

# In My Tradition: Ballads and Folk Lyrics

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Four more songs, all sung *a cappella*. Two of these I've known for many years: the other two I learned more recently to illustrate conference papers given by Dave, and liked enough to go on singing them. This time I seem to have unconsciously focused on flowers (garden and other) and musical instruments. It must have something to do (at least the flowers part) with spring finally coming to northern Alberta (although this is actually the Winter 2011-12 issue of *Canadian Folk Music!*).

## *The Bloody Gardener*

This unusual and chilling tale with its distinctive tune was collected by Maud Karpeles on her first collecting trip in Newfoundland. It was sung to her by Mrs. May McCabe at North River, Conception Bay, on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1929. It was her favourite among the non-Child ballads that she found in Newfoundland, and one that she used to sing herself when back in England in the 1930s, along with her most famous discovery, "She's Like the Swallow".

## *Let No Man Steal Your Thyme*

I've known this classic warning to young women at least since University of Keele days, back in the '60s. There is an early version by Isla Cameron which features two verses about garden flowers (pinks, violets, roses) as in "The Seeds of Love" and similar songs. I can't remember where or when I learned my three-verse version, but it remains one of my favourites.

## *My Bonnie, Bonnie Boy*

Another favourite from college days. This one I learned from the singing of English (Nottingham-

shire) traditional singer Anne Briggs on her 1963 Topic EP, *The Hazards of Love*. The three other songs on that long-ago disc – "Lowlands Away", "Polly Vaughan" and "Rosemary Lane" – have already been featured in this column in the Fall 2009 and Fall 2011 issues of *Canadian Folk Music*.

## *Flowers in the Valley*

This engaging (but not exactly feminist) song has something of a history. It was collected in 1891 by Devon collector and clergyman Sabine Baring-Gould from Sam and Mary Gilbert of Mawgan-in-Pyder, Cornwall. Neither informant could remember all the words, so Baring-Gould, in the manner of the day, created a composite lyric based on the possible English and Scottish antecedents of the fragments Sam and Mary provided him with and published it in his 1895 collection, *A Garland of Country Song*. So technically it may be a 'fakesong', and it does have a sort of 'Victorian' ring to it, both in language and attitude. All the same, it preserves (possibly) some genuine traditional poetry and, certainly, a lovely tune. The references to musical instruments in the fifth and sixth lines of each verse put me in mind of one of the hymns I loved best as a child, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch "Jesus' Bloemhof" (or, as I knew it, "The Garden of Jesus"), which has a refrain:

There angels sing in jubilant ring,  
With dulcimers and lutes,  
And harps and cymbals, trumpets, pipes,  
And gentle, soothing flutes.

It could be a Pre-Raphaelite painting – and, for that matter, so could "Flowers in the Valley".

# The Bloody Gardener

Anon

Voice



'Twas of a la-dy fair, a shep-herd's daugh-ter dear, She was  
court-ed by her own sweet heart's de-light, But false let-ters moth-er wrote: "Meet me,  
dear, my heart's de-light, For it's a-bout some bus-ness I have to re-late.

Twas of a lady fair, a shepherd's daughter dear,  
She was courted by her own sweetheart's delight;  
But false letters mother wrote: "Meet me, dear, my heart's delight,  
For it's about some business I have to relate."

O this young maid arose and to the garden goes  
In hopes to meet her own true heart's delight.  
She searched the ground and no true love she found,  
Till at length a bloody gardener appeared in view.

He says, "My lady gay, what brought you here this way,  
Or have you come to rob me of my garden gay?"  
She cries, "No thief I am, I'm in search of a young man  
Who promised that he'd meet me here this way."

"Prepare, prepare," he cried, "Prepare to lose your life,  
I'll lay your virtuous body to bleed in the ground,  
And with flowers fine and gay your grave I'll overlay  
In the way your virtuous body never will be found."

He took out his knife, cut the single thread of life,  
And he laid her virtuous body to bleed in the ground,  
And with flowers fine and gay her grave he overlaid  
In the way her virtuous body never should be found.

This young man arose and into the garden goes  
In hopes to meet his own true heart's delight.  
He searched the garden round, but no true love he found  
Till the groves and the valleys seemed with him to mourn.

O he sat down to rest on a mossy bank so sweet  
Till a milk-white dove came perching round his face,  
And with battering wings so sweet all around this young man's feet,  
But when he arose this dove she flew away.

The dove she flew away and perched on a myrtle tree  
 And the young man called after her with speed;  
 This young man called after her with his heart filled with woe,  
 Until he came to where the dove she lay.

He said, "My pretty dove, what makes you look so sad,  
 Or have you lost your love as I have mine?"  
 When down from a tree so tall, down on her grave did fall,  
 She drooped her wings and shook her head, and bled fresh from the breast.

