

In the Sunny Long Ago – Margaret Bennett Repertoire 2000
Produced in Collaboration with her son late Martyn Bennett

In the sunny long ago

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Total running time: 54 mins. 29 secs

© Recorded at 'An Tobar', Tobermory, Isle of Mull, spring and autumn 2000. All arrangements and production by Martyn Bennett.

1. Go and Leave Me

This song might sound as if it came from a Country and Western 78 disc, but it's a 19th century 'weepee'. Who knows where it started off, but it was popular in Scotland by the early 20th century. Mr Greig and the Rev. Duncan received requests for it via the newspaper, and in 1906, after they'd collected a number of versions in the North-east, Greig remarked that 'the song has been traditional [in Scotland] for a while'. [G-D #1145] My version comes from the singing of two friends, Cathal McConnel and Duncan Williamson.

Once I loved with fond affection
One whose thoughts were dear to me,
Until a dark girl did entice him
Never more will he speak to me.

Go and leave me if you wish, love,
Never let me cross your mind
Oh, if you think I'm so unworthy
Go and leave me, I don't mind.

Years have gone since first I saw you
I was then so young and free

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You won my heart and then you left me
Left me here in misery.

Many's the day with you I've rambled
Many an hour with you I've spent,
I thought your heart was mine forever,
Then I knew it was only lent.

Many's the night while you lay sleeping
Dreaming on in sweet repose,
While I poor girl lay broken-hearted
Listening to the wind that blows.

Take back that ring that once you gave me
When our hearts they were entwined
Give it to the dark-haired maiden
She'll never know it once was mine

2. Sweet Forget-me-nots

I was still in my teens when I first went to Newfoundland so, not surprisingly, the years I spent there influenced my repertoire. Most Newfoundlanders are of Irish extraction and so am I – my father's family are from County Armagh. While I was a student (of Folklore) in the 1970s, no get-together in Newfoundland was complete without this song. Sung, played on fiddle or accordion, it was also waltzed on every dance-floor for it spread like wildfire after Aidan O'Hara, (friend and fellow student) 'collected' it. (Dolores Keane also learned it on a visit to Newfoundland.)

Fancy brings a thought to me
Of a flower bright and fair
Her grace and beauty both combine
More lovely and more rare,
Like a maiden I once knew
Who shared my happy lot
Where we parted when she whispered
'You'll forget me not.'

She's graceful and she's charming like the lilies in the pond
Time was gliding swiftly by, of her I'd grown so fond;
The roses and the daisies they bloom around the spot
Where we parted when she whispered 'You'll forget me not.'

I must admit I don't know where
But it's really all the same,
Love grows in the village street

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And all around the lane.
I gently took her tiny hand,
A glance at me she shot,
She dropped a flower,
I picked it up,
'Twas a sweet forget-me-not.

Then there came a happy day
When something that I said,
Caused her lips to mumble 'Yes'
And shortly we were wed.
Now a cottage by a lane
In a little garden spot
Grows a flower, you know it well,
It's a sweet forget-me-not.

3. Sonny's Dream

Another song from Newfoundland, but this time from the pen of one 'our crowd' that used to hang out, put the world to right and sing the night away. The ink would be scarcely dry when Ron Hynes would come up with new songs, and we'd all join the chorus. Ron is now known internationally for his gifted compositions — this is probably his best-known, though no doubt my version has been weathered by many years and Atlantic crossings.

Sonny lives on a farm in a wide, open space;
Take off your shoes, just get out of the race,
Lay down your head by a soft river-bed
Sonny always remembers the words Mama said:

Sonny, don't go away, I'm here all alone
Your Daddy's a sailor and never comes home,
The nights are so long, the silence goes on,
I'm feeling so tired, I'm not all that strong.

Sonny carries his load though he's barely a man,
There's not much to do but he does what he can.
He watches the sea from his room near the stairs,
The sea keeps on rolling — it's done that for years.

Many years have gone past, Sonny's old and alone,
His daddy, the sailor, just never came home.
But sometimes he wonders what life might have been
But still from her grave Mama's voice haunts his dream.

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4. An t-Oighre Og

The Isle of Skye has been home to my family for generations. This is one of many Gaelic songs I got from my mother and though it has been in the family for years, we never did know the name of the young woman who composed it.

