

Singing the Child Ballads

Rosaleen Gregory



Rosaleen in Scotland, c. 1966

A full complement of four Child ballads this time, preceded by the two that were squeezed out of the last issue for reasons of space. First a thank-you to Robert Rodriguez and Fiona Gregory for their kind words and interesting comments in the last issue. I hope some people are enjoying this feature, though I don't seem to have succeeded in attracting any 'alternative versions'. Probably everyone is too busy to send them—just remember they are always welcome, and my request now covers all Child ballads up to and including Child # 84 "Bonny Barbara Allan". I don't see why we shouldn't include foreign language versions, too. That should open things up a bit. So here are this issue's six ballads (actually seven, since there are two variants of Child # 81). I sing the first two *a cappella*, as I do the first version of "Little Musgrave", but I use guitar accompaniment with the others.

Fair Margaret and Sweet William, # 74

An early broadside version collected by William Chappell, to which Dave introduced me. It has a rather peculiar tune that winds its way down an octave over the course of each couplet. Feeling that this version really is a rather moderate jewel, I have altered the odd word here and there (sometimes to make the

lines scan better), and omitted a couple of verses which seemed particularly flat.

The Lass of Roch Royal, # 76

I learned the tune of my version from the singing of Maddy Prior on the 1976 LP *Silly Sisters*, where it is called "The Lass of Loch Royal". Also known as "Lord Greg(g)ory", this is a lovely and well-loved ballad of which there are many versions 'out there'. My text is a composite from a variety of sources.

The Unquiet Grave, # 78

A very well-known love lament. I found this version, with suitable guitar chords, under its alternative title "Cold Blows the Wind", in Dan Milner and Paul Kaplan's *Songs of England, Ireland and Scotland (A Bonnie Bunch of Roses)*, Oak Publications, 1983. It actually comes from Charlotte Burne's *Shropshire Folk-Lore*, and was noted by Burne and James Smart from the singing of Jane Butler in the village of Edgmond, Shropshire, in 1879. See Dave's *Victorian Songhunters*, pp. 376-379.

The Wife of Usher's Well, # 79

An American version from the *Joan Baez Songbook*, Ryerson Music Publishers Inc., 1964, where it is called "Lady Gay". Sung accompanied.

Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard, # 81

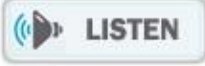
Two versions of this very popular and dramatic ballad: "Little Musgrave", from Stephen Sedley's *The Seeds of Love* (Essex Music Limited in association with the EFDSS, 1967), and Joan Baez's "Matty Groves" in her 1964 *Songbook*. The first sung *a cappella*, the second with guitar. Stephen Sedley collated his text from Child and an American version found by Cecil Sharp and his tune from versions printed from oral tradition by William Chappell and Motherwell. Joan Baez's version is apparently adapted from that collected by John Jacob Niles.

Bonny Barbara Allan, # 84

For this best known of all British ballads I went back to a quite attractive version with guitar accompaniment that I found in my oldest songbook, the *Burl Ives Songbook*, published by Ballantine Books in 1953. I've sung this ballad since 1959, when I first acquired the songbook.

Fair Margaret and Sweet William

An on



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_3/Fair_Margaret_and_Sweet_William.mp3

Voice



As _ it fell out _ up - on _ a day, two lov - ers they sat on _ a _ hill. They



sat _ to - geth - er that long sum - mer's day _ And could _ not talk their _ fill.

As it fell out upon a day, two lovers they sat on a hill,
They sat together a long summer's day, and could not talk their fill.

“I see no harm by you, Margaret, and you see none by me;
Before to-morrow at eight o'clock a rich wedding you shall see.”

Fair Margaret sat in her bower-window, a combing of her hair;
There she espied sweet William and his bride, as they were riding near.

Down she laid her ivory comb, and up she bound her hair;
She went away fast out of the bower, but never more came she there.

When day was gone and night was come, and all men fast asleep,
Then came the spirit of fair Margaret and stood at Williams bed feet.

“God give you joy, you true lovers, in bride-bed fast asleep;
Look, I am going to my grass-green grave, and I in my winding sheet.”

