

BILL SHUTE & LISA NULL

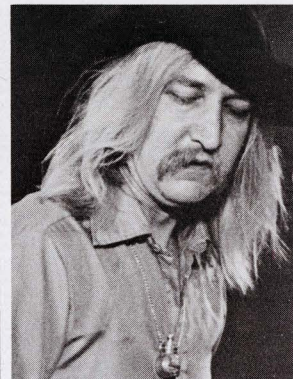
AMERICAN PRIMITIVE

with Peter and Anthea Bellamy, Ken Bloom, Saul Broudy,
Tom Conger, Leo Kretzner, Debby McClatchy,
Todd Purcell and Claudia Schmidt





Lisa Null



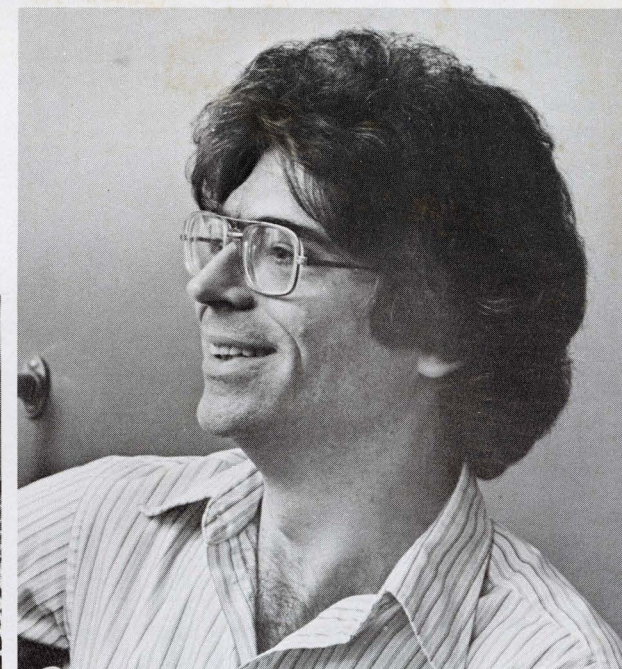
Peter Bellamy



Anthea Bellamy



Debby McClatchy



Bill Shute

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Tom Conger, Saul Broudy, Ken Bloom



Leo Kretzner, Claudia Schmidt, Todd Purcell

SIDE A

If He's Gone, Let Him Go Vocal—Lisa Null; guitar—Bill Shute; chorus—Peter and Anthea Bellamy, Debby McClatchy

Powder River/Carrie's Gone to Kansas City Vocal—Lisa Null; guitar—Bill Shute; dulcimer—Claudia Schmidt; harmonicas—Saul Broudy

Only Remembered Vocal—Lisa Null; chorus—Saul Broudy, Leo Kretzner, Todd Purcell, Claudia Schmidt

La Bastringue Guitars—Bill Shute

Remember the Poor Vocal—Lisa Null; guitar—Bill Shute; electric bass—Tom Conger; Northumbrian small pipes—Ken Bloom

Santa Fe Trail Vocal—Lisa Null; guitar—Bill Shute; second guitar—Lisa Null; electric bass—Tom Conger; harmonica—Saul Broudy; chorus—Saul Broudy, Todd Purcell

SIDE B

Work in the Mines Vocal—Lisa Null; vocal harmony—Todd Purcell; guitars—Bill Shute; electric bass—Tom Conger

The Cruel Mother Vocal—Lisa Null; guitar—Bill Shute

Bonnie Light Horseman Vocal—Lisa Null; guitar—Bill Shute; second guitar—Lisa Null; electric bass—Tom Conger; chorus—Claudia Schmidt, Peter Bellamy

Erin's Green Shore Unaccompanied vocal—Lisa Null

Living Next to the Soil (Everett I. Billie Hughes, composer) Vocal—Lisa Null; lead guitar—Bill Shute; rhythm guitar—Ken Bloom; electric bass—Tom Conger; clarinet section—Ken Bloom; harmonica—Saul Broudy

Virginia's Alders Vocal—Lisa Null; vocal harmony—Claudia Schmidt; guitar—Bill Shute; electric bass—Tom Conger; dulcimer—Lisa Null

All the songs on this album are traditional or traditionally-based folksongs of America and Canada. Bill and I are modern musicians who reflect a wide variety of musical influences. We cannot fully recreate the styles in which these songs were performed during their heyday. It is too late for that. We come from our own time and have our own musical statements to make. We lament the passing of old musical traditions as varied as the rural folk communities which produced them. We learn what we can from what is left. From tapes, cassettes, records, books, and face-to-face encounters, the old songs have spoken to us. We value their strong words and tunes. We accept their irrepressible sentimentality.

