



Shirley Collins





1 Bonnie Boy (Trad arr S & D Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

A broadside of this song was around at the time of the Restoration, with a 'reply' which gave it a happier ending.

Dolly has based her setting around my existing 5-string dulcimer pick. On this track, and 'Greenwood laddie' we are joined by Bram Martin on his 1740 Tosturi cello. Having played for the Beatles on 'Eleanor Rigby' and 'She's Leaving Home', Mr Martin was able to grasp very quickly the idiom we were after: even, discreet and 'wonderful warm'.

2 Richie Story (Trad arr S & D Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

The only thing you can do to alter the sound of the breezy set of pipes which Dolly plays is to add an octave by means of pushing a crude brass lever. This we did to add pomp and flutey circumstances to the story of King Richard who loved a lady enough to leave the throne of England and wait on her. Attending the lady's progress is the Mediaeval Percussion Band: Mike Heron plays Indian finger-cymbals and thumps an African drum, and Robin Williamson clicks Japanese sticks and plays tin whistle.

3 Lovely Joan (Trad arr S & D Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

Etched in sunlight on a bright green field, Joan, with her resource and agility (not to mention her faithfulness to her true-lover) is immortal. The air is well-known: Vaughan Williams used it as an interlude in his Greensleeves Fantasia. Dolly's completely radical yet simple arrangement seems to underline the young man's caddish advances.

4 Just As The Tide Was Flowing (Trad arr S & D Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

I discovered quite recently that these verses which I learned from Aunt Grace were part of a long seduction song (see the Hammond and Gardner Collection). But I have never seen any pressing reason to disturb this sad lady. For me she will always be straying across the fields at break of day.

5 The Unquiet Grave (Trad arr S Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

This song is a tender and magical expression of an ancient community belief: a very proper belief that when the mourning of a lover's death started to drain life from the living, love was being misused. Tears flowed into the Styx, and the river swelled and became impassable, so the dead come back and warn the quick. On this track and elsewhere I play an instrument made for me by John Bailey, which is a dulcimer with a five-string banjo neck.

6 Black-Eyed Susan (Trad arr S & D Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

Tableau: a handsome sailor on board a ship of the line taking leave of his true love. They make vows, exchange tokens, dry tears; the fleet is setting sail. It's a familiar scene on dinner plates, prints and samplers. Out of such an emotionally charged situation just had to come some great songs. This rather formal sailor's farewell has a few literary touches to give away its composed origin (John 'Beggars' Opera' Gay) but they don't worry me. Dolly's stately dancing decorations are true in feel to the song's date of composition – the mid-eighteenth century.

7 Seven Yellow Gipsies (Trad arr S Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

With two handsome gipsies (Robin Williamson and Mike Heron) clapping her on, the lady's off again, with her lord in full pursuit. This account of a well-known bit of scandal has a rare, cracking pace about it, and a reference to an arranged cash-marriage in the last verse. It comes from an Irish singer, Paddy Doran. I think the girl must be daft to leave her comfortable castle to go rolling in the fields with seven yellow gipsies.

8 Over The Hills And Far Away (Trad arr S & D Collins) LOOKING GLASS MUSIC

Tom the Piper, who supplied John Gay with such a super tune for 'The Beggars' Opera' is more than a nursery rhyme figure. For Tom has been the Fool in mummer's plays for many centuries, and description show him traditionally in 'a bonnet, red-faced, or turned up with yellow, something like red muffedtees at his wrists. Over his doublet is a red garment, like a short cloak with armholes and with a yellow cape, his hose red, and garnished across and perpendicularly on the thighs with a narrow yellow lace.' 'The Beggars' Opera' song is a duet between dashing highwayman MacHeath and winsome, trusting Polly Peachum ('Polly his passion requited'). They take one verse each in the hayloft, and in the duet the chorus should be superimposed over a reprise of the verse. Dolly's hurdy-gurdy arrangement with the melody 'upside down' gives a hint of this.