When day was come, and night was gone, and all men wak'd from sleep,
Sweet William to his lady said, “My dear, I've cause to weep.

“I dream'd a dream, my dear lady, such dreams are never good;
I dream'd my bower was full of red wine, and my bride-bed full of blood.”

“Such dreams, such dreams, my dear husband, they never do prove good;
To dream thy bower was full of wine, and thy bride-bed full of blood.”

He called [up] his merry men all, by one, by two, and by three,
Saying, “I'll away to fair Margaret's bower, by the leave of my lady.”

And when he came to fair Margaret's bower, he knocked at the ring;
So ready were her seven brothers to let sweet William in.

Then he turn'd up the covering-sheet: “Pray let me see the dead;
Methinks she looks both pale and wan, she has lost her cherry red.

“I will do more for thee, Margaret, than any of thy kin;
For I will kiss thy pale wan lips, though a smile I cannot win.”

With that bespoke the seven brothers, making most piteous moan,
“You may go kiss your jolly brown bride, and let our sister alone.”

“If I do kiss my jolly brown bride, I do but what is right;
For I made no vow to your sister dear, by day, nor yet by night.”

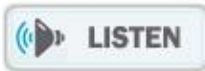
Fair Margaret died to-day, to-day, sweet William died the morrow;
Fair Margaret died for pure true love, sweet William he died for sorrow.

Margaret was buried in the lower chancel, and William in the higher;
Out of her breast there sprang a rose, and out of his a briar.

They grew as high as the top of the church, till they could grow no higher;
And there they grew in a true lovers knot, which made all the people admire.

Lass of Loch Royan (Lord Gregory)

Anon



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_3/Lass_of_Rochroyal.mp3

Voice

I am a king's daughter come straight from Cappoquin,
In search of Lord Gregory, pray God I find him.
The rain beats on my yellow hair, the dew wets my skin, the babe is
cold in my arms, Lord Gregory let me in.

“I am a king’s daughter, come straight from Cappelquin,
In search of Lord Gregory, pray God I find him.
The rain beats on my yellow locks and the dew wets my skin,
The babe is cold in my arms, Lord Gregory let me in.”

“Lord Gregory he’s not here and henceforth can’t be seen,
For he’s gone to bonny Scotland to bring home his new queen.
So leave now these windows and likewise this hall,
For it’s deep in the ocean you should hide your downfall.”

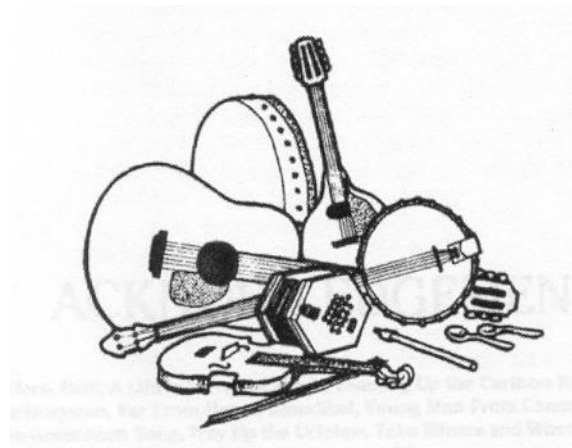
“But who will shoe my babe’s little feet, who’ll put gloves on her hand,
Who will tie my babe’s middle with a long linen band?
Who will comb my babe’s yellow locks with an ivory comb,
Who will be my babe’s father till Lord Gregory comes home?”

“Do you recall, darling Gregory, that night in Cappelquin,
When we both changed pocket-handkerchieves, and me ‘gainst my will?
For yours was pure linen, love, and mine but coarse cloth;
For yours cost a guinea, love, and mine but one groat.

“Do you remember, love Gregory, that night in Cappelquin,
When we changed rings on our fingers, and I ‘gainst my will?
For yours was pure silver, love, and mine was but tin,
Yours cost a guinea, love, and mine but one cent.”

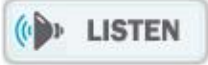
“Now my curse on you, mother, my curse being so,
Sure I dreamed the girl I love came a-knocking at my door.”
“Lie down, my foolish son, lie down and sleep long,
For it’s long ago that weary girl lies drowning in the sea.”