These songs come from a time when ordinary men and women actively coped with their own cultural life. They rarely had time or opportunity to develop professional musical skills; instead, they fashioned music to suit their daily needs and limitations. We do not sing and play folk music because it is simple—it is often quite intricate.

We view folksongs as small, beautifully scaled monuments to the creative potential in each of us.

Bill and I draw on the musical influences of our own upbringing—rock, pop, jazz, classical and ethnic. The fact that we play in coffeehouses, concert halls, and on festival stages also colors our approach. But elements of the old styles are alive in us too. We have listened to them and they have crept into our consciousness. Sometimes old styles assert themselves in new and unexpected ways. An Appalachian vocal ornament winds up on the guitar; a blues slide insinuates itself into an unaccompanied ballad. Our record is full of strange mixtures and influences. We hope we have sustained the harsh, unadulterated character of the old songs while luxuriating in the pleasure of making music with some of our favorite fellow performers.

Extensive notes on the songs and the arrangements are enclosed in the jacket. You will also find a postcard. Please return it to us, and we'll happily send you a catalog of Green Linnet Records.

Recorded, mixed and mastered at Golden East Recording Studios, New Canaan, Connecticut • Sound Engineer, Don Wade

Produced by Bill Shute and Lisa Null • Production consultant (Living Next to the Soil), Ken Bloom • Cover illustration by Peter Bellamy • Design, Carla Frey • Photographs by Dan Doman except Anthea Bellamy by Valerie Grosvenor-Myer and Debby McClatchy by Friedrich K. von Schenk • Notes on the songs, Lisa Null • Notes on the arrangements, Bill Shute • Production assistance, ERH Sales Corporation • Management and supervision, Wendy Newton

LISA NULL

BILL SHUTE & LISA NULL

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Notes on the songs by Lisa Null • Notes on the tunings (from the sixth to the first string) and on the arrangements by Bill Shute

SIDE A

If He's gone, Let Him Go comes from a record produced by Jimmy Driftwood called AUNT OLLIE GILBERT SINGS OLD FOLK SONGS TO HER FRIENDS (Rimrock RLP-495, Concord, Arkansas 72523). It joins floating verses common to all English language folk traditions with a black tune almost identical to the *St. James Infirmary Blues*. We open almost every concert with this song. I think it's a great woman's song—lots of self-assertion cut with just enough self-pity to keep it emotionally honest. I've changed the words and melody a little over the years—bluesed it up a bit. The chorus reproduces those wonderful modal harmonies we encounter when singing old-timey choruses in a good British folk club.

*Tuning: DGDGCD (capo 3, key of B^b). I've always heard the **St. James Infirmary** tune done in a 4/4 dixieland arrangement or as updated by the likes of trumpeter Jonah Jones in the fifties. The structure of the melody seems, however, to suggest a 3/4 time original as in this version. The guitar uses a "mountain minor" banjo tuning extended to include the bass strings. It is played in a three finger style with occasional frailing techniques used.*

Powder River/Carrie's Gone to Kansas City **Powder River** was collected from Joan O'Bryant by Austin and Alta Fife and appears in their book *Cowboy and Western Songs* (New York, Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1969). It represents that transformation of popular poetry into folk song one so often finds in cowboy music. A lovely girl who lives by the banks of Wyoming's Powder River is abducted by her lover when she will not willingly part from the waters she seems part of. In anger, the river strikes out. We do not know whether the girl was a vanished fantasy or a drowned woman of flesh and blood. The allegorical message, however, is perfectly clear: possessive love destroys that which it desires most.

*Tuning: DADGBE (key of D). **Carrie's Gone to Kansas City** is a tune by the late nineteenth century piano virtuoso Blind Boone. According to ragtime authority Rudi Blesh, Boone based *Carrie* on a Missouri folk tune current in his youth. I learned it from a Max Morath recording and made a solo guitar arrangement of it. Similarities of melody and period prompted us to combine **Powder River** with it in one arrangement. Saul's mouth harp and Claudia's dulcimer add to the period feeling.*

Only Remembered I found this gospel tune in Vance Randolph's *Folksongs of the Ozarks*, Vol. 4 (Columbia, Missouri, State Historical Society, 1946-50) and responded to its mystical lyricism and all-purpose theology. How hard it is to find gospel music I can sing with sincerity and belief. This is one I subscribe to completely and its message transcends dogma. Some may remember The Patons singing this at the Fox Hollow Folk Festival right after Richard Nixon resigned.

La Bastringue

Tuning: Both guitars DGDGGD (capo 2, key of A). This is a French-Canadian dance tune learned from the playing of Jean Carignan; it is also frequently played for contra-dancing in New England. I especially love the tune's jaunty Gallic quality and the modality of the B section. The tuning of both guitars is like that of a big fat dulcimer; all tonic-fifth. The lead is played in a standard flat-pick style, and the second guitar is strummed halfway up the neck to simulate a dulcimer.