9 Greenwood Laddie (Trad arr S & D Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

Perhaps a boy as beautiful as this one can only exist in the tender imagination of a young girl. The beauty of the song is real enough. Bram Martin negotiates the time-changes (from 3/4 to 4/4 and even 5/4) with noble ease. Collected by Jean Ritchie from Sean Boyle.

10 Lady Margaret and Sweet William (Trad arr S & D Collins) LOOKING GLASS MUSIC

Another song from Jean Ritchie, as sung to her by Justus Begley of Hazard, Kentucky. There are more complete versions, but none I can find explain why Sweet William passed up Lady Margaret, or how she died or how he died. But with all its ambiguities, or maybe because of them, it remains the outstanding ballad of its type where the True-lovers' Knot triumphs over human pride, tragedy and death.

11 The Maydens Came (Trad arr S & D Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

This is a cryptic fragment of anon poetry found by Dolly in a posh Sunday newspaper and set to tunes at different times by different members of the family. My Aunt Jackie worked this one out and I love it. Robin Williamson adds his chanter (the Indian shahānshai) to make a sound like the extra stop on the original 1643 organ.

12 Polly Vaughan (Tune composed and words Trad arr S Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

'Oh Jimmy, dear Jimmy, don't you see what you have done?' He's made her immortal, with Ieda and her swan/god/lover, and the princess of Swan Lake. Polly has her place: she would have been forgotten if it weren't for that fateful walk in the rain. As it is she has become as beautiful as a fountain of snow. In some versions Polly's ghost comes back to intercede at Jimmy's trial. The melody is my own.

13 The Barley Straw (Trad arr S & D Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

When he was a boy, Harry Cox sat outside the pubs in Norfolk and listened to his grandad singing with his friends inside. This was how, with perfect recall, he started to build up his great repertory of traditional songs. It includes this sly and sardonic account of the ingenious seduction methods of the idle gentry. The farmer's daughter seemed to enjoy it, too, but had a price to pay beyond the nurse's fee. Dolly has great fun here with a 'country-fair' organ sound.

14 Barbara Allen (Trad arr S & D Collins) CACOPHONY MUSIC

Barbara Allen is the 'dark lady' of the ballads. She has been known to skip out of Jimmy's reach as he stretches a pale arm for her from his death bed; laugh out loud as she sees Jimmy's ghost in the lane on her way home. But after her devilish behaviour she always dies of remorse and finishes up in the churchyard with Jimmy. Of all the many versions I have heard, this one, with its sad two-part tune, haunts me most, and best seems to evoke Barbara Allen herself.

The Power of the True Love Knot

The songs on this record belong to ladies fair and tender, the ballad-heroines with lily hands, riding through the night, sighing for love, wandering through meadows distracted, saving or losing their virtue, getting pregnant, eloping with gypsies, dying of remorse, twined in the True-Lovers' Knot.

Certain special kinds of song seem to have survived down the generations, because one or two quite ordinary people felt that they had a stake in the great poetry, wonderful stories and beautiful tunes of their country; so they just went on singing them. The songs here reflect an idea which is still evolving in our generation: the conflict between ties of love and friendship and the ties of society.

Within the old love-ballads can be seen the idea of true love as a power outside society's control, ungovernable, irresistible and inviolable, and because this idea still forms the basis of all romance, the songs keep their power to stir us.

The love-knot which in ballads unites the star-crossed lovers after death is a very ancient piece of lore. It was certainly a traditional symbol of love, faith and friendship when the Danes brought the root-word for true love 'Trulofa' (I plight my faith) to Britain.

Has the true-love knot ever had any real power? The songs record that the church was willing to sanctify marriages of convenience arranged to keep lands and fortunes intact: that the armed forces of the crown took husbands and lovers away whenever cannon fodder was needed to defend the cause of trade and territory. In spite of all this we still look for signs and symbols to assure ourselves that whatever society does to lovers (let alone what lovers do to each other) love itself can never be harmed.

