

YES, THIS IS

# CHOOOG TWO-FOUR

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The drawing on the cover is a crude sketch from the photo on CMS #101, BACKROOM BALLADS.

Articles and incidental sketches by LeeH.

I suppose it was obviously inevitable from the steady build-up in earlier issues of Shawzines that I'd finally achieve an issue 100% saturated with folkmusic lore and the like. So here it is: the adventures of a folkmusic fan in New York, with added apologies for inadequate Obliterine.

-LeeH  
15 Apr 57



# Folkmusic: what is it?

Boyd Raeburn asked me, "Just what do you mean when you say you are a folkmusic fan?" That's a hard question to answer. I'm not even sure what folkmusic is. A lot of people who are far better qualified than I, have tried to define it, and they rarely agree completely. The American College Dictionary says it is "music, usually of simple character, originating and handed down among the common people". That's not much help. Books on hand about folk-music generally take pages to stab at a definition, and then they leave the reader pretty much to decide for himself in a lot of cases. So I use the term "folkmusic" loosely; but when somebody like Boyd pins me down, I have to be a mite more semantic, and even then I'm pretty vague.

So I say that we are specializing in English-language folkmusic partly for entertainment (as music) and partly because of its interesting archaeological aspects. And when I am asked, "What do you mean by folkmusic?" I just stall around. I mean a lot of things: the Child ballads, Horace Sprott's field calls, Woody Guthrie's dustbowl ballads, Paul Clayton's whaling songs, Oscar Brand's bawdy songs, the IWW's songs of protest, etc.etc. A lot of it is definitely borderline stuff; folk-type music. Just where one leaves off and the other begins, I couldn't say. In the case of recent stuff, like college-parodies, union songs, and marching songs of WWII, you have to decide individual cases for yourself.

But I don't think it matters much just how you label a song, or what limits you set on the definition of "folkmusic". The song is no more or less entertaining as a song by being labelled a folksong.

Some of the "authorities" say that, if the author of a song is known, it can't be classified as a folksong. It seems to me that almost every song must have been originated at some time by someone. Maybe its been changed through the years to the extent that it is no longer recognizable to the author. Maybe it has only changed a word or two here or there. Maybe a wandering minstrel composed it in the court of Camelot. Maybe Billy Gashado wrote it in 1882. To the folkmusic historian, this is very important, but as far as singing goes, the song must stand or fall on its own merit, rather than its background.

For my own purposes, I have a definition of some sort, but it is more emotional than intellectual, so I can't very well write it here for you. I can say this though: as far as I'm concerned, folk-music --its performing-- is as valuable as a participation sport as it is as a spectator sport.

--LH

13-April-57



## Department of Comparative Folkmusic

Herewith, an excellent example of the wandering folksong. In the first column, I'm printing the English version. In the second column is a version collected in Newfoundland. The third is an American version.

### EGGS AND MARROWBONE

There was an old woman in our town,  
In our town did dwell,  
She loved her husband dearly,  
But another man twice as well.

She went to see the doctor,  
To see what she could find,  
To see what she could buy, sir,  
To make her old man blind.

Eggs, eggs, and marrowbone,  
Feed them to him all,  
That will make him so gol-durn  
That he can't see you /blind  
/at all

She fed him eggs and marrowbone,  
Fed them to him all,  
That did make him so gol-durn blind  
That he couldn't see her at all.

Now that I am old and blind,  
And tired of my life  
I will go down and drown myself  
And that will end my strife.

To drown yourself, to drown y'self,  
Now, that would be a sin,  
So I'll go down to the water's edge  
And kindly push you in.

The old woman took a running jump  
For to push the old man in,  
The old man he stepped to one side,  
And the old woman, she fell in.

### WOMAN FROM DOVER

There lived an old woman in Dover,  
In Dover she did dwell,  
She loved her husband dearly,  
But another man twice as well.

She went down to the doctor's,  
Some medicine for to buy,  
Saying, "Have you any medicine  
To make an old man blind?" /here,

"Oh yes, I have some marrowbone,  
Just grind it up so small,  
And before he gets it half down,  
He won't see you at all."

She carried home the marrowbone,  
And ground it up so small,  
And before he got it half down,  
He couldn't see her at all.

She said, "Now you're old and  
/feeble,  
In this world you cannot see,  
Now if you want to drown yourself,  
Just boldly follow me."

She led him to the river,  
She led him to the brim,  
"And if you want to drown yourself.  
Now boldly you jump in."

The little old woman she sneaked  
To push her husband in, /behind  
But the old man he jumped to one  
And boldly she fell in. /side



## EGGS AND MARROWBONE (2)

She yelled for help,  
      /screamed for help,  
Loudly she did bawl,  
The old man said, "I'm so blind,  
I can't see you at all."

She swam along, she swam along,  
Till she came to the river's brim,  
The old man got a great, long pole,  
And pushed her further in.

Now the old woman is dead and gone,  
And the devil's got her soul.  
Wasn't she a dad-blamed fool,  
That she didn't grab that pole.

Eggs, eggs, and marrowbone,  
Won't make your old man blind.  
So if you wants for to do him in,  
You must sneak up from behind.

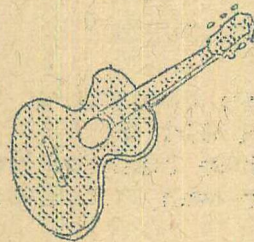
## JOHNNY SANDS

There was a man named Johnny Sands who married Betty Hague,  
And though she brought him gold and lands, she proved a terrible plague.  
For, oh, she was a scolding wife, full of caprice and whim,  
She made poor Johnny tired of life and she was tired of him.