O this young man arose and unto his home did go,  
 Saying, "Mother, dear, you have me undone;  
 You have robbed me of my dear, my joy and my delight,  
 So it's alone with my darling I'll soon take flight."

## Let No Man Steal Your Thyme

Anon

Voice

The musical score is written on three staves in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The lyrics are: "Come all you fair and tend - er girls, That flour - ish in your prime ... , Be - ware, be - ware keep your gard - en fair, Let no man steal \_ your thyme, \_ Let \_ no man steal \_ your thyme. \_".

Come all you fair and tender girls,  
 That flourish in your prime;  
 Beware, beware, keep your garden fair,  
 Let no man steal your thyme,  
 Let no man steal your thyme.

For when your thyme is past and gone,  
 He'll care no more for you;  
 And in the place where your thyme was raised,  
 'Twill all spread o'er with rue,  
 'Twill all spread o'er with rue.

A woman is a branchy tree,  
 And man's a clinging vine;  
 And from her branches carelessly  
 He'll take what he can find,  
 He'll take what he can find.

# My Bonnie, Bonnie Boy

Voice

I once lov'd a boy and a bon - nie, bon nie boy....., who would  
 come and would go at re - quest. And this hand - some young boy was my  
 pride and my joy and I built him a bower in my breast, in my breast, And I  
 built him a bower in my breast.

I once loved a boy, and a bonnie, bonnie boy,  
 Who would come and would go at request,  
 And this handsome young boy  
 Was my pride and my joy,  
 And I built him a bower in my breast, in my breast,  
 And I built him a bower in my breast.

Well, up the long alley and down the green valley,  
 Like one that was troubled in mind,  
 I hollered and I whooped  
 And I played upon my flute,  
 But no bonnie boy could I find, could I find,  
 But no bonnie boy could I find.

So I set myself down on a green mossy bank,  
 Where the sun it shone wonderful warm;  
 And who did I spy but my own bonnie boy,  
 Fast locked in some other girl's arms, in her arms,  
 Fast locked in some other girl's arms.

Well, the girl who's the joy of my bonnie boy,  
 Let her make of him all that she can;  
 And whether he loves me, or whether he don't,



I'll walk with that boy now and then, now and then,  
I'll walk with that boy, now and then.

## Flowers in the Valley

Anon

Voice

O there was a wom-an and she was a wid-ow, Fair are the flowers in the  
val - ley, With a daugh-ter as fair as a fresh sun-ny mead-ow, The red, the \_green, and the  
yel - low. The harp, the lute, the pipe, the flute, the cym-bal, Sweet goes the tre-ble vi-o-o-  
lin The maid so \_rare and the flowers so fair, To - geth-er they grew in the val - ley.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Flowers in the Valley'. It consists of four staves of music in G minor (three flats) and 4/4 time. The first staff is labeled 'Voice' and contains the first line of the lyrics. The second and third staves continue the melody and lyrics. The fourth staff concludes the piece with a double bar line. The lyrics are: 'O there was a woman and she was a widow, Fair are the flowers in the valley, With a daughter as fair as a fresh sunny meadow, The red, the green, and the yellow. The harp, the lute, the pipe, the flute, the cymbal, Sweet goes the treble violin. The maid so rare and the flowers so fair, Together they grew in the valley.'

O there was a woman, and she was a widow,  
Fair are the flowers in the valley,  
With a daughter as fair as a fresh sunny meadow,  
The red, the green, and the yellow.  
The harp, the lute, the pipe, the flute, the cymbal,  
Sweet goes the treble violin.  
The maid so rare and the flowers so fair,  
Together they grew in the valley.

There came a knight all clothed in red,  
Fair are the flowers in the valley,  
"I would thou wert my bride," he said,  
The red, the green, and the yellow.  
The harp, the lute, the pipe, the flute, the cymbal,  
Sweet goes the treble violin.  
"I would," she sighed, "ne'er wins a bride!"  
Fair are the flowers in the valley.

There came a knight all clothed in green,  
Fair are the flowers in the valley,  
"This maid so sweet might be my queen,"  
The red, the green, and the yellow.  
The harp, the lute, the pipe, the flute, the cymbal,  
Sweet goes the treble violin.  
"Might be," sighed she, "will ne'er win me!"  
Fair are the flowers in the valley.

There came a knight, in yellow was he,  
Fair are the flowers in the valley,  
"My bride, my queen, thou must with me!"  
The red, the green, and the yellow.  
The harp, the lute, the pipe, the flute, the cymbal,  
Sweet goes the treble violin.  
With blushes red, "I come," she said,  
"Farewell to the flowers in the valley."