

# In My Tradition: Ballads and Folk Lyrics

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Here are four more songs, all sung unaccompanied. Two at least of them have quite a lot of ornamentation – they’re what my daughters used to call “waily songs”. I have tried to indicate how I do this, while bearing in mind that even Percy Grainger had trouble trying to write down every trill his singers did. Some people feel one should write in the bare melody (itself easier said than done!) with the comment that “there is ornamentation”, especially since no two singers may ornament quite the same, or even be consistent from verse to verse, let alone from one performance to another. I usually stick with a particular pattern which feels ‘right’ and then don’t vary it much in subsequent performances, but I am still reminded of the little rhyme I learned as a child:

The centipede was happy, quite,  
Until the toad, in fun,  
Said, “Pray, which leg goes after which?”  
Which wrought his mind to such a pitch  
He lay distracted in a ditch,  
Considering how to run.

## Lowlands Away

I learned my version from the singing of English folksinger Anne Briggs, first released as an EP with three other songs as *The Hazards of Love* on Topic Records in 1963. I’ll pay homage to Anne as I always do; I don’t think anyone has ever surpassed her treatment of traditional songs. All the same, over the years I’ve changed the melody line to a small degree – it is a song that one ‘lets rip’ on, going where the spirit takes you – while the words I’ve changed more drastically, arriving at a version which derives from several different sources including my own imagination. So there’s a big chunk of ‘singers’ license’ in this one.

## The Bonnie Bunch of Roses

I took down my version of this rousing tribute to Napoleon from the singing of Irish *sean nós* performer

Joe Heaney, who sang it at a Folk Festival held at Keele University while I was there in the 1960s. I managed to get the words afterwards, but the tune I jotted down as he sang, without bar lines or key signature, but with all its ornamentations pretty well intact. That said, I’ve changed the ending a little from Joe’s singing: it’s almost impossible to cast a wandering tune like this in stone.

## I Will Put My Ship in Order

Learned from Stephen Sedley’s *The Seeds of Love*, published by Essex Music in association with the English Folk Dance and Song Society in 1967. One of many beautiful ‘night visiting’ songs, some of its lines crop up elsewhere; for example, the last two verses appear in a version of “The Grey Cock” included in the Sam Henry Collection under the title “The Bonny Bushes Bright”. Some say the lover who visits here is actually a ghost, though I don’t think that is clearly made out. English folksinger Shirley Collins adapted the lovely tune from a version provided by song collectors Bruce and Stokoe in *Northumbrian Minstrelsy: A Collection of the Ballads, Melodies, and Small-Pipe Tunes of Northumbria* (1882).

## Lovely on the Water

This one is more straightforward. I’ve known it many years and cannot remember where I first learned it, but almost certainly in the late 1950s or early 1960s. It was the gorgeous melody rather than the rather prosaic words which first attracted me. It has apparently been collected only once from oral tradition, by Ralph Vaughan Williams, who took it down from the singing of a Mr. Hilton of SouthWalsham, Norfolk. Other than that, it’s clearly a broadside ballad, similar to one titled “Henry and Nancy, or the Lovers’ Separation” mentioned by Roy Palmer in his 1983 edition of Vaughan Williams’ collected *Folk Songs* (J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.)

# Lowlands Away

Anon

Voice

I dreamed a dream \_\_\_\_\_ the other \_\_\_\_\_ night, Low - lands, lowlands a -

way, \_\_\_\_\_ my love, I dreamed a dream the oth - er night, Low - lands, lowlands

a - way... \_\_\_\_\_

I dreamed a dream the other night,  
Lowlands, lowlands away, my love,  
I dreamed a dream the other night,  
Lowlands, lowlands away.

I dreamed my dead love came to me,  
Lowlands, lowlands away, my love,  
Across the cold and stormy sea,  
Lowlands, lowlands away.

“My grave is on the salt sea strand,  
Lowlands, lowlands away, my love,

Between the high seas and the land,  
Lowlands, lowlands away.

“The seabirds pick my body o’er,  
Lowlands, lowlands away, my love,  
And round my head the wild winds roar,  
Lowlands, lowlands away.”

Oh my love lies drowned in the windy lowlands,  
Lowlands, lowlands away, my love,  
My love is gone and won’t return,  
Lowlands, lowlands away

# The Bonnie Bunch of Roses-O

Anon

Voice

The image shows a musical score for a voice part. It consists of five staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The melody is written on a treble clef. There are three triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above the notes) on the first, second, and fourth staves. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words underlined. The lyrics are: "By the marg-in of the oc-e-an, One pleasant ev'ning in the month of June, The feath-ered warb-ling black-bird, His song so sweetly sung in tune. It was there I spied a fe-male, who was in great grief and woe, Con-vers-ing with young Bon-a-part-e Con-cern-ing the bon-ny bunch of ro-ses O."