“Then saddle me the black horse, the brown or the bay,
Come saddle me the best horse in my stable today.
And I’ll range o’er the mountains, over valleys so wide,
Till I find the girl I love, and I’ll lay by her side.



The Unquiet Grave (Cold Blows the Wind)

Anon



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_3/Unquiet_Grave.mp3

Voice

Cold blows the wind o'er my true love, Cold blow the drops of rain,
I never had but one true love, And in Cam-ville he was slain. I'll
do as much for my true love As an - y young girl may, I'll sit and weep down
by his grave For twelve months and one day.

The musical score is written on a single treble clef staff in G major and 6/8 time. It consists of four lines of music. The first line begins with a whole rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The second line begins with a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The third line begins with a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The fourth line begins with a quarter note C4, a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note F4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note D4, and a quarter note C4. The score ends with a double bar line.

“Cold blows the wind o'er my true love, cold blow the drops of rain,
I never had but one true love, and in Camville he was slain.
I'll do as much for my true love as any young girl may,
I'll sit and weep down by his grave for twelve months and one day.”

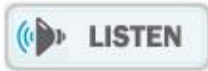
But when twelve months were come and gone this young man he arose,
“What makes you weep down by my grave? I can't take my repose.”
“One kiss, one kiss, of your lily-white lips, one kiss is all I crave,
One kiss, one kiss, of your lily-white lips, and return back to your grave!”

“My lips they are as cold as my clay, my breath is heavy and strong,
If thou wast to kiss my lily-white lips, thy days would not be long!”
“O, don't you remember the garden-grove where we was used to walk?
Pluck the finest flower of them all, 'twill wither to a stalk!”

“Go fetch me a nut from a dungeon deep, and water from a stone,
And white milk from a maiden's breast [that babe bare never none].”
“Go dig me a grave both long, wide, and deep, as quickly as you may,
I will lie down in it and take one sleep, for twelve months and one day.
I will lie down in it and take one sleep, for twelve months and one day!”

The Wife of Usher's Well (Lady Gay)

An on



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_3/Wife_of_Ushers_Well.mp3

Voice

There was a La - - - dy and a La - - - dy Gay, _____ Of - -

child-ren - - she - - had three. _____ She sent them a - way _____ to the north count -

tree, To learn their gram - mar - ree. _____

There was a lady, and a lady gay; of children she had three.
She sent them away to the North Countree to learn their grammaree.

They'd not been gone but a very short time, scarce three weeks and a day,
When death, cruel death, came hastening along and stole those babes away.

“There is a King in Heaven,” she cried, “A King of high degree;
Send back, send back my three little babes, this night send them back to me.”

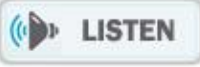
She made a bed in the uppermost room, on it she put a sheet,
And over the top a golden spread, that they much better might sleep.

She set a table of fine linen, on it she placed bread and wine;
“Come eat, come drink, my three little babes, come eat, come drink of mine”.

“We want none of your bread, mother, neither do we want your wine,
For yonder stands our Saviour dear, to Him we must resign.

“Green grass is over our heads, mother, cold clay is over our feet,
And every tear you shed for us, it wets our winding-sheet.”

Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_3/Little_Musgrave_and_Lady_Barnard.mp3

An on

Voice

As it fell on one hol - y day As man - y be in the
year, Little Mus - grave would to the church and pray, And see the fair - ladies
there.

As it fell on one holy day as many be in the year,
Little Musgrave would to the church and pray, and see the fair ladies there.

Some came down in red velvet, and some came down in pall,
And then came down my lady Barnard, the fairest among them all.

She cast a look on Little Musgrave, as bright as the summer's sun;
And then bethought him Little Musgrave, "This lady's love I have won."

"Good day, good day, you handsome youth; God make you safe and free;
What would you give this day, Musgrave, for a night in bower with me?"

"I dare not for my lands, lady, I dare not for my life,
For the ring on your white finger shows you are Lord Barnard's wife."

"Lord Barnard's to the hunting gone, and I hope he'll ne'er return,
And you shall sleep into his bed, and keep his lady warm.

"You nothing have to fear, Musgrave, you nothing have to fear;
I'll set my page without the gate, to watch till morning clear."

