

Singing the Child Ballads

Rosaleen writes:

Here is the second installment of Child ballads in singing versions from my own repertoire. As I mentioned previously, I don't sing Child numbers 5, 6, 7 and 8, so I have moved on to the next four that I do perform, namely numbers 9, 10, 12 and 13. Here are some brief notes on my versions of these four ballads:

9. *The Fair Flower of Northumberland*

This attractive ballad, which dates back to the Elizabethan era, I have only recently learned; it was not around, as I recall, in the English folk club scene in the 60s, nor did I hear it in Ontario in the 70s. The text I use is Child's version E, "written down from memory by Robert Hutton, shepherd, Peel, Liddesdale". The tune, from Bronson's *Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads*, was collected by the Rev. J. B. Duncan from a Mrs. Lyall in Aberdeenshire. I think this is similar to the version that I heard Dick Gaughan sing at a Calgary folk festival a few years back.

10. *The Twa Sisters (aka Binnorie)*

There are a number of versions of this fine ballad and I used to sing a different one, but I've finally settled on the text and tune in Bruce & Stokoe's *Northumbrian Minstrelsy*. I actually learned it from Dan Milner & Paul Kaplan's excellent songbook *Songs of England, Ireland and Scotland: A Bonnie Bunch of Roses* (New York: Oak Publications, 1983). Although I usually sing unaccompanied, I do like the simple, unobtrusive guitar chords suggested by Kaplan for use with this version of the ballad – they provide a steady, inexorable beat which suits the song and keeps this long story (31 verses in the original, of which I've kept 29) moving along without dragging. Since this version employs dialect, I've also modified a few of the original words to make the song more accessible to a non-Scottish audience.

12. *Lord Randal*

This, along with my version of # 13, "Edward", I got from my falling-to-pieces copy of the *Burl Ives Songbook*, published in 1953 and purchased in 1959, the first folksong book I ever acquired. Neither ballad is one of my favourites, but for both of them Ives printed acceptable, if not particularly distinctive, versions. So I've sung Ives' "Lord Randall" for a long time, but I only recently discovered that his version appears to be based in text and tune on Cecil Sharp's in *One Hundred English Folksongs* (1916).

Ives' choice of guitar chords helps what is perhaps a rather pedestrian melody.

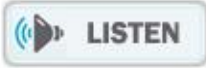
13. *Edward*

Also learned from Burl Ives, whose text seems to be a composite from various Appalachian versions, the closest being that collected by Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles in 1917 from Trotter Gann in Sevier County, Tennessee, and printed in the 1932 edition of *English Folk Songs from the Appalachians*. I have slightly modified Ives' text. The tune, however, is not Trotter Gann's, but is almost identical to that sung to Sharp a couple of months later by Strauder Medford of Jackson County, North Carolina, and published in the same book. So it seems likely that Ives went to this printed source for both text and tune.

Dave writes:

"The Fair Flower of Northumberland" provides an interesting example of the problematic relationship of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century broadsides to oral tradition. The earliest known version of it was written by Elizabethan ballad monger Thomas Deloney. Child, who refused to include in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* any compositions known to be Deloney's, assumed that in this case Deloney had reworked a traditional ballad. But, to me at least, it seems more likely that Deloney wrote the ballad, and that the versions noted much later from oral tradition are variants of his song. As Dave Harker has pointed out, we have the same situation with "The Daemon Lover", since Laurence Price's broadside "A Warning to Married Women" predates any variant collected from oral tradition. And one could multiply examples. There is, of course, a methodological problem here: how can we ever know for sure which came first, the broadside or the vernacular version? And there seems to be no generic answer. We must assume that some broadside writers borrowed from oral tradition as well as contributing to it. But did Deloney? We don't know, and Child didn't either.

Rosaleen doesn't sing Child # 11, "The Cruel Brother", but I'm rather fond of a version that I came across in Davies Gilbert's *Ancient Christmas Carols* (1822) when I was doing the research for *Victorian Songhunters*, my forthcoming book on the vernacular song revival in Victorian England. So I've taken the liberty of including it after her four. Davies Gilbert knew the ballad as "The Three Knights" and the text seems to be somewhat corrupt, but it has a pretty tune that I like playing on the guitar. It appears to have been collected from oral tradition in the English West Country, circa 1820.



The Fair Flower of Northumberland

www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue39_2/The_Fair_Flower_of_Northumberland.mp3

Thomas Deloney

Style/Tempo

A musical score for the song 'The Fair Flower of Northumberland'. It consists of three staves of music in a treble clef, with lyrics written below the notes. The lyrics are: 'A bailiff's fair daugh-ter, she lived by the AIn, A young maid's love is eas-i-ly won, She heard a poor pris-on-er mak-ing his moan, And she the fair flower of North-um-ber-land.'