By the marg-in of the oc-e-an, One pleasant ev'ning in the -  
 month of June, The feath-ered warb-ling black - bird, His song so sweetly sung in  
 tune. It was there I spied a fe - - - male, who was in great grief and woe, Con  
 vers - ing with young Bon - a - part - e Con - cern - ing the bon - ny bunch of  
 ro - - - ses O.

By the margin of the ocean  
 One pleasant evening in the month of June,  
 The feathered, warbling blackbird  
 His song so sweetly sung in tune.  
 It was there I spied a female,  
 Who was in great grief and woe,  
 Conversing with young Bonaparte  
 Concerning the Bonnie Bunch of Roses O.

It was then spoke young Napoleon,  
 And he took his mother's hand;  
 "O mother dear, be patient,  
 And I soon will take command.  
 For I'll raise a terrible army  
 And through tremendous dangers go;  
 And in spite of all the universe  
 I will conquer the Bonnie Bunch of Roses O.

"When first you saw great Bonaparte  
 You fell upon your bended knee  
 And asked your father's life of him,  
 He granted it most manfully;  
 It was then he took an army  
 And over the frozen Alps did go;  
 He said, 'I'll conquer Moscow  
 And come back for the Bonnie Bunch of Roses O'.

"He took three hundred thousand men  
 And kings likewise to join his throng;  
 He was so well provided for,  
 Enough to sweep the world along;  
 But when he came to Moscow,  
 All overpowered by driving snow,  
 All Moscow was a-blazing,  
 And he lost the Bonnie Bunch of Roses O."

“Now, son, ne’er speak so venturesome,  
 For England is the heart of oak,  
 And England, Ireland, Scotland,  
 Their unity has ne’er been broke;  
 And so, son, look at your father,  
 In St. Helena his body lies low,  
 And you will soon follow after,  
 So beware of the Bonnie Bunch of Roses O.”

“O, mother, adieu for ever,  
 Now I’m on my dying bed;  
 Had I lived I might have been clever,  
 But now I bow my youthful head;  
 But although our bones do moulder  
 And weeping willows o’er us grow,  
 The deeds of brave Napoleon  
 Will be sung by the Bonnie Bunch of Roses O.”

## I Will Put My Ship In Order

Anon

Voice

O I will put my \_\_\_ ship in or - der, \_\_\_ And I will set \_\_\_  
 \_\_\_ her \_\_\_ to the sea, \_\_\_ And I will sail to \_\_\_ yon-der har - bour \_\_\_ To  
 see if my love minds on me.

I will put my ship in order  
 And I will set her to the sea,  
 And I will sail to yonder harbour  
 To see if my love minds on me.

I drew my ship into the harbour,  
 I drew her up where my true love lay,  
 I drew her close up to the window  
 To listen what my love did say.

“O who is that at my bower window  
 That raps so loudly and would be in?”  
 “It is your true love that loves you dearly,  
 So rise, dear love, and let him in.”

Then slowly, slowly rose she up,  
 And slowly, slowly came she down,  
 But before she had the door unlocked  
 Her true love had both come and gone.

“Come back, come back, my only true love,  
 Come back, come back, come to my side,  
 I never grieved you nor yet deceived you,  
 And I will surely be your bride.”

The fish shall fly, the seas run dry, love,  
 The rocks shall melt all with the sun,  
 The labouring men shall forget their labour  
 Before that I return again.

# Lovely on the Water

Anon

Voice

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Lovely on the Water'. It consists of two staves of music in 3/4 time. The first staff is labeled 'Voice' and contains the melody with lyrics underneath. The second staff is a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'As I walked out one morning in the springtime of the year, I overheard a sailor boy, likewise a lady fair.' There are red lines under the lyrics to indicate where they align with the notes. A blue '3' above a triplet of notes in the first staff indicates a triplet. The piano part consists of a simple accompaniment of eighth and sixteenth notes.

As I walked out one morning in the springtime of the year, I  
overheard a sailor boy, likewise a lady fair.

As I walked out one morning in the spring-time of the year,  
I overheard a sailor boy, likewise a lady fair,  
They sang a song together, made the valleys for to ring,  
While the birds on the spray in the meadows gay proclaimed that lovely spring.

Said Willie unto Nancy, "Oh, we soon must sail away  
Where it's lovely on the water to hear the music play,  
For our Queen she do want seamen, so I will not stay on shore,  
I will brave the wars for my country where the blinding cannons roar."

Poor Nancy fell and fainted, but soon he brought her to,  
And it's there they kissed, lay down to rest, all upon the shining dew.  
"Come change your ring with me, love, for we may meet once more,  
For there's one alone that will guard you, where the blinding cannons roar."

"Four pounds it is our bounty, and that must do for me,  
For to help my aged parents while I am on the sea."  
But Tower Hill is crowded with mothers weeping sore,  
For their sons are gone to face the foe where the blinding cannons roar.