

## 5: Songs that Answer Back Quotes, Texts and Sources

### Demographics and related issues

‘It may be questionable whether there really ever was a distinctive corpus of music produced by a definable “folk” in the rural setting envisaged by the purists, but this belief, conjoined with socially recognised definitions and practices, provided an implicit authorisation for “folk music” as it was being performed and enjoyed in urban settings in the 1980s’ (Finnegan 2007: 67).

‘When one looks at how ‘folk music’ was actually organised in Milton Keynes ... it is striking how far it was at variance with many of the tenets of this implicit ideology.

First, the social background of the local folk music participants was far from the rural unlettered “folk” of the ideal model. ... Members of the folk music world liked to think of themselves as in some sense “the folk” or at any rate as “classless”. In a way they were justified: once within a folk club or band their jobs or education became irrelevant. They were thus themselves startled if made to notice the typical educational profile of folk enthusiasts. If any of the local music worlds could be regarded as “middle class” it was that of folk music, for all that this ran so counter to the image its practitioners wished to hold of themselves.’ (Finnegan 2007: 68)

‘My view is that the folk scene attracts those who have benefited materially from upward social mobility, but who have not chosen to identify with and refuse to aspire to the dominant competitive individualistic ethic. A pointer to this is to note that it is a specific sub-section of the middle class which is heavily over-represented in folk music, those in service occupations which are largely in the public sector, jobs such as teaching and social work. (MacKinnon 1993: 130)

### Voicing the Folk

Jon Craven: Introduction to *Victoria’s Inferno*:

1. Crude songs of a direct, forceful and simple style. These, the expressions of a largely illiterate though articulate working-class probably comprise the largest group.
2. Pseudo-literary pieces written by members of the working class and generally intended for audiences outside the working class
3. Songs composed by educated supporters of the working class and usually written in a style that apes 1.
4. Songs written by educated supporters of working-class movements, framed in a highly literary fashion and intended to impress or sway their peers.
5. Songs written essentially for entertainment, often by musical performers, but containing some underlying social or economic comment. (Craven 1978: 8)

### Songs

#### Hard Times

(Stephen C Foster)

Let us pause in life’s pleasures and count its many tears,  
While we all sup sorrow with the poor;

There's a song that will linger forever in our ears;  
Oh! Hard times come again no more.  
    'Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,  
    Hard Times, hard times, come again no more  
    Many days you have lingered around my cabin door;  
    Oh! Hard times come again no more.

While we seek mirth and beauty and music light and gay,  
There are frail forms fainting at the door;  
Though their voices are silent, their pleading looks will say  
Oh! Hard times come again no more.

There's a pale drooping maiden who toils her life away,  
With a worn heart whose better days are o'er:  
Though her voice would be merry, 'tis sighing all the day,  
Oh! Hard times come again no more.

'Tis a sigh that is wafted across the troubled wave,  
'Tis a wail that is heard upon the shore  
'Tis a dirge that is murmured around the lowly grave  
Oh! Hard times come again no more.

## The Great Historical Bum

I'm a lonesome traveler, a great historical bum  
Highly educated through history I have come  
I built the Rock of Ages, it was in the year oh one  
That's the biggest thing that Man has ever done

Now I built the garden of Eden in the year oh two  
Joined the apple-pickers union, always paid my dues  
I'm the man that signed the contract to raise the risin'  
    sun  
That's the biggest thing that Man has ever done.

I saw Adam and Eve driven from the door  
I'm the guy that picked the fig leaves that they wore  
From behind the bushes peepin' saw the apple they was  
    eatin'  
And I swear that I'm the one that et the core

I was there when old Noah built the ark  
And I crawled in the window after dark  
I saw Jonah eat the whale and dance with the lion's tale  
And I crossed over Canaan on a log

I was born about ten thousand years ago  
There ain't nothing in this world that I don't know  
I saved king David's life and he offered me a wife  
I said now you're talking business have a chair

I was born about ten thousand years ago  
Ain't nothing in this world that I don't know  
I saw old pharaoh's daughter bring Moses from the  
    water  
I'll whup the guy that says it isn't so

I taught Samson how to use his mighty hand  
I showed Columbus to this happy land  
And for Pharaoh's little kiddies I built all the  
    pyramiddies  
And to the Sahara carried all the sand

Now I was strawboss on the tower of Babel too  
parted the sea to let the mighty children through  
I fought a million battles and I never lost a one  
That's the biggest thing that Man has ever done.

