

A Rogue's Gallery
of Songs for 12-String
Gordon Bok



Folk-Legacy CD-94

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1. McKeon's Coming (Bok, BMI)

The story goes that McKeon was a fisherman from Canada. Had a little schooner; ran it with his son, or another man. Back during Prohibition, the lucrative trade of smuggling booze into the States attracted many people, and McKeon was one. Unfortunately, he got caught, his schooner was impounded and sold at auction, and he was thrown in jail in Massachusetts. When he got out, years later, his health was ruined, and it took him almost two years to work his way back home.

2. I'm a Rambler, I'm a Gambler (arr. Bok, BMI)

One of the many versions of this song I've heard. I don't even remember where this version came from, it was so long ago. I wrote the two verses about the Canso girls, meaning no harm; any person referred to in those verses is purely fictitious, or lives somewhere else.

3. Thumpy (Bok, BMI)

A tune that came out of my work on the film *Coaster*, about the building of the schooner *John F. Leavitt*. I developed the theme for some footage of the boatbuilders and sailmakers; it seemed to have the right "gait" for that work. Since I couldn't talk the great ragtime pianist, Glenn Jenks, into playing for that section of the film, I had to imitate his smiling fingers as best I could.

4. Duncan and Brady (trad)

I used to play blues quite a bit in my youth, but I learned a style of it mostly from piano players like Bob Bannard (who was a Jimmy Yancey fan) and Capt. Bill Peterson. This is basically the version Leadbelly sang, but the hurry-up guitar is not very Leadbelly at all.

5. Belamena (trad)

Learned this on a steel, Dutch-built sloop from a young fellow from South Caicos named Harold Wilson. Taught him a few chords on the guitar one year, and when I took over as captain of that boat, he taught me a few songs from the Carribean. Harold learned the guitar quite quickly, and made his brother (who worked on another boat in the neighborhood) a little jealous thereby. So, while Harold played and sang, his brother used to play that boat like a harp, or a steel band. The guitar is trying to imitate me and Harold and Harold's brother all at once here. (This one can give you blisters.)

The three boats in the song were, according to Harold, rum-runners. A favorite trick, in those days, was to make a run, bring the boat ashore, paint her a different color and take her back out again. Harold said the U.S. Feds were fooled by that, off and on.

6. Marina/Bimbo de Colonello (trad)

Dave Berry, from Bowdoinham, Maine, and I used to do some sailing together. He came back from Italy one year with some lovely tunes, which he played on the mandolin. These are two that I remember.

7. On the Wallaby (Henry Lawson)

Ray Wales, of Perth, Australia, brought me this song on a tape, many years ago. He knew nothing about the song or the singer. Ray went back to Australia, the tape got lost, but I remembered the song pretty accurately, it turns out.

Emily Friedman, of Chicago, finally tracked the song down, with the help of the brilliant Australian story-teller, Kel Watkins, who not only found the original rendition I had heard, but taped that and a reading of Lawson's original bush ballad for us. Emily believes the original was shortened for singing by a Peter Dicky, and the version I heard is beautifully sung by Dave De Hugard, with concertina accompaniment. My thanks to everyone involved.

8. Old Fat Boat (Bok, BMI)

I always felt a little cheated by life in that I had never been in a situation where I felt sorry enough for myself that I had to write what Pete Seeger calls a “navel” or “belly-button” song. Well, it finally struck.

A few years ago I was bringing an old wooden boat from Connecticut to Maine. Ran out of crew about the time the weather started going crook. Threw my back out trying to get an anchor out of the mud. Crippled around Newport for three days in the cold June rain, looking for any unfeathered biped who would help me get the old slab a little farther along the coast. No luck. Got blisters on my butt rowing in wet dungarees. Got wet, too.

Got a raving N.W. wind one day and decided to have a go with-out any help. (Had to use the jib-sheet winch to get the anchor off the bottom... always wondered what those noisy round things were for...) Slammed out of there with half a bag of sail on and headed her East.

Ended up off Mattapoisett harbor with the weather getting gloomy again; decided to get off my feet for the night, so I worked her in there and anchored, got the sails off her. Brownell workboat came out and told me, since it was going to blow Northeast, why didn't I take their mooring... over there. Got the anchor up and went over to pick up their mooring. Realized that, with the wind Northeast, I was a mile downwind of the town wharf... again.

