

Program Notes by Kris Palmer, DMA

ROBERT BEASER'S MOUNTAIN SONGS

Robert Beaser (b.1954) is often classified as a member of the new tonalists, a group whose membership includes Lowell Liebermann, Daniel Asia, Paul Moravec, and other major American composers born at mid-twentieth century. Beaser, like his colleagues, embraces more traditional methods of composition, including tonality and an expressive directness. He possesses a great melodic gift and is unabashed in his use of it. His incorporation of extant folk materials came in the 1980s through his widely performed Mountain Songs nominated for a Grammy award in 1986. This cycle of eight songs contain five lyric ballads from the southern mountains of Appalachia, a minstrel fiddle song, a popular African-American lullaby from the deep South, and an entirely original composition by Beaser inspired by the work of the American poet Daniel Mark Epstein.

APPALACHIAN FOLK SONG

Immigrants from England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland arrived in Appalachia in the 18th century, and their musical traditions would form the backbone of Appalachian folk song. The unaccompanied narratives of English and Scottish ballads and anglo-celtic dance music, such as Irish reels accompanied by a fiddle, would blend with religious hymns, African-American rhythms and percussive effects, vaudeville music, minstrelsy, and African-American blues.

Several Appalachian ballads, such as Barbara Allen, Cuckoo Bird, and House Carpenter, are rooted primarily in the English ballad tradition.

Initial anglo-celtic folk ballads were almost always sung unaccompanied in the early era of the eighteenth century. Later, the fiddle became the main instrument, often alone, as a piano was often much beyond the means of most of the Appalachian populous. The powerful and rhythmic short bow sawstroke technique associated with Appalachian mountain fiddling can be traced back to the mid-eighteenth century Scottish fiddler, Neil Gow. Still later came the introduction of the banjo to the Southern Mountains after the Civil War in the 1860's. Mostly denigrated as a 'slave instrument' until the popularity of the Minstrel Show, starting in the 1840s, the banjo syncopation or 'bom-diddle-diddy' produced a different clog-dance and song rhythm by the turn of the century. Irish immigration also added its own flavor. The sound of the pipes and their drones added a double-stop approach where two strings are usually played together. Common instrumental groupings typically used to perform Appalachian music include the banjo, American fiddle, fretted dulcimer, and guitar. The distinct nasal quality preferred by traditional Appalachian singers may have been influenced by the ornamentations and vocal improvisations found in many early Celtic ballads.

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BARBARA ALLEN

The Ballad of Barbara Allen is a folk song of unknown origin, known in dozens of versions. It may have originated in England or Scotland, and the earliest known mention of the song is in Samuel Pepys' diary entry of January 2, 1666, where he refers to the "little Scotch song of Barbary Allen". The ballad of Barbara Allen was first printed in England in 1750, but it had existed in oral versions at least a century before that date. The ballad was first printed in the United States in 1836.

Most versions of *Barbara Allen* follow the narrative of a young man dying of unrequited love for Barbara Allen; she is called to his deathbed but all she can say is, 'Young man, I think you're dying.' When he dies, she is stricken with grief and dies soon after. Often, a briar grows from her grave and a rose from his, until they grow together. The setting is usually in the fictitious Scarlet Town (possibly a pun on the English town of Reading, pronounced "redding"), although London town and Dublin town are also popular. The action usually takes place "in the merry month of May" although some versions place it in the autumn.

*In Scarlet town where I was born
There was a fair maid dwelling
And every youth cried well away
For her name was Barbara Allen*

*Twas in the merry month of May
The green buds were a swelling
Sweet William on his deathbed lay
For the love of Barbara Allen*

*He sent a servant unto her
To the place she was dwelling
Saying you must come to his deathbed now
If your name be Barbara Allen*

*Slowly slowly she got up
Slowly slowly she came nigh him
And the only words to him she said
Young man I think you're dying*

*As she was walking oer the fields
She heard the death bell knelling
And every stroke it seemed to say
Hardhearted Barbara Allen*

*Oh mother mother make my bed
Make it long and make it narrow
Sweet William died for me today
I'll die for him tomorrow*

*They buried her in the old churchyard
They buried him in the choir
And from his grave grew a red red rose
From her grave a green briar*

*They grew and grew to the steeple top
Till they could grow no higher
And there they twined in a true love's knot
Red rose around green briar*

THE HOUSE CARPENTER

Related to the medieval story "Daemon Lover", "The House Carpenter" is known in many versions with many verses which all retain the basic supernatural origin morphed into a love triangle. The theme of a ship being unable to sail if it has a guilty party aboard is a common thread in numerous English ballads.

