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A CONTEMPORARY ADAPTATION OF AMERICA'S MUSICAL HERITAGE: THE AMERICAN FOLK SET BY STEVEN MARK KOHN

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by

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A CONTEMPORARY ADAPTATION OF AMERICA'S MUSICAL HERITAGE: THE AMERICAN FOLK SET BY STEVEN MARK KOHN

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Steven Mark Kohn's *American Folk Set* is comprised of contemporary arrangements of fifteen historic American folk songs, conceived as art songs for the vocal recital stage. This collection serves as a prime opportunity for performers to discover the expressive potential of the Art Song Repertory through folk settings that exude drama. Drawing from his background and experience as a composer, Kohn's settings combine musical elements from classical Art Song, musical theatre, popular, and folk music. His settings musically depict tales from the lives of those who originally conceived the folk songs. This performance guide offers insights into Kohn as a composer; the historical background and development of each selection; an examination of Kohn's compositional traits as found in each song; Kohn's preferences for performance practices; and a discussion of the artistic potential of this contribution to the Art Song repertory. With equal musical and theatrical integrity, Steven Mark Kohn's contemporary arrangements of historic folk

songs bring moments from America's past to vivid life for performers and their audiences.

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INTRODUCTION

The *American Folk Set* is a collection of fifteen contemporary folk arrangements by composer Steven Mark Kohn. These settings infuse engaging and theatrical folk material to the repertory of classical Art Song. Each selection offers a compelling portrayal of historic folk song and storytelling drawn from America's musical heritage. Kohn's songs bring together in one collection stories from across the nation: in tunes harkening from the Appalachian mining regions of the East, the rural farming communities of the Midwest, and the untamed West that lured prospectors in hopes of striking gold. These folk songs represent the lives and legacy of many hardworking people, who joined in the great experiment that is the United States of America.

These compositions combine more than the tales of those who first sang these stories. They also bring together classical, musical theatre, popular, and folk musical styles into an engaging artistic experience. This amalgamation of contrasting styles is uniquely suited to tell the American story. Within the *American Folk Set* singers and pianists will discover the disciplined understanding of compositional potential found in classical Art Song, the vivid characters of musical theatre, the immediacy of popular music, and the grounded historical connection found in folk music.

This performance guide seeks to enable a richer approach to understanding, appreciating, and performing the dramatic character-studies provided in Steven Mark Kohn's *American Folk Set*. It will trace the development of the composer's vocal works, his impetus to set historical folk song, as well as the publication and subsequent recording of his *American Folk Set*. It will explore the historical roots of each folk song and will discuss the musical traits empowering the vivid storytelling present in each selection. It will consider the intentions of the composer and the mission he embarked upon when choosing to arrange folk songs that would deviate from traditional Art Song settings. Finally, this document will emphasize the experiences available to current and future generations of classical singers through Kohn's *American Folk Set*: the opportunity to delve into the rich history of American Folk Song, where they will discover evocative characters and inspiring tales awaiting musical life on stage.

CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF STEVEN MARK KOHN AND HIS AMERICAN FOLK SET

A BIOGRAPHY OF STEVEN MARK KOHN

Steven Mark Kohn's developmental years were filled with music, but he did not formally study music until his senior year of high school, when he began to take piano lessons.[1] Before the age of eighteen, Kohn openly acknowledges that he could not identify middle C on a score, much less read music. Despite a lack of formal training in music, the young musician had already begun developing an appreciation and understanding of complex rhythms, interesting harmonies, and extended instrumental interludes. For Kohn, these topics were discovered in the music of 1970s progressive rock bands like Genesis, Yes, and Emerson, Lake & Palmer.

Growing up in the 1960s, Kohn remembers listening to his mother's favorite albums on the family's stereo system. His mother was a singer who performed with big bands and whose taste in music included prominent American singer-entertainers Nat King Cole and Johnny Mathis. Kohn vividly

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[1] For what follows in this chapter, I have relied on these sources: Steven Mark Kohn, interviewed by Trey Meyer, phone interview 1, March 19, 2020. Steven Mark Kohn, interviewed by Trey Meyer, Zoom interview 2, May 6, 2021. Steven Mark Kohn, interviewed by Trey Meyer, Zoom interview 3, June 17, 2021. "Biography," Steven Mark Kohn: Composer and Lyricist, accessed April 15, 2021, http://www.stevenmarkkohn.com/about.html.

recalls the right of passage when his mother said "you may now lift the arm. You can do this yourself!" permitting him the opportunity and responsibility of operating the record player. "Putting on an LP and letting the sun stream in through the picture window and sitting alone and listening to it, and looking at the pictures, and reading the LP was big."[2] During the late 1960s Kohn absorbed a wide range of music by Simon & Garfunkel, The Kingston Trio, Cat Stevens, and Peter, Paul & Mary among others. As the 1970s progressed, his interests shifted towards mainstream and progressive rock. As an early teen, he "began playing more elaborate arrangements of songs by the Beatles, James Taylor, Elton John, Billy Joel and other pop artists of the day."[3] By the end of high school Kohn had developed strong pianistic skills; he "could sit down at the piano and play anything from the radio by ear."[4] Still unable to formally read music, in his senior year of high school, Kohn began to study piano and theory with Joseph Howard, whom he recalls as "the right man at the right time."[5] Formal training in music allowed Kohn to flourish. Within his first few months of lessons, he was able to play and appreciate Bach two-part inventions and Scott Joplin rags.

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[2] Kohn, interview 3.
[3] Kohn, "Biography."
[4] Kohn, interview 3.
[5] Kohn, interview 3.

After high school, Kohn started an undergraduate degree in music at Kent State University. Here he quickly discovered a passion for composition and changed his major to composition. His teacher Walter Watson encouraged him to attend the Aspen Music Festival where he would meet many lifelong friends, including composers Craig Bohmler and Michael Ching. Watson also encouraged Kohn to listen to a wide variety of music to immerse the young musician in classical repertoire. Kohn graduated *magna cum laude* in 1979. After graduation, he chose to take a gap year to hone his sight-reading abilities, his self-confessed weakest of skills. In accomplishing his goals, he developed a love for aural skills and musical dictation.

In 1982, Kohn earned his Master of Music in Composition from the Cleveland Institute of Music. In graduate school, he studied under Donald Erb and Eugene O'Brien. His master's recital featured an "avant-garde music theatre piece for 4 actors and 4 separate ensembles, who start finishing each other's lines in a psychotic break kind of style."[6]

During his studies at the Cleveland Institute, Kohn began what would become a career in studio composition and recording. The Cleveland Museum of Art hired Kohn as a recording engineer. He also collaborated with his peer,

[6] Kohn, interview 3.

composer Jim Brickman, to begin writing music for advertisements. As Kohn expresses in his personal biography,

> These two kids in their mid-twenties had the time of their life, collaborating on national spots for Wheaties, Hickory Farms, Stanley Steemer, TRW, BP, Sentry Hardware, and Rax Restaurants and local and regional jingles for The Cleveland Plain Dealer, Ohio Lottery, Indianapolis News, Northfield Park, Schwebels Bread and a host of others.[7]

In 1985 Kohn was awarded a residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity in Alberta, Canada, where he composed the one-act opera *Rite of Passage* with librettist Kerry White. While in residence, he also wrote several of his first art songs. These were settings of six Haiku. Their composition allowed Kohn to gain skills with Mosaic music notation software.

After years of composing music for Arby's, Volvo, GTE, Kelly Tire, SeaWorld, and others in the advertising industry, Kohn was presented with an opportunity to teach his craft. In 1998, a personal friend who also happened to be the Dean of the Cleveland Institute of Music, offered him a position as director of the electronic music studio. Kohn initially declined but later accepted and proceeded to craft a unique program. In addition to writing the

[7] Kohn, "Biography."

textbook he would use in his teaching, Kohn recalls, "I built the studio. I wired in every synth. I loaded in all the software."[8]

Also in 1998, Kohn's first collection of art songs was published by Classical Vocal Reprints owned by Glendower Jones. This initial collection titled *27 Haiku* included the six Haiku he had originally started at Banff. Upon seeing his composition in print, the composer explained, "Glen published the *Haiku* and then all of a sudden there it was in this kind of nicely printed, stapled in the side thing and I thought, 'Well that's thrilling!'"[9]

Now acquainted with a publisher interested in his work, Kohn explored more texts that would inspire solo voice and piano settings. Throughout the early 2000s, Classical Vocal Reprints published the following selections composed by Kohn: the *American Folk Set* (2000, 2004, 2006), *The Senator's Stump Speech* (2006)*, Three Impudent Arias* (2010)*, Lullabies and Dreams* (2011)*, Mary Chestnut: A Civil War Diary* (2012), and *The War Prayer* (2013).

In addition to composing, Kohn is equally interested in writing libretti. Loving the expressive capacity contained in storytelling, Kohn had aspirations to become a playwright, but at that early point in his career he felt he didn't have the skills necessary. After honing his skills as a librettist, he now frequently

[8] Kohn, interview 3.
[9] Kohn, interview 3.

collaborates with his friend, composer Craig Bohmler. Together they have collaborated to create musicals and operas, including *The Quiltmaker's Gift*, *Unstoppable Me*, *The Tale of the Nutcracker*, *The Three Redneck Tenors*, and most recently Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*. Arizona Opera premiered their *Riders of the Purple Sage* in 2017 and mounted a subsequent production of the same opera again in 2020.

Since retiring from teaching electronic music in 2019, Kohn has focused much of his compositional energy on setting to music the journal entries of historical figures. Adriana Zabala, mezzo-soprano, and Myra Huang, pianist, premiered Kohn's dramatic song cycle: *The Trial of Susan B. Anthony* in 2020.

Having found his preferred medium, the composer stated, "I am now going to spend my remaining years building up a dramatic song repertoire for the Art Song stage."

Steven Mark Kohn's development as a composer is unorthodox compared to many prodigious composers of classical works. His experiences, especially those of his youth, contribute directly to the art he creates. Kohn reflects:

> As a composer, you absorb the music of your life between the ages of 5 and 25. Your input valve is wide open. Then we study and work on our craft. When we reach a point of maturity, we go back to the impulses that shape us and put

> it through our filter of craft and technique to create these folk songs.[10]

Kohn's philosophy on musical development includes far more than formal musical training.

COMPOSITIONAL HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN FOLK SET

After the 1998 publication of his *27 Haiku,* Steven Mark Kohn's second foray into the Art Song genre became the selection and setting of several American folk songs.

> I've always loved the storytelling aspect of folk song. The fact that they skip past all of the academic training, they are rooted in human experience. I like the fact, too, that there's a naturally musical quality about them. The tunes are great. The lyrics are funny, so they really emanate from people with talent and an expressive capacity who are out there living a sort of rough and tumble real life.[11]

As Kohn began to contemplate what his contribution to the classical folk repertory might be, he considered the settings of prominent composers who had set folk music. He felt many of the commonly performed settings were often too repetitive and sparsely accompanied. Kohn instead drew inspiration from Ralph Vaughan Williams' approach to setting folk music, which he found far more lyrical and emotionally impactful. Additionally, he felt that there was a

[10] Kohn, interview 3.
[11] Kohn, interview 2.

relatively restricted number of quality American folk settings available to classical singers. Kohn saw an opportunity to create musically sophisticated folk song settings, which could breathe vibrant life into American folk songs.

Initially, Kohn set out to set only five folk songs. To identify folk tunes of a quality that warranted new arrangements, the composer began sifting through the hundreds of songs available in *American Ballads and Folk Songs* by John and Alan Lomax. Reflecting on the value of the collection, Kohn shares that the Lomax book "is a gem. You think about that these guys were going out in the field and having people on their front porches sing them songs their grandparents taught them. This is a very important bit of American scholarship."[12]

From that collection he selected only three songs he felt inspired to arrange. The remainder of the first volume and his subsequent two volumes were sourced from five other compilations: Carl Sandburg's *The American Songbag* (1927), Eloise Hubbard Linscott's *Folk Songs of Old New England* (1939), John and Alan Lomax's *Our Singing Country* (1941), Richard Chase's *American Folk Tales and Songs* (1956), and Alan Lomax's *Penguin Book of American Folk Songs* (1964). Each of the folk songs he selected had to meet

[12] Kohn, interview 2.

four criteria: "have a tune that resonated, have musical opportunities for fleshing it out, tell an interesting enough story, and be a song [he] didn't already know."[13]

Desiring to set the tunes unencumbered by outside influence, Kohn intentionally avoided researching folk recordings or other arrangements of these songs. He approached each arrangement by first addressing the text. Redundant or extraneous verses were cut and the remaining text was reordered to create a succinct, dramatic arc that flowed as an evocative story. Any use of colloquial terms or historic references that might convolute the story were altered for modern audiences to understand with ease. When deemed necessary, Kohn slightly reshaped melodic material. Finally, he crafted piano accompaniments rich with text painting to enhance the characters and their stories.

He concluded immediately that his folk settings could not veer too far away from tonality. "The pieces had to be tonal, had to be singable and had to have a very humanistic, natural quality about them. You're not going to set a folk song in a twelve-tone language; it just isn't right."[14] His original five settings include minimal key shifts. Kohn states, "In the beginning, I thought,

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[13] Kohn, interview 3.
[14] Kohn interview 2.

let's be more traditional with these. Keep it in a key. People around a campfire don't modulate, right?"[15] In several of his settings, the repetitive nature of the source material required more compositional variation to sustain interest through new melodic material, key changes, etc. "If something is repetitive like 'California,' I need to modulate, not only change the accompaniment, but keep lifting up the key centers so the whole thing has growth and an arc."[16] More modulations are found in his second and third volumes of folk song settings.

Of the first five settings published in 2000, "Red Iron Ore" was the first setting completed. While not directly inspired by the order of Aaron Copland's *Old American Songs* (1950 & 1952), Kohn's *American Folk Set* features a similar ordering of tempi in each of his five song volumes:

Medium tempo
Slow tempo
Comic up-tempo
Slow and emotional
Rollicking epic finale

This structure "gives each cycle a shape, a beginning middle and end and provides an arc which allows each of the five-song sets to achieve a dramatic shape."[17] The song order of all three volumes reflects this arc which lends to each five-song set serving as an effective and engaging

[15] Kohn, interview 3.
[16] Kohn, interview 2.
[17] Kohn, interview 1.

recital set. It should be noted that each individual song is equally effective as a stand-alone selection and therefore does not require the other four settings to function dramatically.

PUBLICATION & RECORDINGS

In 2002, the publisher Glendower Jones informed Kohn that David Daniels and Martin Katz were going to perform his set at Carnegie Hall as well as on their upcoming recital tour. While Kohn originally thought he "would just do five, but all of a sudden they're being done in Carnegie Hall. Glen had the connections to get them to libraries and into artists' hands. Andy Garland's doing them at the Phillips Gallery in DC. They're being toured and I thought, 'Wow! I better write some more!' Nothing succeeds like success."[18] While the first volume was originally conceived for the baritone voice. Both of his subsequent volumes in the set were initially written for medium voice. Later high and low editions were published making his settings available to all voice types and genders of performers.

Following the 2000 release of Volume 1, Volumes 2 and 3 were published in 2004 and 2006 respectively. While none of the three volumes received a formal debut performance, Kohn had the foresight to build interest

[18] Kohn, interview 3.

in his set by disseminating recordings of the *American Folk Set*. To do so, he began investigating the possibility of capturing a professional recording of the entire set. Having heard baritone Andrew Garland and pianist Donna Loewy perform several of his songs at the Phillips Gallery in Washington, DC, Kohn felt "these would be two good people to work with."[19] Kohn funded the costs of the project with Garland and Lowey agreeing to visit Cleveland and record *gratis*. The fifteen songs were recorded by engineer Alan Bise over two days in a small recital hall on the campus of Cleveland State University in 2009. The resulting album *On the Other Shore*, was released in 2009. Kohn views the album as "an opportunity to capture these songs in a place where they would reside and could be heard."[20] Arguably, Kohn's decision to make the recordings available for free and easily accessible on YouTube has contributed to the *American Folk Set*'s ever-growing popularity. His choice also ensures that potential teachers and performers looking to use the songs have a quality reference to his intended performance practices. Naxos has since added *On the Other Shore* to their library, securing its inclusion in academic music libraries across the nation.

[19] Kohn, interview 2.
[20] Kohn, interview 2.

In 2018, Steven Mark Kohn was contacted by his friend, composer Michael Ching, who is the opera consultant for the E. C. Schirmer Publishing Group. Having met Kohn at the Aspen Music Festival in 1978, Ching inquired if Kohn had any material that he would be interested in publishing through E. C. Schirmer. Kohn took Ching's offer explaining,

> "I am keen on the idea that we cannot self-publish forever because when you're gone, who's going to send your scores? I am keen on the idea that you'd like your work to outlive you. I would like these songs to live beyond me and Schirmer gave me that opportunity and I was very pleased about that."[21]

After extensive correspondence and editorial updates, the *American Folk Set* was converted to E. C. Schirmer's print format. The new offering is now published as one complete edition of all fifteen songs available in three vocal ranges: high, medium, low. This edition maintains the original song order of the three individual volumes. Kohn's entire catalogue for solo voice can currently be found on publisher E. C. Schirmer's website.

When asked if he intends to arrange further folk settings, Kohn explained that he feels the fifteen settings are enough, "It's important to know when you've said what you need to say and step away."[22] This sentiment

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[21] Kohn, interview 3.
[22] Kohn, interview 2.

applies to the composer's entire catalogue for solo voice. E. C. Schirmer's website currently offers eight publications composed by Kohn, who has emphasized his belief that the quality of his work should far outweigh the quantity, "My catalog is not huge. I will only write if I feel there's something worth saying."[23]

Kohn does not intend to stop composing art song. He believes he has found a real home in composing for the Art Song stage.

> The world of Art Song is a small niche, but it's an ardent and lovely and very friendly and mutually supportive niche. Everyone knows each other. So that is where I'm going to ride out the rest of my happy life, because I've found my voice there and have something viable to say in that world.[24]

Kohn feels the expressive capacity of the modern recital stage is largely untapped and has "zeroed in on the storytelling and theatrical aspect of art song."[25] His most recent Art Song compositions are settings of texts found in historic journals, including *Mary Chesnut: A Civil War Diary* and *The Trial of Susan B. Anthony*. While his future contributions will not be folk arrangements, they will be mini-dramas that contain "characters in action, either based on a

[23] Kohn, interview 3.
[24] Kohn, interview 2.
[25] Kohn, interview 2.

historic story or character where there is a story with an arc, peaks and valleys, and the audience can be taken on a journey."[26]

[26] Kohn, interview 3.

CHAPTER II

A HISTORICAL AND MUSICAL EXAMINATION OF THE AMERICAN FOLK SET

INTRODUCTION

Steven Mark Kohn came of age as a composer in what he describes as a toxic time in compositional history. "Twelve-tone was the way." His mentors warned him to "never use triads, avoid perfect intervals, patterns, sequencing, imitation." They "didn't believe in antecedent and consequent phrases!" He was told "Copland, Vaughan Williams, Prokofiev are crap; don't waste your time with it."[27] The atmosphere in the 1970s and early 1980s afforded no room for a composer who "wants to be expressive and connect with their audience."[28] Kohn recalls composers demonstrating actual contempt for their audience saying, "I don't care what anyone thinks… Composers like this wrote pieces that eight people might hear and then never be played again." Despite this, he feels he is "one of the composers that emerged from that toxic and restraining energy intact, without losing [his] soul."[29]

Drawing on his rock and popular music roots, Kohn describes his compositions as:

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[27] Kohn, interview 3.
[28] Kohn, interview 3.
[29] Kohn, interview 3.

> Music that is fairly simple and direct. The piano parts are not that difficult, but they are pianistic. They fall under the fingers. I like to believe that the piano parts are natural. I don't write overly difficult music. I could, I guess, but that wouldn't be honest. I write it for an audience that might only have the chance to hear it once.[30]

STYLISTIC TRAITS

The settings of the *American Folk Set* demonstrate an approach that suggests a thorough understanding of text setting and an expressive compositional palette that serves the story and the drama. For example, his use of registration in piano and voice to create contrasting text painting among various verses and individual moments in these settings is evocative. He recalls accompanying a singer on "Bright is the Ring of Words," by Ralph Vaughan Williams as "maybe one of the more challenging pieces I've played on piano" and noticed the "shimmering use of the upper register in the accompaniment," which provided an "ethereal contrast to the other places" in the song.[31] Kohn drew upon this inspiration in writing accompaniments that use the extremities of the piano. "Red Iron Ore" and "Ocean Burial" among others contain passages that rise into the upper register of the piano to highlight emotionally intimate moments while underscoring deep images with the lowest register of

[30] Kohn, interview 3.
[31] Kohn, interview 3.

the piano. In the second verse of "Poor Wayfaring Stranger," the use of the piano's registers are juxtaposed simultaneously using only extremely high and low registers of the piano to create a cavernous feeling of hopelessness.

Throughout the three volumes of his folk set, Kohn "tried to find in each song an accompaniment figure that seemed to embody the nature of the story. An accompaniment personality for each song."[32] These are manifested in many forms, from the undulating *arpeggios* depicting waves rocking the ship of prisoners in "Ten Thousand Miles Away" to the droning pedal tones resounding the depths of the coal mine in "Down, Down, Down."

The composer employs dramatic shifts in faster harmonic rhythm to energize movement presented in his texts. "Poor Wayfaring Stranger" exemplifies this specific compositional approach to text painting. When the vocalist sings of "this world of woe," the harmonies change approximately twice a measure, but when the vocalist sings of "going there… to that bright land," the harmonies change with every beat.

Functional tonality provides the foundation for these settings. Kohn warns of the overuse of atonal writing in modern vocal music; he suggests atonal writing obscures and distracts the audience's ability to ascertain the

[32] Kohn, interview 3.

mood of the story. Instead, he chooses relative dissonance by "creating a foundation of consonance from which you can deviate."[33] Kohn explains that a song could begin with open fifths to which the addition of a single second could add the dissonance necessary to emphasize a sentiment.

On songs that feature a repetitive text and/or melody, Kohn heightens the drama through modulation. His more lighthearted selections frequently benefit from his use of modulation; "The Old Woman's Courtship" progresses through three keys in its twenty-five measures and "The Bachelor's Lay" travels through five keys in its seven verses.

