dear when we were yours
You did not dress us in silk so fine.

You pulled out your long penknife
And there you took away our three lives.

Oh my fine boys what will become of me
You'll be seven long years a bird in a tree.

You'll be seven years more a tongue in a bell
And you'll be seven long years a porter in hell.

Alternate chords:

Am	G	
	Am	
Am	C	G
Em	Am	



Album Version: "The Cruel Mother" by George Sansome

For this recording, I've used Karl's Sing Yonder setting of the tune and words. It's a dark, uncomfortable song that confronts mental health difficulties and tells a powerful story. My guitar is tuned CGDGAD.

(Key of Bb, use capo on 5th fret)



ROUD 10

Lord Randall

AKA: Wee Croodlin' Doo, Henry My Son, An Tighearna Randal, Jacky My Son, Lord Donald, Buried in Kilkenny, Poisoned Peas, John Riley, King Henry, Lord Rendal, Green and Yeller, Daniel My Son, Billy My Billy, John Randolph, Johnny Reeler, Jo Reynard My Son, Ranzel My Son, Oh Mak' My Bed Easy, What Did You Have For Your Supper, Tyranty

Summary:

A popular border ballad where a young man discovers he has been fatally poisoned by his sweetheart, for some unknown reason. The sad tale is told in the form of the man's final conversation with his mother.

Setting notes:

When Bob Dylan wrote "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" he started with the mother's appeal as to her son's prior whereabouts, and indeed finished with its influence there too. Still, it's another aspect of how far the influence of this simple idea has travelled. One can only wonder how it ended up in Harry Belafonte's repertoire, for example. For this setting I stayed away from the upbeat, some might say downright cheerful, Irish and American "Make my bed / I've a pain in me head" takes, and took inspiration from the more melancholy versions. Even among these, there's quite a range of lyrical and melodic variation. I decided to start with the directness of Peter Bellamy (which was apparently heavily influenced by Ewan MacColl's singing), and to try and keep it manageably short, I've taken out some of the repetition, and I fain* modernised the language found in some of the older settings.

Suggested further listening:

"Buried in Kilkenny", Mary Kilkenny, *It Fell on a Day, A Bonny Summer Day*

"Henry My Son", Lankum, *Cold Old Fire*

"Lord Randall", Bob and Evelyne Beers, *Walkie in the Parlor*

"Lord Randall", Buffy Sainte-Marie, *Fire Fleet and Candlelight*

"Green and Yeller", Wounded John Scott Cree, Live 1978, [Youtube Video]

"Lord Randall", Frank Proffitt, *Frank Proffitt of Reese, NC*.

"Henry My Son", Narthen, *Narthen*

"An Tighearna Randal (Lord Randal)", Joe Heaney, *Irish Traditional Songs in Gaelic & English*.

* An in-joke for traditional folk fans (and some non-traditional ones). Please refer to almost any other version of Lord Randall to see this archaic term used in a more fitting context.

ROUD 10: LORD RANDALL

Am C
Oh where have you been, Lord Randall, my son?
G F
Oh where have you been, my bonny young man?
Am G
I've been to the wild wood, mother, make my bed soon,
E Am
I'm sick to my heart, and I need to lie down

What happened in the wild wood, Lord Randall, my son?
What happened in the wild wood, my bonny young man?
Oh I dined with my true love, mother, make my bed soon,
I'm sick to my heart, and I need to lie down.

What had you for your supper, Lord Randall, my son?
What had you for your supper, my bonny young man?
I had eels boiled in broth, mother, make my bed soon,
I'm sick to my heart, and I need to lie down.

Oh I fear that you are poisoned, Lord Randall, my son,
I fear that you are poisoned, my bonny young man.
Oh yes, I am poisoned, mother, make my bed soon,
I'm sick to my heart, and I need to lie down.

What'll you leave your mother, Lord Randall, my son?
What'll you leave your mother, my bonny young man?
My gold and my silver, mother make my bed soon,
I'm sick to my heart, and I need to lie down.

What'll you leave your true love, Lord Randall, my son?
What'll you leave your true love, my bonny young man?
A rope for to hang her, mother make my bed soon,
I'm sick to my heart, and I need to lie down.

Alternate chords:

Em	G
D	C
Em	D
B	Em



Album Version: "Lord Randall" by Bryony Griffith

I already have a few versions of this in my repertoire, so why not add another! For this recording, I have pretty much stuck to the melody used here. As I've got older and become a mother myself, I definitely feel differently about some of the songs I've been singing for years. I guess it's empathy rather than sympathy. (not that my son has been poisoned by his girlfriend...) but recording this on my honky tonk piano at home made me feel quite emotional!

[A longer sleevenote can be found on the track's [Bandcamp page](#).]

(Key of Bb - Alt chords, capo 3)



More info and the audio files that accompany this book can be found at

singyonder.co.uk*

Some things that helped me and/or you might enjoy:

Books:

- "Folk Song in England" - Steve Roud
- "The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs" - R. Vaughan Williams & A.L. Lloyd (ed)
- "Eighty English Folk Songs" - Cecil J. Sharp & Maud Karpeles
- "Two Bold Fishermen and the English Folk Revival" - Bruce Lindsay
- "Bert: The Life and Times of A L Lloyd" - Dave Arthur
- "A Song for Every Season" - Bob Copper
- "All in the Downs" - Shirley Collins
- "Desire, Drink and Death in English Folk and Vernacular Song" - Vic Gammon
- "The New Penguin Book of English Folk Songs" - Steve Roud & Julia Bishop (ed)
- "Folk Revival" - Fred Woods
- "A Book of British Ballads" - Roy Palmer (ed)
- "Folk Songs of England, Ireland, Scotland & Wales" - William Cole (ed)
- "Popular Music of the Olden Time", William Chappell

Websites:

- Mainly Norfolk - www.mainlynorfolk.info
- Vaughan Williams Memorial Library - vwml.org
- Tradfolk - Tradfolk.co
- The Folk Forecast - thefolkforecast.substack.com
- Broadside Ballads Online - ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk
- Journal of the Folk Song Society - jstor.org
- Musical Tradition - www.mustrad.org.uk
- Bandcamp - bandcamp.com

Audio, Podcasts, etc:**

- Fire Draw Near podcast
- The Old Songs Podcast
- Old Tunes Fresh Takes podcast
- Jon Boden, A Folk Song a Day
- Every Folk Song podcast

A more complete list of references can be found at singyonder.co.uk



Track 2 on the album was a crowdsourced effort. A big thank you to everyone who contributed versions of The Unfortunate Lass - you can hear these on our Bandcamp page. Thanks to:

John Baker - Broadoak - Tom Gregory - Liz Hassack - Tom Hughes
Joshua Kirch - Helen Lindley - Tina McKeivitt - Gitika Partington
Marko Pauli - Sallows - Triple Threat

* If you are from the future and found a rare hard copy version at the back of a dusty loft, and none of the links or email addresses work, it's possible I have either died, or otherwise departed from the internet to live in a log cabin somewhere. Either way, don't try and find me, go and learn some folk songs instead.

** Please also wherever possible follow/support your favourite folk artists on social media and buy their stuff. The economics of folk music are such that as fans we have to do all we can to keep it alive.

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even if you know every song in Roud’s index, these books are worth having for Karl’s incisive commentary on the songs and sources.”

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