

# Four Songs for the Environment

I wrote these four songs, as well as a few others, a few years ago, during a spell of depression in the wake of the death of my mother. They are militantly political songs, and they reflect a period in my life when I ran for the Green Party as a candidate in a federal election. I had almost forgotten them, but when I rediscovered them recently I was surprised to find they had more merit than I had remembered. Certainly their message is still apposite and, unfortunately, needed more than ever today. Most are self-explanatory, but I should own up to borrowing the metaphor for the environment in "Fair Sister" from none other than Jim Morrison of the Doors. In "Steady State" there is a reference to an incident in the Peace River country of Alberta in which the RCMP, desperate to find evidence on which to convict Wiebo Ludwig of eco-terrorism, tried to manu-

facture it by exploding a bomb at the site of an oil well.

"Cheviot Dawn" employs a traditional melody, that usually associated with "Dark-Eyed Sailor," and I dedicate the song to my daughter Karina, who inspired it. In 1997, at the age of 21, she organized a four-day protest march from Edmonton to Jasper against the proposed Cheviot opencast coal mine on the border of Jasper National Park. The environmentalists' protests delayed but eventually failed to prevent the mine (this is Alberta, eh?) but the song captures the debate between the opposing forces at the time of the Environmental Impact Assessment hearing, which, incidentally, proved to be an utter sham. Literary critics may detect allusions not only to the Book of Revelation but also Villon and Thoreau.

*David Gregory*

## Fair Sister

David Gregory

Voice

Out on the sa-van-ah herds of hung-ry cat-tle graze, A  
new road comes snak-ing through the Am-a-zon-ian glades; Smoke fills the air, the  
dir-ty riv-er hard-ly flows, But no-one real-ly knows where the paint-ted but-ter-fly  
goes. What's that a-com-in? Fair sis-ter gon-na bleed. Why's it a-com in?  
Law-dy, man, it's greed.

Out on the savannah herds of hungry cattle graze,  
 A new road comes snaking through the Amazonian glades,  
 Smoke fills the air, the dirty river hardly flows,  
 But no one really knows where the painted butterfly goes.

*Chorus:* What's that a-comin'? Fair sister gonna bleed.  
 Why's it a-comin? Lawdy, man, it's greed.

A mariner comes whistling, he's playing on an ancient tune,  
 Our fair sister's tired of singing alone to the moon,  
 Will you listen to their music? There's maybe just a little time,  
 Or will you leave them dying in the entrance to the new  
 gold mine?

*Chorus.*

And Alice, poor Alice, she just fell down that prospect hole,  
 Suck in some more smog, boys, it's manna for your pocket  
 (not your soul),

It's late, yeah, it's late, the white rabbit's nowhere near,  
 Too little up there, and much too much way down here.  
*Chorus.*

The Exxon Valdes, she's smashed up on the rocks again,  
 Don't eat the fish, try to clean the seagull's wings.  
 We shout out the slogans, again the banners are unfurled;  
 It's a cycle of samsara, no break through to a different world.  
*Chorus.*

And don't you ever wonder why the hell you just got sick?  
 Well, your death is nothing but a W.H.O. statistic.  
 Why don't they understand by now, Jesus, why don't they  
 care?

The bottom line here, it's the bottom line everywhere.  
*Chorus.*

## Cheviot Dawn

David Gregory

Voice

As I strolled out one morn - ing fair, In Jasp - er Park  
 take the air, I found four horse - men bar - red my way... So I  
 stopped to list - en, so I stop ped to list - en, to hear what they might say.

As I strolled out one morning fair,  
 In Jasper Park to take the air,  
 I found four horsemen barred my way,  
 So I stopped to listen,  
 So I stopped to listen,  
 To hear what they might say.

The first astride a stallion white,  
 Her bow was strung, her eyes flashed bright,  
 She said: "It's time to take a stand,  
 The wounded earth lies bleeding,  
 The gaping earth lies bleeding  
 Where once was native land."

A fiery steed the next she rode,

Its coat was red, blood red her sword,  
 "A battle will be fought," she cried,  
 "A battle for the future  
 Between mankind and nature,  
 On the Cardinal Divide."

The third into her eyes I stared,  
 Dark stagnant pools, no life was there,  
 Deep Cheviot mine, dark watershed,  
 The rainbow trout were jumping,  
 The salmon once were jumping,  
 The harlequin ducks have fled.

Cold fear now froze my spinning brain,  
 A vision of a wasteland came,

The gold is black, it lies right there,  
 Across migration pathways,  
 Across migration pathways  
 Of caribou and bear.

