

ON THE HALLELUJAH LINE

HELEN
BONCHEK
SCHNEYER



FOLK-LEGACY RECORDS, INC.
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ON THE HALLELUJAH LINE HELEN BONCHEK SCHNEYER

Hearing Helen Schneyer always moves me—I admire her courage, her sassy mouth, her extravagant costumes, and her power as a singer. She is a singer of the class of Sara Carter, Bessie Jones, and the Pindar family, women who sang loud, women with some sand and gravel in their voices, whose styles predate the invention of microphones and sound systems. A woman with a strong voice would be restless singing small, intimate songs, and so it's natural Helen should be drawn to hymns, the most powerful songs we have.

The hymns of the Christian faith have been put to a severe test in the phonograph era, as we Christians well know. In preceding eras, if the faithful sang flat and mumbled the words and were listless and flabby in the praise of the Lord, it was a matter between them and a merciful God, but now we can sing hymns wretchedly, homogenize them, decorate them, arrange them as ballet music or show tunes or mood music, and publish them across the land.

The hymns survive these trials because untold thousands of men and women still hold on to them and sing them over and over in secrecy. A person may know only three or four hymns completely, but that small store will do for all occasions—for times of belief and times of unbelief—and after the first few hundred renditions, each of your hymns come to be natural to you. You don't perform them, you sing them straight up to heaven.

All of Helen's music begins in secrecy, and I know that her recording of these songs means that she has sung them for years to herself, has held them in her heart, has heard them in her dreams, before she ever dared to put them here.

God alone knows what she believes of what she sings. She makes no show of her belief or her unbelief, and that is in keeping with the power of this music. Over the years, these songs have been done by pious old frauds and by singers who snickered at the words and by fatuous people who said they loved the music so long as they could overlook the theology.

Helen is another number entirely. I like to imagine her marching into church on a Sunday morning, decked out in a flouncy dress and lavender pumps and sixteen pounds of turquoise jewelry, sitting smack down in the middle pew, and singing the opening hymn out loud. People whisper. Who is she? Is she a Christian? Is she a member? Who invited her? I sit next to her, and I slide a few inches away so that nobody will think she's with me. She pays no attention. She sits, back straight and chin up, and though she dozes during the sermon, she awakens for the triumphant recessional, her voice rising above our voices like a great blue heron taking off from a swamp. Then she's gone. We never find out who she is, but years later, we still remember her vividly. And always with a faint suspicion that she was sent to us and sent for a reason.

Garrison Keillor
The Prairie Home Companion
September, 1981

Side 1:	
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There's a Shout in the Camp	2:06
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Side 2:	
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Notes by Helen Bonchek Schneyer
Recorded by Mike Rivers and Sandy Paton
Photograph by Sandy Paton
Jacket design by Swede Plaut

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ON THE HALLELUJAH LINE HELEN BONCHER SCHNEIDER



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HELEN BONCHEK SCHNEYER

"ON THE HALLELUJAH LINE"

In answer to that oft-asked question, "Why...?", I say because I love any music with strong emotion in it, the emotion being common to all human beings. I think of religious music of the "common folk" as love songs expressed with unashamed fervor. To me, these songs represent man's attempt to deal with the vastness of the universe, and although I cannot get into all the musical forms that various cultures use to express their love, trust, hope, and fervor, I can feel that those beliefs are all one, and in a troubled world I rather naively hope that singing about that love, together with others, will bring us a measure of peace. My singing of these songs is my puny return for the extraordinary gift of life.

I thank all the people who shared in making this record. What would I have done without the "congregation" the Patons rounded up for me on "Moonlight"; without Cathy Fink, voice and banjo; Kathy Hickerson, 'cello; the ubiquitous Jay Ungar on fiddle? A special thanks goes to Jon Eberhart for his voice and unfailing high morale, and to my daughter, Riki, (that wonderful voice deserves to be solo) who has backed me with her original harmonies since she was ten.

Sing!

Helen Bonchek Schneyer
September, 1981

MEETING IN THE AIR (A. P. Carter)
Side 1, Band 1.

One of the great ones. I learned it from the singing of the DeBusk - Weaver Family, though I admit my own interpretation of the song doesn't resemble theirs and is even farther away from A. P. Carter's.

You have heard of little Moses in
the bullrush,
You have heard of fearless David
and his sling,
You have heard the story told of
grieving Joseph,
And of Jonah and the whale you
often sing.
There are many, many others
through the Bible,
I should like to meet them all, I
do declare.
Bye and bye the Lord will surely
let us meet them
At that Meeting in the Air.