Remember the Poor comes from the repertoire of Carrie Grover, a Maine woman who collected and learned the songs of her Nova Scotia family and childhood. She published these in her book *A Heritage of Songs* (Norwood, PA, Norwood Editions, 1973). She says, "When mother was a little girl, she knew an old lady who was so helplessly crippled by rheumatism that she had completely lost the use of her limbs. Each morning some member of the family would place her in her big rocker and there she would sit all day, rocking and singing old songs and hymns. She sat with her right elbow in the padded arm of her chair, ceaselessly rubbing her thumb back and forth across the first joint of her right finger, as these were the only fingers she could move. Mother said that from hearing the old lady singing . . . she learned . . . **Remember the Poor.**"

From singing this song, I have learned to enjoy winter again. It's not easy with the mounting cost of wood and oil, or the long snowy drives from gig to gig. I love the natural images, the strange tune, and the hint of ritual mumming customs.

Tuning: DADGAD (key of D). This tuning is favored by many of the British guitarists and is also a standard old-time banjo tuning. It allows many "cluster" effects while being neither major or minor. The tune itself is interesting for its almost equal use of the major and flattened sevenths of the scale. The chromaticism of the third line ("all nature

seems touched by the finger of Death") is wonderful. Ken contributes some ominous piping and Tom's electric bass anchors the other instruments.

The Santa Fe Trail I learned two verses of this from my third grade music teacher, finding the other two in John and Alan Lomax's *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York, Macmillan Co., 1969). Jules Verne Allen, the singing cowboy, recorded a published version of the song with words by James Grafton Rogers and music by G.H. Gower. This sheet music version came from Denver's Comet Publishing Company, 1911. A somewhat literary idyll, it seems, nevertheless, to have slipped into oral tradition. Cowboys frequently copied songs down or tore out pages of popular verse printed in the regional newspapers. The heroine of **The Santa Fe Trail** is admired for her competence on horseback and her natural sun-tanned beauty. The fancy women of El Paso, for all their ruffles, beading and artifice, wither by comparison.

Tuning: Standard (key of A); second guitar, open G (capo 2). Much of the music of the Southwest is tinged with Spanish influences, rhythmically and melodically. This tune seems to demand a liberal dose of thirds and sixths on the guitar and a fairly lush arrangement. Saul's harmonica creates a Hollywood ambience and Tom's bass works tightly with the guitar.

SIDE B

Work in the Mines (Hard-Working Miner) is a song by Patrick "Giant" O'Neill, a labor organizer from the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania. It was written during the "long depression" of the 1870s. I first found the text in Philip S. Foner's *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1975). It was collected by George Korson and appeared originally in his *Songs and Ballads of the Anthracite Miner*. It was set to the tune of *I'm a Man You Don't Meet Every Day*, an Irish 19th century song. Archie Fisher sings a Scots variant, *Jock Stewart*, and I trimmed the text to fit, having no access to the original tune. One day I may hear the Korson recording of O'Neill singing and revise my "restored" product accordingly. In the meantime, the song has great meaning for me. For many years I was a Scranton housewife. The community was just beginning to pull itself out of the economic depression, social dislocation, and environmental chaos left by the coal mining industry's collapse there. My father-in-law had spent his life in the mines as have many older men from the area. His tales and reminiscences gave me some insight into how miners feel about their work. While acknowledging the danger and toil of their trade, most miners take a tremendous pride in what they do. The hero of this song is no exception.

Tuning: EAE EBE (capo 3, key of G). The bass and guitar again work closely together on the rhythm track, with a second guitar adding counter-melody. The guitars use a pick-style and the bass also uses non-standard tuning: DADG.

The Cruel Mother, Child #20, is a gut-level nightmare for any unmarried woman. Pregnant by her father's clerk, the lady in question murders her twin babies and goes home as if nothing has happened. The ghosts of her babies return to taunt her and to expose the dark underside of her maternal sentiments. I found this version in Bertrand Bronson's *The Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1959). While not the most beautiful version, the monotony of its tune and childish little refrain give it the macabre feel of a nursery rhyme gone berserk.

Tuning: DGDGCD (key of G). The guitar is once again placed in "mountain minor" banjo tuning. This time the technique used throughout is that of a banjo frailer or down-picker. All the melody or on-the-beat notes are attacked (literally!) by a downward motion of the right index finger and all off-beats are played by the thumb.