Yeah, I was born about ten thousand years ago  
Ain't nothing in this world that I don't know  
Saw Peter, Paul and Moses playing ring around the roses  
I'll whup the guy that says it isn't so

I taught Solomon his little ABC's  
I'm the first one to eat Limburger cheese  
Floating down the bay with Methuseleh one day  
I saw his whiskers floating in the breeze

Now I fought the revolution that set this country free  
Me and a couple of Indians dumped the Boston tea  
I won the battle of Valley Forge and the battle of Bully  
    Run  
That's the biggest thing that Man has ever done.

Now Queen Elizabeth she fell in love with me  
We were married in Milwaukee secretly  
But I got tired and shook her and ran off with General  
    Hooker  
To go shootin' gators down in Tennessee

## Psychology of protest song

‘...vocal music may stimulate a higher arousal and attention engagement in listeners’, ‘[these] factors, including our liking response and apparent attraction to vocal music, contribute to the eventual laying down of strong and long-lasting musical memories’ (Williamson 2014: 181).

‘Music breathes, speeds up, and slows down just as the real world does and our cerebellum *finds pleasure* in adjusting itself *to stay synchronised*’ (2008: 191, our emphasis)

## Excerpts from Protest Songs

### Blackleg Miner

It’s in the evening after dark  
When the blackleg miner goes to work,  
With his moleskin pants and his dirty shirt  
There goes the blackleg miner.

Well he grabs his duds and down he goes  
To hew the coal that lies below;  
But there’s not a woman in this town-row  
That would look at a blackleg miner.

So join the Union while you may.  
Don’t wait till your dying day,  
For that might not be far away,  
You dirty blackleg miner.

Oh, Delaval is a terrible place.  
There they rub wet clay in the blackleg’s face,

And around the heaps they run a foot race  
To catch the blackleg miner.

So, dinna gang near the Seghill mine  
Across the weay they’ll stretch a line,  
To catch the throat and break the spine  
Of the dirty blackleg miner.

### Four Green Fields

“What did I have?”, said the fine old woman  
“What did I have?”, this proud old woman did say  
“I had four green fields, each one was a jewel  
But strangers came and tried to take them from me  
I had fine, strong sons, they fought to save my jewels  
They fought and died and that was my grief”, said she

### Which Side Are You On

Florence Reece

Come all of you good workers,  
Good news to you I’ll tell  
of how the good old Union  
has come here to dwell.  
Which side are you on boys,  
which side are you on? (repeat)

Don’t scab for the bosses,  
Don’t listen to their lies.  
Us poor folks haven’t got a chance  
Unless we organize.

They say in Harlan County  
There are no neutrals there.  
You’ll either be a union man  
Or a thug for J. H. Blair.

Oh, workers can you stand it?  
Oh, tell me how you can.  
Will you be a lousy scab,  
Or will you be a man?

My Daddy was a miner  
And I’m a miner’s son;  
And I’ll stick with the union  
Till every battle’s won.

My daddy is a miner,  
He’s in the air and sun,  
But he’ll stick with the union  
Till every battle’s won.

“Sheriff J.H. Blair and his men came to our house in search of Sam – that’s my husband – he was one of the union leaders. I was home alone with our seven children. They ransacked the whole house and then kept watch outside, waiting to shoot Sam down when he came back. But he didn’t

come home that night. Afterward I tore a sheet from a calendar on the wall and wrote the words to ‘Which Side Are You On?’ to an old Baptist hymn, ‘Lay the Lily Low’. My songs always goes to the underdog – to the worker. I’m one of them and I feel like I’ve got to be with them. There’s no such thing as neutral. You have to be on one side or the other. Some people say, ‘I don’t take sides – I’m neutral.’ There’s no such thing. In your mind you’re on one side or the other. In Harlan County there wasn’t no neutral. If you wasn’t a gun thug, you was a union man. You had to be.”

<http://www.laborheritage.org/power-of-songs/>

## Answering back in various contexts

### Nationalist folk-based music

Link to Turbo Folk youtube video with interesting nationalist emblems

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g7slxnRluLs>

Turbofolk video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EL-Y5SPLSeI>

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