CHO.: There's going to be a Meeting in
the Air

In that sweet, sweet Bye and Bye.
I'm going to meet you, meet you
there,
In that home beyond the sky.
Such singing you will hear, never
heard by mortal ears;
It will be glorious, I do declare.
And God's own Son will be the
Leading One
At that Meeting in the Air.

Many things will there be missing in
that meeting,
For the mourner's bench will have no
place at all.
There will never be a sermon preached
to sinners,
For the sinners had refused to heed
the call.
There will be no mourning over wayward
loved ones;
There will be no lonely nights of
pleading prayer.

All our burdens and our anguish will
be lifted
At that Meeting in the Air.

(chorus)

ON THE HALLELUJAH LINE

Side 1, Band 2.

By Rev. J. M. Hobbs and Jno. R
Sweeney, copyright MCCCCXCIV.

I can't tell whether I like best
singing it or thumping it on the piano.
I confess that the "Hallelujah Line" I
envision as a broad white stripe with
stars in it.

Oh, the Glory Hallelujah has been
ringing through my soul
Ever since I came to Jesus and his
spirit made me whole;
All my spirit, soul, and body now
are under His control
On the Glory Hallelujah Line.

CHO.: Glory, glory,
Oh, yes, 'tis glory in my soul.
Ever since I came to Jesus and
His spirit made me whole
I've been on the Hallelujah Line.

Oh, the Hallelujah chorus is a
glorious one to sing,
For the soul's true Hallelujah is
awakened by our King,
For the joy of His salvation makes
the heart with music ring
On the Glory Hallelujah Line.

I'm a Hallelujah pilgrim and I'll
never hold my peace
Till my blessed Savior tells me,
then, then only, will I cease
To invite poor, hungry sinners,
"Come and join the Gospel feast
On the Glory Hallelujah Line."

Then be ready, faithful pilgrims,
to go forward in the fight.
Take the spirit's blade of victory,
wielding it with all your might.
For with faith in God we conquer
and we'll praise Him with delight
On the Glory Hallelujah Line.

WHERE IS MY WANDERING BOY TONIGHT

Side 1, Band 3.

This was composed sometime before
1905 by Rev. R. Lowry.

Although not actually a hymn, this is
included as one in every Baptist hymnal
printed after 1910 that I have ever seen.
It seems to state that the true love of
a parent makes up for everything, is in
never-ending supply, and is God-like in
quality. After carefully considering
my own characteristics as a parent, I
can't help but feel that I must have
missed a turn somewhere. But, oh, what
a marvelous song it is to sing!

Where is my wandering boy tonight,
The boy of my tend'rest care,
The boy that was once my joy and
light,
The child of my love and prayer?

CHO.: Oh, where is my boy tonight?
Oh, where is my boy tonight?
My heart o'erflows, for I love
him, he knows.
Oh, where is my boy tonight?

Once he was pure as morning dew,
As he knelt at his mother's knee.
No face was so bright, no heart
more true,
And none was so sweet as he.

Oh, could I see you now, my boy,
As fair as in olden time,
When prattle and smile made home
a joy
And life was a merry chime.

Go for my wandering boy tonight,
Go search for him where you will.
But bring him to me with all his
blight,
And tell him I love him still.

SHOUT IN THE CAMP

Side 1, Band 4.

This was composed by C. Austin Miles
and can be found in any old Baptist
hymnal.

There's a shout in the camp,
Keep the fires brightly burning
All the night long,
That the lost may return
To the fold of the Shepherd,
From paths of wrong.

CHO.: There's a shout in the camp,
Hallelujah,
Glory to God;
There's an echo in Heaven,
Hallelujah,
Glory to God.

There's a shout in the camp
Over sinners returning
Home to the fold
From the by-way of sin,
With its burden of sorrow,
To joy untold.

There's a shout in the camp,
'Tis a glad Hallelujah,
Praise ye the Lord.
All who trust in His Name
Shall receive His salvation;
'Tis God's own word.

MY FATHER, HOW LONG Side 1, Band 5.

This is a spiritual from the Black
tradition. It was sung, primarily,
during and after the Civil War.

My Father, how long,
My Father, how long,
My Father, how long
This poor sinner suffer here?

My Father, how long,
My Father, how long,
My Father, how long
This poor sinner suffer here?

And it won't be long,
It won't be long,
And it won't be long
This poor sinner suffer here.

Similarly:

We'll soon be free (3X)
When the Lord will call us home.

We'll walk the mirey road (3X)
Where pleasures never die.

We will walk the golden streets (3X)
Of the new Jerusalem.

SHINE FOR JESUS Side 1, Band 6.