O hi 's na hi iù o
Hi ri ri 's na hi iù o
Ho hi ri's na hi iù o
'Se mo rùn an t-oighre òg

Oighre òig à Dunbheagan
Nam piòban 's na feadan
'S mi gun dèanadh do fhreagairt
Le fead cinn 'od mheòir.

'Se 'n fhasan don àrmann
A' bhith falbh anns gach àite
Le ghillean 's le bhàta
Bha àlainn 's gach dòigh.

'S ann aig gairmeadh a' choilich
Fhuair mi sgeula na foill ort,
Chaidh thu seachad an fhadhail
'S cha do thadhail thu oirnn.

Sguiridh mise gad iargainn
Bho nach fhaigh thu mi 'm bliadhn'
Ach seo mo làmh nach mi chiad té
Fhuair briathran do bheòil.

Translation

O hi 's na hi iù o /Hi ri ri 's na hi iù o/Ho hi ri's na hi iù o/It's [about] my love, the young heir [to the clan MacLeod].

Young heir of Dunvegan/With your pipes and your chanter/It is I who would respond/
To a whistle from your fingertips.

It's the custom of the warrior/To travel afar/With his men and his
boat, /Beautiful in every way.

It was at the cockcrow/I got news of your deceit/You went past our shore/And did not
call on us.

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I will stop regretting you/ As I won't be yours this year/But I swear by my hand that I
was not the first/ To be taken in by your sweet talk.

5. Pat Murphy's Meadow

Long after I should have gone to bed, Martyn suggested 'that Newfoundland song about
the sunny long ago...' Another favourite from our Irish-Canadian friends Aidan and
Joyce O'Hara, this is as much a tribute to their friendship as to our fondness for the song.
It was composed in the early 20th century by a popular song-maker, J.M. Devine, who is
also remembered as the man who opened the first department store in St. John's.

The autumn leaves are here again
The night winds chill blow
The woodlands turn to golden hue
The harvest moon's aglow
I dream again of days gone past
To come again once more
When we mowed Pat Murphy's meadow
In the sunny long ago.

Where are those pretty girls and boys
Who danced in the gay quadrille?
And the singer who warbled sweetly
'The Burning Granite Mill'?
There was music soft and tender
On the wind that whispered low
When we mowed Pat Murphy's meadow
In the sunny long ago.

I see the blue of ocean the distant sails afar'
And the maiden in the meadow
Strikes up 'Dark Lochnagar'
Just to hear again at sunset
'Where Sweet Afton Water's Flow'
When we mowed Pat Murphy's meadow
In the sunny long ago

These days are but a memory
Like snow of a yesteryear
And when evening shades are falling
All alone I shed a tear
On my cheeks there falls the soft touch
Of the wind that whispered low
When we mowed Pat Murphy's meadow

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5. The Rocks of Merasheen

The first poetry reading I ever went to was in Newfoundland. Most of the poets were fellow-students or faculty at Memorial University, among them the talented Al Pittman, poet, song-maker, playwright and friend. Al's family came from Merasheen Island, which was evacuated in a government scheme during his childhood. The song is more of a romantic fiction than an account of the true adversity of his people. I can't promise this is exactly as he wrote it – in fact I know it's not, as I've never seen Al's words but only heard them. This version is therefore 'from oral tradition', adapted (to a woman's point of view) and filtered through my imperfect memory.

The fondest wish that e'er I had
Since the day that I was weaned
Is to go back and walk again
On the rocks of Merasheen
 On the hard rocks, the rocky rocks,
 The rocks of Merasheen

I still recall that fond farewell
I bid him on that day
When all upon a whaling ship
He went to earn his pay.

From out of Rosarue they sailed
To hunt the big fish down,
They sailed all on the ocean blue,
He sailed the world around.
With girls in every port of call
He did go oft astray
Forsaking the one I left behind
Back in Placentia Bay
 On the hard rocks, the rocky rocks
 The rocks of Merasheen
 On the hard rocks, the rocky rocks,
 The rocks of Merasheen

Now in my old and aching age
I think of him once more
Of how he fared when I waited
For his knock upon the door.
What fate befell I do not know
But in my sleep I see him
Waiting on the rocky rocks,

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The rocks of Merasheen

On the hard rocks, the rocky rocks,
The rocks of Merasheen
On the hard rocks, the dirty rocks
The rocks of Merasheen

7. Ailean, Ailean

Scotland has never been short of songs of conflict, war, and political activity. Dr John MacInnes taught me this song for our series of Edinburgh Festival recital-lectures on the anniversary of the death of the Jacobite Prince Charles Edward Stuart. Composed around the 1740s (possibly earlier) by an unknown woman, the song is a cry to battle, not only to her husband, Allan, but also to anyone who cares about the fate of their country. 'Morag' is one of several code-names for the prince.