But woe be to the wee foot-page, and an ill death may he die!
For he's away to the green, green wood, as fast as he can flee.

And when he came to the wan water, he slacked his bow and swam,
And when he came to growing grass, set down his feet and ran.

And when he to the green wood came, 'twas dark as dark could be;
And he found his master and his men asleep beneath a tree.

“Rise up, rise up, master”, he said, “Rise up and speak to me!
Your wife’s in bed with Little Musgrave; rise up right speedily.”

“If this be true you tell to me, it’s gold shall be your fee;
But if it be false you tell to me, I’ll hang you on a tree.

“Go saddle me the black,” he cried, “Go saddle me the grey,
Nor wind no horns,” quoth he, “on your life, lest our coming it should betray.”

There was a man in Lord Barnard’s train had a love to Little Musgrave;
He blew his horn both loud and high – Away, Musgrave, away!

“Methinks I hear the throstle cock, methinks I hear the jay;
Methinks I hear Lord Barnard’s horn, Away, Musgrave, away!”

“Lie still, lie still, thou Little Musgrave, and huddle me from the cold;
‘Tis nothing but a shepherd’s boy driving his flock to fold.

“Is not thy hawk upon the perch, thy steed eats oats and hay,
And thou, a gay lady in thy arms, and yet thou wouldst away!”

He turned him right and round about, and he fell fast asleep;
And when he woke, Lord Barnard’s men were standing at his feet.

“How do you like my bed, Musgrave, and how like you my sheets,
And how like you my fair lady, who lies in your arms and sleeps?”

“It’s very well I like your bed, and it’s well I like your sheets,
But foul may fall your lady fair, lies in my arms and sleeps.”

“Get up, get up, young man,” he said, “Get up as swift as you can;
It never shall be said in my country that I slew a naked man.

“I have two swords in one scabbard, full dear they cost my purse;
And thou shalt have the best of them, and I will have the worst.”

Slowly, slowly rose he up, and slowly put he on,
And slowly down the stairs he goes, and thinking to be slain.

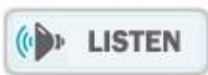
And the first stroke that Little Musgrave got, it was both deep and sore,
And down he fell at Barnard’s feet, and word spoke never more.

“O how do you like his cheeks, lady? and how do you like his chin?
Or how do you like his fair body, that there’s no life within?”

“O well I like his cheeks,” she said, “and well I like his chin,
And better I like his fair body than all your kith and kin.”

He’s taken out a long, long brand, and stripped it through the straw,
And through and through his lady’s sides he’s made that cold steel go.

Matty Groves



LISTEN

www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_3/Matty_Groves.mp3

An on

Voice

Hi-ho, hi-ho, ho-li-day, _____ the first one of the year, Little Mat -
ty Groves to church did go, _____ some ho-ly words to hear, _____ some hol-y words _____ to
hear. _____

Hi ho, hi ho, holiday, the first one of the year;
Little Matty Groves to church did go, some holy words to hear, some holy words to hear.

He spied three ladies dressed in black, as they came into view;
Lord Arlen's wife was gaily clad, a flower among the few, a flower among the few.

She tripped up to Matty Groves, her eyes so low cast down,
Saying, "Pray, oh, pray come with me stay, as you pass through the town, as you pass through the town."

"I cannot go, I dare not go, I fear 'twould cost my life,
For I see by the little ring you wear, you are Lord Arlen's wife, you're the great Lord Arlen's wife."

"This may be false, this may be true, I can't deny it all;
But Arlen's gone to consecrate King Henry at Whitehall, King Henry at Whitehall.

"Oh pray, oh pray come with me stay; I'll hide thee out of sight,
I'll serve thee there beyond compare, and sleep with you the night, and sleep with you the night."

Her little page did listen well to all that they did say,
And ere the sun could rise again, he quickly sped away, he quickly sped away.

And he did run the King's highway, he swam across the tide,
He never stopped until he came unto Lord Arlen's side, to the great Lord Arlen's side.

"What news, what news, my bully boy, what news brings you to me?
My castle burned, my tenants robbed, my lady with baby, my lady with baby?"