As expected from a composer who is also a librettist, Kohn sets his folk song selections with sensitivity to the inflection of natural speech. Whenever warranted, the text is afforded sustained rhythmic durations to allow the singer to linger in a moment. To further affect natural speech rhythms, Kohn often changes meters within a selection. The change of meter is typically not to create instability, but to allow metrical downbeats to influence the vocalist's inflection of the text.

Accelerating a tempo or subdividing a beat may serve to convey excitement or nervous energy. *Fermatas*, pauses, *caesuras*, and rests allow

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[33] Kohn, interview 3.

characters the time necessary to react and make discoveries that dramatically prepare the next moment in their stories. Unlike many folk arrangements, Kohn's accompaniments rarely double the vocal line. When doubling does occur, Kohn's intention may be to strengthen the text, to shadow the melody hauntingly in the piano, or to expose vulnerability with a thinner musical texture.

Kohn's range of dynamics varies broadly for both vocalist and pianist. The pianist and vocalist traverse the range of *fortissississimo* to *pianissississimo* to communicate the characters and their stories more effectively. *Sforzandi* followed by a sudden shift to *piano,* as used in the punch line of "The Farmer's Curst Wife," is an example of how the composer uses sudden changes in dynamics to elevate the drama in contrast to the many *crescendi* and *decrescendi* that alter dynamics as excitement grows or dwindles. Detailed markings in the scores influence the performance of both the accompaniment and vocal line. Kohn's frequent use of accents, *staccati*, slurs, markings guiding the use of the piano's sostenuto pedal as well as the composer's written instructions—all provide musical nuances adding theatricality to the storytelling.

Scattered throughout the *American Folk Set* are opportunities for the vocalist to engage in varied vocal productions. The vocalist is instructed to produce straight tone, falsetto, *sotto voce* spoken dialogue, and exclamations

to create varied dramatic moments. Examples include the "absurd falsetto" passages in "The Old Woman's Courtship" or spoken exclamations present in "Hell in Texas." Within the vocalist's interpretation of these folk songs, belting, covering as well as aspirate and legitimate vocal productions may appropriately color the vocal line. Kohn has liberated the vocalist from any restrictive tradition, thus, tremendously expanding the vocalist's expressive potential and bringing a contemporary theatricality to these historic folk songs.

In his endeavor to set American folk music, Steven Mark Kohn has taken liberties in adjusting the text, melody, and accompaniment to convey his interpretation of the stories that first attracted him. "These songs are folk songs. They've been modified over the many years; every one of us has a right to modify in our own way."[34]

The following three sections examine the historical information available on each of the fifteen settings. Background on the original songwriters, historical evolution of the songs and their variants, and Kohn's choices all valuably inform any performer's interpretations of these settings. The forthcoming analysis highlights Kohn's compositional choices by drawing attention to many musical details that bring vivid life to the historic characters

[34] Kohn, interview 3.

and their stories. The complete text for each of Kohn's settings are available in the appendix. The keys of the following musical discussion have been drawn from the medium edition with the ranges referencing the baritone octave.

VOLUME 1

Ten Thousand Miles Away

TYPE	Music Hall Ballad / Sea Shanty
ORIGIN	British, attributed to Joseph Bryan Geoghegan
TEMPO	Smoothly flowing, with feeling
	♪ = 126 – 138
BARITONE RANGE	B♭2 – F 4
DURATION	4:10[35]

The title of the first setting from the *American Folk Set* refers to the distance by sail from the British Isles to Australia. The text is a personal response to the late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century British practice of deporting criminals to Australian penal colonies. In this ballad, the narrator expresses his longing to reunite with his true love, who has been transported to Australia. Her deportation would have been punishment for a crime potentially as minor as petty theft. "Ten Thousand Miles Away" is also known as "Botany Bay," an inlet in Australia where the deportation ships often landed. As the prisoners being deported were both Irish and English in origin, variants of

[35] Full texts for each song can be found in the appendix on page 107.

the text reference both points of departure resulting in Irish and English versions of this folk song.

Joseph Bryan Geoghegan (1816 – 1889) is credited as the composer in *The Scottish Student's Song Book* (1897).[36] The popular Irish ballad, "Molly Malone," is also attributed to Geoghegan. He wrote "Ten Thousand Miles Away" in the 1860s while serving as the chairman of the Star Music Hall in Bolton, England.[37] One of the earliest American publications of this folk song is found in Henry De Marsan's *New Comic and Sentimental Singer's Journal*, issue 42 (1868-1882).[38] Originally performed as a music hall ballad, this folk song gained popularity as a sea shanty. The variant set by Steven Mark Kohn is sourced from Carl Sandburg's *The American Songbag* (1927).[39] The first two verses and refrain of this version provide the basis of Kohn's setting.

In the text, the narrator of the song remains in England as his true love sails on a prison ship destined for Australia. The narrator expresses his intention to do what he can to reunite with his beloved, but the song

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[36] Millar Patrick, William Nelson, J. Malcolm Bulloch, and A. Stodart Walker, eds, *The Scottish Students' Song Book*, (London: Bayley & Ferguson, 1897), 126.
[37] John Baxter, "JB Geoghegan," *Folk Song and Music Hall*, Last modified December 28, 2020, http://folksongandmusichall.com/index.php/jb-geoghegan/.
[38] Henry De Marsan, "Ten Thousand Miles Away," *Henry De Marsan's New Comic and Sentimental Singer's Journal,* No. 42, (New York, NY: Henry De Marsan, 1868-82), 303.
[39] Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag*, (Boston, MA: Harcourt, 2003), 100-101.

concludes before he embarks on his quest. Verse four of the traditional text (not included in Kohn's arrangement), illustrates these sentiments.

> Oh! if I could be but a bo' s'n bold,
> Or only a bombadier,
> I'd hire a boat and hurry afloat,
> and straight to my true love steer
> And straight to my true love steer, my boys,
> Where the dancing dolphins play,
> And the whales and the sharks are having their larks,
> Ten thousand miles away.[40]

Including Kohn's setting, many versions do not include the third verse, which reveals why the great distance divides the two lovers.

> Oh! dark and dismal was the day
> when last I saw my Meg,
> She'd a government band around each hand,
> and another one around her leg
> And another one around her leg, my boys,
> as the big ship sailed away
> And I said that I'd be true to her
> ten thousand miles away![41]

Steven Mark Kohn's setting features tasteful alterations to enrich the source material without deviating from its roots. He utilizes a more modern duple meter with the use of $\frac{6}{8}$ instead of $\frac{6}{4}$ time. To delay the climax, Kohn reserves the highest pitches until the end of the verse rather than at the end of the first phrase as in the original version. He employs a simple and unobtrusive

[40] Patrick, et al, 127.
[41] Sandburg, 101.

key change from E♭ major to F major which helps delineate verses and heighten the emotions later in the song. Kohn's setting shifts the overall temperament of the work from a lilting sea shanty to a more relaxed sentimental portrayal of the story.

The accompaniment melodically undulates depicting the rise and fall of the waves at sea, while the perpetual motion of the rhythm characterizes the perpetual rolling sea. Throughout the accompaniment, constant sixteenth notes propel both the story and narrator's emotions onward. The sixteenth notes only halt to give space just before "for I'm on the road to my own true love" as the narrator considers his motivation to make the formidable journey and again in the final repetitions of the title phrase separating "ten thousand miles" from the final word "away" as the narrator is daunted by the distance (see fig. 1).

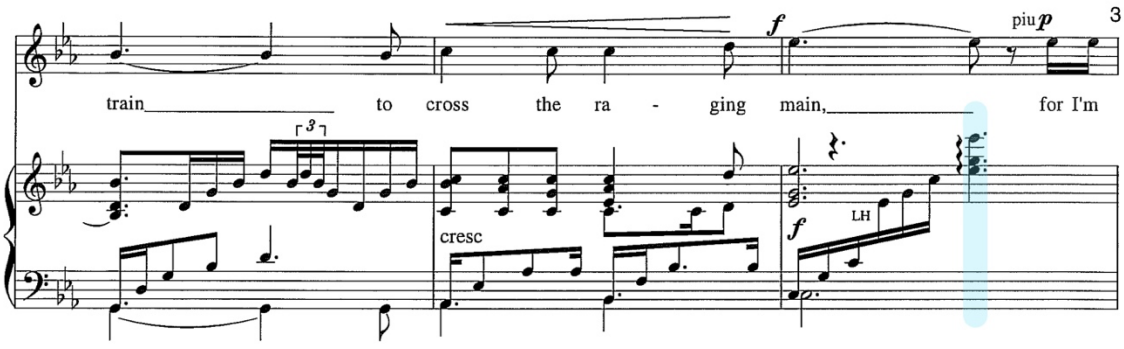

Figure 1 Cessation of sixteenth notes

The simplicity of delivery found in the original folk song is retained through Kohn's use of harmony, meter, and texture. When the singer

remembers their true love's voice, the piano's tessitura rises higher while the dynamics become more hushed allowing a contrast of tender memories, which inform the despair over being separated from a true love (see fig. 2).

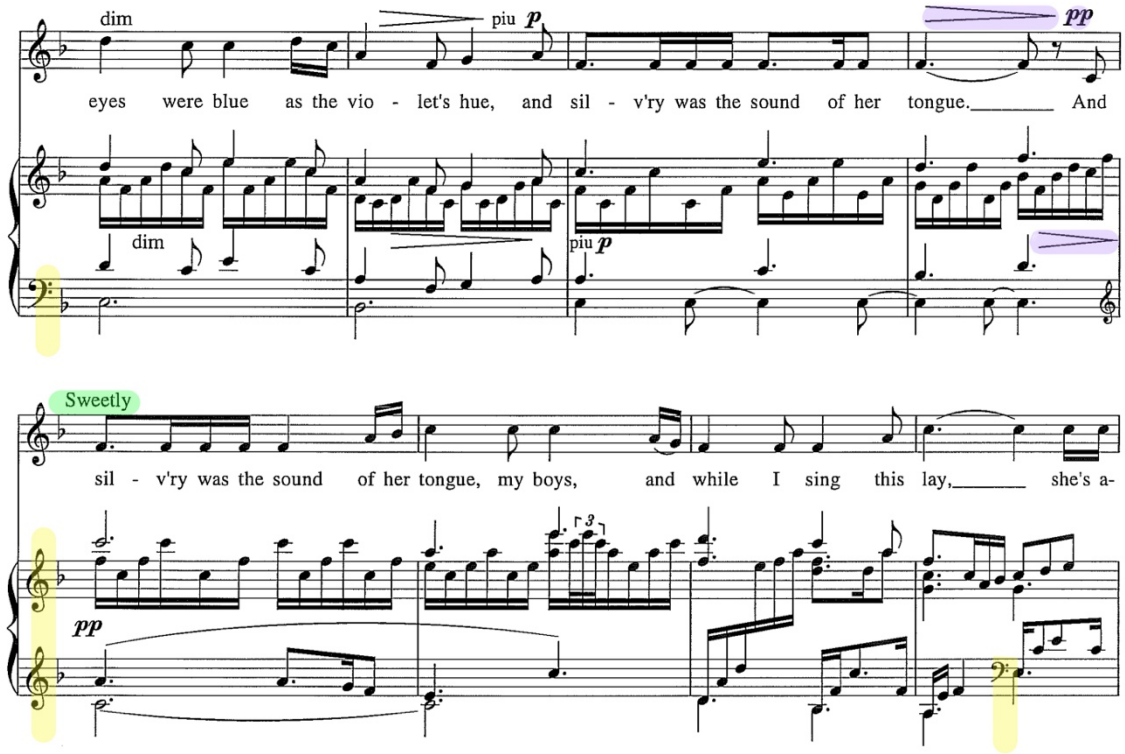

Figure 2 Higher tessitura for lover's voice

Tenderness grows as the phrase repeats pianissimo and is instructed to be sung sweetly. Similarly, the final line of the refrain is repeated to end the song. It is set in a slower tempo over a thinner accompaniment with a marking of *sotto voce*. To represent the growing distance between the two lovers, the accompaniment ends with the left hand separated by four octaves (see fig. 3).

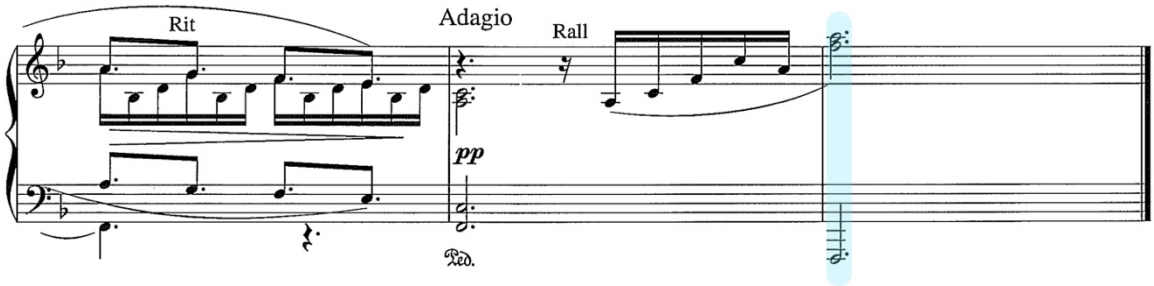

Figure 3 Four octaves between hands

On the Other Shore

TYPE	Hymn
ORIGIN	American unknown
TEMPO	Slowly, with great tenderness ♩ = 56 – 70
BARITONE RANGE	B♭2 – F♯4
DURATION	3:55

Including "On the Other Shore", many of the selections included in the *American Folk Set* were sourced from collections compiled by John Lomax (1867–1948) and Alan Lomax (1915–2002), a legendary father and son team, who contributed to the preservation of folk music from every walk of American life.[42] Both men were fervent in their inclusion of African American music as part of the American story.[43] In his early career, John Lomax traveled from Texas to Harvard University to study under George Lyman Kittredge (1860-1941) who succeeded Francis James Child (in his own, a legendary folk collector) as professor of English. Kittredge encouraged John Lomax to follow his childhood passion for collecting ballads and cowboy songs. Following his studies at Harvard, Lomax returned to his home state of Texas and eventually worked for several institutions. He continued to cultivate his interest in folk song and helped found the Texas Folklore Society (1909). John Lomax, and

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[42] Nolan Porterfield Nolan & Darius L. Thieme, "Lomax Family," *Grove Music Online,* last updated February 24, 2010, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.48410.

[43] John A. Lomax, *Adventures of a Ballad Hunter*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017), xx.

later his son Alan, would ultimately partner with the Library of Congress to archive a wide range of American folk music. To that end, Lomax had a recorder installed in the trunk of his Ford sedan (1933). This was the device used to capture everyday Americans singing the songs of their heritage. Between the two men, over 10,000 recordings of American folk music were captured and preserved. "On the Other Shore" and variants of all selections in Kohn's *American Folk Set* may be heard in the Lomax Collection housed in the Library of Congress.

"On the Other Shore" is included in the Lomaxes' anthology: *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, published in 1934.[44] This song is known by varied titles: "I Have a Mother Gone to Glory," "Calling the Mourners," and "Over Yonder's Ocean." The latter is also included Richard Chase's *American Folk Tales and Songs* (1956).[45] A recording of Minnie Floyd performing this version was captured by the Lomaxes in 1937. Floyd's tune varies from the version sung by John Lomax on the same recording.[46] Lomax's version originates from

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[44] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1994), 572.
[45] Richard Chase, *American Folk Tales and Songs,* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1971), 136-137.
[46] Minnie Floyd & John A. Lomax, "I Have a Mother Gone to Glory Over Yonder's Ocean," *Deep River of Song: South Carolina Got the Keys to the Kingdom,* Rounder Select B000067ULQ, 2007, CD.

"camp meetings by Texas circuit riders."[47] These were preachers who traveled throughout the area during a revival period at the turn of the twentieth century. Lomax's variant serves as the basis for Kohn's arrangement.

Steven Mark Kohn sets this hymn tune with an accompaniment of blocked chords honoring its history. The sparse accompaniment evokes the universally relatable hardship of losing a loved one. The introduction tone paints the singer's loss with a hushed descent into death followed by a bell tone releasing the soul. A gentle arpeggio then ascends to linger in a fermata portraying the soul's ascent into eternity (see fig. 4). This tone painting

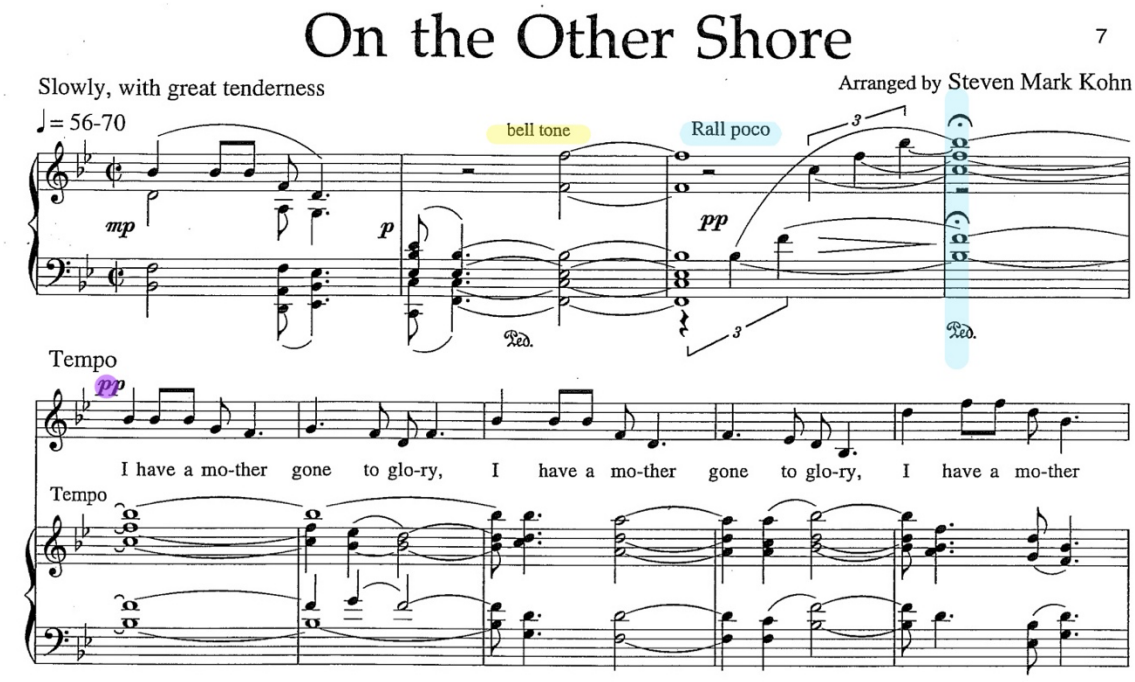

Figure 4 Introduction with bell tone

[47] Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs,* 572.

continues predominantly via Kohn's dramatic use of the piano's varied tessituras. The pianist's hands move at times entirely to the bass clef or the treble clef. At other points, the accompaniment extends to the opposing extremities of the keyboard.

The final chord of the introduction is left to decay as the voice enters, essentially unaccompanied in voicing their loss. As the first verse progresses, the accompaniment begins to double the vocal line, as is common in hymn writing. In the second verse the accompaniment becomes more rhythmic. The singer's optimism begins to take hold as they look forward to seeing their mother in heaven. Each successive verse builds dynamically with one exception. Each time the title line is sung, the dynamic is reduced to *piano*. This hushed treatment of "on the other shore" reflects the mystery and distance associated with the afterlife.

The final verse includes a gospel-inspired, chromatic modulation from B$^{\flat}$ major to B major as the singer sings of their belief that they too will meet the "blessed savior." In the same manner as the beginning, bells toll, but this time repeatedly accenting the text, "There," implying that heaven will eventually summon all of us.

The third time the text "There we'll see our blessed savior" is sung, the harmony moves naturally toward the dominant. Kohn does this initially, but

then pivots to the dominant of the dominant just prior to the cadential chord returning to the struggle of grief. The arrangement concludes with a gentle resolution home to the tonic.

The Farmer's Curst Wife

TYPE	Humorous Southern Mountain Song
ORIGIN	English unknown
TEMPO	With bounce and Good Humor, not rushed
	♩ = 96 – 108
BARITONE RANGE	D3 – E 4
DURATION	3:45

The "Farmer's Curst Wife" is a comic tale of a hardy farm wife whose crotchety old husband offers her up when the devil arrives to collect his due. The devil obviously underestimates his quarry and subsequent verses describe the woe he encounters when he attempts to drag her back to hell.

A story of husband versus wife that has been passed down through the ages, "The Farmer's Curst Wife" is quite possibly the oldest selection set by Kohn in his *American Folk Set*. The traditional English folk song can be found referenced in print as early as 1792. It was published at the turn of the twentieth century amongst the Child ballads. Not to be confused with a children's nursery rhyme, the Child ballads are a collection of 305 folk songs compiled into five volumes entitled *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* by Francis James Child.[48] The pioneering folk scholar was educated and later

[48] Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, volume 3, 346-355.

appointed as the first "Professor of English" at Harvard University where in the 1860s, he embarked on a lifelong quest to collect and preserve folk songs of British origin.[49] "The Farmer's Curst Wife" is number 278 in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, volume 5, part 9.[50] Due to a diverse dissemination, this folk song can be found under a plethora of titles: "The Devil and the Farmer's Wife," "The Sussex Farmer's Old Wife," "Kellyburn Braes," "The Old Lady and the Devil," and most notably, "The Devil and the Ploughman." The latter was collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) in 1903. Vaughan Williams notes that the song "used to be sung in Sussex with a whistling chorus," which contrasts with the nonsense syllables usually employed for the refrain.[51] The syllables that most frequently appear in English variants relate directly to the tune of "Lillibulero." Originally composed as a march in 1688 by Henry Purcell, this popular tune has been adopted for singing a variety of folk texts and also appeared in Act III of *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) by John Gay and Johann Christoph Pepusch.[52] When the text of "The Farmer's Curst Wife" is

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[49] James Porter, "Child, Francis James," *Grove Music Online*, last updated June 10, 2012, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.48785.
[50] Francis James Child, ed. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads, parts 1-10, (*Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1804), 107-108.
[51] Ralph Vaughan Williams, Frank Kidson, Lucy E. Broadwood, Cecil J. Sharp, and J. A. Fuller-Maitland, "Songs Collected from Sussex," *Journal of the Folk-Song Society* 2, no. 8 (1906): 185, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4433889.
[52] Robert D. Hume, "Beggar's Opera, The," *Grove Music Online*, last reviewed August 29, 2012, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O002751.

set to the tune of "Lillibulero," the tune's title is adapted as the refrain "Lilli bulero bullen a la."