Ailein, Ailein, 's fhad an cadal
Tha'n uiseag a' gairm 's an là glasadh
A ghrian ag èiridh air a' leacainn
'S fhad bhuan fhin luchd nam breacan.

Hug o ro hi, hug oireannan
Hug o ro hi, ri ri-i ri hui
O hithill u hug oireannan.

Ailein duinn, gabh sgoinn 's bi g' eirigh
Tionail do chloinn, is cuimhnich t' fheum orr'
Bidh Alba mhòr fo bhinn nam bèisdean
Mara dion a muinntir fhein i.

A Mhòrag na faicinn t' fhear-ceusaidh
Ga b' ann air cabhsair Dhun Eideann
Tharainn na lainn chaola, gheura,
'S dh' fhagainn fhin e marbh gun èiridh

Translation

Allan, Allan, you've slept too long/ The skylark is singing, the day is dawning /The sun is rising on the hillside /And far in front of me are the men in tartan.

Brown-haired Allan, take courage and stir yourself/Gather your clan, remember your need of them/Great Scotland will be under sentence of doom/Unless her own people defend her.

Morag, if I could meet your torturer/Were it on a street in Edinburgh/I myself would draw the keen, slender blade/And I'd leave him lying lifeless

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8. Aye Waukin O

I've always loved the songs and poetry of Robert Burns whom I also regard as one of Scotland's earliest folklorists. His devotion to preserving songs is much more deserving of our praise and gratitude than the common criticism that he altered or 'improved' the texts. So what! There are many versions of this very old song but I like to sing the one that first drew me to Burns.

Summer's a pleasant time,
Floo'ers of every colour,
The water rins ower the heugh,
And I long for my true lover.

Aye waukin o, waukin aye an' wearie
Sleep I can get nane, for thinkin o' my dearie,
Aye waukin o.

When I sleep I dream,
When I wake I'm eerie,
Sleep I can get nane
For thinkin' o' my dearie.

Lanely night comes in,
A' the lave are sleepin',
I think o my bonnie lad,
And bleer my e'en wi greetin'.

9. Connemara

This song was popularised in Newfoundland in the 1970s by Ryan's Fancy, a group of four Irishmen who immigrated to St. John's then became household names right across Canada. Small wonder they felt so at home in Newfoundland, peopled by generations of emigrants before them.

I still recall that day in July
When you said to me your last goodbye;
And that same night you sailed away
To distant lands across the sea

In Connemara by the lake
Two young lovers hearts did break,
In County Galway by the sea

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There I loved you and you loved me.

For seven long years I had to wait
And now you've come, alas, too late,
For I was told that you were dead
And yesterday at noon I was wed.

The western breezes whisper true,
They bring back memories of you,
Of summer days I cannot forget
In Connemara where we met.

10. Plooman Laddies

Having left home at seventeen to become a student, I joined two very active Folk Clubs in Glasgow. The Folksong and Ballad Club used to meet in the now-demolished Grand Hotel at Charing Cross which is where I first heard this song from the Northeast. I can't remember who sang it but do recall that room resonating with chorus singing.

Doon in yon den there's a plooman lad
Ane simmer time he'll be a' my ain
And sing laddie, aye, and sing laddie-oh,
The plooman laddies are a' the go.

Doon in yon dell I could hae gotten the miller
But the smell o the dust wad hae done me ill.

Doon in yon dell I could hae gotten the merchant
But a' his stuff wisna worth a groat.

I lo'e his cheek and I lo'e his chin,
I lo'e the verra cairt he hurls in!

I hear him comin fae yonder stack,
I hear his wheep gie anither crack.

I see him comin fae yonder toon
Wi a' his ribbons hingin roon an roon.

Weel, noo I've gotten my plooman lad
As bare as ever he's left the ploo.

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11. Jock o Hazeldean

Sir Walter Scott composed this song based on a traditional Border Ballad, 'John of Hazelgreen'. I like the occasional ballad to have a happy ending and, better still, the lady to marry the man she loves. Martyn and I have enjoyed performing this and other Scott compositions at Abbotsford — a wonderful setting for a ceilidh.