Written by Julian Alford, copyright
1915 by E. C. Deas.

Although I heard Frank Warner do a
rousing rendition of this, I actually
never learned it until I found it in a
paperback book called *Gospel Pearls*.
It's another soul rattler.

When the clouds are hanging low,
Shine, shine,
And you know not where to go,
Shine for Jesus.
Take your burden to the Lord,
You can take Him at His word.
Sing and pray every day
And shine, shine, shine.

CHO.: Shine when troubles shake you,
Shine when friends forsake you.
All the way, every day,
There's a crown awaiting.
Shine when foes assail you,
Shine when others fail you.
Keep your eye on Jesus
And shine, shine, shine.

When your sins are washed away,
Shine, shine,
He'll go with you every day,
Shine for Jesus.
You are never more alone;
Jesus Christ is all your own.
Sing and pray every day
And shine, shine, shine.

When your path is black as night,
Shine, shine,
Soon He'll bring you to the light,
Shine for Jesus.
Though the way be hard and long,
Never change from right to wrong.
Sing and pray every day
And shine, shine, shine.

HE SET ME FREE (A. E. Bromley) Side 2, Band 1.

Copyright 1939, Stamps-Baxter Music &
Printing Co.

I can't recall where I learned this,
but it is one of my favorites among con-
temporary religious songs.

Once like a bird in prison I dwelt;
No freedom from my sorrow I felt.
Then Jesus came and listened to me.
Glory to God, He set me free.

CHO.: He set me free, He set me free;
He broke the bonds of prison
for me.
I'm glory-bound my Jesus to see.
Glory to God, He set me free.

Now I am climbing higher each day;
Darkness of night has drifted away.
My feet are planted on higher ground.
Glory to God, I'm homeward bound.

Goodbye to sin and things that
confound;
Naught of this world shall turn
me around.
Daily I'm working, I'm praying, too,
And it's glory to God, I'm going
through.

THE SWEETEST WORDS HE EVER SAID Side 2, Band 2.

Words and music by Joel Hemphill;
copyright 1975, Hemphill Music Co.

I learned this from the singing of
that splendid gospel group from Frank-
lin, Kentucky, the Spiritual Way Quar-
tet, when they sang a program for the
Folklore Society of Greater Washington.
I wish I could hear them again; I like
their message, as expressed in most of
their songs, i.e., God is merciful.

Like the woman brought to Jesus
Who was taken in her sin,
I was so ashamed of what I'd done
And where I'd been.
Well, justice called for payments
That were more than I could give,
When mercy smiled upon me, saying,
"I forgive."

CHO.: Oh, the sweetest words He ever
said were
"I forgive."
Death's sentence then was wiped
away
And I could live.
Well, I liked the part where He
told about
The mansions He would give,
But the sweetest words He ever
said were
"I forgive."

Now, if you're tired of living
With the wrongs that you have done,
Come on home to Jesus,
You know He's the cleansing one.
In His arms He'll hold you
And you've just begun to live,
When you hear Him gently whisper,
"I forgive."

JERUSALEM, MY HAPPY HOME (E. O. Excell) Side 2, Band 3.

I know very little about this song or
when it was composed, but it is one of
the sweet, gentle ones that abounds with
love.

Jerusalem, my happy home,
Oh, how I long for thee.
When will my sorrows have an end?
Thy joys, when will I see?

CHO.: I will meet you in the city
Of the new Jerusalem;
I am washed in the blood of the
Lamb.
I will meet you in the city
Of the new Jerusalem;
I am washed in the blood of the
Lamb.

(repeat chorus)

Thy walls are set with precious stones
Most glorious to behold.
Thy gates are filled with wondrous
pearls;
Thy streets are paved with gold.

Reach down, reach down thine arms of
grace
And cause me to ascend,
Where congregations ne'er break up
And praises never end.

THERE IS A LAND (I'LL BE THERE) Side 2, Band 4.

Words by Isaac Watts; music by George
F. Root, 1849.

This is one of the many marvelous
songs George F. Root composed or set
to music. This man was a goldmine, and
the song is one of the hymns one can
sing gently.

*There is a land of pure delight
Where saints immortal reign,
Infinite day excludes the night
And pleasures banish pain.*

*I'll be there, I'll be there,
When the first trumpet sounds
I'll be there.*

*I'll be there, I'll be there,
When the first trumpet sounds
I'll be there.*

*There everlasting Spring abides
And never with'ring flowers;
Death, like a narrow sea, divides
This Heavenly land from ours.*

*Sweet fields, beyond the swelling
flood,
Stand dressed in living green;
So, to the Jews, old Canaan stood,
While Jordan rolled between.*

*Could we but climb where Moses
stood
And view the landscape o'er;
Not Jordan's stream nor death's
cold flood
Should fright us from the shore.*

I KNOW MOONLIGHT

Side 2, Band 5.