This particular English ballad tells the story of a man (usually the Devil), who returns to a former lover after a very long absence, and finds her with a husband (usually a carpenter) and a baby. He entices her to leave both behind and come with him, luring her with many ships laden with treasure. Together they board one of his ships, (which in many versions she is surprised to find does not have a crew) and put to sea. She soon begins to lament leaving behind her child, but is heartened in some versions by spying a bright hill in the distance. Her lover informs her that the hill is heaven, where they are not bound. Instead he indicates a much darker coast, which he tells her is hell, their destination. In the end, the ship is either broken in half with his bare hands and feet, or the ship is wrecked by a storm at sea, drowning them both.

*"Well met, well met, my own true love"
"Well met, well met," cried he
"I've just returned from the salt salt sea
And it's all for the love of thee"*

*"I could have married the King's Daughter dear
And she would have married me
But I refused her crowns of gold
And it's all for the love of thee"*

*"You could have married the King's Daughter
dear
I'm sure you are to blame
For I am married to a house carpenter
And he is a fine young man"*

*"Will you forsake your house carpenter
And come away with me?
I'll take you to where the grass grows green
On the banks of the salt salt sea"*

*"If I forsake my house carpenter
And come away with thee
What have you got to maintain me upon
And keep me from poverty?"
"Six ships, six ships are on the sea
Seven more on dry land
A hundred ten bold sailor men
Shall be at your command"*

*She picked up her sweet little babe
Gave it kisses one two three*

*Saying "you stay right here with the house
carpenter
And you keep him good company"*

*She dressed herself in rich attire
So glorious to behold
And as she rode upon her horse
She shone like glittering gold*

*They had not out about two weeks
Two weeks or maybe three
When this lady began to weep
And she wept most bitterly*

*"Tell me why are you weeping so?
Do you weep for your golden store?
I am weeping for my sweet little babe
Who I shall see no more"*

*They had not been at sea three weeks
three weeks or maybe four
When the ship it sprang a leak
And it sank to rise no more*

*Once around spun our gallant ship
Twice around spun she
Three times spun around our gallant ship
Til she sank to the bottom of the sea*

*"Farewell, farewell, my own true love"
"Farewell, farewell," cried she
"I have forsaken my house carpenter
Now I'll die at the bottom of the sea"*

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HE'S GONE AWAY

The exacted origins of the hauntingly beautiful folk melody are somewhat obscure. However, it is believed to have emanated from the Southern United States, perhaps in the Carolinas during the Civil War. It appears to be the story of a young couple separated by the Civil War.

*"O what a bright, bright hill is yon,
That shines so clear to see?"*

*"O it is the hill of heaven" he said,
"Where you shall never be."*

*"O what a black, dark hill is yon,
That looks so dark to me?"*

*"O it is the hill of hell," he said,
"Where you and I shall be."*

He's Gone Away

*I'm goin' away for to stay a little while,
But I'm comin' back if I go ten thousand miles.*

Oh, who will tie your shoes ?

And who will glove your hands?

*And who will kiss your ruby lips when I am
gone?*

Oh, it's pappy'll tie my shoes,

And mammy'll glove my hands,

*And you will kiss my ruby lips when you come
back!*

Oh, he's gone, he's gone away,

For to stay a little while;

*But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand
miles.*

*Look away, look away, look away over Yandro,
On Yandro's high hill, where them white doves
are flyin'*

*From bough to bough and a-matin' with their
mates,*

So why not me with mine?

For he's gone, oh he's gone away

For to stay a little while,

*But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand
miles.*

*I'll go build me a desrick on Yandro's high hill,
Where the wild beasts won't bother me nor hear
my sad cry*

*For he's gone, he's gone away for to stay a little
while,*

*But he's comin' back if he goes ten thousand
miles.*

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HUSH YOU BYE

Known equally as "Hush You Bye", "Hush-A-Bye" and "All the Pretty Little Horses", this song is a traditional African-American lullaby from the southern United States. It is said to have been sung by an African-American slave who could not take care of her baby because she was too busy taking care of her master's child. She would therefore sing this song to her master's child. The original lyrics "birds and butterflies, peck at his eyes" eventually changed to "birds and butterflies, flutter 'round his eyes" to make a lullaby less violent for younger children. Like many American folk lullabies, this song uses a natural minor key.