Said he, "I think I'll drown myself in the river down below."  
"Pray do," she said, "You silly oaf, I wished it long ago."  
She he, "Upon the brink I'll stand, while you run down the hill.  
And push me in with all your might." Said she, "My love, I will!"

"For fear that I should courage lack and try to save my life,  
Pray tie my hands behind my back." "I will," replied his wife.  
She tied them fast as you might think and when securely done,  
"Now stand," she said, "upon the brink while I prepare to run."

So down the hill his loving bride now ran with all her force,  
To push him in, but he stepped aside and she fell in, of course,  
So splashing, dashing, like a fish, "Oh, save me Johnny Sands!"  
"I can't, my dear, though much I wish, for you have tied my hands."



(On checking back, I find that the version I give as English, tho  
basically the "original" may be somewhat Americanized. --Ed)



I trust you've noticed that the mouse in Pogo regularly sings snatches of a song including the phrase "Look ahead, look astern, look the weather in the lee. Blow high, blow low..." Well, here is a full text to his song --

## High Barbaree

There were two lofty ships from old England came,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we:  
One was the Prince of Luther and the other Prince of Wales,  
Sailing down along the coast of High Barbaree!

"Aloft there, aloft!" our gallant boatswain cried,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we:  
"Look ahead, look astern, look aweather and alee,  
Look along down the coast of High Barbaree!"

"There's nought upon our stern, there's nought upon our lee,"  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we:  
"But there's a lofty ship to windward, she's sailing fast and free,  
Sailing down along the coast of High Barbaree!"

"Oh, hail her; oh, hail her!" our gallant captain cried,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we:  
"Are you a man-of-war or a privateer?" he cried,  
"Sailing down along the coast of High Barbaree!"

"oh, I am not a man-of-war nor privateer," said he,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we:  
"But I am a salt-sea pirate, a-looking for my fee,"  
Sailing down along the coast of High Barbaree.

"If you are a jolly pirate, we'd have you come this way!"  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we:  
"Bring out your quarter guns, we'll show these pirates play!"  
Sailing down along the coast of High Barbaree.

"Twas broadside to broadside a long time we lay,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we:  
Until the Prince of Luther shot the pirate's mast away,  
Sailing down along the coast of High Barbaree.

"Oh, quarter. Oh, quarter," those pirates did cry,  
Blow high, blow low, and so sailed we:  
But the quarter that we gave them--we sank them in the sea,  
Sailing down along the coast of High Barbaree.



11 April 57

## Oscar Brand: as seen by me

Well, since the Jean Ritchie concert I mentioned earlier, where we saw Oscar Brand for the first time, we've see him sing three different programs (well, almost different). And we had the opportunity of exchanging a few words with Jean and, later, Oscar.

Oscar announced on his weekly folkmusic program (on radio) that he would be doing a program of folksongs at Midnight, Saturday night, at the Actors' Playhouse, on 7th Ave. S. So, naturally we went.

I don't know why we got to Manhattan so early, but there we were in the Village with a couple of hours to kill. We hit Marlboro, and that fine bookstore further over, where I discovered a good volume of Irish broadside ballads, and several other small items. With them, and a Lomax collection (which has proved to be about the best book of Folkmusic I have seen--all full of fine old songs with piano and guitar accompaniments), we headed back for 7th. We stopped in the drugstore with the paperback display at Sheridan Square, and then drifted into Simple's for coffee.

Finally it turned 11:30 and we walked over to the Actors' Playhouse. From the outside, this is a door with an awning to the curb, and a couple of display cases full of stills from whatever play is current there. On the sidewalk there was an Aboard with a photo of Oscar and an announcement of his program on it. I'm not positive about this but I think the program was listed as "Bad Men and Worst Women".

As we crossed 7th, we saw a man in a dark blue suit going into the Playhouse. Oscar, I thought casually. I was right, I think. The man on the door refused us entry on the grounds that Oscar had just arrived, the lighting technician hadn't arrived yet at all, and the lights still had to be set. (One followspot had to be "set"?)

So we browsed the bookstalls next to the Playhouse while waiting to be let in, and ran into Ken Beale who wanted to know if Jean Ritchie was going to be singing with Oscar. We thought not. Ken bade us a farewell and left.

Noticing the line of people accumulating in front of the Playhouse, we decided to queue up. It was St Patrick's Day (Oscar is a Good Man--he did NOT have a program of Irish Songs) and the queue-ees were mostly well dressed and pretty happy. A bunch of "uptowners", I thought disdainfully, since we were Villagers once (and still lay some claim to the apartment on Sullivan Street by right of all the stuff we've got "stored" there with Bill and Dixie).