Piled into that ridiculous plastic dog-dish they call a rowboat and pulled ashore, in the rain. Called home, went back down to the “rowboat” and, as I was shipping the oars, got a humongous great splinter in the crotch of my hand. Blew down wind back out to the ketch. Went below, started the leaky stove to get the damp out, got out the hydrogen peroxide, the knife and the oilstone. Looked at the splinter, got out the rum. Properly

anaesthetized, I was working on the splinter when it occurred to me to wonder what was for supper. Realized it was Saturday night, raining, town was a mile's row upwind and a mile's walk after that... A couple of days later, I found most of this song, along with a list of groceries (existent and non-existent) in the logbook. Even sailors have a right to sing the blues.

9. Ramble Away (trad)

Trent Sorensen brought John Roberts to my place a good many years ago, guessing rightly that we'd be kindred spirits. This is one of the many fine songs John sang for me that night. I've been enjoying his music when and where I can, ever since.

10. A Most Unpleasant Way, Sir (Goulder)

This is in Dave Goulder's book of songs called *January Man and other songs by Dave Goulder* (Robbins Music Corporation, Ltd., 35 Soho Square, London, W.1). I don't know what all else is in the book, save for "The Dark North Sea," which is one of the loveliest songs in the English language. This song represents one of his many facets; his songs are so distinct and different from each other that the only consistent denominator in them is their quality.

11. Mist Covered Mountains/Bonnie Galway (trad)

Two Irish tunes. I learned these from Cliff Perry and Richard Scholtz, two fine musicians from Bellingham, Washington. Their love and consideration of the music is a thing to behold; if you like a tune they're playing, they happily stop the world and play it until you can never forget it. A couple of years ago they played "Bonnie Galway" for me on my birthday, after a long flight to the west coast. They played me to sleep with it, one of the nicest birthday presents I've ever had.

12. Blackbird (J. B. Goodenough)

Over the last few years, Judy and I have corresponded off and on, to my everlasting benefit. She first sent me some verses to a song I wrote (“Hearth and Fire”) which were so singular and striking that I took the liberty of writing a melody for them on their own.

Having told her that, I was rewarded by receiving two more songs she had written over the next couple of years, “Boat of Silver” and “Blackbird.” Fine songs, fine poetry. (*Editor’s note: Cancer took Judy Goodenough from us a few years ago.*)

13. St. Thomas (Rollins)

I am told that, even though this tune is now played on the island of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands as a “folk” tune, it was originally written by the jazz musician Sonny Rollins. I learned it from Debbie Suran, who learned it from Andy Cohen, and in the transition from guitar to hammered dulcimer to 12-string, I can’t vouch for the accuracy of my version of it.

14. Woodworker’s Litany (Questions for Malcolm) (Bok, BMI)

This is a series of questions, musical and verbal, that had been bubbling along for many years and were finally brought together while I was working on the film *Coaster* for John Craig Cloutier, watching the footage of the shipbuilder, Roy Wallace.

I’ve built/carved things in wood since I can remember; always loved wood and never understood it. To take a piece of the body of something that had a natural and contributive function on this planet and shape it into something else always seemed to require more care than anything else I did; more conscience, you could say.

So, while I’m holding that particular piece of God in my hands, before I change it, I try to slow down my thinking to a quieter, more careful pace, try to become like the heroes of my youth, the master boatbuilders of

this coast, and the young ones who are following in their tracks. And I ask these questions (in my mind) of Malcolm, Lloyd, and Gene and Dick and Bill and Nick and Orvil and all those who have cared enough to be care-ful.

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A booklet containing the texts to the songs on this CD
is available for \$2 from Folk-Legacy.

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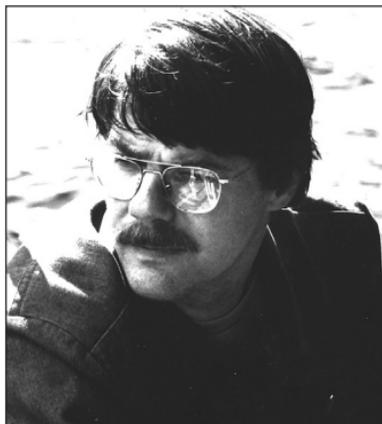
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- 6. Marina/Bimbo de Colonello** (trad) 2:45
- 7. On the Wallaby** (Lawson) 4:42
- 8. Old Fat Boat** (Bok, BMI) 3:07
- 9. Ramble Away** (trad) 3:10
- 10. A Most Unpleasant Way, Sir** (Goulder, BMI) 2:32
- 11. Mist Covered Mountains/Bonnie Galway** (trad) 6:09
- 12. Blackbird** (Goodenough, BMI) 3:16
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When Sandy Paton remarked that he'd like to hear a program or an album of just my work with the 12-string, I started putting some stuff down on tape, first at home and then at Folk-Legacy. This is the result. I must admit, it has been interesting.

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