Bonnie Light Horseman is another song from Carrie Grover's book. Some variants have been collected in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but it is almost unknown on this side of the ocean. **Bonnie Light Horseman** comes from the time of the Napoleonic Wars, when impressment and economic desperation swelled the British army with unwilling soldiers. Perhaps this explains why the woman who is mourning her slain lover has some bitterness for King George. She is a tough lady. Angry at the King, she resolves to dress like a man and die on her lover's battlefield. In the last verse, she yearns to be not a sparrow, dove, or swallow like other folk ladies, but a powerful, passionate eagle:

Had I the wings of an eagle, through the air I would fly
I would cross the salt seas where my true love doth lie
And with my fond wings I would bear on his grave
And kiss those sweet lips that lie cold in the clay.

I started off singing this song alone, but the emotions seemed too big for me to handle. I asked Claudia Schmidt to help out. Even that was not enough, so we pulled in Peter Bellamy. It was difficult to resist calling in a truckload of Metropolitan Opera divas.

Tuning: DGDGAD (capo 2, key of A); second guitar, open G (capo 2). One reason I enjoy playing with Tom is that he doesn't rely on clichés or take the easiest available bass line; he works on each specific song. Here I play my guitar in a three finger style, using moving bass lines and a certain amount of Irish ornamentation, occasionally duplicated on the bass.

Erin's Green Shore Since the early middle ages, Irish poets have used the allegorical device of a beautiful dream woman to symbolize freedom or virtue. The dream woman here carries a political message and calls herself a sister of Daniel O'Connell, the Irish patriot. **Erin's Green Shore** has taken root all over America, not only in Irish ethnic communities. This version, again from Carrie Grover, has a wonderful and archaic tune.

Livin' Next to the Soil was composed by Everett I. "Billie" Hughes. An early country song, it deals with an important 20th century theme: the migration of rural Americans into the city and their subsequent nostalgia for country life.

The city's no place for an old cow puncher
Just spending his dough and breakin' his back
When the work is done, no money, no nothin'
And there never will be, livin' out of the pack.

This verse sums up the cowboy's feeling about city life, just as the final part shows his allegiance to the land:

From the hills I come, that's where I'll go to
And while I'm there, give me the strength to toil
I want to get back to Oklahoma
I'm happy there, livin' next to the soil.

Travelling through the midwest, Bill and I have been amazed at how the lilt of ragtime and swing has taken hold among folk, bluegrass, and country musicians—even among some unaccompanied singers. Perhaps decades of bad lounge music have jaded the ears of East Coast folkies to the beauty and vigor in swing and in the other forms of country music that synthesize black and white musical traditions. This song is not traditional, but it does show how folk traditions extend themselves into modern popular art forms, enriching them with lyrical power and stylistic variety.

Tuning: Lead guitar, standard (capo 1, key of B^b). We learned this from a recording by Jack Guthrie and his Oklahomans on the Capitol "Americana" label. It probably dates from the early forties. A description on the label reads "Vocal with Cowboy Band," for which we now use the term "Western Swing." Jack Guthrie was a cousin of Woody, best remembered for his co-authorship of Oklahoma Hills. Two acoustic guitars have been substituted for an electric guitar on our recording, and clarinets and harmonica have taken the place of fiddle. The effect we achieved is described by Ken as "Art Linkletter House Party Sound." Well, the clarinets do give it more a late forties feel.

Virginia's Alders is our name for *Friends and Neighbors*, a song from George Edwards, the Catskill singer. He told Norman Cazden, who collected and published the song in *The Abelard Song Book* (New York, Abelard Schumann, 1958), that his mother wrote it. He said she set the words to a hymn called *Praise the Mountain*. Sacred Harp buffs may recognize the tune as *Nettleton*. I'm curious as to why a woman chose to write this personal and emotionally charged song from a male point of view. Are these her own feelings, or was she trying to understand the mindset of her husband, known to be a wanderer in his time? If you drive along New York's Route 17, west toward Binghamton, you'll travel alongside the Susquehanna's west branch. Eventually it joins the main branch flowing south through the Endless Mountains of northeast Pennsylvania. This is where I used to escape when I lived in Scranton. To the restless hero of this song, trapped in an ingrown mountain community, the Susquehanna also seems like a beckoning source of freedom and release.

Sometimes, during performances, Bill and I find members of our audience singing along on the verses. They are usually former campers from Camp Woodland. Norman Cazden and many others involved with folk music were associated with this famous Catskill camp. *Friends and Neighbors* was their traditional parting song, and it seemed a fitting way for us to close the record.

Tuning: DGDGBD (key of G). This is one of my very favorite songs in the world; the arrangement had to be simple so as not to obscure the beauty of this piece. The guitar is played in a three finger style and combined with occasional down-picking. The bass is rhythmically close to the guitar once again.