I gleefully eavesdropped some of the conversation going on in the queue, catching such names as Josh White and Richard Dyer-Bennett. In

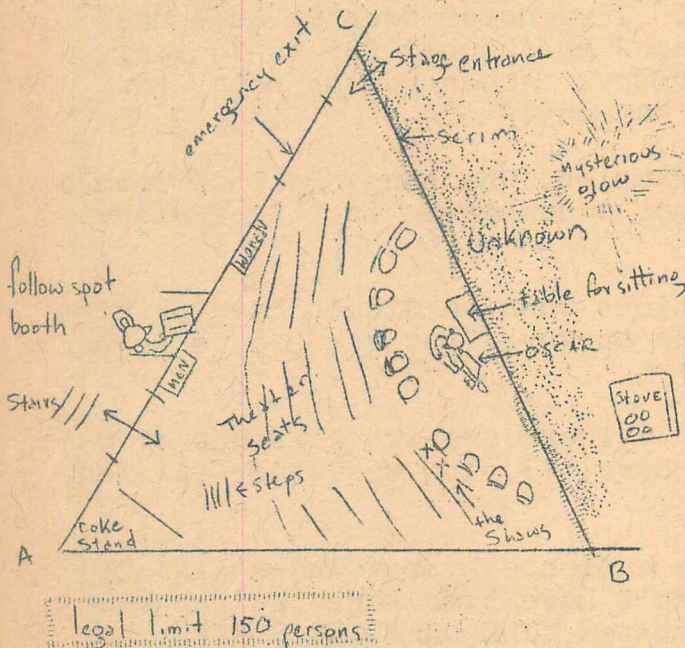


## Oscar Brand, Twelve String Guitar Player (2)

retaliation I mentioned Woody Guthrie, Cisco Houston and Jack Elliott, to nobody in particular. For good measure I threw in Frank Warner and John Greenway and they opened the door to the Playhouse so we all went in.

We wound down a flight of stairs that turned so often I lost my meager sense of direction completely. The walls of the staircase were lined with paintings, mostly of the Modern School, apparently for sale (I think there was a sign to that effect).

At the bottom of the staircase there was a very small room of triangular shape. We entered at vertex A, which faced wall BC, or rather curtain BC, for across the BC end of the room was a scrim, all painted for the play that they were doing. About four feet in front of the scrim there was a row of loose, miscellaneous chairs, some spattered with dried stage paint, and all looking like refuge from a junk heap. The regular theatre seating began immediately behind them, rising sharply on an inclined plane. Maybe I'd better diagram the whole works.



The audience entered at point A and dispersed to chairs. Larry and I settled on the aisle at the point marked with an X on the diagram, where we seated ourselves on the aisle in the first row of theater seats (second actual row) and waited.

Behind the scrim one could make out some kitchen furniture (stove and the likes, I think) and a guitar which seemed to be standing upright in the center of the stage.

Someone came from one side of the scrim and brought a small table into the narrow area between the audience and the scrim. He set it down and then left again.

Someone moved the guitar.

We waited.

And then Oscar came out carrying the guitar. He came from the far end of the scrim, a tall dark young man in a dark blue suit and the same tie he'd worn at the Jean Ritchie concert (a striking model in pink and blue stripes). In the light of the follow spot he crossed to the small table and sat down on it.



Oscar Brand, Red-Blooded American Folksinger (3)

The guitar in his lap was a gaudy thing, blond-faced and inlaid in several places. It was the first 12-string guitar I've seen up close, and it was most impressive--think of having to tune 12 strings. The object wrapped around its neck proved to be (as I had suspected) a capo, also the first in my experience. It was an old, experienced looking guitar.

Oscar settled himself on the table and told us that he'd been on the other side of the scrim, watching us. The entire audience blushed. The reason they had held us in a queue outside, he explained, was to allay the suspicions of the authorities, who (he claimed) might raid the place if they saw people sneaking in furtively one by one. I didn't realize the full significance of this statement until I heard a few of the evening's songs.

He opened with the Bad Man's Lament, which is on the CMS disc as Early One Morning, and which is a variation of Bad Lee Brown (or vi-va) He'd talk a bit, and then sing a bit.

A lot of what he sang was familiar stuff...at least to those of us who have the three volume set of Bawdy Ballads...and when he asked us to join in the chorus, we'd sing out. I've never seen an audience more responsive. When our voices waned he shouted for us to sing louder, so that he could sing the harmony. "When you go home, you can tell your folks you were singing harmony!"

He lectured on euphemisms, with examples. He sang "Ball of Yarn". And he asked if we understood just what a euphemism is. Some wiseacre shouted back, "A ball of yarn!"

Oscar apologized for asking questions when he didn't have refrigerators or cash prizes to give for the answers, but assured us that "your neighbors are proud of you."

Then he sang the One Eyed Reilly. "There are two versions of this, he explained. "In one, Reilly is the hero. I sing the other version. In it, I'm the hero."

Along about 2 AM he tantalized the audience by reading a list of songs that he might have sung but didn't have time for. We pleaded, and he finally sang two fine old favorites, THE CHANDLER'S WIFE and ZULIKA. When someone shouted out for him to sing THE ERIE CANAL (raging version) he refused on the grounds that he had a radio show to do the next day, and that **after singing the Er-i-e**, he was in no condition to sing anything for the following three days.

He told us that he'd be doing a program called Laughing America (also the title of his latest record release) at McMillan (C.U.) the following Thursday and that, since it would be recorded for the Voice of America, his choice of selections would be somewhat different than it had been at Actors' Playhouse.

And he bade us farewell, and left.



## Oscar Brand, the Laughing Voice of America (4)

McMillan is considerably larger than Actors' Playhouse, and much further Uptown. The audience Oscar drew there was somewhat different. Larry and I were seated in the middle of the second row, in front of a group of young hi-fi enthusiasts. One of them was speculating about the program and wondering if Oscar would sing any of the selections from Bawdy Ballads. Another was worrying about the capstan on his tape-recorder, which seemed to be wobbling.

There were two microphones on stage, in front of the curtain, and a tall stool. One of the mikes had a Voice of America i.d. plate on the stand, upside down. An assortment of cables ran about the stage.