The text and tune set by Steven Mark Kohn can be found in Alan Lomax's *The Penguin Book of American Folk Songs.*[53] The melody of this version is different from "*Lillibulero*," instead enlisting the nonsense syllables "Sing hi-diddle-i-diddle-i, Fi-diddle-i-diddle-i-day" as a comic refrain. This refrain functions as an integral comic device in Kohn's musical storytelling.

When first approaching this song, the most noticeable changes to the source material are in meter, dynamics, and tempo. Changes in meter set the prosody facilitating the composer's preferred syllabic stress. Dynamics are marked with specificity throughout to guide the singer and pianist in exacting the storytelling devices and character interjections. For example, the first two verses are marked *mezzo forte* with a *crescendo* leading to the refrain. The two subsequent refrains begin suddenly quiet with a swell in the middle to move the story along. Each refrain varies in dynamics and accompaniment allowing a musical heightening of specific dramatic moments in the storytelling, i.e. the narrator's storytelling suspense, the farmer's devious thinking, the farmer's laughing, the devil making his plan, the imps' surprised horror, the baby devils

[53] Alan Lomax, *The Penguin Book of American Folk Songs*, (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1964), 43.

fleeing, the devil's begrudging surrender, and finally the narrator's smug laughter. While the storytelling requires the singer to embody the drama, the accompaniment material supports the action and provides stimuli. When the little devils run away from the woman, accented blocked chords hit in an unpredictable rhythm while the singer is incessantly singing "diddle-i" as the little devils scurry away from the wife (see fig. 5).

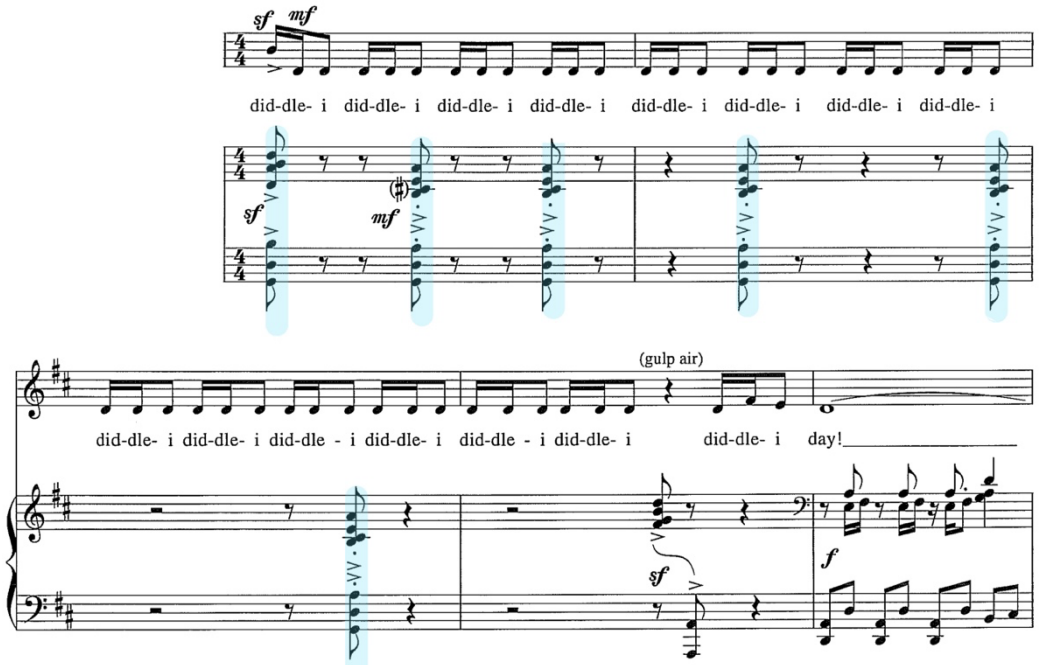

Figure 5 Little devils run away

In the accompaniment, increased chromaticism depicts the descent to hell. Once the scene shifts to hell, the accompaniment roils with further chromaticism creating harmonic instability (see fig. 6). The use of chromaticism diminishes as the devil returns to earth in defeat. To control the singer's inflection of the text with metrical downbeats, Kohn changes meter twenty-two times within this song. To enhance an authentic conveyance of the ebb and

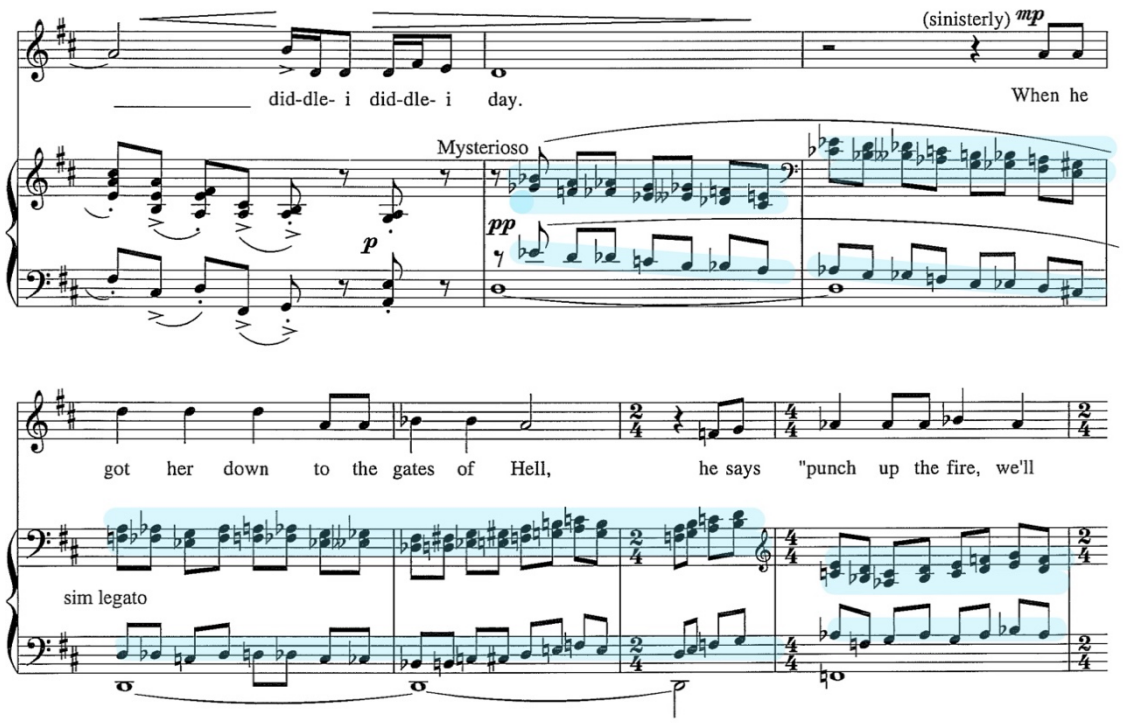

Figure 6 Chromaticism of hell

flow of the story, the dynamics and tempi fluctuate dramatically, *i.e.* when the moral of this tale is presented, the dynamics are initially *piano* with a quick *crescendo* to *forte* in a single beat. Punctuated by three increasingly accented harmonies, a *caesura* leaves the audience in stunned silence, which is followed by a slowly delivered hushed, but nonetheless cheeky, punchline (see fig. 7).

The accompaniment is often reminiscent of guitar accompaniments so common in folk music. Sounding the bass string followed by a strum of harmony is coined a "boom chuck" strum by guitarists. This strum is reflected in the accompaniment's syncopation and off-beat stresses (see fig. 7).

The text of "The Farmer's Curst Wife" follows the form of a cautionary folk tale. Tempering the dangers of hell with humor, the text concludes with

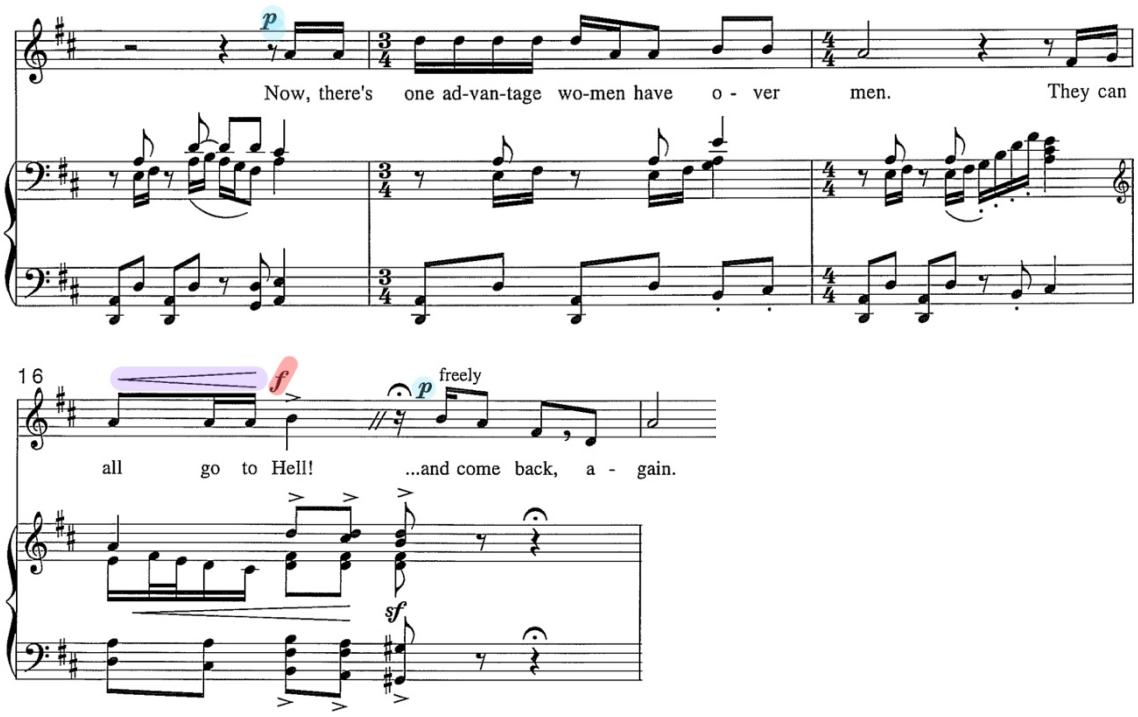

Figure 7 Moral of the song

the mandatory moral. Kohn's arrangement offers the performer an engaging theatrical opportunity to experiment with the many voices, temperaments, and reactions of the characters that inhabit this equally comic and dramatic folk song.

Wanderin'

TYPE	Ballad
ORIGIN	American unknown
TEMPO	With a steady even roll, mournfully, distantly ♩= 72 – 84
BARITONE RANGE	D3 – D4
DURATION	3:20

At the turn of the twentieth century in America, migrant workers, also known as hobos, proliferated. They traveled across the country trying their hand at whatever work came their way. The dangerous practice of

freighthopping was a frequent mode of transportation. They kept on the move gathering a wealth of life experiences along their way. As in "Wanderin'," many folk songs illustrate the lifestyle of Americans who rarely knew a secure job or a constant home.

This particular song was first documented in the 1920s and found its way into *The American Songbag* in 1927. The origin is hazy; the rendition included in Sandburg's collection amalgamated versions from two sources. Sandburg credits the first three stanzas to Arthur Sutherland of Rochester, NY, and the last two to Hubert Canfield of Pittsford, NY.[54] Beyond this, little is known of the song's composition. The text and tune were later included in Alan Lomax's *The Penguin Book of American Folk Song.*[55]

Despite humble beginnings, this folk song has remained relevant throughout the twentieth century. "Wanderin'" and "The Devil and the Farmer's Wife" were both featured in the revue of American folk music *Sing Out, Sweet Land,* which ran from December 27, 1944 to March 24, 1945, at the International Theatre in New York City.[56] The music for this production was arranged by Elie Siegmeister with the book written by Walter Kerr. Most of the

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[54] Sandburg, 188-189.
[55] Lomax, *Penguin Book of American Folk Songs*, 143.
[56] The Theatre Guild, "Sing Out, Sweet Land," *Playbill*, performed at International Theatre: New York, NY, January 14, 1945, https://www.playbill.com/production/sing-out-sweet-land-international-theatre-vault-0000007697.

folk songs were sung by the leading character named Barnaby Goodchild portrayed by Alfred Drake. Drake gained acclaim for his many roles in early Broadway productions including *Oklahoma!*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, and *Babes in Arms*.[57]

"Wanderin'" received further recognition after being recorded by James Taylor on his 1975 album *Gorilla*[58] and later released as part of the 1995 album *PPM & (Lifelines)* by Peter, Paul & Mary.[59]

As cited in Sandburg's *Songbag*, he discusses "Wanderin'":

> The pulsation is gay till the contemplative pauses, the wishes and the lingerings, of that line of each verse, and the prolonged vocalizing of "l-i-k-e." The philosophy is desperate as the old sailor saying, "To work hard, to live hard, to die hard, and then to go to hell after all, would be too damned hard."

Steven Mark Kohn stays true to Sandburg's assessment in his setting.

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[57] "Alfred Drake: American Actor," *Encyclopaedia Brittanica,* October 3, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alfred-Drake.
[58] James Taylor, "Wandering," *Gorilla,* recorded March-April 1975, Warner Bros., May 1975, CD.
[59] Peter, Paul & Mary, "Wandering'/Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out," *PPM & (Lifelines),* Warner Off Roster, December 10, 2006, CD.

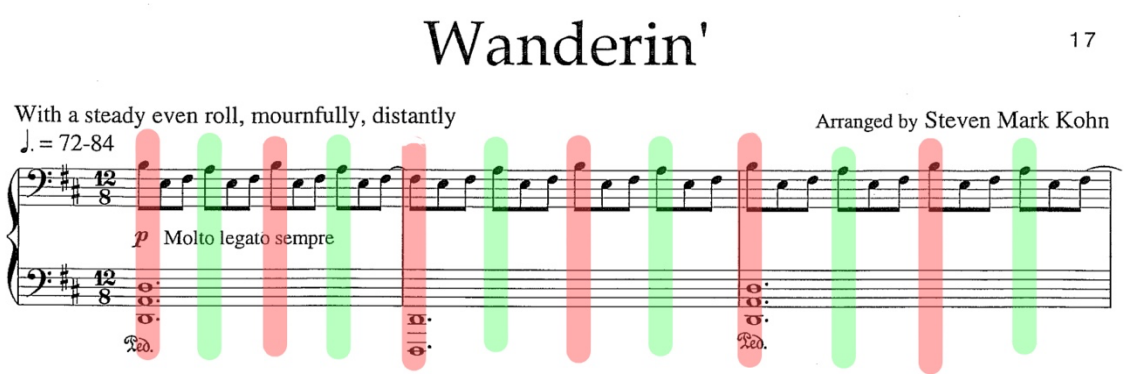

Figure 8 Clickety Clackety of the train

In Kohn's setting, alternating the undulating patterns of three eighth notes per beat allows the accompaniment to embody the rhythmic clickety-clackety of the train wheels on the tracks (see fig. 8). The frequent repetition of pitches in the vocal line allows the text to be easily conveyed and counteracts the forward momentum of the accompaniment to evoke the notion of treading water. The life of a vagabond is tough and tiring. Not having a constant family, home, job, or purpose can easily drive a person to despair. The prolonged reminder of hardship reiterates each time the singer quietly and distantly begins the refrain.

Kohn sets his final verse as a half-hearted resignation to dying a vagabond. The two against three effect contrasts the rhythm of the voice against the right hand in the accompaniment providing rhythmic tension as the singer delivers a final cautionary phrase, "If whiskey don't get you, then the woman must." Kohn slightly alters the melody of this phrase by transitioning to the parallel minor (D minor) for three measures (see fig. 9). After the vocal line

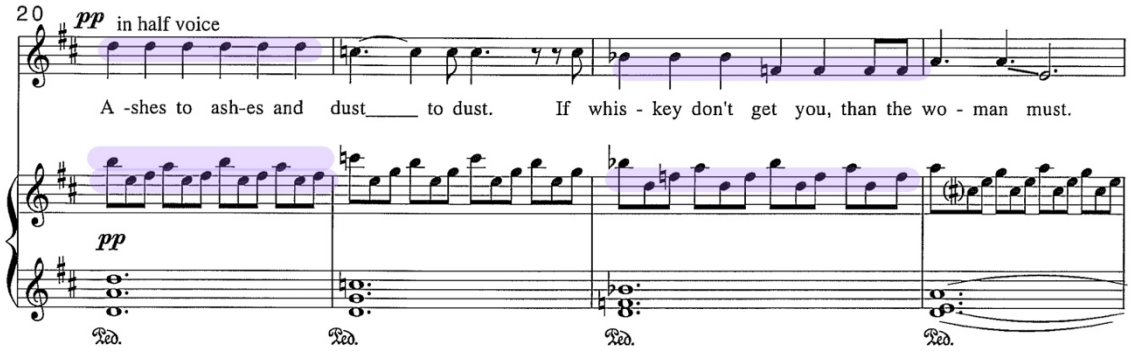

Figure 9 Two against three between voice and accompaniment

concludes and fades, the locomotive motive begins to slow and fade. Alternating with an open octave statically pitched on the tonic in the lowest tessitura of the accompaniment, the pianist's left had crosses into the treble clef to sound four forlorn whistles before the train vanishes into the distance of a final *fermata* (see fig. 10).

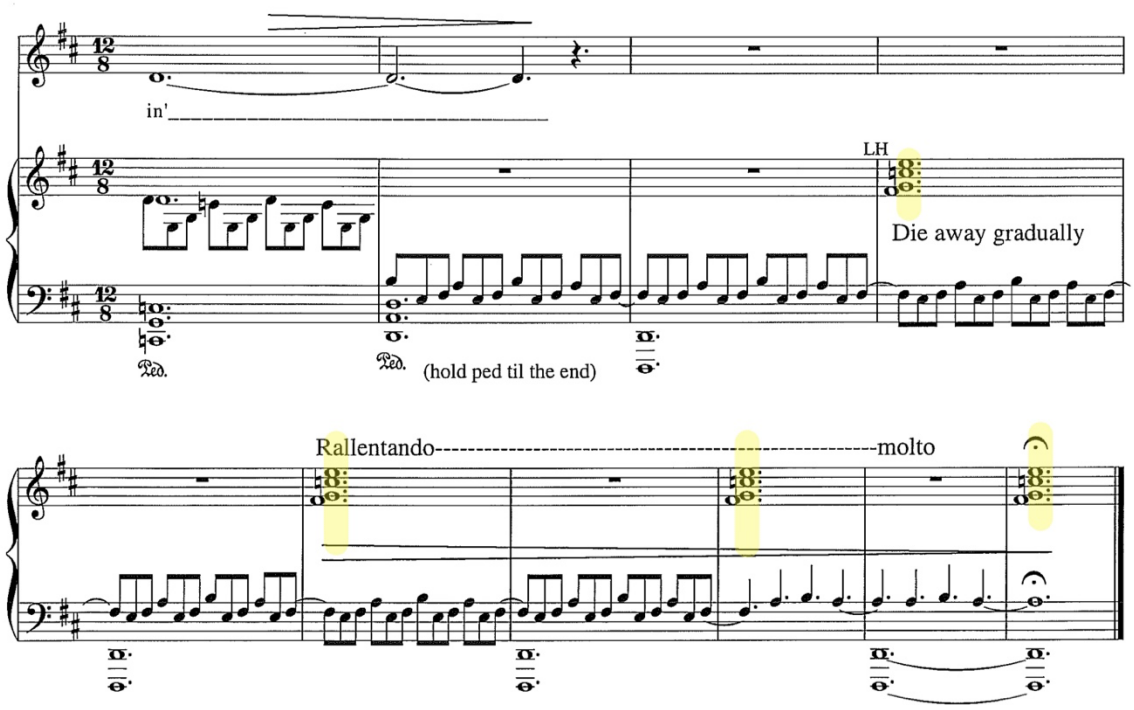

Figure 10 Four train whistles into the distance

Red Iron Ore

TYPE	Industrial / Inland Sailor Ballad
ORIGIN	American and English unknown
TEMPO	With measured pace, not rushed
	♩= 56 – 66
BARITONE RANGE	D3 – E 4
DURATION	6:00

"Red Iron Ore" details the ventures of the schooner *E. C. Roberts* and its crew, who hauled iron ore during the second half of the nineteenth century. The ship was built in Cleveland, OH and launched in 1856.[60] The ballad conveys the arduous and dangerous occupation of shipping iron ore across the American Great Lakes. At the time of this story, likely sometime between

[60] *E. C. Roberts,* (1856, Schooner), Ship Directory, Great Lakes Maritime Collection from C. Patrick Labadie, Alpena County George N. Fletcher Public Library, Alpena, MI, accessed May 27, 2021, https://greatlakeships.org/details.asp?ID=2897492&n=6.