Why weep ye by the tide, lady,
Why weep ye by the tide?
I'll wed ye tae my youngest son
And ye shall be his bride,
And ye shall be his bride, lady,
Sae comely tae be seen,
But aye she loot the tears doonfa'
For Jock o Hazeldean.

Noo let this waefu' grief be done
And dry yer cheeks sae pale;
Young Frank is chief o' Errington
And Lord o' Langleydale.
His step is first in peacefu' ha'
His sword in battle keen,
But aye she loot the tears doonfa'
For Jock o Hazeldean

A crown o' gold ye shallna lack,
Nor braid tae bind yer hair;
Nor mettled hound, nor managed hawk,
Nor palfrey fresh and fair.
And ye, the foremost o' them a'
Should ride the forest, queen,
But aye she loot the tears doonfa'
For Jock o Hazeldean

The kirk was decked at morning-tide,
The tapers glimmered fair;
The priest and bridegroom wait the bride
And dame and knight were there.
They sought her baith by field and ha',
The lady wisna seen,
She's ow'r the Borders and awa'
Wi Jock o Hazeldean

12. Oran Chaluum Sgair

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This song is from the Isle of Lewis where I spent most of my teenage years. The words were composed mid-1800s by a fisherman, Malcolm MacAulay, ('Calum Sgaire' – Malcolm, son of Zachariah). He was in love with a girl whose parents wanted her to marry the merchant, an older, wealthier man. The young couple planned to elope the night before her arranged wedding but a mist came down and they didn't meet. Next day, distraught, she married the merchant and Calum sailed for Quebec. He never returned to Lewis, and tragically his sweetheart died of a broken heart within a year. The song doesn't really tell this story which I heard in Quebec from a distant relative of the girl's. Kitty MacLeod, the legendary Gaelic singer from Lewis, composed the tune in the 1930s.

Och a rìgh, gur trom m' osna
'S fhad' bhom luaidh a-nochd mi;
Mise tuath air ceann Lochlainn
'S is' aig Loch an Fhir Mhaoil.

Ged is math a bhith seòladh,
'S olc a tha e gam chòrdadh
'S mòr gum b' fheàrr a bhith 'm Bosta
Cur an eòrn' anns an raon.

Air fal ill ò rà u
Fà ill èileadh ò rà u
Air fal ill ò rà u
Hogaidh ò hò rò hì.

Dh' fhalbh i, ghluais i leinn dhachaigh,
Chuir i chuairt ud air Arcaibh
Cruinn ùra 's siùil gheala,
Tide mhara 's i leinn.

Nuair a dhirich i 'm bruach
Shad i bhuarach 's an cuman
'S thuir i "Suaimhneach an diugh mi,
Seo e, cuspair mo rùin."

Oh God, my sigh is heavy/And I far from my love tonight, /I to the north of
Norway/And she at Loch an Fhir Maoil [Bald Man's Lake]

Although it's good to be sailing/ It's not to my liking,/ Much better to be in Bosta/
Planting barley in the field.

She [the boat] sailed homewards with us/ Went around Orkney/New masts and white
sails,/ The tide in our favour.

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When she [the sweetheart] reached the hilltop/ She threw down the milking pail and
fetter/And said “Happy am I today/ He is here, the one I love.”

13. Bonnie Bunch o Thyme

There are versions of this song all over the English-speaking world. When it comes to
warning against anyone ‘stealing your thyme’ I am equally inclined to write ‘time’ these
days. According to the modern day press TIME seems to be at a greater premium than
THYME, the ancient symbol for virginity. Either way, the word of caution is no bad
thing. I have to admit it’s the chorus that makes me keep singing it for I love to hear folk
join in.

Come all ye maidens young and fine,
All ye who are blooming in your prime
Always beware to keep your gardens fair
Let no one steal away your thyme,

For thyme it is a precious thing
Time brings all things to my mind
Time with all its labours along with all its joys
For time brings all things to and end.

Once I had bunch of thyme,
I thought it never would decay.
But there came along a sailor who chanced to pass my way
And he stole my bunch of thyme away.

The sailor gave to me a rose,
A rose that never would decay;
He gave it to me to keep me reminded
Of the night he stole my thyme away.

This album is dedicated with love to all who gave us our songs — grandparents,
parents, siblings, and friends

And without Martyn’s enthusiasm, energy encouragement and patience, there
would have been no “Sunny Long Ago....”

Sleeve notes by Margaret Bennett