

DYER-BENNET RECORDS the twelfth album in a series

# Richard Dyer-Bennet 12

TENOR accompanying himself on the classic spanish guitar  
complete lyrics to all songs included inside jacket

SEAFARING MEN,  
WATERY GRAVES,  
HARD SHAKERS,  
A GIANT RAIN,  
AN INDIAN SCALPING  
AND ONE EDIBLE RAT

Martin Rosenzweig



# Richard Dyer-Bennet 12

Of ships, seafaring men, watery graves, card sharpers, a giant ram, an Indian scalping, and one edible rat

## A short essay on nomenclature

Have you ever noticed how aptly things are named? The universe, for example; or man; or woman. How appropriate these names are! Once God had made them, what else could He possibly have called them?

A friend of mine, usually very perceptive, claims that familiarity and repeated association make things sound right, that it's only a matter of habit. He points out that there is nothing really *right* about the word cabbage, that only habit makes us identify the name with the vegetable. But here he has chosen a bad example, and one which only proves the rule by its exception. Artichoke is fine, so is asparagus, and so is potato. What else could these possibly be named? But cabbage? No, no. Someone slipped up there, and only apathy makes us go on accepting the misnomer. In the same way, cup and bowl are obviously well named, whereas saucer is patently ridiculous.

To the unbiased mind it must be clear that most things have names which fit. Once something new has been created the correct name for it simply cries out to be used. So it was with this recording. The material demanded a title both succinct and pithy. To find the precise words was but the work of a morning.

Richard Dyer-Bennet, September, 1964

- Shallow Brown
- The drunken sailor
- The Eddystone light
- Hullabaloo belay
- The mermaid
- The willow tree
- The Charleston merchant
- Peter Gray
- The roving gambler
- Billy Barlow
- Australian girls
- Hanging Johnny
- The Derby ram
- Plain language from Truthful James

## Side 1

**Shallow Brown** A capstan chanty. Mr. Brown's name probably refers not to the depth of his character but to some body of water with which he was associated. Perhaps he ran a ship aground.

**The drunken sailor** Another capstan chanty. Learned from David Lloyd Garrison in Santa Barbara in 1929.

**The Eddystone light** Learned from Bill Bonyun in New York City in 1942. Bonyun had it from Denis Puleston who has twice circumnavigated the globe in a small sailing ship and lived to talk, write and sing about it. The last verse is my own addition, written in 1942. I have already lived long enough to see it become part of the oral tradition, having heard young singers all over the U.S.A. using it—which is rather pleasing.

**Hullabaloo belay** A capstan chanty, also from Dave Garrison.

**The mermaid** Probably not a genuine sailor's song, but contrived in that idiom for the use of glee clubs and male quartets. It was well known in the drawing rooms of America around the turn of the century, and I have a version of it printed in 1909 in a collection called Heart Songs, this being a compilation of favorite songs chosen from suggestions made by 25,000 readers of the National Magazine.

**The willow tree** I learned this in Concord, Mass., in about 1939, from a young woman in whose family the song had been handed down for several generations. The last verse is my own.

**The Charleston merchant** A West Virginia ballad, from the manuscript collection of Fletcher Collins. Note the implied moral: the liberties of the travelling man may be matched by those of the wife he leaves at home. The last verse is my own.

## Side 2

**Peter Gray** Lomax collected a version of this in Oklahoma in 1939, from a man whose father sang it to him in Kansas in 1909. Lomax quotes the editors of the Harris Collection of American Poetry and Plays as dating the song back to 1858. It is also printed in Heart Songs, 1909, and my grandmother remembered hearing it in Illinois in the late 1800's.

**The roving gambler** The origin of this song is unknown to me. I have never heard it from a rural singer, but many times from urban singers all over the U.S.A. during the last quarter century. I had difficulty composing a suitable accompaniment until I hit on a simple A major chord with the addition of an F sharp in the bass, and played with a banjo-like configuration.

**Billy Barlow** Widely sung in America, this is a descendant of an English song in which the victim was a bird.

**Australian girls** Learned from Dave Garrison. Perhaps a chanty if sung at a slower pace. Here, as with most of my sea songs, I make no attempt to catch the original work song tempo, but rather let the poetic and musical content shape the performance. After all, it is a performance and not a working situation.

**Hanging Johnny** A hauling chanty, learned from a British merchant mariner, Cubit-Smith, who survived the perils of the Murmansk run during World War II only to lose his life in a tanker explosion after the war. During my nightclub days Cubit-Smith and I used to occasionally enjoy a spot of rum backstage and sing mournful chanties.

**The Derby ram** A traditional song from Derbyshire, England. My grandmother remembered an elderly relative telling her that his grandfather, as a boy, sat on George Washington's knee and heard Washington sing The Derby Ram. It was my grandmother's understanding that some of the verses sung by Mr. Washington were "rather naughty," as she put it. A mental autopsy performed on the ram's anatomy by the inquisitive listener will suggest the tenor of such verses.

**Plain language from Truthful James** This is a musical setting of my own of some ballad verse written by Bret Harte, 1839-1902, and published in San Francisco in 1870 in the Overland Monthly, of which Harte was then editor. Harte had written the poem some years previously and included it in an addition of The Overland Monthly only because he had some unexpected space to fill. The poem enjoyed immediate national recognition and launched Harte's career as a chronicler of the early West. It should be remembered that many Chinese had been brought to California to provide a cheap labor force, thus depressing wages and creating the somewhat prejudiced attitude toward the Chinese people which endured for so long in America. But note that in Harte's poem all the participants are rascals, the Chinaman being simply more accomplished than the Americans.



Betty Rosenzweig

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Mr. Dyer-Bennet is managed by Hurok Attractions, Inc., 730 Fifth Avenue, NYC 19, NY.

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