Oscar came out, in front of the curtain and seated himself on the stool. He wore the same (?) dark blue suit, but a different tie, and in the more general lighting, he looked somewhat less sinister than he had in the Actors' Playhouse.

He introduced himself and explained that the Vof A was recording the show and that their taper could only a half an hour at a time, so he'd have to pause during the program at regular intervals.

He proceeded to sing some very fine stuff, some of it selections from his record, Laughing America, and some which I haven't heard recorded anywhere. He has a very fine version of Whiskey in the Jar, and also a fine Talking Atomic Blues ("Stop the world! I wanna get off!").

Again, he asked the audience to sing with him, but the response was rather weak. For one thing, the songs were not so familiar and for another the McMillan isn't quite as conducive to group singing as is the Actors' Playhouse. And for another, a lot of us are right shy about singing out.

Oscar tries to encourage his audience. He leads them into a chorus and then drops down slightly himself. He says he wants to sing the harmony. I think, tho, that when he drops, so do the people who are singing with him. The average person is willing to sing in a group if he's sure that his voice won't be heard above the melee. If the loud man stops, Sam Average stops too.

So there was Oscar, singing almost alone, and apparently a little disappointed by it.

But he did sing some fine songs. I am particularly fond of one that is on the L.A. disc, SEE THEM BUZZARDS. This is a fine cowboy type song, which he made the most of on the program.

At ten o'clock, he called it quits, on the grounds that he had instructions not to sing past ten o'clock under any circumstances. The audience pleaded for encores, and insisted on curtain calls, and then it was over. With grim determination, Oscar had refused the encores, but taken the curtain calls.



## Oscar Brand, Tired Folksinger (5)

Last Saturday night, he sang a return engagement at the Actors' Playhouse. Larry and I made arrangements with Bill and Dixie to spend the night at the apartment in Sullivan street, to save us the early morning trip back to Staten afterwards, and we went to hear and see Oscar sing again.

His program this time, according to the A-board would be "Flaming Youth". We speculated whether this would be another illustrated lecture on euphemisms. It seemed fairly likely.

We queued up with a lot of Brand and/or Bawdy Ballad fans to wait. Some kind of fiasco was getting started in front of the theater, between two drivers who were made at each other and each other's cars. I couldn't figure out exactly why, and before the blood began to spatter, they started letting us into the theater, so I never saw the whole fight.

Inside, the Actors' Playhouse had changed plays, so the scrim was different. And the table provided for Oscar was different too. It looked far too wobbly to be trusted as a seat. I hoped Oscar wouldn't rely on it too much.

The same man was on the follow spot, and I wondered casually if he were an IA man. Saturday night from midnight to 2 AM should be a lucrative spot for an IA man.

Larry and I were, again, in the first row of theater seats, behind a row of chairs, on the stageleft side of the theater. In the center of the first row, there were several familiar looking young men... I'm sure they had been at the previous performance. One had copies of the pb Treasury of Folk Music, the little English folk-song book I'd bought earlier myself, and some other stuff. Ah, I thought, a folkmusic fan.

The people being seated were chattering with each other. Two couples took the seats behind us. One pair seemed to be from Off Somewhere. Their conversation went something like this:

"Who is Oscar Brand?"

"He sings dirty songs."

"Do you think I'm old enough for that sort of thing?"

Somewhere in the audience someone mentioned Richard Dyer-Bennett, who seems to be a pretty popular object of conversation in local circles nowadays.

In the front row, one of the young men seemed to be illustrating something to one of the others by singing the folksong which goes, "Early one morning as the sun was rising, I heard a maid sing in the valley below..."



## Oscar Brand, the Man With The Limp Hand (6)

As it is wont to do, everybody's conversation seemed to lull at the same time, and this youth's voice rang out loud and clear in the evening. It faltered blushing, and then regained strength enough to bluff through to the end of the verse. Applause rang through the audience.

And then Oscar came from behind the curtain, guitar in hand. In what appeared to be the same suit, but a different tie, he confronted the audience.

"I was back there, watching you through the curtain," he told us. "I heard someone singing and I thought the concert had begun. Then I realized it wasn't me..."

He explained that he had given the program a title so that we'd think it was a lot of new songs. Then he told us that, after doing a program for which he had prepared a number of less-familiar songs, he'd been confronted by a lot of fans who wanted to know why he didn't do the old favorites like Burl Ives, Richard Dyer-Bennett and Josh White. So tonight, he said, he was going to do all Burl Ives' favorites

He opened the program with ~~The~~ popular nursery song, Three Merchants Came A-Riding. He managed to make it sound pretty bawdy.

He went on to sing a variety of songs about flaming youths, and flaming older folks, including the One-Eyed Reilly (this is one of my favorites), during which he sang himself into a hole and had to do some pretty fancy singing to get out again.

He seemed to be having trouble with his capo. He'd slip it into place and then finger it and jiggle it, and plunk various strings on the guitar. One dissatisfied him and he retuned it.

He seemed a little tired, and near the end of the program he explained why. He'd spent the day in a recording session. I believe the figure he mentioned was eleven hours. You know the Talking Guitar Blues? The lines, "...Lord, my fingers were killing me. I couldn't mash the strings down..."? Oscar held up his left hand and told us, "Twelve steel strings..." A murmur of sympathy went through the guitar-playing members of the audience.

Then he volunteered to sing the Erie Canal (raging variety) for us, since he felt like he could hit every note in it, and his voice was shot for the next few days anyway. When the applause died down, he sang.