1867 and 1873,[61] small schooners like the *E. C. Roberts* were the best equipped method of transporting ore from mining regions to steel foundries. In contrast to larger, side-loading steamers, the hatches on schooners were located on top of the vessel easily receiving the shoots used to dispense ore from the docks. In the narration, the *Roberts* sails for the port of Escanaba, Michigan to load ore mined from the Marquette Iron Range. After loading its cargo, the ship is towed out of the bay by a tugboat. The crew of another ore-hauling schooner the *Minch* calls out jibes suggesting they'll beat the *Roberts* back home saying, "See you in Cleveland next fourth of July." The voyage is initially smooth sailing as the *Roberts* sets sail for Cleveland, but the ship quickly encounters the notorious gales of November, storms deadly to mariners of the Great Lakes. Despite the hardship, the brave ship and crew manage to arrive in Cleveland ahead of the competition. Once on shore, the captain celebrates their accomplishment, by treating the crew to a round of drinks. In the version of the text catalogued in the Lomax's *American Ballads and Folk Songs* and subsequently adapted by Kohn, the captain is mentioned

[61] Robert B. Waltz and David G. Engel, "Red Iron Ore [Laws D9]," *The Traditional Ballad Index*, accessed May 28, 2021, http://www.fresnostate.edu/folklore/ballads/LD09.html

as Harvey Shannon; however, the actual captain of the *E. C. Roberts* was Harve Rummage, who is accurately credited in other variants of the song.[62]

The original author of "Red Iron Ore" is unknown; the text was first collected in Minnesota by Michael Cassius Dean for his 1922 compilation *Flying Cloud: And One Hundred and Fifty other Old Time Songs and Ballads of Outdoor Men, Sailors, Lumber Jacks, Soldiers, Men of the Great Lakers, Railroadmen, Miners, etc.*[63] The basis for the tune originates from the English folk ballad "Derry Down." This melody was not only adapted for "Red Iron Ore" but is a popular text and tune for the refrain of numerous ballads. The "Derry Down" tune was first documented at the end of the seventeenth century, when it was refenced as "A New Ballad of King John and the Abbot of Canterbury." This tune would be employed as the melody for airs in many English Ballad operas, including *The Beggar's Opera*.[64] The ballad was later catalogued as Ballad 45 titled "King John and the Bishop" by Francis James Child.[65] The tune's popularity spread to America and was eventually incorporated into a

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[62] Lee Murdock, vocalist, "E. C. Roberts / The Red Iron Ore," track 14 on *Cold Winds,* released January 1, 1991, Depot Recordings DEP-011, CD.
[63] "The Red Iron Ore," Roud Folksong Index (S159210), *Vaughan Williams Memorial Library,* accessed May 28, 2021, https://www.vwml.org/roudnumber/2233.
[64] Glenda Goodman, "Musical Sleuthing in Early America," *Commonplace: The journal of early American life*, 13, no. 2 (Winter 2013), http://commonplace.online/article/musical-sleuthing-early-america/.
[65] Child, 403.

ballad titled "The Dreadnought." This song was titled after a legendary clipper ship known for ferrying immigrants from Liverpool to New York in the 1850s.[66] This maritime descendant of the "Derry Down" tune was a precursor to "Red Iron Ore" appropriated and modified to appear as versions catalogued in later collections including the Lomaxes' *American Ballads and Folk Songs* and Sandburg's *The American Songbag*. In his notes, Sandburg stresses the importance of performing "Red Iron Ore" as more than a strophic log of the crew's undertakings:

> "It may, at first, seem just a lilt with a matter-of-fact story. It is more than that; it is a little drama; the singer should know what it is to shovel red iron ore; the singer should know the wide curves of that ship path from Chicago to Cleveland on three Great Lakes."[67]

Kohn meets this challenge with an adaptation setting ten of the twelve verses printed in the Lomaxes' version. The narrator encourages everyone to gather as he begins to share his memories of time spent serving on the *E. C. Roberts*. After a brief introduction the accompaniment thins, making room for the singer to initiate their tale. The second verse transports the singer and audience into the past with an ethereal, *legato* ascending piano line. The energy and momentum of the story heightens as the ship picks up speed

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[66] Frank C. Bowen, "The Wild Boat of the Atlantic," *Shipping Wonders of the World,* 12: 374-377, https://www.shippingwondersoftheworld.com/dreadnought.html.
[67] Sandburg, 176-177.

portrayed in the detached rhythmic accompaniment propelling forward from downbeat to downbeat (see fig. 11). Arriving at Escanaba as night draws near,

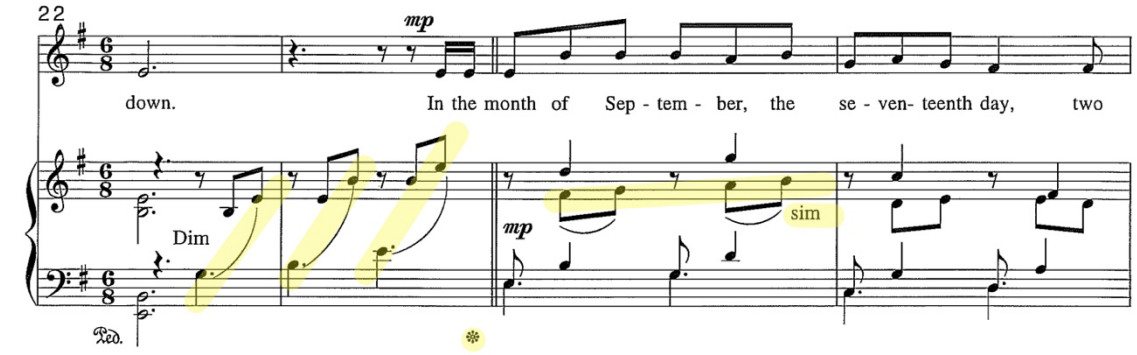

Figure 11 Memory

the crew drops anchor and hauls in the sails. After a *sforzando* punctuates the anchor's descent into the bay, the tempo calms and the rhythmic motive suddenly quiets as the workday concludes (see fig. 12). The rhythmic motive

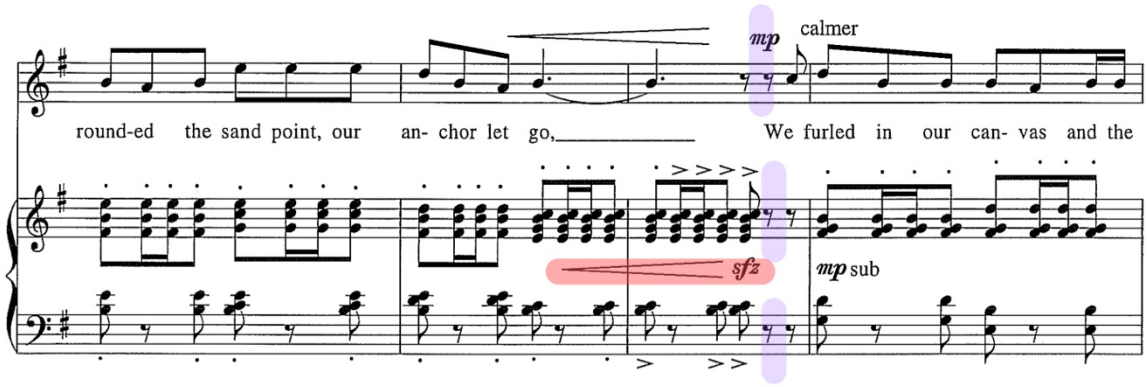

Figure 12 Anchor dropping at night fall

quickly resumes but slurs replace *staccati* as a new day begins (see fig. 13). The ship pulls into the docks to receive the ore. As the men shovel ore from the deck into the hold, a chordal accompaniment denotes their labor and the steady shoveling. For four measures the left and right hand of the accompaniment alternate tolling open octaves and fifths sound the ships' bells

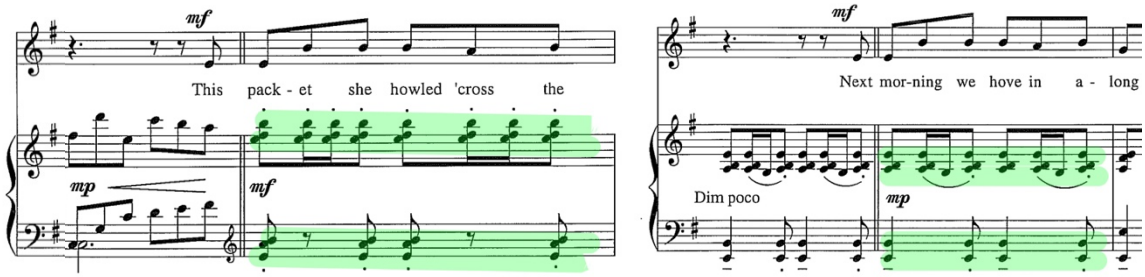

Figure 13 Left, Detached rhythm in verse three; *Right*, Slurred rhythm in verse four

warning of close proximity. The *Minch* and eventually the *Roberts* are tugged back out to the lake with both crews taunting the other about arriving after the winter's weather has cleared. The accompaniment begins to roll uniform homophonic chords to sound the calm waves as the ships are tugged out into bay. A six-measure piano interlude follows with a sweeping depiction of the fully loaded *Roberts'* sails gradually billowing open as the schooner voyages back into the open waters of Lake Michigan. Hushed sweeping sixteenth note *arpeggios* give way to *forte*, detached *arpeggios* followed by accented broken octaves as the accompaniment sinks below the treble clef underscoring the danger in the rough waters of verse seven.

As the *Roberts* arrives in Cleveland to deliver the ore, the crew discovers that they've bested the other ships. After unloading the freight, they go to a pub to celebrate their victory. The end of the mariners' tale is punctuated by two expansive chords, the second an octave higher than the first, both marked with *fermati* and followed by a *caesura*. The final verse then quietly resumes

with hymn-like, blocked chords providing a sparse accompaniment, which allows the narrator to comment on the tale and raise a toast. The last refrain begins softly and slowly as though the sentimental memory of such a remarkable ship and crew may bring forth tears; however, after a sustained *fermata* the narrator concludes with one final, *forte* repetition of "Derry down, down, down, derry down!" sung with gusto as the tempo stretches even slower. The final three measures are punctuated by wide, accented chords settling to the lowest pitch in the accompaniment to underscore the final "down." The melody, text, and accompaniment work together to offer a solemn final salute to the *E. C. Roberts*.

VOLUME 2

The Bachelor's Lay

TYPE	Courting Song
ORIGIN	Unknown
TEMPO	Simply
	♩. = 68 – 80
BARITONE RANGE	B2 – E4
DURATION	3:45

"The Bachelor's Lay" belongs to a family of ballads whose themes center around the plight of single men who, either by intention or fate, have struggled to successfully court a lady. These ballads share similar thematic material and often interchange verses and tunes. It is often sung to the tune of "The

Bachelor's Hall," a similar ballad suggesting men are better off remaining single in a bachelor's house. The variant set by Kohn is set from the perspective of an old bachelor, who recollects his failed attempts at romance in song. While he expresses disappointment in questioning what "the reason may be that none of those girls will marry me," he doesn't seem too interested in changing his ways and not terribly interested in settling down in the first place. This sentiment would align this folk song with others that share a theme suggesting freedom through bachelorhood.

The earliest known documentation of this version was catalogued by Henry Belden as early as 1904.[68] Beyond the title listed here, the tune can be found entitled: "The Bachelor's Lament," "The Old Bachelor," "The Discontented Bachelor," or "The Bachelor's Complaint." The latter variant may be heard on the 1954 album, *Solomon Valley Ballads* recorded by Eugene Jemison.[69] This album also features recordings of "Ten Thousand Miles Away" and "The Ocean Burial."

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[68] Robert B. Waltz and David G. Engle, "Bachelor's Lament (II), A," *The Traditional Ballad Index,* accessed May 30, 2021, http://www.fresnostate.edu/folklore/ballads/JHCox160.html.
[69] Eugene Jemison, "The Bachelor's Complaint," track 5 on *Solomon Valley Ballads,* Folkways Records B000S9DQ1I, CD.

Kohn's setting was sourced from John Lomax's and Alan Lomax's 1941 collection, *Our Singing Country*.[70] He modifies an existing tune to better connect phrases into a single cohesive structure by delaying a strong cadence until the conclusion of each verse. As heard in many of Kohn's settings, the composer chooses varied tessituras of the piano to create atmosphere. The piano's introduction is played only in the right hand as the sostenuto pedal is held throughout chord changes. Ethereal tone painting in a higher tessitura is used again in the piano's final interlude as the old bachelor drifts into his memories of the women of his past to summarize his plight (see fig. 14). The

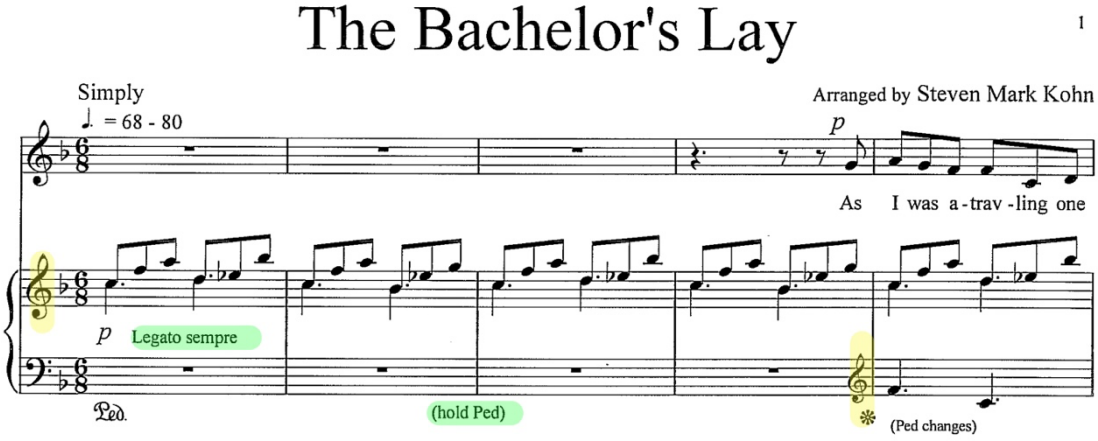

Figure 14 High tessitura for ethereal atmosphere

first two phrases are voiced by a narrator, the remainder of the song is sung in the voice of the old bachelor with a brief exception set apart by a *caesura* before the old bachelor mimics the girls' unsatisfying answers to his questions.

[70] John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, *Our Singing Country: Folk Songs and Ballads*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1941), 119-121.

The tale begins simply as he lists the varying demographic of women he's pursued. As he settles further into his memories, the accompaniment raises the key with repeated, blocked chords grounded in the bass clef to underscore his recollection of his adventures as a sailor. The key shifts a total of five times as the bachelor sifts through his memories in search of an answer. Each change of key serves to enhance the drama by musically designating a new direction in the bachelor's pondering his problem. His concern over not securing a wife is stated a total of seven times. Each restatement is supported by a different accompaniment. With each return, these phrases gradually grow more complex to reflect his growing frustration, until the final statement, when the narrator voices the issue supported only by a single chord on the downbeats in the accompaniment.

After the protagonist concludes recounting his failed conquests, the piano introduces his next phrase an interval of an eleventh higher (see fig. 15).

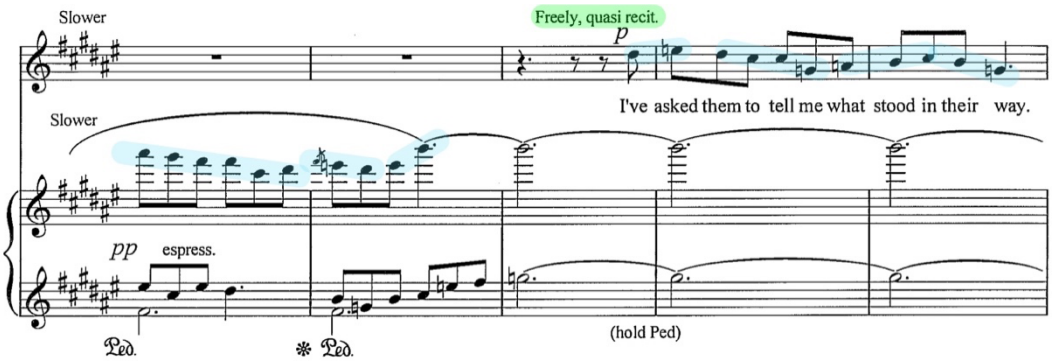

Figure 15 Piano introducing vocal line

As the old man surfaces from his memories, the accompaniment alters the mood from frustration in failure to pity for his predicament. Kohn includes only one of the three original verses that took the form of advice. Sung at a robust *forte*, the final verse of advice swells to an impassioned *fortissimo* then after a pause of silence, the old man resumes more slowly and quietly to an intimate final phrase. A *pianissimo* postlude is comprised of delicately rising *arpeggios* that descend stepwise to conclude the song with a blocked major chord. This subtle ending might be interpreted to disclose the unlikelihood that the bachelor's advice will serve anyone with greater success than it did the man himself.

Down, Down, Down

TYPE	Industrial/Barroom Ballad
ORIGIN	William "Bill" Keating
TEMPO	In a slow "one," with weight ♪ = 120 – 144
BARITONE RANGE	C3 – D4
DURATION	3:08

"Down, Down, Down" is a barroom ballad heralding from the anthracite mining region of northeastern Pennsylvania. This selection is the signature work of coal miner and self-taught balladeer William "Bill" Keating. Bill was born to a multi-generational family of miners near Schuylkill County,

Pennsylvania– a powerhouse of the mining industry at the turn of the twentieth century.[71]

After only one year of grade school, Keating began working in the coal mines at the age of nine. As his mining experiences multiplied, Bill began crafting and performing ballads. He started creating "Down, Down, Down" in 1916 while driving mules as a teamster in the Oak Hill anthracite mine. Keating described his inspiration for this song, "There was no body [sic] but me and the mule during the shift. I composed this song as I traveled in and out of the gangways on the car bumper mostly to break my loneliness and to show my mule I was in a friendly mood."[72] After years of improvisation and additions, the full version of "Down, Down, Down" sported a staggering forty verses. This bounty of verses was necessitated at least in part by Keating's penchant for drinking. At the time, bartenders commonly awarded singers a complimentary round of drinks after performing several verses. To keep the alcohol flowing, Bill would often add impromptu verses whenever the existing material began to run short. Because Keating didn't learn to read or write until the age of thirty-two, this epic ballad would remain solely in his head until he met George Korson in the mid-1920s.

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[71] Eric C. Nystrom, "Miner, Minstrel, Memory: Or, Why the Smithsonian Has Bill Keating's Pants," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, January 2007, 83.
[72] Nystrom, 85.

George Korson was a budding journalist for a newspaper in Pottsville, Pennsylvania. One of his smaller assignments, writing an article about miners' songs, eventually turned into a career cataloging industrial folk tunes.[73] Several of Keating's ballads, including "Down, Down, Down," were published in Korson's 1938 collection *Minstrels of the Mine Patch.* Korson would further promote Keating's music by inviting him to perform at a number of folk festivals which would often begin with "Down, Down, Down" as the opener. In 1948, Korson engaged the Library of Congress to send an audio engineer out to the Pottsville Public Library to capture authentic folk performers, including Keating.[74]

The lyrics of "Down, Down, Down" voice many of mining's inherent dangers: cave-ins, dust inhalation, hazardous materials catching fire, and explosions. Steven Mark Kohn characterizes the heavy reality of exhausting labor in deadly surroundings in the repeated tolling of a pedal C in open octaves. This pedal tone persists for a total of thirty-eight bars of the accompaniment. The original version utilizes a borrowed chord from the dominant. Kohn opts for a different approach by using flat sevenths throughout the piece. He also creates dramatic changes in tonality to make a

[73] Nystrom, 88.
[74] Nystrom, 91.

stronger emotional statement as found in the initial introduction of the text "down, down, down." The beginning of the phrase is set in C major. The first three settings of the text "down, down, down" add two flats to progress from E♭ to B♭ to F blocked chords as the piano accompaniment descends (see fig. 16).

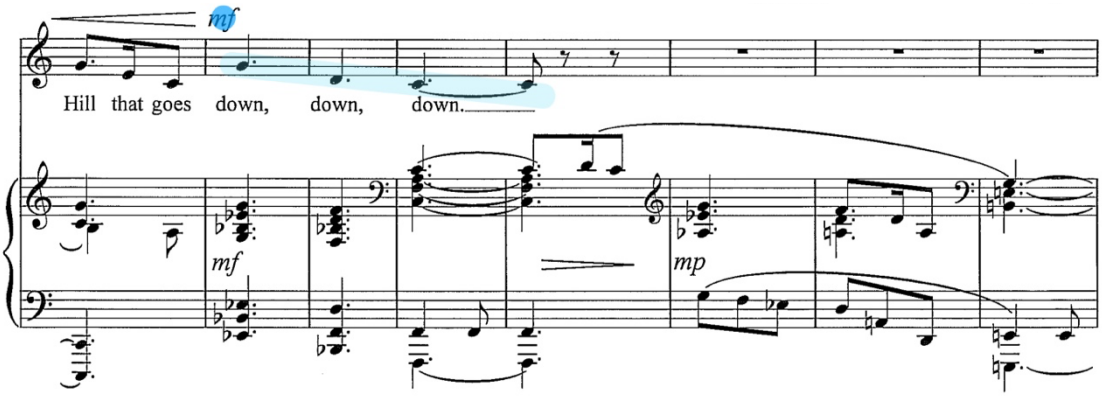

Figure 16 Down, down, down chord progression

The second verse follows the first in a similar manner with a higher voicing in the piano to portray Bill's youthfulness. The second interlude bustles with the atmosphere of the mine's entrance and musically depicts the lowering workers in an extended descending line. The new workers are invigorated with its sixteenth note *arpeggios*. Marked *pianissimo* to reflect the silencing of daily life as the miners descend, Bill sings seven repetitions of "down" as the accompaniment meanders downward through a series of accidentals shifting key centers finally to land in all naturals on a deep C pedal tone (see fig. 17).

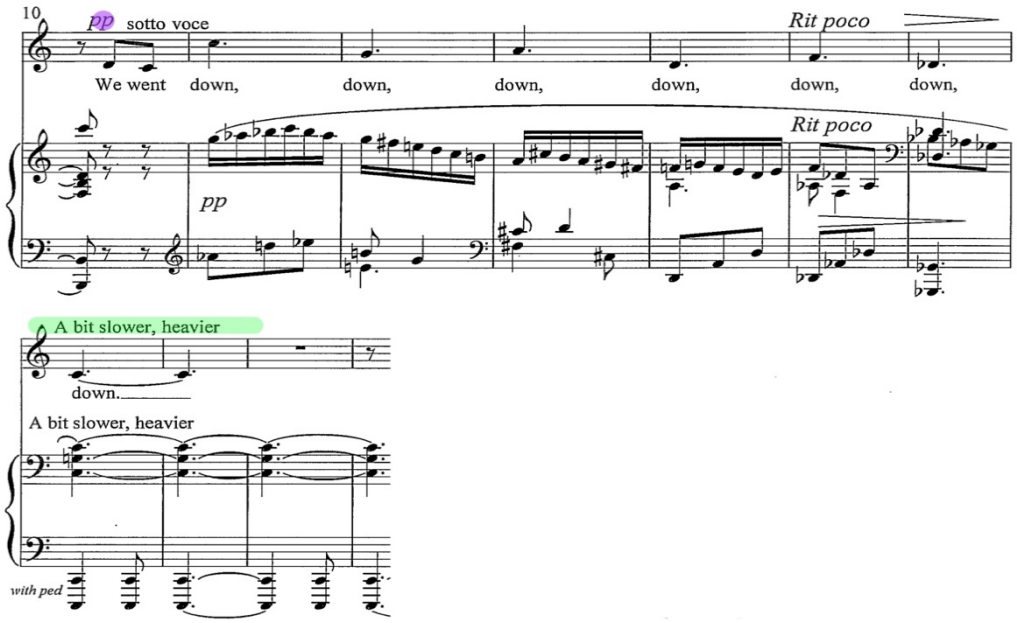

Figure 17 Unrelated key centers

The fifth and final verse is performed with the dynamic marking of *piano*. A sparse chordal accompaniment allows the story its final warning. The accompaniment's open C octave pedal returns tolling the potential risks. The final verse includes the most mining jargon of any verse.