Making new written settings for these songs, whilst keeping faith with their spirit, is a problem which my sister Dolly has taken very much to heart. We have again used the miniature pipe-organ, a modern mechanically-blown reproduction, by N P Mander Ltd., of a hand-pumped original of 1643. The little wooden pipes make a straight uncontrollable flutey sound, which we have loved since we first heard it. Dolly has now worked with me in concerts at the Royal Festival Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall, on two LP's, a radio broadcast and two TV programmes. This has meant some upheavals in her life, for up to now she has kept out of the limelight.

We were born in Hastings into a big country family who all sang together. All the time I had been travelling round America collecting Blues, and singing my way round Britain's folk clubs, and raising two children, Dolly had been working in a day job and studying composition with Alan Bush. At one stage she lived and wrote music in a double-decker bus in a field, with a piano installed on the lower deck. Now she lives in a cottage in Hastings, and is currently working on a full-scale Mass.

Shirley Collins, November 1967



Produced by Joe Boyd

Photograph of Shirley on the inlay card by David Montgomery

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for Ian, Rebecca, Tilly and Jake Kearey with much love and thanks. Shirley x

Shirley Collins



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The Power of the True Love Knot

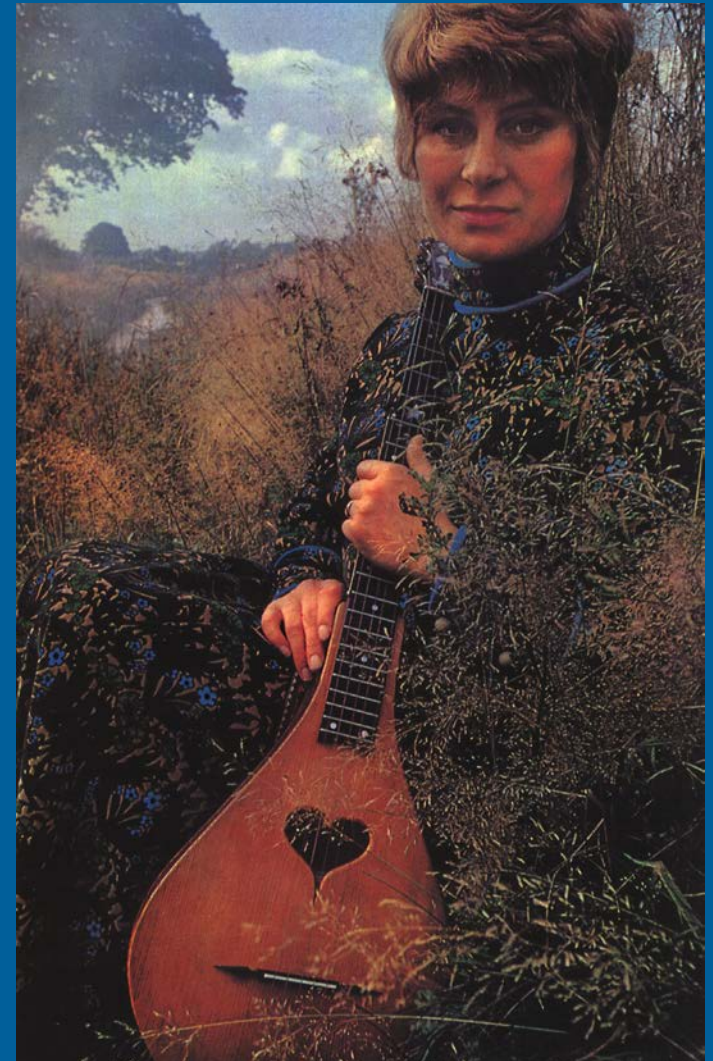
1	Bonnie Boy	3:45
2	Richie Story	4:19
3	Lovely Joan	2:31
4	Just As The Tide Was Flowing	1:40
5	The Unquiet Grave	3:27
6	Black-Eyed Susan	3:36
7	Seven Yellow Gipsies	1:48
8	Over The Hills And Far Away	2:29
9	Greenwood Laddie	1:45
10	Lady Margaret And Sweet William	5:11
11	The Maydens Came	2:00
12	Polly Vaughan	2:50
13	The Barley Straw	3:52
14	Barbara Allen	3:27

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