You can hear him sing this on either Riverside's American Drinking Songs and one of the Bawdy Ballad discs, but you really ought to see him sing it. He is more than just a singer. He is an actor, and an entertainer.



## Oscar Brand: American Youth

He rendered the Erie Canal magnificently.

And when he tried to tie up the program, the audience wouldn't let him do it. They were insistent. We were insistent! So he came back.

He apologized for dragging out an item that had once been tops on the Hit Parade. But he assured us that it was a good old folksong, nevertheless. And then he led us all in the singing of On Top Of Old Smoky.

And then he left, disappearing behind the scrim.

Larry and I filled in favorable comments on the slips of paper we'd been given on entering the theater. Yes, we advised, we'd like to be on the mailing list; we heard about the concert through the NY Times; and we think Oscar Brand is great. We turned in the slips as we filed through the door, and then we wandered into the subtle darkness of Greenwich Village. It was a wild and windy night, perfect for a quick coffee.

So we sat in a little coffee joint and talked about the show, and about folksongs in general: bawdy songs, clean songs, written songs, and folk songs. And folksingers.

The next time we saw Oscar Brand was a mere few hours ago. He was performing at the annual FOLKWAY FAIR, sponsored by the Metropolitan New York Council of the American Youth Hostels.

This was a Real Deal, featuring calypso singer, Lord Burgess with Herb Levy on the pennywhistle and Al Lindo on the drums. The bulk of the show was folkdancing, which Oscar mc'd.

Larry and I arrived shortly before the proposed curtain time: two thirty Sunday afternoon. We ran into George Nims Raybin first off. He spoke a few fannish words, and then we picked up our tickets and boarded a crowded elevator for the theater. It seems the show was on a high floor in the Manhattan Center, on 34th Street.

We were loaded out of the elevator and instructed to make a turn around and up a flight of stairs. There we encountered a youth who thrust a pair of blue cards at us, asking that we fill them out. They were requests for information: how did we hear about the show, and could they put us on their mailing list...

The theater itself was a rather wierd place, its walls and ceiling decorated with roccocco work and bas-relief murals, and painted in terrible shades of red and pink. The floor was apparently designed for dancing, and seating was by way of regular chairs in rows across the floor.



Oscar Brand: "Canadian, but..." (8)

We picked a pair of chairs on the stage right agile, as near the front as we could get. This proved to be a miscalculation as it put us right under the PA horns.

We settled down and watched the activity onstage. For some reason, although the show was far from underway the curtains were open. From our seats we could see well into the stage left wings where someone was playing piano while someone else leaned on the piano. Various people walked back and forth across the stage. A boy did things to the foot lights. People went up the stairs to the apron, and backstage between the curtain and the proscenium. And finally the curtains were closed and we prepared for the show to begin.

A slender man in a bright red shirt came out and regaled us with an introduction to Oscar Brand which included the statement that "he's Canadian but he's a fine folksinger..." or words to that immediate effect.

Oscar came out and told us that Frank (the man in the red shirt) was "an American but a fine introducer..." He assured us that Canadians have, and sing, folksongs too. Then he proceeded to sing a South African folksong. As is his wont, he led us in the chorus.

He was more casually dressed today than he had been at the previous concerts: he wore what appeared to be the same dark blue suit, although under the lighting there, it was hard to tell. He wore no tie, but a dark (blue or black) turtleneck, and a red & blue cross-striped shirt open at the throat. Most of the program, he worked in front of the draw curtain, with no lights on him but the foots, almost under his chin. The effect was unusual.

Whether it was Oscar, or the PA system, I don't know, but when he started talking he sounded somewhat hoarse. I wondered if he hadn't recovered yet from singing the Erie Canal.

After a couple more songs, and a fascinating bit of commentary, he introduced the first dance group, four couples of Swedish folkdancers with a fiddler, all in costume.

The next group of dancers were Phillipine. While they danced, the theater seemed to fill up with photographers. Men with strobe-light packs slung over their shoulders grouped all around the stage, standing, kneeling and contorting themselves in various ways to get the angles they wanted. One in particular, seemed to make a point of blocking the view of as much of the audience as possible for as long a period as possible for each shot he took.

Pretty soon Oscar was back on stage, guitar in hand.

He was playing to a different audience here from the audience at the midnight shows. I doubt that many of us were attendees of both. Yet his presentation wasn't much different.



Oscar Brand: Half lit folksinger (9)

Primarily he seemed to be just Oscar Brand, a guy with a very pleasant personality and a wealth of small stories and entertaining songs. And a slight tendency to repeat himself. This is most noticeable on his radio show. During the live performances, one is hardly aware of his repetitions.

At one point during the show, he stood in the fierce underlighting of the foots, singing, and a young man came up to the apron of the stage and began doing something to the footlights. It looked as if he were unscrewing the lamps one by one, until Oscar was only half-lit by the center lamps. In their eerie glow he sang The Battle of Bull Run, a lively item from the collection of Frank Warner. During this number Oscar managed to play and shoot the guitar at the same time. It's a fascinating song, in the first person by an Irish Union soldier, who tells how the Yankees won the first battle of Bull Run.

Shortly after this, they let Oscar onto the front half of the stage itself, using a traveller across the center of the stage between him and the preparing dancers, instead of forcing him out in front of the grand curtain. The lighting from the overhead strips was considerably better than just the foots, and Oscar was fully visible and fully lit when he sang for us SEE THEM BUZZARDS, one of the fabulous Bejar Ballads. This item (I'm sure I've mentioned this before) is on the disc LAUGHING AMERICA. It is only one of several items on that disc any one of which would be worth the price of the record by itself. (I'd particularly like to mention LOOKING FOR A HOME)

At 4:30 almost to the minute, Oscar closed the folkdance portion of the show, and introduced Lord Burgess. He exited to stage left, disappearing into the darkness.