> "You could look at the rib or the face or the top.
> Ne'er a sign of a laggin' or slab or of prop.
> Some day I expect this old mountain to drop...
> and come down, down, down."

An understanding of these terms is essential for both the performer and audience. The rib, face, and top refer respectively to the wall, terminus, and ceiling of the mine shaft. The laggin' are planks across the ceiling that prevent rock-fall. The slab refers to the concrete reinforcement of the roof. The props

are the vertical supports that line the walls.[75] When Bill sings "Ne'er a sign" of these provisions, he is detailing the lack of safety precautions in the mine, which prompt his forewarning: someday the mine will likely "come down."

The Old Woman's Courtship

TYPE	Nursery Rhyme
ORIGIN	English Unknown
TEMPO	Briskly, with good humor
	♩ = 108 – 132
BARITONE RANGE	C3 – D4
DURATION	1:10

"The Old Woman's Courtship" more often appears titled as the "The Deaf Woman's Courtship." One of the earliest versions of the text appears in the 1928 publication *Old Rhymes for All Times* by English illustrator Cicely Mary Barker (1895–1973).[76] The first appearance of the score came several years later in 1932, when published in Cecil Sharp's (1859 – 1924) second volume of *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians*.[77] An active curator of English folk songs, Sharp visited the United States from 1916-1918 to escape the ongoing World War in Europe. While in America, he toured the

[75] U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, "Glossary of Mining Terms," accessed April 11, 2021, https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1165780/000116578003000001/glossary.htm.
[76] Robert B. Waltz and David G. Engle, "Deaf Woman's Courtship, The," *The Traditional Ballad Index,* accessed June 2, 2021, http://www.fresnostate.edu/folklore/ballads/R353.html.
[77] Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians*, Edited by Maud Karpeles, (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1932), 252.

southern Appalachians tracing the development of folk songs that had emigrated from England.[78]

The second appearance comes in Richard Chase's (1904 – 1988) *American Folk Tales and Songs* first published in 1956.[79] Apart from the substitution of several minor words, Kohn's setting follows the text found in Chase's version. Richard Chase is also credited with teaching this folk song to George & Gerry Armstrong for their 1961 album *Simple Gifts*.[80]

As an encore number for Peter Pears and contralto Kathleen Ferrier in 1952, Benjamin Britten arranged a lesser-known version of the "Deaf Woman's Courtship." While Britten's version is traditionally performed as a duet, baritone Gerald Finley opted to perform the piece as a solo on his June 2010 album *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*.[81] He performs the piece by singing the suitor in a rich baritone and the old woman in falsetto. Steven Mark Kohn's solo arrangement employs a similar approach with the composer's instructions, "absurd falsetto ad lib for Old Woman's parts" (see fig. 18).

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[78] Frank Howes, "Sharp, Cecil (James)," *Grove Music Online*, January 20, 2001, https://doi-org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25594.
[79] Richard Chase, *American Folk Tales and Songs,* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1971), 136-137.
[80] George & Gerry Armstrong, performers, "Deaf Woman's Courtship," *Simple Gifts*, Folkway Records FW02335, 1961, CD.
[81] Gerald Finley, "The Deaf Woman's Courtship," *Benjamin Britten Songs & Proverbs of William Blake,"* Hyperion CDA67778, 2008, CD.

Figure 18 Introduction and Absurd falsetto on Old Woman's parts

Steven Mark Kohn's perfunctory one-measure introduction initiates his straightforward approach to setting this folk song. To add interest to the strophic source material, Kohn increases the dramatic and musical intensity as his arrangement progresses. Starting in E♭ major with a dynamic level of *mezzo forte*, the suitor poses his first question to the old woman. The next verse increases the dynamic and raises the key to F major. The texture of the accompaniment grows slightly in density, while still maintaining its percussive momentum with a rhythmic boom-chuck. The third and final verse increases the dynamic level to *fortissimo* in addition to raising the key to G major as the suitor delivers his final questions. This gradual build-up leads the vocalist to

intensify the characters' intent to communicate with each other. After one final inquiry, the accompaniment halts in a *caesura*, increasing the audience's anticipation as they await the old woman's response. With the composer's choice of a tacet in the accompaniment as the old woman delivers her final lines, he exposes the old woman's secret of having heard her suitor all along. A final button in the accompaniment, a punctuated note or chord that concludes a song, simultaneously sounds the extreme, lowest and highest pitches of the song, to punctuate the surprise (see fig. 19).

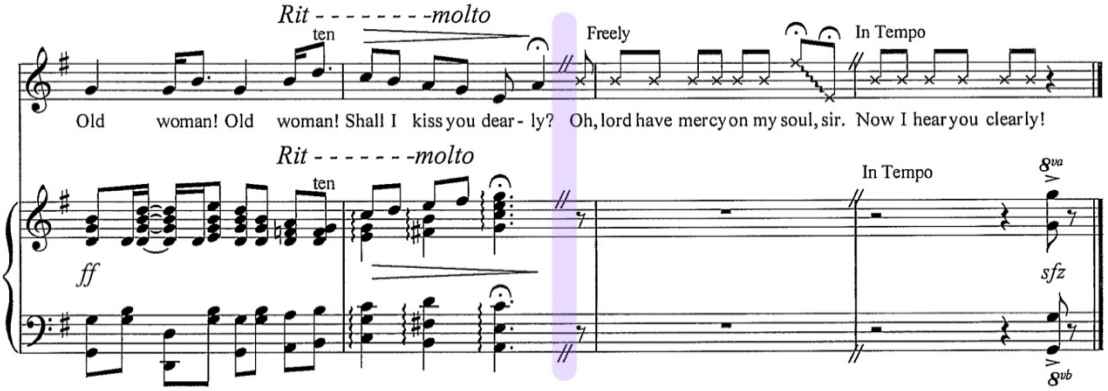

Figure 19 Punch line

The Ocean Burial

TYPE	Tragic ballad
ORIGIN	Reverend Edwin H. Chapin, text
TEMPO	Tenderly, not too slow ♩ = 76 – 96
BARITONE RANGE	C3 – D4
DURATION	4:30

Originally published in 1839, "The Ocean-Buried" is a poem written by a teenage Edwin H. Chapin. Raised with a strong devotion to God and fervent interests in oratory, art, and music, Edwin Chapin was known for his early command of the English language and easy conversation among his drama

club peers.[82] Despite his lack of formal schooling caused by a nomadic upbringing, Chapin's poetry demonstrates a deep understanding of language and the communication of difficult ideas through rhyme.

"The Ocean-Buried" was first set to music by George N. Allen.[83] While easily found in print and on recordings, it is not the tune arranged by Kohn. One early adaptation of Chapin's poem shifted the setting of the story from the ocean to the open prairie. John Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* includes "The Dying Cowboy" as his first selection. This adaptation is set on the lone prairie rather than a ship (see table 1).

Table 1 Comparison of verses

Verse 10 of "The Ocean Burial"	Verse 8 of "The Dying Cowboy"
"In the hair she has wreathed, shall the sea snake hiss? This brow she has pressed, shall a cold wave kiss? For the sake of my loved one that weeps o'er me, Oh, bury me not in deep, deep sea!	"These locks she has curled, shall the rattlesnake kiss? This brow she has kissed, shall the cold grave press? For the sake of the loved ones that will weep for me O bury me not on the lone prairie.[84]

[82] Sumner Ellis, *Life of Edwin H. Chapin, D.D.,* (Boston, MA: Universalist Publishing House, 1883), 10-13, https://archive.org/details/lifeedwinhchapi01elligoog/mode/2up?view=theater&q=burial.
[83] Eloise Hubbard Linscott, *Folk Songs of Old New England*, 2nd ed. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1990), 245.
[84] John Avery Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, (New York, NY: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1910), 4-5.

Before "The Ocean Burial" was set to music, it inspired the composition of "The Sailor Boy's Grave." With words and music by J. Martin, Esq. written in 1841, this folk song takes the opposite stance, by asking to be buried at sea and not in the ground.

Kohn sourced this song from Eloise Hubbard Linscott's book F*olk Songs of Old New England*. Eloise Hubbard Linscott (1897-1978) was an amateur folk song collector from the New England region. The only female folk song collector of her time, she initially collected songs from her family and later from people across much of New England.[85] According to Linscott, Phillips Barry sent her the tune she published. Since this tune is not commonly used to set "The Ocean Burial," an accurate composer cannot be identified.

Kohn approaches "The Ocean Burial" with a different temperament from the source material. Nearly the same length as a full verse, the introduction's descent spanning over five octaves allows the vocalist to visualize a burial at sea, therein motivating the opening text as sung by an ailing young man, "Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea." His first plea is underscored by blocked chords rocking between slowly shifting harmonies. A shift to a narrator's voice introduces the young man. The song then returns to the voice of the dying

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[85] James Hardin, "An Illustrated Guide to The Eloise Hubbard Linscott Collection: Preface," *American Folklife Center Library of Congress,* accessed June 30, 2021, http://www.loc.gov/folklife/guide/preface.html.

young man. Kohn's marking, "*poco più forte*," indicates the vocalist should portray the young man as mustering his energy to demand his final wishes. After the young man explains his fears and before he utters his final plea, Kohn marks "*più piano*" informing the vocalist that the weakened young man has spent his strength. To evoke the uncertainty of the young man's fate, toward the end of the second verse, the tonality vacillates between F major and F minor before returning to F major (see fig. 20).

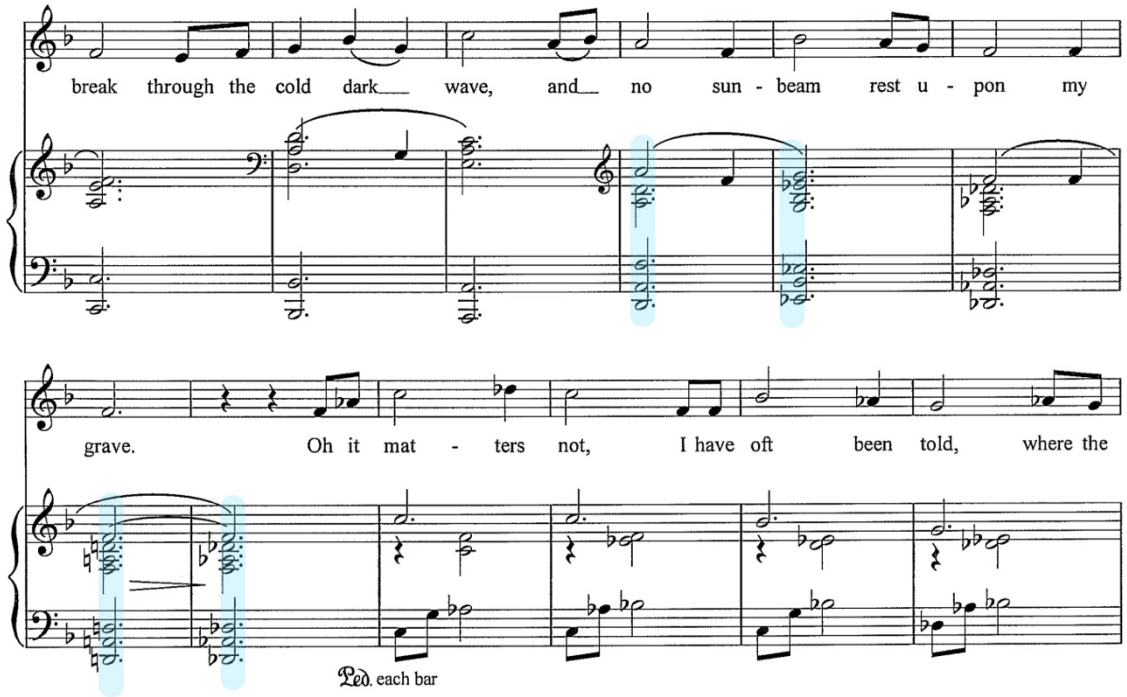

Figure 20 Vacillating between F major and F minor

A significant piano interlude of nineteen measures follows the second verse. Initially marked "*pesante,*" this interlude may be interpreted as underscoring the young man's heavy contemplation of his impending death (see fig. 21) followed by the elevation of potential joy after death at the key

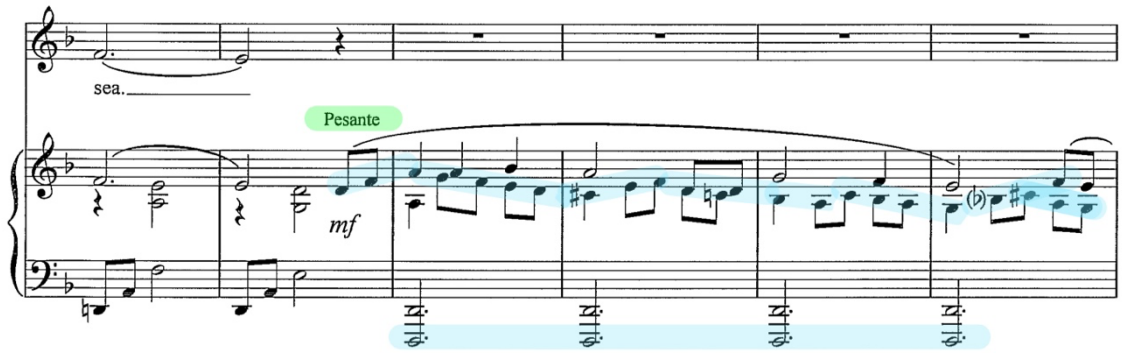

Figure 21 Interlude representing gravity of the situation

change, his ultimately finding peace with the final "*più tranquillo*," and perhaps a revelation of acceptance during the "*tenuto*" marked on the highest pitch of the interlude's final phrase.

Marked "*espressivo,*" "*delicatissimo,*" and "*pianissimo*," the third verse follows with both of the pianist's hands playing in the treble clef to depict the young man's fragile health as he discusses where he would like to be buried, rather than where not to be buried. A gradual *crescendo* and heavenly, harp-like rolled chords support the young man's hope of being with his deceased father. Kohn's marking the young man's final two phrases "keep pushing" and *crescendos* beyond *fortissimo* inspire the vocalist to rally the young man's final burst of life. A rest marked with a *fermata* forever silences the young man. The narrator returns to finish the young man's tale. After the protagonist's death, the piano is heard no more as the narrator sings *a capella* starkly mourning the young man and the disregard of his final wishes.

California

TYPE	Sea Shanty
ORIGIN	Jesse Hutchinson
TEMPO	With rollicking energy ♩ = 112 – 132
BARITONE RANGE	A2 – F4
DURATION	3:35

"California" is one of a plethora of folk tunes to come about during the American Gold Rush of 1849. While the gold rush often conjures images of wagon trains traveling across the prairie, "California" depicts the four-month route to Sacramento by sail.

Written in 1849 by Jesse Hutchinson, of the popular Hutchinson Family Singers, and later published in his brother Asa Hutchinson's *Book of Words* in 1851, the folk song "California" was performed as a musical sendoff for gold miners heading west from Massachusetts.[86] Being an outspoken abolitionist, Jesse Hutchinson included several anti-slavery lines in the final passage of "California".[87]

> O! the land we'll save, for the bold and brave-
> Have determined there never shall breathe a slave;
> Let foes recoil, for the sons of toil
> Shall make California God's Free Soil.
> *Chorus:*
> Heigh O, and away we go,
> Chanting our songs of Freedom, O.

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[86] Asa Burham Hutchinson, *The Hutchinson Family's Book of Words,* (New York, NY: Baker, Godwin & Co. Steam Printers, 1853), 22-23.
[87] Marek Bennett, "Ho! for California! (Hutchinson, 1849)," *The Hardtacks: Folk Music of the Antebellum & Civil War Eras* (Blog)*,* June 6, 2016, https://civilwarfolkmusic.com/2016/06/06/1849-hutchinson-ho-for-california/.

Hutchinson's text was originally set to a variant of "The Boatmen Dance," a minstrel song written by Dan Emmet in 1943 and later included as the opening setting of Aaron Copland's *Old American Songs* premiered by Peter Pears and Benjamin Britten in 1950.[88] Quickly gaining popularity, "California" was adopted as a sea shanty when prospectors began taking ships around Cape Horn to California. These adaptations commonly set the text to the tune of another minstrel song, "Camptown Races," published in 1850 by Stephen Foster. From this point forward, variations of the text and title multiply with the song appearing as "Californi-o," "Banks of the Sacramento," and even "Der Hamborger Veermaster" (Hamburg's four-master), a German variant maintaining the standard English chorus.[89]

> Then, ho! Boys ho! For California, O!
> There's plenty of gold, so I've been told,
> On the banks of the Sacramento.

Kohn's arrangement combines elements of both "California" and "The Banks of the Sacramento" as found in *The American Songbag.*[90] Notably, both versions exclude the abolitionist sixth verse found in the original text. By the

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[88] Vivian Perlis, "Old American Songs, Set I," *Aaron Copland,* 1998, https://www.aaroncopland.com/works/old-american-songs-set-i/.
[89] Robert B. Waltz and David G. Engle, "Ho for California (Banks of Sacramento)," *The Traditional Ballad Index,* accessed June 4, 2021, http://www.fresnostate.edu/folklore/ballads/E125.html.
[90] Sandburg, 110-112.

time Sandburg collected and published "California" in 1927, the text and tune existed as an amalgamation of many historical revisions.

Kohn's arrangement travels through six different key signatures over the course of the song. In addition to key changes, accidentals provide brief visits to other centers to add tension, notably when the story involves hard work or surprise. For example, the fourth verse has a natural key signature of A minor, but does not consistently maintain this key (see fig. 22).

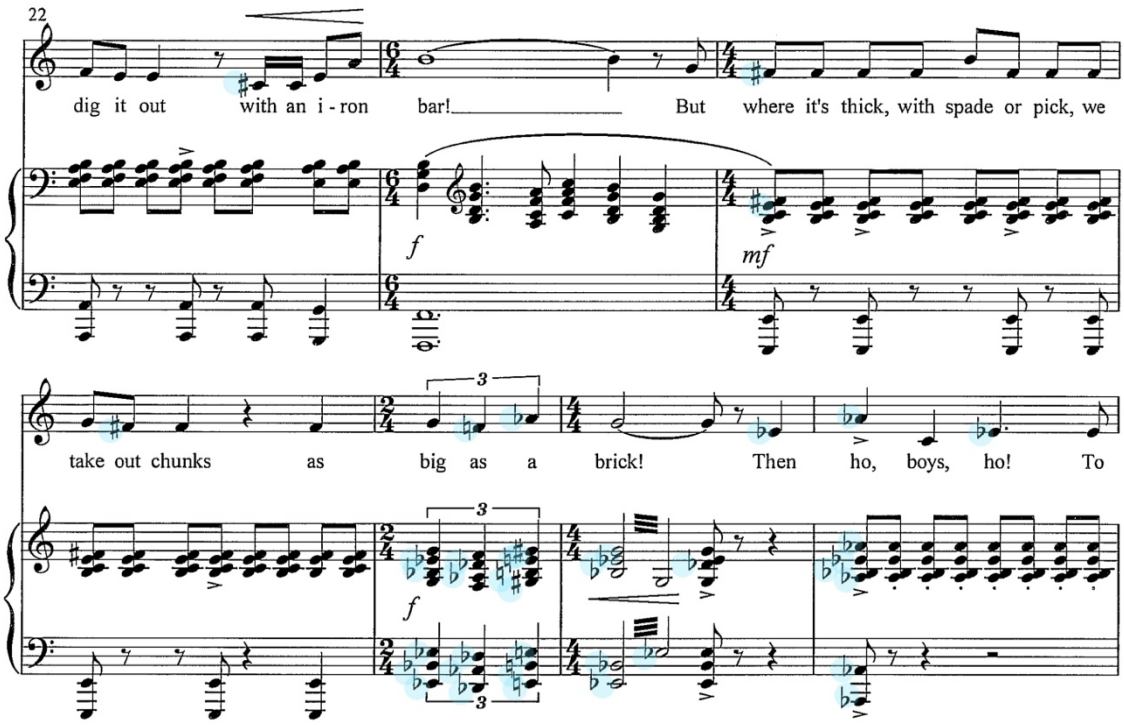

Figure 22 Fourth verse key destabilization

Until the fifth verse, the accompaniment features primarily repeated block chords representing the repetitive routines on ships. Beginning in the piano interlude and continuing in the fifth verse, the accompaniment settles with pedal tones sustaining under two or more measures of flowing arpeggios

at a time as the homesick sailors remember their families and friends. In this verse, the vocal line rarely subdivides a beat. At the opening of this verse, Kohn marks "tempo" to remind the vocalist that the slower expressivity is written into the rhythms, not the tempo. The verse ends with a *caesura* before the chorus begins "Distantly, in half voice" (see fig. 23). With subsequent

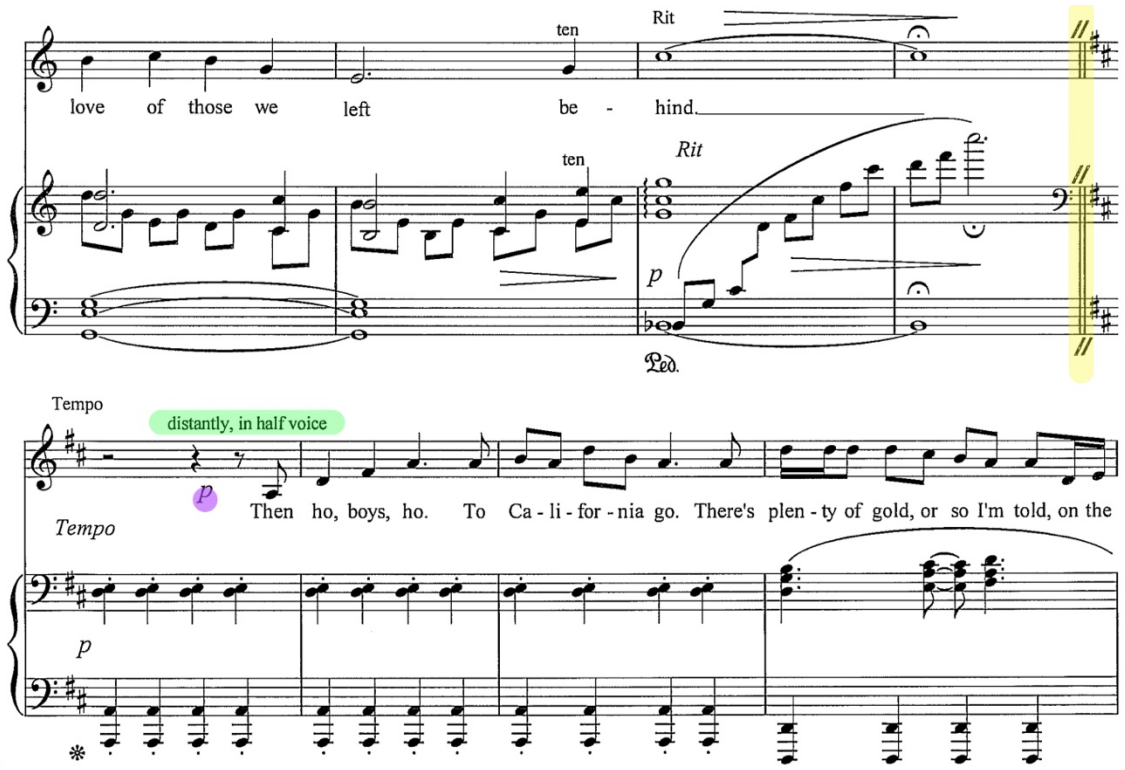

Figure 23 Final chorus

reiterations of the chorus, the dynamics gradually build from *piano* to *fortissimo*, the accompaniment gradually expands featuring several pianistic flourishes, and both the piano and vocal line gradually become more rhythmically energized. The vocalist may interpret the purpose of the repeating choruses as the men using song to relieve their homesickness, fears, and

boredom. They gradually succeed in buoying their spirits to carry on in their quest for a fortune in gold.