She read my thoughts, her voice was cold:  
 "Yesteryear's snows and knights of old,  
 Sermons of love and revolution,  
 Are weighed now in the balance,  
 Found wanting in the balance,  
 Walden Pond is no solution!

"So put this dreaming out of your mind,  
 Other wilderness you'll surely find,  
 The sun's too dim, the wind's too slack,  
 Ecology kills progress,

Technology brings progress,  
 It's too late to turn back."

In mute appeal to the fourth I turned,  
 Face pale, her eyes with fever burned:  
 "The choice is yours alone; take care  
 Of all you've been entrusted,  
 Of all you've been entrusted  
 In earth, sea, fire, and air."

I stood and watched this vision fade,  
 A long strange path their footprints made;  
 The forest sighed, the earth was torn,  
 The hard rain came a-falling,  
 The hard rain came a-falling,  
 On the rust of the Cheviot dawn.

## Steady State

David Gregory

Voice

Con - fuc - i - us he say now. "The pace of change is slow,  
 Life is like a ri - ver, me - and - er with the flow." Life is like a torr - ent, shop - ping trips are fun,  
 Tax - i cab in Cair - o, how many red lights can he run? Stea - dy state, stea - dy state,  
 Tok - yo sub - way, that's our fate; Stea - dy state, Stea - dy state, stop the world be -  
 fore it's too late.

Confucius he say now: "The pace of change is slow,  
 Life is like a river, meander with the flow."  
 Life is like a torrent, shopping trips are fun,  
 Taxi cab in Cairo, how many red lights can he run?

*Chorus:*  
 Steady state, steady state, Tokyo subway that's our fate,  
 Steady state, steady state, stop the world before it's too late.

Temperature is rising, population too,  
 Could it be Toronto is really just a zoo?  
 Writing on the subway wall: "Nous sommes pas des bêtes!"  
 Isn't it a pity no one told El Papa yet.  
*Chorus.*

Politician's talking, he presses human flesh,  
 But he can't do nothing 'bout floods in Bangladesh;  
 Businessman he's preaching: "Eco-terrorism's wrong!"  
 He forgot to mention the Mounties set the bomb.  
*Chorus.*

Cull the seals, cull the wolves, Greenpeace can't be  
 everywhere,  
 Fallout from Chernobyl still floating in the air;

The codfish they are gone now, we only have one earth,  
 Perhaps it's time to calculate what nature's really worth.  
*Chorus.*

Club of Rome decided the future it must see,  
 Crystal ball is a computer, courtesy of M.I.T.,  
 Ms. Donella Meadows she swore a bloody oath:  
 "By ash and oak and bonny thorn, there's limits to our growth!"  
*Chorus.*

Jesus born in Bethlehem, big is beautiful,  
 Just one little problem, they don't question myths in school;  
 Now I've got to thinking the hour is getting late,  
 Five minutes to midnight, it's time for steady state.  
*Chorus.*

## Children of the World

David Gregory

Voice

What do you think, should we change direction? Got a funny feeling, no  
 way out of this trap. If we don't wake up, we may get where we're heading. Hey, sweet child, did you  
 ev-er find the map?

Children of the world, children of nowhere,  
 Tourist bus on the horizon chewing up the dust;  
 Once we talked to animals, sang with the sunrise,  
 What happened to our dreamtime, did it turn to rust?

*Chorus:*  
 What do you think, should we change direction?  
 Got a funny feeling - no way out of this trap,  
 If we don't wake up, we may get where we're heading,  
 Hey sweet child, did you ever find the map?

Exploring our heritage, way out 'mong the pyramids,  
 Just make a small hole to peer inside the tomb;  
 What's that crumbling inside that sarcophagus?  
 Hey, we only wanted to chase away the gloom.  
*Chorus.*

Working at a job, just hopin' for the good life,  
 It used to be enough just to sing our song;  
 Who gave us that advice: "Just cultivate your garden"?  
 Hey, Jean-Jacques, where on earth did we go wrong?  
*Chorus.*

While we weren't watching they clear-cut all the forests,  
 Filled the world with plastic and cancelled all the trains,  
 Now they've got the IMF, WTO, World Bank;  
 Sun set on the Empire but they're at it once again.  
*Chorus.*

When I was a child I rode my bike to the flatlands,  
 Black earth stretched for miles 'long the Forty-Foot Drain;  
 Searchin' through the Fenlands, searchin' in the mountains,  
 Searching for an answer just to ease our pain.  
*Chorus.*