A little while later, while Lord Burgess sang, Oscar (wrapped in a husky overcoat and muffler) with guitar case in hand, came through the space between the curtain and the procenium on stage right. He was followed by members of the dance groups, and he paused by the steps to help the young ladies down in the semi-darkness.

And then they all left, dancers, Oscar and guitar, leaving the Lord and his men to entertain an entranced audience.

I remembered, during the intermission seeing a youngster of 10 or 12 or so, with a copy of Laughing America clutched in his hands, dashing around, apparently looking for Oscar to ask for an autograph or the like. I wondered if the kid had found him.

After the show, along with dozens of others, Larry and I walked down the back stairs rather than wait for the elevator. Outside, we saw Oscar once more, the somewhat battered-appearing guitar case in hand, dashing across 34th street and into a parking lot. He came out moments later, behind the wheel of a dark green Ford station wagon, vintage 1953.

He drove off alone.

--LH 14 April 57



## WHISKEY IN THE JAR

As I was going over the far famed Kerry mountain,  
I met with Captain Farrell and his money he was counting.  
I first produced my pistol and I then produced my rapier,  
Saying, "Stand and deliver for you are my bold deceiver!"

O, whack fol the diddle,  
O, whack fol the diddle,  
O, whack fol the diddle,  
There's whiskey in the jar.  
(repeat)

He counted out his money and it made a pretty penny,  
I put it in my pocket and I gave it to my Jenny.  
She sighed and she swore that she never would betray me,  
But the devil take the woman for they never can be easy.

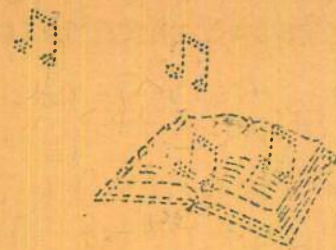
I went into my chamber all for to take a slumber,  
I dreamt of gold and jewels and for sure it was no wonder.  
But my Jenny drew my charges and she filled them up with water,  
And she sent for Captain Farrell, to be ready for the slaughter.

And 'twas early in the morning before I rose to travel,  
Up comes a band of footmen and likewise Captain Farrell;  
I then produced my pistol, for she stole away my rapier,  
But I couldn't shoot the water so a prisoner I was taken.

And if any one can aid me 'tis my brother in the army,  
If I could learn his station, in Cork or in Killarney.  
And if he'd come and join me we'd go roving in Kilkenny,  
I'll engage he'd treat me fairer than my darling, sporting Jenny.

((This item is reprinted from a book of IRISH STREET BALLADS collected  
by Colm O Lochlainn and published at the Sign of the Three Candles in  
Fleet Street, Dublin, Ireland. ))





## Folkmusic In Hardcover

Possibly the most famous book of folkmusic is Carl Sandburg's THE AMERICAN SONGBAG, published by Harcourt. Brace and Co. And in my opinion it is really a fine book. As a collection of folk music it is magnificent. But as a song book, it has its shortcomings.

The introduction tells us that "this is a book of singable songs. It is for the library, but it belongs in the music corner of the library, or on the piano, or on the back porch, or at the summer cottage, or at the camp, or wherever people sing songs and want new songs to sing." "...it is first of all, we say again, a song-book to be sung rather than read."

But a book to be sung rather than read should be in the form most workable for Sam Average, and Sam can't always ad lib his guitar accompaniment, or easily remember the words to the next-to-last verse. The book is laid out primarily in this manner: music for singing and piano, with the first verse under the music, and then the full set of words given in verse form at the end of the item. Thoughtfully, where a piece takes more than one page, it is put on a double page spread rather than the front and back of a page; turning pages while trying to play, is a nuisance, and the man laying out a song book should keep it in mind. But it is just as inconvenient to have to turn the page to read the text of the second or third verse, especially when someone is trying to play from the music. And it is always easier for the amateur singer to put together words and music when the words are written under the melody, instead of at the end of it.

In the prefatory notes it is stated that "If time and circumstances had permitted there would have been included a number of guitar, accordian, and harmonica accompaniments for the portable instruments." I'm sorry that time didn't ~~and~~ circumstance didn't permit. I suspect that I'm not the only oaf in this world with a guitar, banjo, uke, or the like who can't do much good without wrote-accompaniment, but who'd have a fine time plunking away at the right chords while stabbing feebly at singing the words to some new song.

And for the archaeologist/historian the Songbag falls somewhat short. At least for the rank amateur like me. As far as they go, his notes are excellent, but for me, they don't go far enough. In most cases Mr Sangburg gives his immediate source for a song, but in a great many cases, he hints at background without going into



## THE AMERICAN SONGBAG (2)

detail, rousing my curiosity and then not satisfying it. And sometimes he pulls a bit like this from the notes on FOGGY, FOGGY DEW.

"A middle verse is censored from this version as being out of key and probably an interpolation." He gives only two verses, the ones which open and close the popular version of the song. One begins "When I was a bach'lor..." and the other, "Oh, I am a bach'lor..."

He gives a song, such as HE'S GONE AWAY (page 3 -) which contains the lines!

"Oh, who will tie your shoes?  
And who will glove your hands?  
And who will kiss your ruby lips when I am gone?"