The final five bars played by the piano tell the end of the tale. The excitement builds to *tremolo* C major with a flat seventh chord, a brief silence is followed by a brief, quiet melodic figure, which could reflect uncertainty of the destination. After another brief silence, a robust fortissimo cadence suggests the ship has finally reached Sacramento, where fortune awaits (see fig. 24).

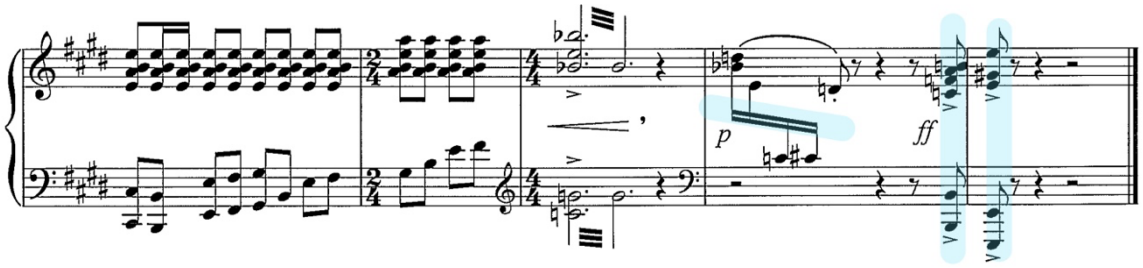

Figure 24 Piano postlude

VOLUME 3

The Gallows Tree

TYPE	Tarnished Love Tale
ORIGIN	English unknown
TEMPO	Briskly
	♩ = 92 – 104
BARITONE RANGE	B♭2 – D 4
DURATION	3:15

"The Gallows Tree", also known as "The Gallows Pole", was originally catalogued as a Child Ballad under the title "The Maid Freed from the

Gallows." Twelve variations of "The Gallows Tree" can be found in Child's third volume of ballads.

The versions of text and tune adapted in Kohn's "Gallows Tree" appear in Sandburg's *The American Songbag*.[91] Best known for sharing the stories of blue-collar Americans, Sandburg was also an avid collector of folk music. Accompanying himself on guitar, Sandburg performed a variety of folk songs on his many tours. Recordings of Sandburg's performance of "The Gallows Tree" have been preserved and are still available to the public.

A wide range of musicians have performed "The Gallows Tree." Two of the earliest surviving recordings of this folk tune were released in 1940: one by Huddie Ledbetter, better known as "Lead Belly," and the other by celebrated folk singer and composer John Jacob Niles.[92] A popular, more modern adaptation of "The Gallows Tree" is the track titled "Gallows Pole" found on the rock album *Led Zeppelin III* released in 1970.[93]

Through the many variants of "The Gallows Tree," the narrative usually remains relatively unchanged. The narrator stands at the gallows, the noose

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[91] Sandburg, 72.
[92] Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter, performer, "The Gallows Song," *Classics by Lead Belly, Vol. 3*, Recorded 1940, BMI, 1940. John Jacob Niles, "The Maid Freed From The Gallows," *My Precarious Life in the Public Domain*, Recorded 1940-41, Rev-Ola – CR REV 138, 2006, CD.
[93] Led Zeppelin, performer, "Gallows Pole," *Led Zeppelin III*, Recorded 1969-1970, Atlantic B000002J1U, 1970, CD.

around their neck, awaiting punishment. In the distance, they see their father riding to secure their release. This scene is repeated for the arrival of any number of relatives who ultimately fail to aid the condemned, until hope is nearly lost. In the final verse, their true love arrives to set them free.

Most versions set this story in a generally strophic structure. In his arrangement, Steven Mark Kohn crafts a rich dramatic arc that adds a heightened sense of hope, despair, urgency, and relief to the otherwise repetitive folk song.

Kohn's arrangement opens with an accompaniment motive derived from later vocal material that is transposed up two octaves (see top fig. 25).

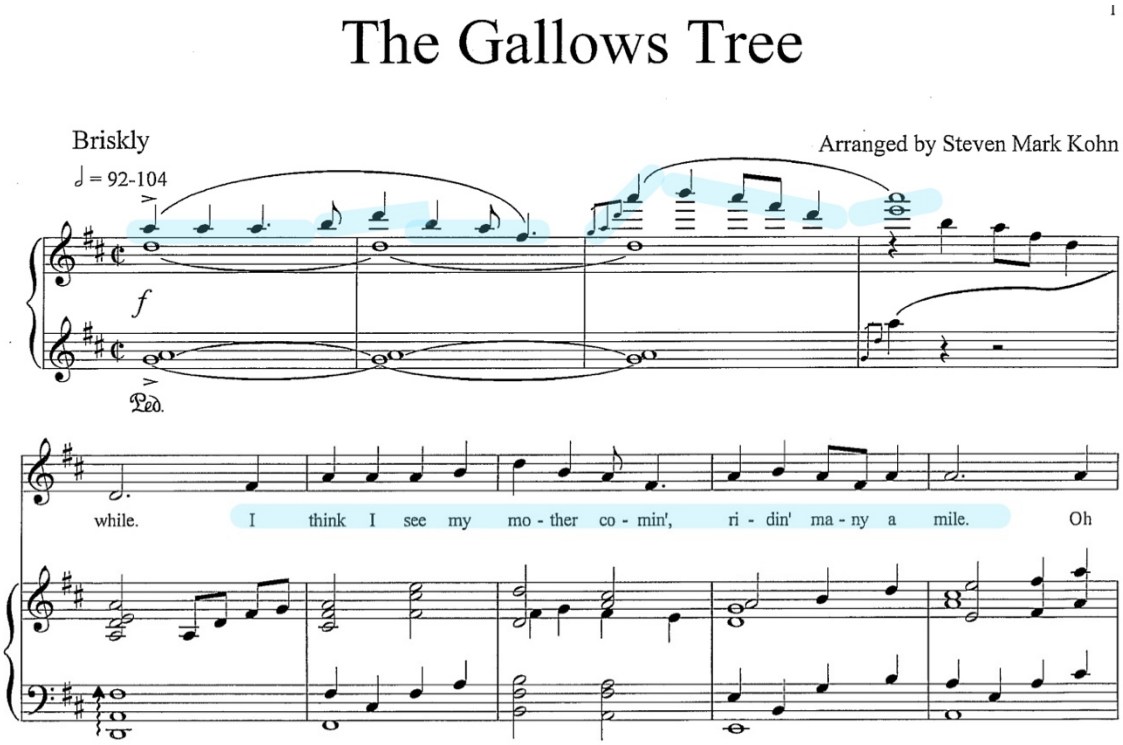

Figure 25 Top, Opening optimistic motive; *Bottom*, Original melody comparison

The adapted melody is borrowed from the phrase, "I think I see my mother comin', ridin' many a mile" introduced at the bottom of the first page (see bottom fig. 25). The use of this phrase at the onset of the piece establishes an undercurrent of hope that, regardless of desperation, remains present throughout the piece. The optimistic sentiment is suddenly interrupted with a flourish to D6 that illustrates the moment the condemned looks up to see a relative coming to their aid. With salvation so near, they cry out to the executioner to stay the rope a few moments longer.

Most renditions of "The Gallows Tree" begin with the father as the first relative to arrive. In Kohn's setting, the mother arrives first in the opening verse. One would assume a mother will, indeed, help. When she declines, the condemned is stunned. Their disbelief can be heard with the resolution to a B minor chord as the verse concludes. Immediately, the tonic returns as the father appears and hope resurges. Spirits remain high until the narrator inquires as to their father's intentions. Realizing the father's alternate motives, the piano sounds a pungent C minor chord belying any confidence in salvation (see fig. 26). When the

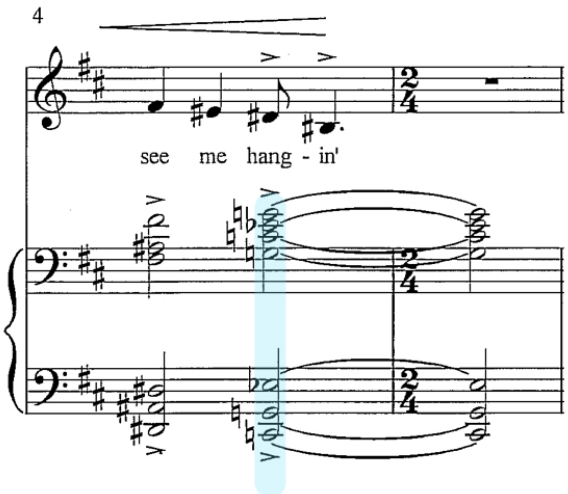

Figure 26 C minor chord

father also fails to secure freedom, death seems a forgone conclusion as heard in the successive downward motion in the piano's left hand. Leading into the final verse, the accompaniment begins to repeat the same measure fourteen times marked "eerily" in a stasis of tension as the melody rocks between the tonic and the leading tone over a bass walking from la to re. The narrator's distress is indicated through a performance direction of "strident" marking the vocal entrance with a *fortissimo* call to the hangman, "slack your rope" (see fig 27). The narrator is hesitant to believe that the final visitor will offer the deliverance for which they've longed. A final gasp of hope rings out in G major as the singer pleads with their lover for aid. A gentle reply, "yes," gradually pulls the condemned back from despair. The uplifting motive from the introduction returns and justifies the hope that had remained present all along.

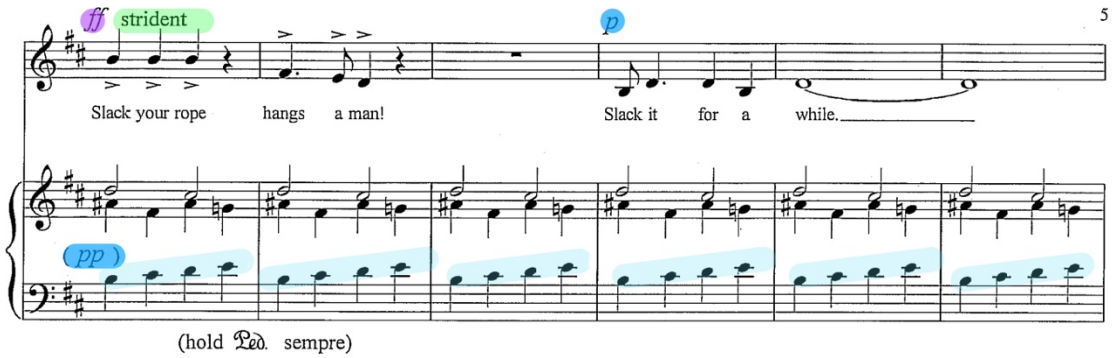

Figure 27 Final verse

I'm a Stranger Here

TYPE	Blues
ORIGIN	American unknown
TEMPO	Plaintively flowing, not too slowly
	♩ = 96 – 112
BARITONE RANGE	A2 – C4
DURATION	3:40

"I'm a Stranger Here" was collected by John and Alan Lomax from Mrs. Louise Henson in San Antonio, Texas in 1937 and included amongst the collection of *Our Singing Country* (1941).[94] The Lomax's catalogue may be the only location where this particular version of the song is found because Mrs. Henson's version of "I'm a Stranger Here" borrows material from other folk songs. Notably, the second verse is borrowed from "Worried Man Blues."[95]

> I'm worried now, but I won't be worried long,
> I'm worried now, but I won't be worried long,
> It takes a worried man to sing a worried song.

"Worried Man Blues" was arranged by Alvin Pleasant Carter, then made popular by the Carter Family Singers in 1930, and subsequently recorded by many prominent performers.[96] The Carter family recording may have been the source of the verse that Mrs. Henson interpolated into her version of "I'm a Stranger Here."

In the *American Folk Set*, Kohn's arrangement of "I'm a Stranger Here" offers the composer's most original writing. The composer dramatically altered the unremarkable, original tune. Most importantly, the story portrayed takes an

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[94] Lomax & Lomax, *Our Singing Country,* 371-372.
[95] Dorothy Scarborough, *On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925).
[96] The Carter Family, "Worried Man Blues," *Worried Man Blues: Their Complete Victor Recordings (1930),* Rounder Records, 1995, CD.

entirely different tone. The heartbreaking and dramatic arc crafted by Kohn conveys the wanderings of an unfortunate person deprived of a sense of home and inclusion. This couldn't be further from the disparaging text found in the original source's final two verses.

5 When you get a woman, man, you better get two,
When you get a woman, boy, you better get two,
'Cause you never can tell what a woman goin' to do.

6 I'm goin' back home, I'm going to settle down,
I'm goin' back home, Lord, I'm goin' to settle down,
'Cause I ain't no dog and I won't be dogged around.

Steven Mark Kohn crafts a melody to suit each verse and alters the chorus to better suit his more plaintive arrangement. Kohn introduces a two-measure pattern in which the pianist's left hand shifts between the tonic and the dominant under a quietly meandering melody. This pattern repeats four times as the accompaniment's repeated pattern denies the journey any destination (see fig. 28). As the accompaniment's pattern changes to outline new harmonies, a melody is added under the meandering eighth notes obscuring the common meter by playing two dotted notes followed by a quarter note further challenging any sense of destination.

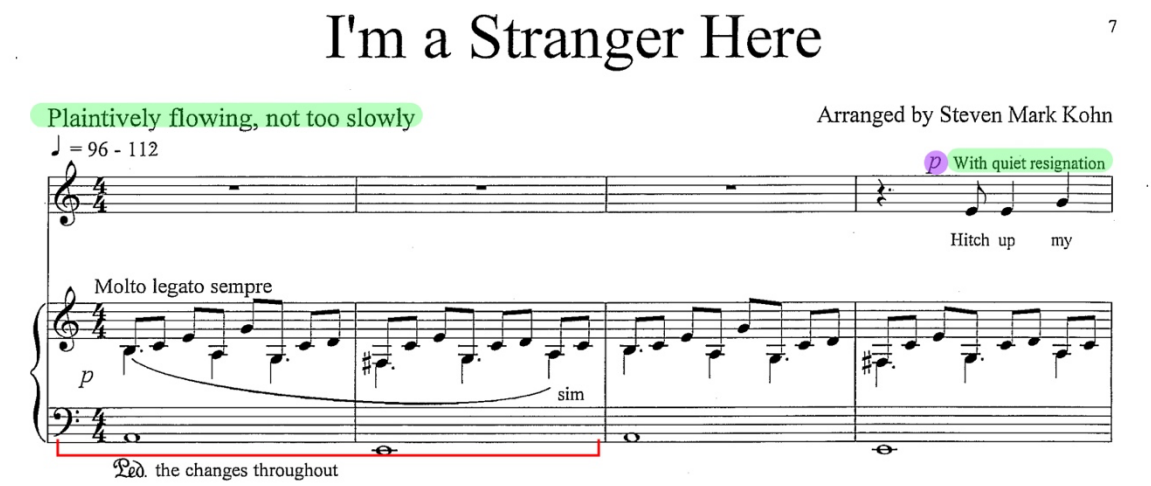

Figure 28 Two-measure repeated material

For every chorus, Kohn marked the vocal entrance *pianissimo*. The delicate accompaniment moves entirely into the treble clef mostly resting above the vocal line, which creates distance between the vocal line and the accompaniment and creates an imaginative distance between the storyteller/singer and audience. Kohn challenges the singer to remain within the loudest dynamic marking: *mezzo piano*. The storyteller is not bragging about their experiences, but quietly confessing his reality. To sing the piece otherwise deviates from the sentiment proposed by the composer.

Unlike the previous two verses, the third verse begins by continuing the accompaniment in the same high tessitura as the preceding chorus. Kohn instructs the vocalist, "Distantly, non vibrato" (see fig. 29). A stilled continuity of

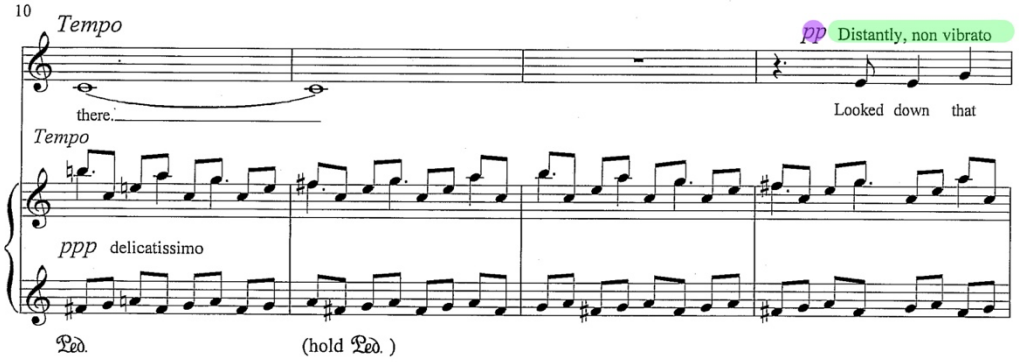

Figure 29 Third verse in higher tessitura sans vibrato

the vocal line creates the haunting quality of unfulfilled dreams. To conclude the third verse, the constant eighth notes pause for two and a half measures exposing the final phrase of verse three (see fig. 30). A *caesura* before the final two words adds importance to the phrase, "And a little bitty hand kept wavin' back // at me." In this vulnerable moment, the protagonist has a fleeting chance to envision their life with loved ones waiting at home to greet them.

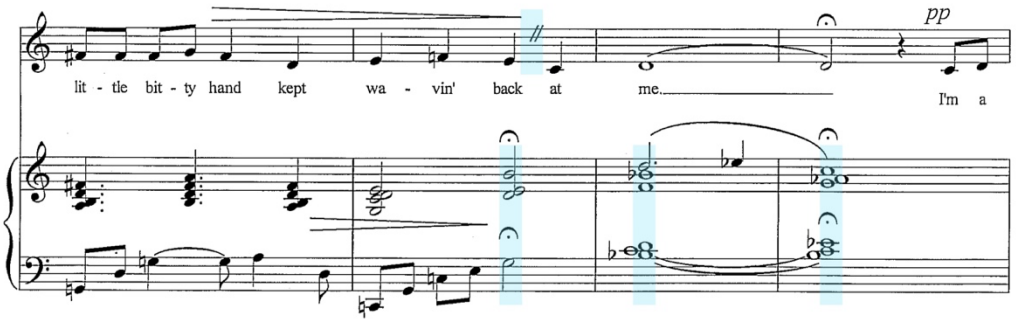

Figure 30 Third verse conclusion

The chorus returns with its meandering, constant eighth notes, but this time with the accompaniment notated in the bass and treble clef as though reality has returned. The final phrase of the final chorus slows and lacks a definitive cadence as the traveler's desire for home remains unrealized. Kohn marks a *fermata* and *caesura* before the final lyric "there" to create rhythmic space and silence between the traveler and any home he might have known. In the postlude, a *decrescendo* to "*niente"* melodically meanders to the tonic pitch played as an open octave. Marked with a *fermata*, the final pitch sustains to decay as the traveler's hope of family and home fade.

Steven Mark Kohn's setting of "I'm a Stranger Here" masterfully reconciles source material that is averse to modern sensibilities. In place of a misogynistic narrative, Kohn has endowed this folk song with a poignant arrangement imbued with a theme inherent to every individual: a yearning to belong.

The Drunken Old Fool

TYPE	Humorous Folk Song
ORIGIN	English unknown
TEMPO	With pace and humor
	♩ = 112 – 126
BARITONE RANGE	C3 – D4
DURATION	2:25

"The Drunken Old Fool," better known as "Our Goodman" (Child 274) is amongst the most widely disseminated of the ballads collected by James

Francis Child.[97] Currently, 498 entries are available in the Roud Folk Song Index, a folk song catalogue of over 250,000 entries created by Steve Roud (b. 1949) who assigns each folk text a specific number and cross-references it with hundreds of published folk song compilations.[98] "Home Came the Old Man," "Four Nights Drunk," "Seven Drunken Nights," "The Cuckhold's Song," and "Mustache on a Cabbage Head" number among the copious titles based on this folk tale.[99] The first documented appearance of this folk song can be found in David Herd's 1776 publication *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*—a compilation of songs that were already well-traveled before appearing in print. As confirmed by the numerous Roud catalogue's entries for "Our Goodman," the tune appears in countless compilations. The version set by Kohn was selected from *Folk Songs of Old New England,* a 1939 collection by Eloise Hubbard Linscott.[100]

The narrative of "The Drunken Old Fool" offers performers and audiences alike the opportunity to tailor the tale to their own perspective. The story depicts the interplay between a wife and her inebriated husband. The

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[97] Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, volume 4, 597-600.
[98] Jon Wilks, "Steve Roud interview: What is folk music, exactly?" *Jon Wilks: Writer and Traditional Folk Musician,* August 30, 2017,b http://jonwilks.online/what-is-folk-music-an-interview-with-steve-roud.
[99] "Our Goodman," Roud Folksong Index (S217923), *Vaughan Williams Memorial Library,* accessed June 10, 2021, https://www.vwml.org/roudnumber/114.
[100] Linscott, 259-262.

husband believes he has happened upon evidence of another man's presence in their abode, but the wife denies it by telling him what he sees as implying her adultery is some other harmless thing. Should he trust his drunken eyes? The audience is left to decide which party speaks the truth. This situation is repeated over the course of several nights via several verses. This open-ended story allows the singer the liberty to choose the protagonist for themselves. One might deem each of the old man's visions an intoxicated hallucination with the poor wife endlessly humoring her spouses' nightly ramblings. Alternately, one might determine the old man is, indeed, discovering evidence of his wife's new lover. The audience is free to decide whether the absent and often inebriated husband deserves the fate of an unfaithful wife or if the wife is taking advantage of her drunken old fool of a husband.