"No harm has come your house and land," the little page did say,
"But Matty Groves is bedded up with your fair lady gay, with your fair lady gay."

Lord Arlen called his merry men, he bade them with him go,
He bade them ne'er a word to speak, and ne'er a horn to blow, and ne'er a horn to blow.

But among Lord Arlen's merry men was one who wished no ill,
And the bravest lad in all that crew blew his horn so loud and shrill, blew his horn so loud and shrill.

"What's this, what's this," cried Matty Groves, "What's this that I do hear?
It must be Lord Arlen's merry men, the ones that I do fear, the ones that I do fear."

"Lie down, lie down, little Matty Groves, and keep my back from cold;
It's only Lord Arlen's merry men a-callin' the sheep to fold, a-callin' the sheep to fold."

Little Matty Groves he did lie down, he took a nap asleep,
And when he woke, Lord Arlen was a-standing at his feet, a-standing at his feet.

"How now, how now, my bully boy, say, how do you like my sheets?
And how do you like my fair young bride, who lies in your arms asleep, who lies in your arms asleep?"

"It's very well I like your bed, and it's fine I like your sheets,
But it's best I like your fair young bride, who lies in my arms asleep, who lies in my arms asleep."

"Rise up, rise up, little Matty Groves, as fast as e'er you can;
In England it shall ne'er be said I slew a naked man, I slew a naked man."

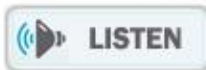
And the first stroke little Matty struck, he hurt Lord Arlen sore;
But the next stroke Lord Arlen struck, little Matty struck no more, little Matty struck no more.

"Rise up, rise up, my gay young bride, draw on your pretty clothes,
Now tell me, do you like me best, or like you Matty Groves, the dying Matty Groves?"

She picked up Matty's dying head, she kissed him cheek and chin,
Said, "It's Matty Groves I'd rather have than Arlen and all his kin, than Arlen and all his kin.

"Ah, woe is me and woe is thee; why stayed you not your hand?
For you have killed the fairest lad in all of England, in all of England."

Barbara Allen



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue40_3/Bonny_Barbara_Allan.mp3

Anon

Voice

In Scarlet town where I was born, there was a fair maid

dwelling, made ev'ry youth cry well-a-day, and her name was Bar-b'ry Al-len.

In Scarlet town where I was born, there was a fair maid dwellin',
Made every youth cry "Well-a-day!", and her name was Barb'ry Allen.

'Twas in the merry, merry month of May, when green buds they were swellin',
Sweet William on his deathbed lay for the love of Barb'ry Allen.

He sent his servant to the town, to the place where she was a-dwellin',
Cried, "Master bids you come to him, if your name be Barb'ry Allen."

Then slowly, slowly she got up, and slowly she went nigh him,
And when she pulled the curtains back, said, "Young man, I think you're dyin'."

"Oh, yes, I'm sick, I'm very, very sick, and I never will be better,
Until I have the love of one, the love of Barb'ry Allen."

"Oh, ken ye not in yonder town, in the place where you were dwellin',
You gave a toast to the ladies all, but you slighted Barb'ry Allen."

"Oh yes, I ken, I ken it well, in the place where I was dwellin',
I gave a toast to the ladies all, but my love to Barb'ry Allen."

Then lightly tripped she down the stairs; he trembled like an aspen;
"Tis vain, 'tis vain, my dear young man, to hone for Barb'ry Allen."

She walked out in the green, green fields; she heard his death bells knellin',
And every stroke they seemed to say, "Hard-hearted Barb'ry Allen."

Her eyes looked east, her eyes looked west, she saw his pale corpse comin',
Cried, "Bearers, bearers, put him down, that I may look upon him."

The more she looked, the more she grieved, until she burst out cryin',
"Oh bearers, bearers, take him off, for I am now a-dyin'!"

"Oh, father, oh, father, go dig my grave, go dig it deep and narrow,
Sweet William died for me today; I'll die for him tomorrow."

They buried her in the old churchyard; Sweet William's grave was nigh her,
And from his heart grew a red, red rose, and from her heart a brier.

They grew and they grew o'er the old church wall, till they couldn't grow no higher,
Until they tied a true lover's knot, the red rose and the brier.