A bailiff's fair daughter, she lived by the AIn,
 A young maid's love is easily won,
 She heard a poor prisoner making his moan,
 And she the fair flower of Northumberland.

"If ye could love me, as I do love thee,
 A young maid's love is hard to win,
 I'll make you a lady of high degree,
 When once we go down to fair Scotland."

To think of the prisoner her heart was sore,
 A young maid's love is easily won,
 Her love it was much, but her pity was more,
 And she the fair flower of Northumberland.

She stole from her father's pillow the key,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 And out of the dungeon she soon set him free,
 And she the fair flower, etc.

She led him unto her father's stable,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 And they've taken a steed both gallant and able
 To carry them down to fair Scotland.

When they first took the way, it was darling and dear,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 As forward they fared, all changed was his cheer,
 And she the fair flower, etc.

They rode till they came to a fair Scottish cross,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 Says he, "Now, pray madam, dismount from my horse
 And go get you back to Northumberland."

"It befits not to ride with a leman light,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 When awaits my returning my own lady bright,
 My own wedded wife in fair Scotland."

The words that he said on her fond heart smote,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 She knew not in sooth if she lived or not,
 And she the fair flower, etc.

She looked to his face and it seemed so unkind,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 That her fast coming tears soon rendered her blind,
 And she the fair flower, etc.

"Have pity on me as I had it on thee,
 O why was my love so easily won!
 A slave in your kitchen I'm willing to be,
 But I cannot go back to Northumberland."

"Or carry me up by the middle sae small,
 O why was my love so easily won!
 And fling me headlong from your high castle wall
 For I dare not go back to Northumberland."

Her wailing, her woe, for nothing they went,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 His bosom was stone and he would not relent,
 And she the fair flower, etc.

He turned him around and he thought of a plan,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 He bought an old horse and he hired an old man
 To carry her back to Northumberland.

A heavy heart makes a weary way,
 A young maid's love, etc.,
 She reached her home in the evening gray,
 And she the fair flower, etc.

Down came her step-dame, so rugged and dour,
 "O why was your love so easily won?
 In Scotland go back to your false paramour,
 You shall not stay here in Northumberland!"

Down came her father, he saw her and smiled,
 "A young maid's love is easily won,
 You are not the first that false Scots have beguiled,
 And ye're aye welcome back to Northumberland."

You shall not want houses, you shall not want land,
 A young maid's love is easily won,
 You shall not want gold for to gain a husband,
 And you're the fair flower of Northumberland."

The Twa Sisters



LISTEN

www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue39_2/Twa_Sisters.mp3

Dmin Amin

There were twa sisters sat in a bower, Bin-

Dmin Amin Dmin F C

no - rie, O, Bin - no - rie, There came a knight to

Amin Dmin Amin Dmin

be their wooer, By the bon - ny mill dams of Bin - no - rie.

There were twa sisters sat in a bower,
Binnorie, O Binnorie,
There cam a knight to be their wooer,
By the bonny mill-dams of Binnorie.

He courted the eldest with glove and ring,
Binnorie, &c.
But he loved the youngest above anything,
By the bonny, &c.

He courted the eldest with broach and knife,
But he loved the youngest aboon his life.

The eldest she was vexed sair,
And sore envied her sister fair.

The eldest said to the youngest one:
"Will you go and see our father's ships come in."

She's taken her by the lily hand,
And led her down to the river strand.

The youngest stood upon a stone,
The eldest came and pushed her in.

"O sister, sister, reach out your hand,
And ye shall be heir of half my land."

"O sister, I'll not reach my hand,
And I'll be heir of all your land."

"O sister, reach but me your glove,
And sweet William shall be your love."

"Sink on, nor hope for hand or glove,
And sweet William shall better be my love."

"Your cherry cheeks and your yellow hair
Made me gang maiden ever mair."

Sometimes she sunk, sometimes she swam,
Until she came to the miller's dam.

The miller's daughter was baking bread,
And went for water as she had need.

"O father, father, draw your dam!
There's either a mermaid or a milk-white swan."

The miller hasted and drew his dam,
And there he found a drown'd woman.

You couldna see her yellow hair
For gold and pearls that were sae rare.

You couldna see her middle small,
Her golden girdle was sae braw.

You couldna see her lily feet,
Her golden fringes were sae deep.

A famous harper passing by,
The sweet pale face he chanced to spy;

And when he looked that lady on,
He sighed and made a heavy moan.

"Sair will they be, whate'er they be,
The hearts that live to weep for thee."