To set the narrator's passages, Kohn borrows the blocked chords and vocal melody from the source material. Inviting speech-rhythms and playful characterizations, "Be flexible with vocal rhythm; duple/triple feel *ad lib*" are his instructions to the singer and "With pace and humor" are his instructions to the pianist. With the three different voices of narrator, husband, and wife to portray, the singer has the composer's encouragement to become theatrical in creating different characters to inhabit their interpretation. To offer support in the accompaniment, Kohn selects different accompaniment figures for each

character. Generally, the narrator features detached chords in closed positions; the drunk old man features slurred notes with low octaves on offbeats; and the woman features rolled chords at the beginning of her comments (see fig. 31). These features are not isolated to these characters, but frequently occur during each respective character's lines.

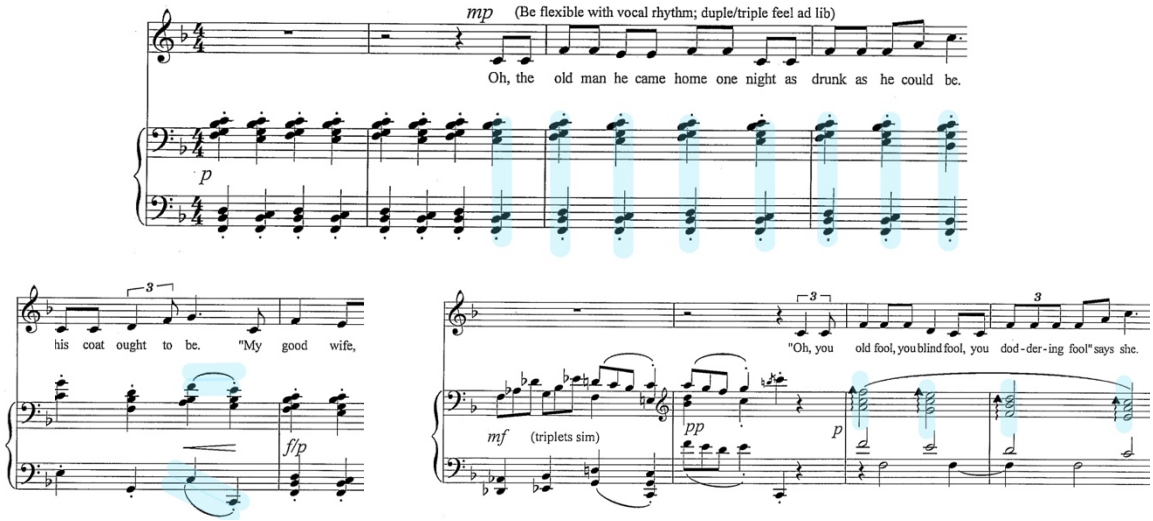

Figure 31 Top, Narrator; *Bottom left,* Drunken man; Bottom *right,* Old woman

Before each of the woman's replies, an elegant short interlude with two ascending and two descending triplets permits her a moment to compose her thoughts before addressing her husband's accusations. The singer may take advantage of this time to switch characters by changing their physical stance and mannerisms, in addition to vocal colors. Marked *forte* with an accent on "never" and a *sforzando* emphasizing his final word "before," the old man's boisterously doubt-filled reaction to his wife's explanations contrasts dramatically with the *piano* dynamic marking and calming rolled chords that

characterize the wife's ability to de-escalate the confrontation. Ultimately, Kohn's instructions and markings found in the score serve to enhance the engagement of the performer and, in turn, the audience.

Poor Wayfaring Stranger

TYPE	Hymn
ORIGIN	American unknown
TEMPO	Slowly and Simply
	♩ = 48 – 60
BARITONE RANGE	B♭2 – E♭4
DURATION	3:35

Perhaps the most well-known of the fifteen historical folk tunes included in Kohn's *American Folk Set,* "Poor Wayfaring Stranger" has been a staple of American folk music for over 200 years. Many composers have arranged this piece with recordings available from numerous artists including Burl Ives and Johnny Cash.

Since the early twentieth century, hundreds of variants of "Poor Wayfaring Stranger" have emerged. The earliest documentation of the tune is titled "Judgment" and dates to the shape-note songbook, *Kentucky Harmony* published in 1816.[101] The themes and text commonly associated with this tune first appear in the 1858 *Christian Songster*.[102] After its inclusion as number 457

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[101] Ananias Davisson, *Kentucky Harmony*, (Harrisonburg, VA: Ananias Davisson, 1816). Robert B. Waltz and David G. Engle, *The Traditional Ballad Index*, accessed June 12, 2021, http://www.fresnostate.edu/folklore/ballads/FSC077.html.

[102] Joseph Bever, ed. *The Christian Songster: a collection of hymns and spiritual songs, usually sung at camp, prayer, and social meetings, and revivals of religion,* (Dayton, OH: United Brethren in Christ, 1858), 34-35.

in *The Sacred Harp* 1936 edition, the song has appeared in many church hymnals.[103] Kohn sourced his tune from Lomax's *The Penguin Book of American Folk Songs*.[104]

"Poor Wayfaring Stranger" is a sorrowful song sung by an individual yearning for the promised land. The singer feels prepared to see their mother and father, be home, and cease traveling through the constant challenges of life. In contrast with other arrangements of this piece, Kohn chooses a relatively sparse and gentle accompaniment. One that is closer to the tender temperament of the celebrated Burl Ives recording and other folk renditions than the jazzy upbeat setting by Jay Althouse.

Kohn opens with a frugal accompaniment featuring dissonances of major seconds that imply the struggles of life, while the accompaniment's ascending melodic leaps reflect a yearning for heaven (see fig. 32). A solitary dotted quarter followed by an eighth note in each measure provides adequate forward motion for the tired wayfarer to keep wandering. When the singer says they are going "there" meaning heaven, the musical texture thickens and the tessitura rises.

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[103] *The Sacred Harp: 1991 Edition,* Hugh McGraw, Richard L. DeLong, Raymond C. Hamrick, David Ivey, Toney Smith, Jeff Sheppard, and Terry L. Wootten, music committee, (Hustville, AL: Sacred Harp Publishing Company, 1991), 457.
[104] Lomax, *The Penguin Book of American Folk Songs,* 78.

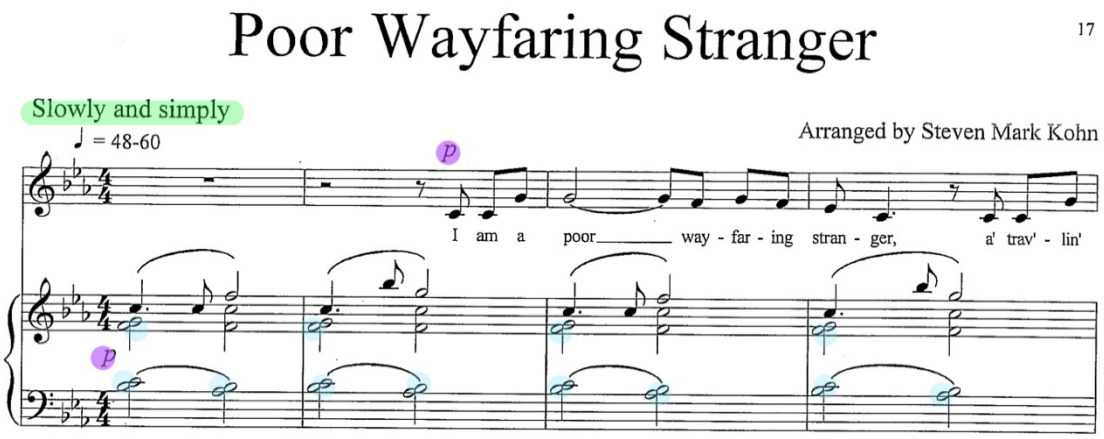

Figure 32 Major seconds in accompaniment

The second verse has a ponderous atmosphere due to the pedal C0 and C1 in addition to the direction *più pesante."* At times the distance spanned in the accompaniment extends from C0 to F6 to reflect expansive distance between heaven and earth (see fig. 33). The phrase "no more to roam," is

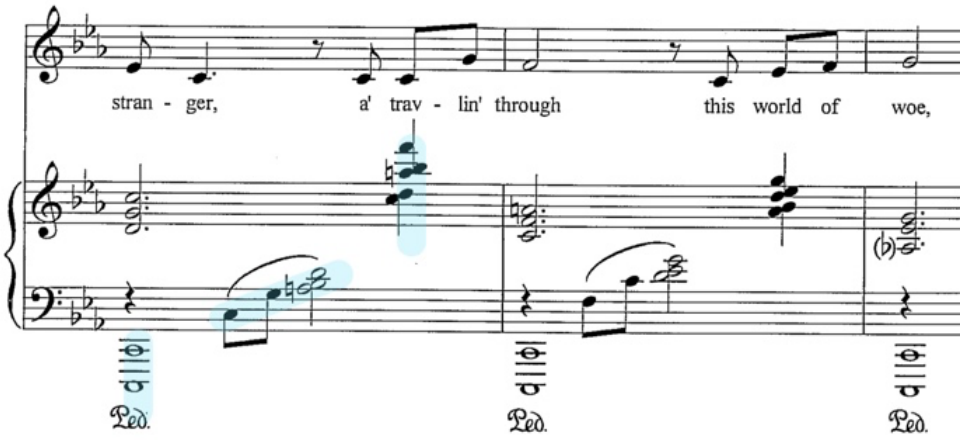

Figure 33 Range of piece signifying reaching from earth to heaven

punctuated with emphatic blocked chords in closed position to bring urgency and conviction to the singer's belief (see fig. 34). A quiet return to the introductory material signals the singer's return to reality. After a fermata sustaining a dissonant second, the short postlude hauntingly echoes the vocal

melody an octave higher, to conclude the piece with the same sorrowful longing with which it began.

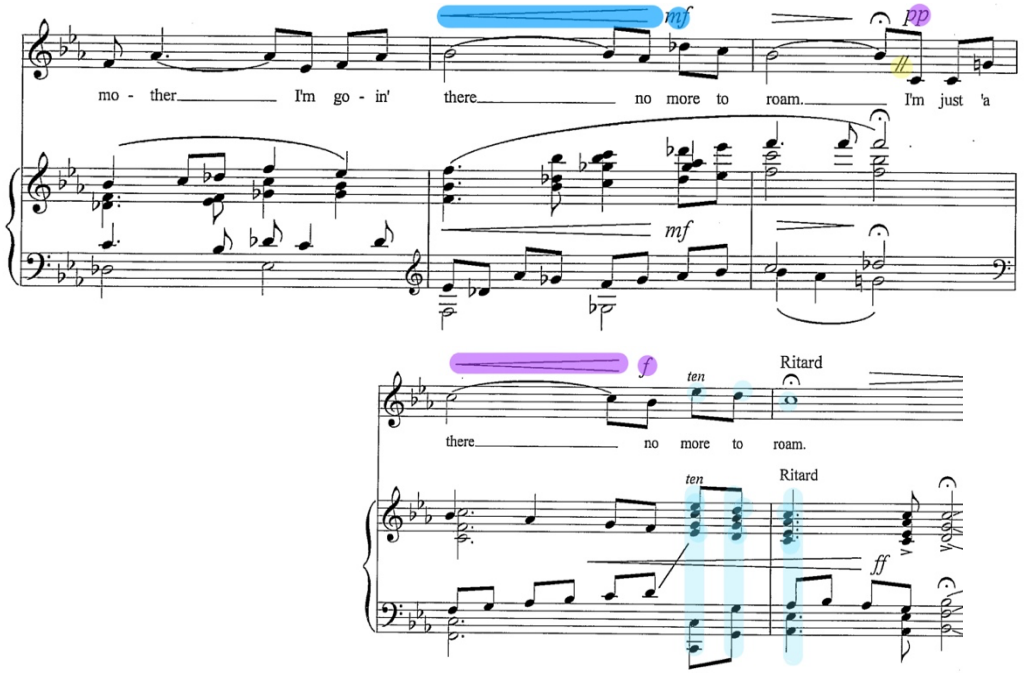

Figure 34 Top, Initial build to "roam"; *Bottom,* Ultimate build to "roam"

Hell in Texas

TYPE	Broadside/Cowboy Ballad
ORIGIN	John R. Steele
TEMPO	With emphasis, not too fast
	♩. = 72 – 94
BARITONE RANGE	B♭2 – F4
DURATION	4:25

The rousing conclusion to the *American Folk Set*, "Hell in Texas" was first published in John Lomax's 1910 compilation of *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*.[105] Lomax received the text for this broadside ballad from the barkeep of the Buckhorn Saloon in San Antonio. The tune, however, was not

[105] Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, 222-223.

included. The version published by Lomax and set by Steven Mark Kohn is believed to have been penned by frontier soldier, John R. Steele.[106] The tune was curated by folk singer Sam Hinton (1917 – 2009) on the 1976 album *Cowboy Songs*.[107] Hinton is credited by modern folk singers as propagating this version of the melody. The more common tune used for "Hell in Texas" is borrowed from the "Irish Washerwoman."

As is the natural evolution of many folk songs, "Hell in Texas" varies with the geographic region in which it is sung. The song has been altered to apply to several southwestern states. "Hell in Texas" also appears as "The Devil made: Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona" to name a few.

In his arrangement, Steven Mark Kohn combines the text of "Hell in Texas" and "Arizona" – both sourced from Lomax's *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. The first five verses mirror those from "Hell in Texas" with the addition of the last four lines borrowed from "Arizona."[108]

> And after he fixed things so thorny and well
> He said, 'I'll be damned if this don't beat hell.'
> Then he flapped his wings and away he flew
> And vanished from earth in a blaze of blue.

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[106] Lomax and Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs*, 401.
[107] Sam Hinton, "Hell in Texas," *How the West Was Won,* Living Stereo SF-5082/3 & LSO 6070, 1960, Vinyl.
[108] Lomax and Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs,* 402.

Kohn adds two original lines of dialogue giving the song a lighthearted conclusion.

The opening piano motive utilizes octaves and an open fifth with a grace note low on the piano for eleven bars of stasis effectively chaining the devil in hell (see left fig. 35). When the Lord begins his reply to the devil's request, the piano signifies his celestial elevation with shimmering sixteenth note, arpeggiated chords (see right fig. 35). As previously heard, upward key changes again act as an invigoration of energy and a welcome change to an otherwise repetitive strophic song.

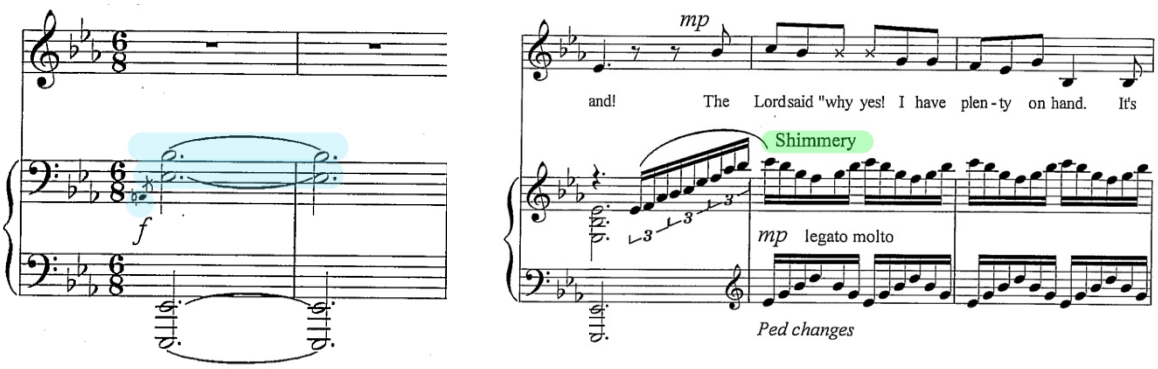

Figure 35 Left, Chaining devil motive; *Right,* Shimmering God motive

In the fourth verse, Kohn deviates from the traditional tune to melodic material of his own creation. This verse describes the many elements the devil introduces to spruce up his playground. The staccato eighth notes of this passage are reminiscent of a tarantella, a dance purporting to cure those suffering from a tarantula bite. Throughout the two verses of the devil's creation, the accompaniment grows fuller in texture as dynamics swell; the

conditions of hell become more frightening. The piano also adds short interjections all the while the devil is at work: the tarantula's bite, the prickly cactus thorns, the horned toads, the shudder of ants crawling all over, and finally the sinking feeling of finding a poisonous snake under a rock (see fig 36). After the audience has heard of all hell's new creatures, an expansive pianistic cadenza is included as the singer physically embodies the devil. The interlude intensifies first with thirty-second notes then sixty-fourth notes as it perverts the earlier Lord's sixteenth note motive in an evil frenzy.

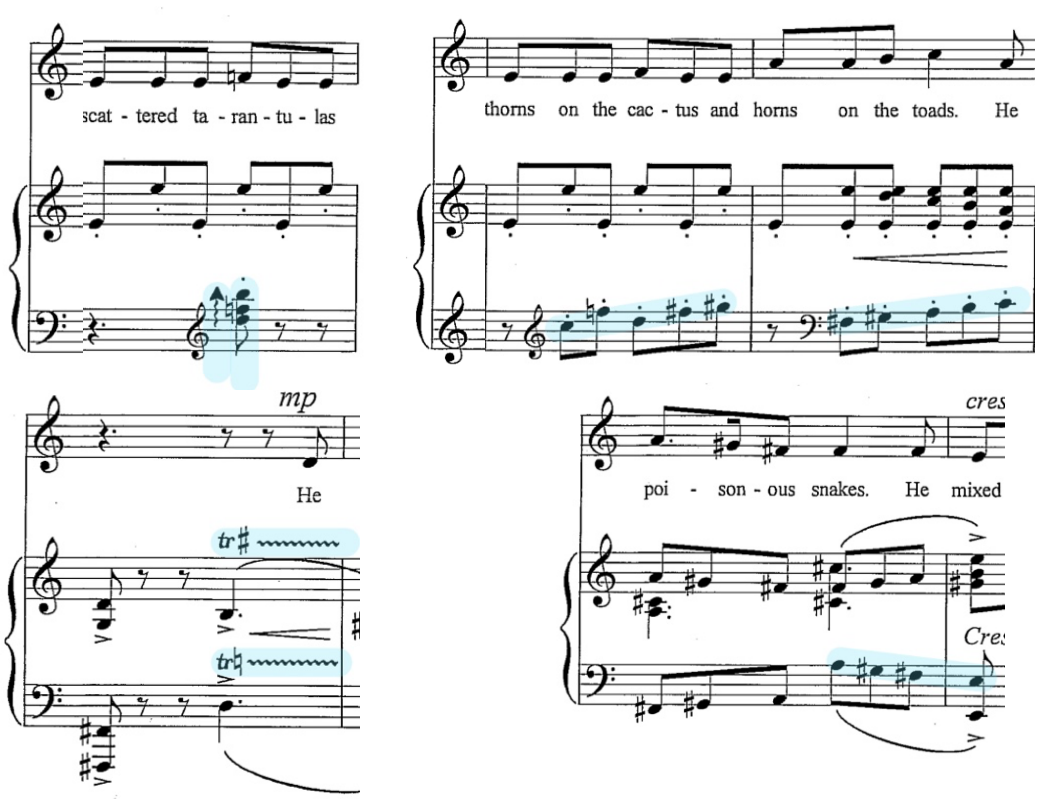

Figure 36 Top left, Tarantula bite; *Top right,* Prickly cactus thorns and horned toads; *Bottom right,* Shudder of ants; *Bottom right,* Poisonous snakes

Upon finishing his work, the devil flies away and the Lord's motive returns. The pianist strikes a *sforzando* tritone to end the setting's penultimate phrase, therein reminding the audience that the devil, and his handiwork, may still be lurking about.

CHAPTER III

THE PERFORMANCE PRACTICE OF THE AMERICAN FOLK SET

As a composer and librettist Steven Mark Kohn pays careful attention to engaging a modern audience. Within themselves, audiences contain a juxtaposition of unique traits. Modern populations are amongst the most widely educated in human history; but their reduced attention spans demonstrate less patience to absorb long-form entertainment than in the past. This fact is of critical importance to modern performers and composers, as Kohn explains:

> Something composers need to be aware of today is how the audience has changed. Technology, television, streaming this and streaming that, film music. The fact that the average person, without even knowing it, has experienced atonal music. Everyone's ears have been expanded and everyone's sense of storytelling has been expanded to the point where Joe Schmoe will say, 'Well, she wouldn't say that.' They'll watch a movie and say, 'Well that motivation just, doesn't work. Audiences are much more savvy than when the medicine show would slide through a small town and puppets would entertain, so we have to be aware and we have to write up to the contemporary audience. Even in rural communities and the less sophisticated pockets of our country and of our world because they have absorbed a lot of stuff. So we have to be aware of that.[109]

[109] Kohn, interview 3.