On pages 98-99 he give three related texts containing almost identical phrases, but he doesn't relate them to HE'S GONE AWAY, tho it looks to the outsider (me) like there must be a relationship. And if there is, I'd like to know about it, or about what speculations are common concerning it.

Regarding SWEET BETSY FROM PIKE, he fails to note that this very common folksong got its tune from a very common English folksong called VILLIKINS AND HIS DINAH.

There are a number of omissions in the book, and a number of songbook-shortcomings. Maybe a lot of them can be blamed on the age of the book. It was originally published in 1927 and the status of the folksong in those days may have been considerably different than it is now. I don't know. I wasn't here to notice.

THE AMERICAN SONGBAG is certainly a foundation book in any collection of American Folkmusic, but for a just plain singing-from book one could do better with something like BEST LOVED AMERICAN FOLK SONGS by John and Alan Lomax (originally FOLK SONG: U.S.A). This is nicely laid out, in fairly simple arrangements for piano and guitar on double-page spreads where-ever suitable, and with a fine assortment of notes. The words aren't all under the music, but I suppose that's a minor problem, and it would be difficult to squeeze a song like OLD JOE CLARK (23 of its verses are included in the book) all into place.

THE AMERICAN SONGBAG was selling for \$5.75 when I bought my copy. BEST LOVED AMERICAN FOLKSONGS is selling now for \$4.95. They're two different books and I'd feel unlettered without either of them, but for the person whose only interest is in books of singable folksongs, I'd recommend the Lomax first.

It's a good book.

-LH



Here's a fine old folk song that gave its melody to Georgia Tech for their "Rambling Wreck".

## Rambling Wretch

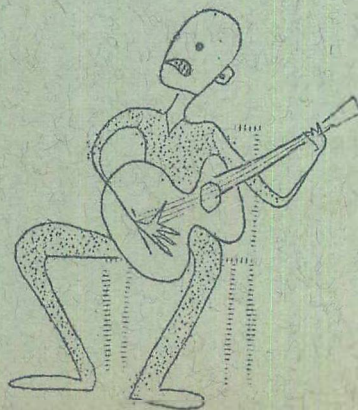
I'm a rambling wretch of poverty, from Tip'ry town I came.  
'Twas poverty decided me to go out in the rain.  
In all sorts of weather, be it wet or be it dry,  
I'm compelled to earn me livelihood or lay me down and die.

### Chorus:

Then sing our little ditties as from pub to pub we steer,  
Like every honest fellow, I drinks my lager beer;  
Like every jolly fellow, I takes my whiskey clear.  
I'm a rambling wretch of pverty and the son of a gambolier--  
I'm the son of a son of a son of a son of a son of a gambolier.

I once was tall and handsome, ans was so very neat.  
They tought I was too good to live but good enough to eat.  
But now I'm old, my coat is torn and poverty hold me fast,  
And every girl turns up her nose as I go strolling past.

I'm a rambling wretch of poverty, from Tip'ry town I came,  
My coat I bought from an old hock shop way down in Maiden Lane.  
My hat I got from a sailor just come back from sea,  
And my shoes I picked from an old dust heap which everyone shunned  
but me.





## Department of Comparative Folkmusic # 2

This folksong originated way back when. According to Oscar Brand it is one of the oldest ballads in the English language. The first version I gave here is a fairly common one. I don't know whether the second version is an updating of a folk-song, retaining its classification as folkmusic, or whether it is only a parody.

The song is "Four Nights Drunk" and begins:

The first night when I came home, drunk as drunk as drunk could be,  
I found a horse in the stable where my horse ought to be.  
I turned to my wify and said unto she,  
"Why is there a horse in the stable where my horse ought to be?"  
"You durned fool, you stupid fool, can't you never see,  
It's nothing but a milk-cow that my mother sent to me."  
Now, I've been living in this old world for forty years or more,  
And a milk cow with a saddle on, I never saw before."

The second night, he comes home and finds a coat on the coatrack where his coat ought to be. His wife tells him that it's nothing but a coverlet her mother sent to her, but he never saw a coverlet with buttons on before.

The third night, he finds boots in the corner where his boots ought to be, but she says that they are milk jars her mother sent. He never saw milk-jars with laces on before. Then:

The fourth night when I came home drunk as I could be,  
I found a head lying in the bed where my head ought to be.  
I called to my wify and said unto she,  
"Why is there a head lying in the bed where my head ought to be?"  
"You blamed fool, you stupid fool, can't you never see,  
It's nothing but a cabbage head my mother sent to me."  
Now I've been living in this old world for forty years or more,  
And a cabbage head with a mustache on, I never saw before.



## Comparative Folkmusic (2)

Here's the mid-20th Century version:

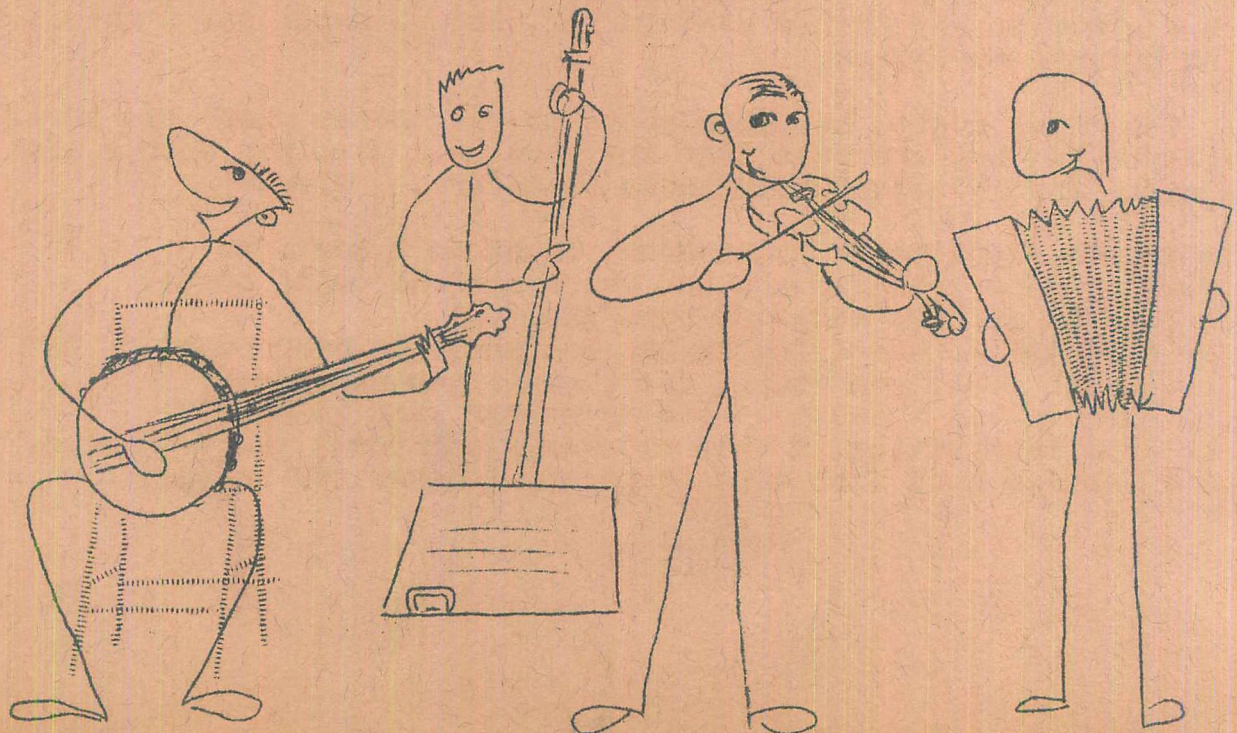
The first night when I came home as drunk as I could be,  
I found a Jaguar in my garage where my Ford ought to be.  
I turned to my wify and said unto she,  
"Why is there a Jaguar in the garage where my Ford ought to be?"  
"You blamed fool, you stupid fool, can't you ever see,  
It's nothing but a dishwasher my mother gave to me."  
Now I've been living in this old world for forty years or more,  
But a dishwasher with a foxtail on I never saw before."

The second night he finds a sports car cap on the rack where his  
homburg ought to be. His wife tells him that it's nothing but an  
ashtray her mother sent to her. He replies, "...a red plaid ashtray  
with a buckle in the back, I never saw before."

The third night there is a guitar in the corner where his banjo  
ought to be. She says, "It's nothing but an egg-slicer that my  
mother sent to me." He is flabbergasted, "An egg-slicer with a capo  
on, I never saw before."

The fourth night he finds a head lying in the bed where his head  
ought to be. She tells him, "It's nothing but a shot put that my  
mother threw at me." He says, "I've been rolling around this old  
world for forty years or more, but a shot put with a Van Dyke beard  
I never saw before."

\* \* \*





There once was an old English folksong called "All Around My Hat".  
This is one of its descendents.

## *FAR, FAR AWAY*

Around her neck, she wore a yellow ribbon,  
She wore it in the springtime and in the month of May,  
And if you asked her why she wore that ribbon,  
She'd say, "It's for a soldier who's far, far away."

Far away, far away She wore it for a soldier who's far, far away.

Around her waist she wore a yellow girdle,  
She wore it in the springtime and in the month of May,  
And if you asked her, "Why a yellow girdle?"  
She'd say, "It's for a soldier who's far, far away!"

Far away, far away. She wore it for a soldier who's far, far away.

Around the block, she pushed a baby carriage,  
She pushed it in the springtime and in the month of May  
And if you asked her why the hell she pushed it,  
She pushed it for a soldier who's far, far away.

Behind the door her father kept a shotgun.

On the wall she keeps a marriage license.

In the desk, the sheriff keeps a warrent.

And in her heart she has a secret passion,  
She has it in the springtime and in the month of May,  
And if you asked her, for whom a secret passion,  
She has it for a sailor who's not so far away.

And on her face, she has a sad expression,  
She wears it for a fly-boy who's far, far away.

And in New York, she keeps a small apartment,  
She keeps it in the springtime and in the month of May,  
And if you ask her why the hell she keeps it,  
She keeps it for me, and I see her every day!



Here's a World War One folksong,

## The Dying Aviator

A young aviator lay dying,  
At the end of a bright summer's day,  
His comrades had gathered about him,  
To carry his fragments away.

His airplane was piled on his wishbone,  
His cockpit was wrapped 'round his head.  
He wore a sparkplug on each elbow,  
'Twas plain he would shortly be dead.

He spit out a valve and a gasket,  
And stirred in the sump where he lay,  
And then to his wondering comrades,  
These brave parting words he did say:

"Take the manifold out of my larynx,  
Take the cylinders out of my brain.  
Take the piston rods out of my kidneys,  
And assemble the engine again!"

CH000G 2 - 4  
FAPA May 1957  
L. Shaw  
545 Manor Road  
Staten Island 14, NY