This spiritual from the Black tradition was probably a plantation song. I learned this somewhere as a child and spent years piecing it together again. The tune closest to the one I know is in Sandburg's *Songbag*, and many more verses can be found in a book called *Army Life in a Black Regiment* by Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an abolitionist officer who commanded the First South Carolina Volunteers, a Black regiment. He collected this unbelievably stunning song, the words and music of which never cease to move me. This, and "Amazing Grace," are the two most powerful pieces of religious song that I know. Let me here thank Florence Brunnings for her help in finding the song again. May she and her cataloguing system wave a long time.

*I know moonlight,
I know starlight.
I lay this body down.*

*I walk in the moonlight,
I walk in the starlight.
I lay this body down.*

*I know the morning
And the evening star.
I lay this body down.*

*Oh, graveyard,
Oh, graveyard.
I lay this body down.*

*I walk in the graveyard,
I lay in my grave.
I lay this body down.*

*I lay in my grave,
I feel my grave's side,
When I lay this body down.*

*I go to the judgement
In the evening of the day,
When I lay this body down.*

*Then my soul and your soul
Will meet on that day,
When I lay this body down.*

*I know moonlight,
I know starlight.
I lay this body down.*

FOUNTAIN FILLED WITH BLOOD (J. Boyd)

Side 2, Band 6.

Joan Boyd wrote these words, based on the old hymn. I have included this song because it is a good example of one of the uses religious music is put to in this country. Particularly among miners, the use of melodies of familiar hymns as the tunes for songs of protest against working conditions was and is still common. It is also a magnificent song with a fierce and dedicated fervor about it, despite its secular subject. I learned it from the singing of Mike Kline, who moved me to tears when I first heard him do it.

*There is a fountain filled with blood,
The blood of our mining men so brave,
Who worked together in the black coal
pits,*

*Men who dug each other's graves.
Men who dug each other's graves,
oh, Lord,
Men who dug each other's graves,
Who worked together in the black
coal pits,
Men who dug each other's graves.*

There is a stream that's filled
with tears,
The tears of our children and our
wives,
For their husbands and sons, all
good mining men,
Who so senselessly have died.
Who so senselessly have died,
oh Lord,
Who so senselessly have died.
For their husbands and sons, all
good mining men,
Who so senselessly have died.

There is a river deep and wide (*)
That once was so beautiful and
grand,
Till the strip-miners tore down our
mountainside;
Now it runs brown with the blood
of our land.
It runs brown with the blood of
our land, oh Lord,
It runs brown with the blood of
our land.
Till the strip-miners tore down
our mountainside;
Now it runs brown with the blood
of our land.

There is a fountain filled with
blood,
The blood of our brave mining men.
Let us stand beneath its powerful
flood,
Be revived to fight and win.
Be revived to fight and win,
oh Lord,
Be revived to fight and win.
Let us stand beneath its power-
ful flood,
Be revived to fight and win.

(*) These are the correct words. H.B.S.

Many thanks to everyone who helped
on this record. People came from Boston,
Washington, D.C., and various parts of
Connecticut to take part. The singers
who join with Helen are:

Side 1, Band 1: Cathy Fink and Jonathan
Eberhart
Side 1, Band 2: Riki Schneyer and Jon-
athan Eberhart
Side 1, Band 3: Riki and Jonathan again
Side 1, Band 4: Cathy Fink, Joe and Kathy

Hickerson, Lisa Neustadt, Sarah New-
comb, and Jim McDade

Side 1, Band 5: same as band 4

Side 1, Band 6: Riki Schneyer and Jon-
athan Eberhart

Side 2, Band 1: Cathy Fink and Joe Hick-
erson

Side 2, Band 2: Riki Schneyer and Jon-
athan Eberhart

Side 2, Band 3: Riki and Jonathan again

Side 2, Band 4: Riki Schneyer

Side 2, Band 5: same as Side 1, Band 4,
plus John and Ginny Dildine, Sandy
McDade, Stan Mattson, Dave Parker, and
Caroline Paton.

Side 2, Band 6: Cathy Fink and Joe
Hickerson

Piano: Helen Bonchek Schneyer

Banjo: Cathy Fink

'Cello: Kathy Hickerson

Fiddle: Jay Ungar

2nd Piano (Side 1, Band 1): Jonathan
Eberhart

Our apologies, if we have left
anyone out!

S. & C. Paton