This is especially true of the somewhat archaic recital performance setting in which Art Song so often abides. The hard truth is that the vast majority of modern audiences are no longer interested in sitting still for an hour to listen to even the most beautiful solo vocal selections performed in another language devoid of an expressive understanding by either the performer or listener. Kohn believes that Western European standards for Art Song performed on the recital stage frequently does not engage the general public. The potential to engage a contemporary audience inspires Kohn. In composing art songs, Kohn's goal is to create a small collection of art songs that could inspire more engaging performances on the recital stage. He explains his aspirations, "here's this world. It exists largely in university and small recital halls. I'd like to penetrate that world and create, perhaps, a small, but significant, niche within that."[110]

To achieve this objective Kohn combines the expressive capacity of contemporary American musical theatre with the classical tradition of song settings for the solo voice. He endeavors to "bring a folk, pop, and American Songbook sensibility to Art Song, coupled with a love of theatre and Art Song's potential to tell a story—not just a stiff rendition of something."[111] Kohn

[110] Kohn, interview 3.
[111] Kohn, interview 2.

observes that alongside American opera, "Art Song is evolving in America to become something more interesting, more compelling, more arresting and more accessible to the public because it's necessary."[112]

While not a singer himself, the composer heard a specific voice when composing the *American Folk Set*. Lower voice types are especially effective in portraying the unrefined characters and raw emotions found in many of his settings. Kohn remarks that after listening to David Daniels perform Volume 1 at an Art Song festival in Cleveland, "I did not appreciate the countertenor voice in these songs. It sounded quasi androgenous and didn't quite have the dramatic weight."[113]

A male perspective is dominant in most of the folk narratives Kohn chose to set. Despite being originally intended for the male voice, Kohn feels any of these selections may be sung by women. Regardless of the singer's gender, voice type, or technique, the most critical aspect of performance is the ability to convey a dramatic arc.

> First and foremost is the storytelling and the acting. The acting, to me, and the story, to me, is every bit as important as your ability to hit that note- so I will opt for acting first, singing second. I lean toward the music theatre style of singing, not operatic, because I feel that every word needs to be clearly understood. I feel that in the music theatre

[112] Kohn, interview 2.
[113] Kohn, interview 3.

> world, it's a more natural manner of singing. More conversational.[114]

Kohn expresses great appreciation for the rigorous training of the classical singer and their ability to realize a composer's writing with great precision; however, he also prizes the music theatre performer's ability to communicate the story with conversational ease and dramatic intention. Elements of both styles are necessary to prepare an authentic performance to fulfill the composer's intentions.

Kohn's settings demand a wide range of vocal colors, which he invites through dynamics and instructions written to the performer in his scores. These are not to be mistaken as editorial additions. Kohn's notes to the performer are specific; he expects a playfulness with the voice that gives contemporary life to these American stories through a more relaxed American vocal aesthetic. Believable communication of the texts sung and spoken by evocative characters open opportunities for a wider range of vocal production and vocal registers than the highly prized evenness of the round and robust vocal tone aspirational in most Western European Art Song.

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[114] Kohn, interview 2.

While there are moments and even full selections throughout the folk set where a full classical production is completely appropriate, this should not be the only vocal style employed. A more informal, conversational style should be the primary approach from which the singer explores. When describing the vocal color he hears in his settings, Kohn justifies why he prefers a singer to engage in a style of vocal production associated with American musical theatre, "There isn't an overlay of technique, color, and all sorts of operatic trappings. I'm not a fan of the classical manner of singing. I would say music theatre, even popular music, American songbook—it's all in there."[115] "These are not vocal showcases. It's: 'listen to this story.'"[116] The act of singing passages completely devoid of vibrato can prove challenging to the classical singer; however, straight-tone is nonetheless necessary to create the dramatic vocal palette intended by the composer. "The challenge of not using vibrato is part of the storytelling, part of the peaks and valleys."[117]

Kohn gives the performer liberty in the sections featuring spoken dialogue. While any syllables that fall on the downbeats should remain fairly accurate, everything else can be approximated and conversational.[118]

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[115] Kohn, interview 2.
[116] Kohn, interview 3.
[117] Kohn, interview 3.
[118] Kohn, interview 3.

Little liberty is offered when considering tempi. Singers are encouraged to remain within the composer's marked range. For each of his folk songs, Kohn includes a small metronomic range from which to choose. If the music of Johann Sebastian Bach is any indication, tempo "will make or break any piece;" for Kohn, "tempo is the most important thing going."[119]

As a librettist, Kohn uses rhythmic space in his music to punctuate the text and effect drama. The many pauses, *caesuras*, *fermatas*, and moments of silence appear in these settings to serve a specific purpose.[120] To use these moments for full effect, the singer should take each instance as an opportunity make a definitive choice. This might appear as a decision to dramatically "step forward, step back, or reflect back on the story."[121]

When considered within the greater context of Art Song repertoire, the settings in Steven Mark Kohn's *American Folk Set* offer rich educational potential for the developing singer. Each song features a unique dramatic journey to portray in a performing experience liberated from the challenges of difficult translations and extended vocal ranges. Kohn's settings demand dramatic integrity; their performance must become charismatic storytelling to be successful because this was his compositional goal. To realize his objective,

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[119] Kohn, interview 3.
[120] Kohn, interview 1.
[121] Kohn, interview 1.

performers must respect his many markings and instructions found in the score. Determining the specific intent of each of the composer's compositional choices facilitates each story's springing to dramatic life.

The engaging historic stories paired with the contemporary appeal of Kohn's settings can entice aspiring performers to grow in their understanding and appreciation of classical Art Song. Performers can break away from "the static, formal treatment so common in Art Song."[122] They can learn concepts that can be retroactively applied to German *Lied*, French *Mélodie*, Russian *Romance*, and Italian *Arias*. This attentive, engaging, and conversational approach can bring new life to legendary works of song such as those by Franz Schubert, whose works were never intended to be placed upon a pedestal, but rather performed in intimate, yet lighthearted, social settings. They can instill in singers a dedication to a more complete service to the text.

From Kohn's perspective, the clarity of both text and dramatic intention must be the utmost priority in the performance of Art Song for contemporary audiences. His passionate belief in this priority shapes his folk song settings. Two facts fundamentally influence Kohn's compositional approach: the audience may only hear an art song once in their lifetime and a single

[122] Kohn, interview 2.

exposure to any work of art has the potential to make a powerful impression. Kohn summarizes his advice to those preparing to perform his *American Folk Set,* "These should be direct. The audience should get every single word. The actor should be able to act every single line because it is so simple and direct."[123]

[123] Kohn, interview 2.

CONCLUSION

Cultures from every corner of the globe possess a unique style of capturing their experiences in song. Folk songs are most often created by those with negligible formal training in music. With an aural tradition of being passed down generation to generation, folk songs preserve their originators' perspective on the history they lived. Each new variation of a folk song contributes a new entry in a rich heritage awaiting subsequent generations. For centuries, American Folk Song has flourished as a genre of popular music. As arranged by classically trained composers for voice as well as other instruments, folk songs have found their way to vocal recital stages. The fifteen folk songs arranged by Steven Mark Kohn in his *American Folk Set* extend the legacies of all who created and added their personal stamp to the songs he set, but his settings also breathe fresh life into a neglected genre of vocal music. While some may regard folk songs as rustic, dated, or simplistic, Kohn sees Folk Song as filled with an untapped potential to appeal to contemporary singers and audiences. In their elevation of American folk music, the fifteen settings of the *American Folk Set* join Aaron Copland's *Old American Songs* as extraordinary representations of folk song settings for the recital stage.

In his *American Folk Set*, Steven Mark Kohn succeeds in synthesizing the musical language of classical, musical theatre, popular, and folk music styles. His settings employ text painting; mixed meters; modulations; journeys through multiple key centers; a colorful palette of tessituras; pianistic introductions, interludes, and postludes contributing more than mere accompaniment; varied vocal productions and character-voices; a wide range of expressive dynamics; dramatically varied musical textures; and additional detailed score markings, including specific instructions written to the singer and pianist. Performers are encouraged to view every detail in Kohn's scores as significant; his details provide valuable keys to unlocking each song's artistic potential.

This performance guide offers a limited sampling of the bountiful inspiration offered to performers in Kohn's detailed scores. The background of his chosen source material enriches performers' artistic interpretations and informs their decisions with facts not always evident in each song's lyrics. Potential interpretations of specific musical moments sample the creative imagination that gives Kohn's settings both musical and theatrical integrity.

In his arrangements of folk songs, Kohn inspires contemporary performers to bring historic characters and their stories to vivid life on the recital stage. The fifteen selections in Steven Mark Kohn's *American Folk Set*

stand as the most current descendants in the storied chronicle of human experience passed down through the music of common and extraordinary American people.

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APPENDIX

SONG TEXTS FROM THE AMERICAN FOLK SET

Ten Thousand Miles Away

Sing I for a brave and a gallant barque, for a stiff and a rattling breeze,
A bully crew and a captain true, to carry me o'er the seas.
To carry me o'er the seas, my boys, to my true love so gay,
Who went on a trip on a government ship, ten thousand miles away.

Oh, blow ye winds, hi oh! A roaming I will go.
I'll stay no more on England's shore, so let the music play.
I'll start by the morning train, to cross the raging main!
For I'm on the road to my own true love, ten thousand miles away.

My true love she was handsome. My true love she was young.
Her eyes were blue as the violet's hue, and silvery was the sound of her tongue.
And silvery was the sound of her tongue, my boys, and while I sing this lay,
She's a doing of the grand in a far off land, ten thousand miles away.

Oh, blow ye winds, hi oh! A roaming I will go.
I'll stay no more on England's shore, so let the music play.
I'll start by the morning train, to cross the raging main!
For I'm on the road to my own true love, ten thousand miles away.

On the Other Shore

I have a mother gone to glory, on the other shore.
By and by I'll go to meet her, on the other shore.
Won't that be a happy meetin', on the other shore.
There we'll see our good old neighbors, on the other shore.
There we'll meet our blessed savior, on the other shore.

The Farmer's Curst Wife

There was an old man at the foot of the hill. If he ain't moved away, he's a' livin' there still.
Sing hi diddle-i diddle-i fi, diddle-i diddle-i day.
The devil he come to his house one day, says "one of your family I'm gonna take away."
Sing hi diddle-i diddle-i fi, diddle-i diddle-i day.
"Take her, my wife, with all a' my heart, and I hope, by golly, you never part."
Sing hi diddle-i diddle-i fi, diddle-i diddle-i day.
The devil he put her up on his back and off to Hell he went, clickity clack.
Sing hi diddle-i diddle-i fi, diddle-i diddle-i day.
When he got her down to the gates of Hell, he says "punch up the fire, we'll scorch her well."
Sing hi diddle-i diddle-i fi, diddle-i diddle-i day.
In come a little devil draggin' a chain. She upped with a hatchet and split his brain!
Sing hi diddle-i diddle-i fi, diddle-i diddle-i day.
Now nine little devils went a climbin' the wall, sayin' "take her back daddy, she'll a' murder us all!"

Sing hi diddle-i diddle-i fi, diddle-i diddle-i day.
The old man was a' peepin' out of a crack. And he saw the old devil come draggin' her back.
Sing hi diddle-i diddle-i fi, diddle-i diddle-i day.
Now there's one advantage women have over men. They can all go to Hell…and come back again.
Sing hi diddle-i diddle-i fi, diddle-i diddle-i day!

Wanderin'

I been a wanderin' early, I been a wanderin' late, from New York City to the Golden Gate.
An' it looks like I'm never gonna cease my wanderin'.
Been a' workin' in the army 'an workin' on a farm. All I got to show for it is the muscle in my arm.
An' it looks like I'm never gonna cease my wanderin'.
There's snakes up on the mountain and eels in the sea. "Twas a red headed woman made a wreck of me.
An' it looks like I'm never gonna cease my wanderin'.
Ashes to ashes and dust to dust. If whiskey don't get you, then the woman must.
An' it looks like I'm never gonna cease my wanderin'.

Red Iron Ore

Come all ye bold sailors who follow the lakes,
on an iron ore vessel your livin' to make,
I shipped in Chicago, bid adieu to the shore,
bound away to Escanaba for red iron ore.
Derry down, down, down, derry down.
In the month of September, the seventeenth day,
two dollars and a quarter was all they would pay.
And on Monday morning the *Bridgeport* did take
the *E. C. Roberts* out into the lake.
Derry down, down, down, derry down.
This packet she howled 'cross the mouth of Green Bay,
and before her cut water she dashed the white spray.
We rounded the sand point, our anchor let go.
We furled in our canvas and the watch went below.
Derry down, down, down, derry down.
Next morning we hove in along the *Exile,*
and soon was made fast to an iron ore pile.
They lowered their chutes and like thunder did roar.
They spouted into us that red iron ore.
Derry down, down, down, derry down.
Some sailors took shovels while others took spades,
and some took wheel barrows, each man to his trade.
We looked like red devils, our fingers got sore.
We cursed Escanaba and that damned iron ore!
Derry down, down, down, derry down.
The tug *Escanaba* she towed out the *Minch.*
The *Roberts* she though she had left in a pinch.
And as she passed by us she bid us good bye,
saying "we'll meet in Cleveland next fourth of July."
Derry down, down, down, derry down.
'Cross Saginaw Bay the *Roberts* did ride
with dark and deep water rolling over her side.
And now for Port Huron the *Roberts* must go,

where the tug *Katey Williams* will take us in tow.
Derry down, down, down, derry down.
We went through North Passage, O Lord how it blew!
And all 'round the dummy a fleet there came too.
The night being dark, old Nick it would scare.
We hove up next morn and for Cleveland did steer.
Derry down, down, down, derry down.
Now the *Roberts* in Cleveland made fast stem and stern,
and over the bottle we'll spin a big yarn.
But Cap Harvey Shannon had ought to stand treat
for getting to Cleveland ahead of the fleet.
Derry down, down, down, derry down.
Now my song is ended. I hope you won't laugh.
Our dunnage is packed and all hands are paid off.
Here's health to the *Roberts,* she's staunch, strong and true.
Not forgotten, the bold boys that make up her crew.
Derry down, down, down, derry down.

The Bachelor's Lay

As I was a traveling one morning in May, I heard on old bachelor beginning a lay;
"Oh, I can't tell why the reason may be that none of those girls will marry me.
I've courted the rich and I've courted the poor. I've often been snubbed at the meeting house door.
And I can't tell why the reason may be that none of those girls will marry me.
I've offered them silver, I've offered them gold, and many fine stories to them I have told.
But gold and silver won't do, I can see, for none of those girls have married me.
I've been through the mountains, I've traveled the plains. I courted the missus, I've courted the dames.
And I can't tell why the reason may be that none of those girls will marry me.
I've sailed on the main and I've followed the coast. No conquest of love can I honestly boast.
And I can't tell what the reason may be that none of those girls will marry me.
I've asked them to tell me what stood in their way. And all of them answered "I'd rather not say."
So I can't tell why the reason may be that none of those girls will marry me.
Go shave off your whiskers and powder your hair! Go dress yourself up with the greatest of care.
Put on your broad sword and bright buckles too! …if you want a young lady to marry you."

Down, Down, Down

With your kind attention a song I will trill for ye who must toil with the pick and the drill,
and sweat for your bread in that hole at Oak Hill that goes down, down, down.
When I was a boy, said my daddy to me "stay out of Oak Hill, take my warnin'" said he,
"or with dust you'll be choked and a pauper you'll be, broken down, down, down."
But I went to Oak Hill and I asked for a job, a mule for to drive or a gangway to rob.
So the boss said "come out, Bill and follow the mob that goes down, down, down."
"All aboard for the bottom" the topman did yell. We stepped on the cage and he gave her the bell.
Then from under our feet like a bat out of, well…we went down, down, down.
You could look at the rib or the face or the top. Ne'er a sign of a laggin' or slab or of prop.
Some day I expect this old mountain to drop…and come down, down, down.

The Old Woman's Courtship

Old woman, old woman, will you go a shearing?

"Speak a little louder sir, I'm rather hard of hearing."
Old woman, old woman, are you good at weaving?
"Pray speak a little louder sir, my hearing is deceiving."
Old woman, old woman, will you go a' walking?
"Speak a little louder sir, or what's the use of talking?"
Old woman, old woman, are you fond of spinning?
"Pray speak a little louder sir, I only see you grinning."
Old woman, old woman, will you do my knitting?
"My hearing's getting better now, come near to where I'm sitting."
Old woman, old woman, shall I kiss you dearly?
"Oh, Lord have mercy on my soul, sir. Now I hear you clearly."

The Ocean Burial

"Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea." These words came low and mournfully
from the pallid lips of a youth who lay in his small cabin bed at the close of day.
"Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea, where the billowy shroud will roll over me,
where no light will break through the cold dark wave, and no sunbeam rest upon my grave.
Oh it matters not, I have oft been told, where the body may lie when the heart grows cold.
But grant, oh, grant me this one final plea, to bury me not in the deep, deep sea.
I have always hoped to be laid when I died, in the old church yard on the green hillside.
By the bones of my father, oh, there let me be. Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea.
Oh, bury me not-" …and his voice failed there. But they gave no heed to his dying prayer.
They have lowered him over the vessel's side, and above him has closed the cold, dark tide.

California

When formed our band, we are all well manned to journey far to the promised land.
The golden ore is rich in store on the backs of the Sacramento shore.
Then ho boys, ho, to California go! There's plenty of gold, or so I'm told, on the banks of the Sacramento!
We all expect the coarsest fare, sleeping out in the open air.
On the ground we'll all sleep sound, 'cept when the wolves go howling round!
Then ho boys, ho, to California go! There's plenty of gold, or so I'm told, on the banks of the Sacramento!
As we explore the distant shore, filling our pockets up with ore.
Hear the sound, the shout goes round, filling our pockets with a dozen pounds!
Then ho boys, ho, to California go! There's plenty of gold, or so I'm told, on the banks of the Sacramento!
The gold is almost everywhere, we dig it out with and iron bar!
But where it's think, with spade or pick, we take out chunks as big as a brick!
Then ho boys, ho, to California go!
As oft we roam the dark sea foam, we'll not forget our friends at home.
For memory kind will bring to mind the love of those we left behind.
Then ho boys, ho, to California go! There's plenty of gold, or so I'm told, on the banks of the Sacramento!

The Gallows Tree

Slack your rope, hangs a man! Slack it for a while.
I think I see my mother comin', ridin' many a mile.
Oh, mother have you brought me gold or have you paid my fee?
Or have you come to see me hangin' on the gallows tree?
"I have not brought you gold. I have not paid your fee.
But I have come to see you hanging on the gallows tree."

Slack your rope, hangs a man! Slack it for a while.
I think I see my father comin', ridin' many a mile.
Oh, father have you brought me gold or have you paid my fee?
Or have you come to see me hangin' on the gallows tree?
"I have not brought you gold. I have not paid your fee.
But I have come to see you hanging on the gallows tree."

Slack your rope, hangs a man! Slack it for a while.
I think I see my true love comin', ridin' many a mile.
Oh, darlin' have you brought me gold or have you paid my fee?
Or have you come to see me hangin' on the gallows tree?
"Yes, I have brought you gold. Yes, I have paid your fee.
I have not come to see you hanging on the gallows tree."

I'm a Stranger Here

Hitch up my buggy, saddle up my old black mare.
Goin' to find me an angel in this world somewhere.
I'm a stranger here. I'm a stranger everywhere. I would go home, but honey, I'm a stranger there.
I'm worried now, but I won't be worried long.
It takes a worried man to sing a worried song.
I'm a stranger here. I'm a stranger everywhere. I would go home, but honey, I'm a stranger there.
Looked down that road far as I could see.
And a little bitty hand kept wavin' back at me.
I'm a stranger here. I'm a stranger everywhere. I would go home, but honey, I'm a stranger there.

The Drunken Old Fool

Oh, the old man he came home one night as drunk as he could be.
He saw a coat upon the rack where his coat ought to be.
"My good wife, my dear wife, my darlin' wife" said he,
"whose coat is that upon the rack where my coat ought to be?"
"Oh, you old fool, you blind fool, you doddering fool" says she,
"it's nothing but a bed quilt me uncle sent to me."
"I've traveled the world over ten thousand times or more,
but buttons on a bed quilt I've never seen before."

Oh, the old man he came home again as drunk as he could be.
He saw some boots beneath the bed where his boots ought to be.
"My good wife, my dear wife, my darlin' wife" said he,
"whose boots are these beneath the bed where my boots ought to be?"
"Oh, you old fool, you blind fool, you doddering fool" says she,
"it's nothing but some milk jugs me uncle sent to me."
"I've traveled the world over ten thousand times or more,
but spurs upon a milk jug I've never seen before."

He stumbled home the next night as drunk as he could be.
He saw a face between the sheets where no face ought to be.
"My good wife, my dear wife, my darlin' wife" said he,
"whose face is that between the sheets where my face ought to be?"
"Oh, you old fool, you blind fool, you doddering fool" says she,

"it's nothing but a cabbage head me uncle sent to me."
"I've traveled the world over ten thousand times or more,
but a mustache on a cabbage head I've never seen before!"

Poor Wayfaring Stranger

I am a poor wayfaring stranger, a' trav'lin' through this world of woe,
And there's no sickness, toil or danger in that bright land to which I go.
I'm going there to meet my mother (father). I'm going there no more to roam.
I'm jus a' goin' over Jordan. I'm just a' goin' over home.

Hell in Texas

Oh, the devil in Hell they say he was chained. And there for a thousand years he remained.
He never complained, no, nor did he groan, but decided he'd start up a Hell of his own.
Where he could torment the souls of men, free form the walls of his prison pen.
So he asked the Lord if he had any sand left over from making this great land.

The Lord said "why, yes, I have plenty on hand. It's way down south on the Rio Grande.
But I've got to be honest the stuff is so poor, that I wouldn't use it for Hell anymore."
So the devil went down to look over his truck. It came as a gift, so he figured he's stuck.
And when he examined it careful and well, he decided the place was to dry for Hell.

Well, the Lord he just wanted the stuff off his hands, so he promised the devil he'd water the land.
He had some old water that wasn't no use, a rancid old puddle that stunk like the deuce.
The Lord he was crafty, the deal was arranged. He laughed to himself as the deed was exchanged.
But the devil was ready to go with his plan to make up a Hell and so he began.

He scattered tarantulas over the roads, put thorns on the cactus and horns on the toads.
He sprinkled the sand with millions of ants, so if you sit down, you need soles on your pants.
He put water puppies in all of the lakes and under the rocks he put poisonous snakes.
He mixed all the dust up with jiggers and fleas, hung thorns and brambles all over the trees.
The heat in the summer's a hundred and ten. Not bad for the devil but way to hot for men!

And after he'd fixed things so thorny and well, he said "I'll be damned if this don't beat Hell!"
Then he flapped up his wings and away he flew, and vanished from earth in a blaze of blue!
So if you ever end up in Texas, let me know if it's true!