He made a harp of her breast bone,
Whose sounds would melt a heart of stone;

The strings he framed of her yellow hair,
Their notes made sad the listening ear.

He brought it to her father's hall,
There was the court assembled all.

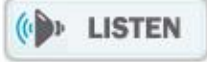
He laid the harp upon a stone,
And straight it began to play alone—

"O yonder sits my father, the king,
And yonder sits my mother, the queen."

"And yonder stands my brother Hugh,
And by him my William, sweet and true."

But the last tune that the harp played then
Was – 'Woe to my sister, false Helen!'

Lord Randall



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue39_2/Lord_Randall.mp3

Anon

Where have you been all the day, Randall, my son?
 Where have you been all the day, my pretty one?
 I've been to my sweetheart's, mother,
 I've been to my sweetheart's, mother,
 Make my bed soon, for I'm sick to my heart,
 And I fain would lie down.

What have you been eating there, Randall, my son?
 What have you been eating, etc.,
 Eels and eel broth, mother,
 Eels and eel broth, mother,
 Make my bed soon, etc.

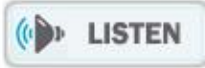
Where did she get them from, Randall, my son?
 From hedges and ditches, mother.

What was the color of their skins, Randall, my son?
 Spickled and spackled, mother.

What will you leave your brother, Randall, my son?
 My gold and silver, mother.

What will you leave your sweetheart, Randall, my son?
 A rope to hang her, mother.

Edward



www.canfolkmusic.ca/songs/issue39_2/Edward.mp3

Anon

What makes that blood on the point of your knife? My
 son, now tell to me, O..... It is the blood of my
 old gray mare that plowed the fields for me, for me, that
 plowed the fields for me.

What makes that blood on the point of your knife?
 My son, now tell to me, O.
 It is the blood of my old gray mare
 That plowed the fields for me, for me,
 That plowed the fields for me.

It is too red for your old gray mare,
 My son, etc.
 It is the blood of my old coon dog
 That chased the fox for me, for me,
 That chased, etc.

It is too red for your old coon dog,
 My son, etc.
 It is the blood of my brother John
 Who hoed the corn for me, for me,
 Who hoed, etc.

What did you fall out about, my own dear son?
 My son, etc.
 Because he cut yon holly bush
 Which might have been a tree, a tree,
 Which might, etc.

What will you say when your father comes home,
 When he comes home from town?
 I'll set my foot in yonder boat,
 And I'll sail the ocean round, round, round,
 I'll sail the ocean round.

When will you come back, my own dear son?
 My son, etc.
 When the sun it sets in yonder sycamore tree,
 And that will never, never be,
 And that will never be.

The Three Knights

Anon
 Davies Gilbert

There did three knights come from the west, with the
 high and the li-ly oh! And these three knights courted
 one lady, I as the rose was so sweet-ly blown

There did three Knights come from the West, with a high and the lily oh!
And these three Knights courted one Lady, and the rose was so sweetly blown.

The first Knight came was all in white, with the high and the lily oh!
And asked of her if she'd be his delight, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

The next Knight came was all in green, with the high and the lily oh!
And asked of her, if she would wed, and the rose was so sweetly blown.

Then have you asked of my Father dear, with the high and the lily oh!
Likewise of her who did me bear? As the rose was so sweetly blown.

And have you asked of my brother John? With the high and the lily oh!
And also of my sister Anne? As the rose was so sweetly blown.

Yes, I have asked of your Father dear, with the high and the lily oh!
Likewise of her who did you bear, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

And I have asked of your sister Anne, with the high and the lily oh!
But I've not asked of your brother John, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

For on the road as they rode along, with the high and the lily oh!
They there did meet with her brother John, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

She stooped low to kiss him sweet, with the high and the lily oh!
He to her heart did a dagger meet, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

Ride on, ride on, cried the serving man, with the high and the lily oh!
Methinks your bride looks wond'rous wan, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

I wish I were on yonder stile, with the high and lily oh!
For there I would sit and bleed awhile, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

I wish I were on yonder hill, with the high and the lily oh!
There I'd alight and make my will, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

What would you give to your Father dear, with the high and the lily oh!
The gallant steed which doth me bear, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

What would you give to your Mother dear, with the high and the lily oh!
My wedding shift which I do wear, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

But she must wash it very clean, with the high and the lily oh!
For my heart's blood sticks in ev'ry seam, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

What would you give to your sister Anne, with the high and the lily oh!
My gay gold ring, and my feathered fan, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

What would you give to your brother John, with the high and the lily oh!
A rope and gallows to hang him on, as the rose was so sweetly blown.

What would you give to your brother John's wife, with the high and the lily oh!
A widow's weeds, and a quiet life, as the rose was so sweetly blown.