*Hush-a-bye, don't you cry,
Go to sleepy little baby.
When you wake, you shall have,
All the pretty little horses.
Blacks and bays, dapples and greys,
Go to sleepy you little baby,*

*Hush-a-bye, don't you cry,
Go to sleepy little baby.
Daddy's boy mama's joy
Go to slumberland my baby
When you wake, you shall have,
All the pretty little horses.*

*Hush your cries, close your eyes
Dream of pretty little horses
Hush-a-bye don't you cry
Go to sleep my little baby*

*Darkness falls sand man calls
Go to sleep my little baby
When you wake, you shall have,
All the pretty little horses.
Up and down round and round
Dream of pretty little horses*

*Hush-a-bye don't you cry
Go to sleep my little baby
Go to sleep my little baby.*

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CINDY

Flourishing during the mid-nineteenth century, the minstrel show initially consisted of white male musicians performing broad, unfortunate caricatures of African-Americans through wearing blackface. Later nineteenth-century minstrel shows also included black performers and occasional female performers. Traveling minstrel shows were common in Appalachia, and their influence on Appalachian music continues long after the genre itself thankfully faded from popularity. Perhaps minstrelsy's most notable influence on Appalachian folk song tradition was the introduction of the banjo to the region. "Cindy" is a popular American Folk song of North Carolinian origins. It was found in elementary school songbooks throughout the early and middle 20th century. One of its earliest versions was found in Anne Virginia Culbertson's collection of African-American folktales, *At the Big House, where Aunt Nancy and Aunt 'Phrony Held Forth on the Animal Folks* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1904).

CUCKOO

"The Cuckoo" is a traditional English folk song with varying titles, including "The Coo-Coo, The Coo-Coo Bird, The Cuckoo Bird," and "The Cuckoo Is A Pretty Bird". Lyrics usually include the line (or a slight variation): *The cuckoo is a pretty bird, she sings as she flies; she brings us glad tidings, and she tells us no lies.* According to Thomas Goldsmith of The Raleigh News & Observer, "The Cuckoo" is reportedly descended from an old folk ballad; it's an interior monologue where the singer "relates his desires — to gamble, to win, to regain love's affection."

*Gonna build me a log cabin
on a mountain so high,
So I can see Willy,
as she goes walking by.*

*Oh, the cuckoo, she's a pretty bird,
Lord, she warbles as she flies;
She'll never say cuckoo
Till the fourth day of July.*

*Well I played cards in old England
And I've gambled over in Spain,
And I'll bet you ten dollars
That I'll beat you next game.*

*My horses they ain't hungry
And they won't eat your hay.
I'll drive home just a little further
Wondering why you treat me this way.*

*Oh, the cuckoo she's a pretty bird.
Lord, she warbles as she flies.
She'll cause never more trouble
And she'll tell you no lies.*

*There's one thing that's been a puzzle
Since the day that time began
A man's love for, for his woman
And her sweet love for her man.*

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FAIR AND TENDER LADIES

"Come All You Fair and Tender Ladies" is also known as "Tiny Sparrow" or "Little Sparrow." An American folk ballad originating from the Appalachian region, the song's title sometimes finds "Maidens" substituted for "Ladies," and "Come All Ye" or "Come All You" sometimes omitted.

*Come all you fair and tender ladies
Take warning how you court young men
They're like a bright star on a cloudy morning
They will first appear and then they're gone*

*They'll tell to you some loving story
To make you think that they love you true
Straightway they'll go and court some other
Oh that's the love that they have for you*

*I wish I were some little sparrow
And I had wings and I could fly
I would fly away to my false true lover
And while he'll talk I would sit and cry*

*But I am not some little sparrow
I have no wings nor can I fly
So I'll sit down here in grief and sorrow
And try to pass my troubles by*

*I wish I had known before I courted
That love had been so hard to gain
I'd of locked my heart in a box of golden
And fastened it down with a silver chain*

*Young men never cast your eye on beauty
For beauty is a thing that will decay
For the prettiest flowers that grow in the garden
How soon they'll wither, will wither and fade away*