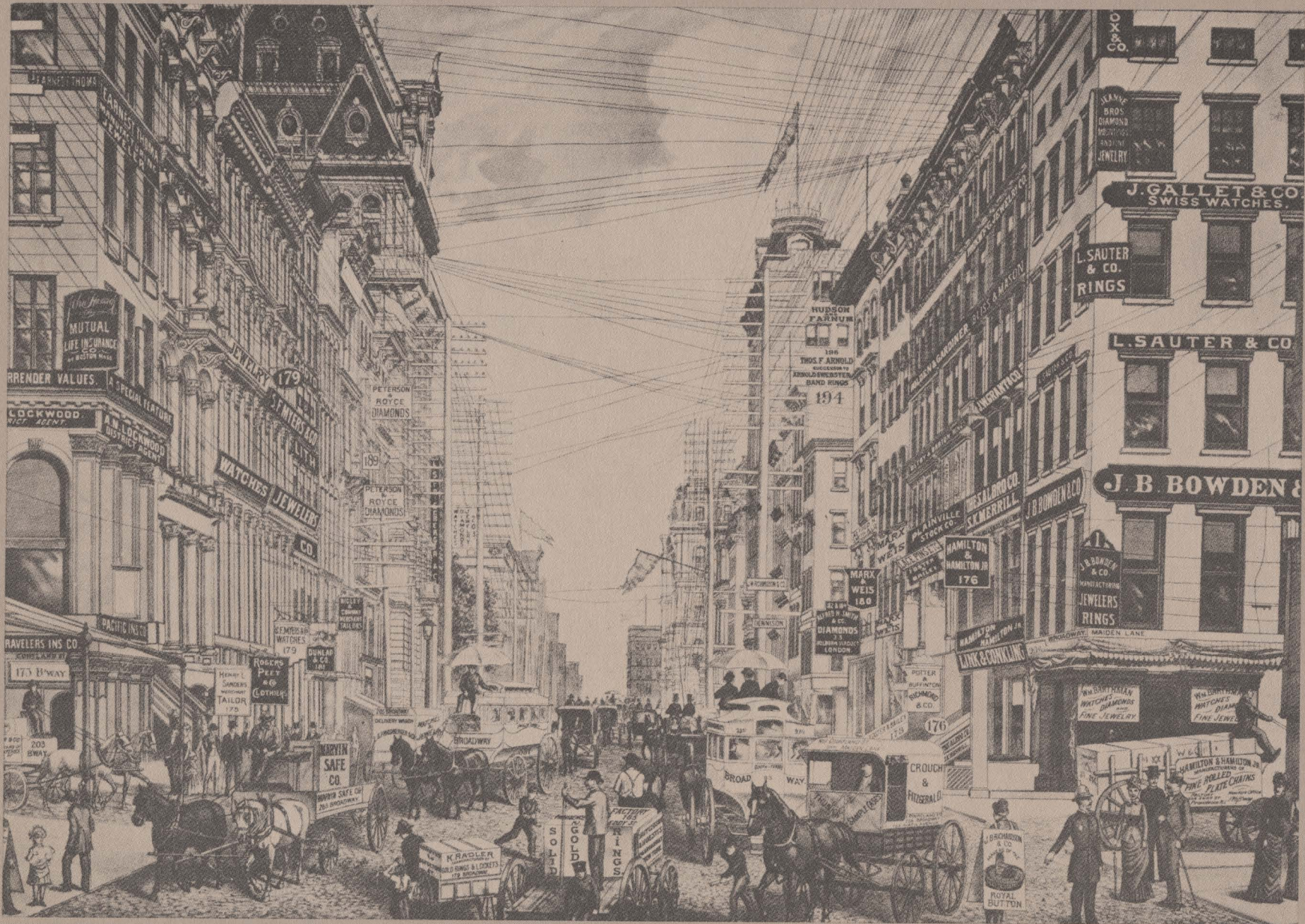


STEREO FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 32352

Folk Songs of New York City 2

FROM THE MIDDLE OF THE 19TH CENTURY

June Lazare



BROADWAY BETWEEN CORTLAND STREET AND MAIDEN LANE, 1880, NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 32352

SIDE A

1. Honey Bee (3:28)
2. Gray Mare (2:19)
3. Dark Girl Dress'd in Blue (5:54)
4. Thirtieth Street Murder (5:53)
5. Lather and Shave (3:07)

SIDE B

1. Unconstant Lovier (2:26)
2. Amos Street Fight (4:29)
3. Billy Barlow (3:13)
4. Brooklyn Theater Fire (5:10)
5. Change For a Ten Dollar Bill (3:53)
6. Talking Subway Blues (2:33)

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of New York City 2**

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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Folk Songs of New York City Vol. 2

Introduction
BY JUNE LAZARE

The songs on this record are not folk songs in the traditional sense. The traditional folk song is an end product, the result of years of oral transmission which shaped and reshaped the original material. These songs are the raw material from which the folk song might have emerged and developed.

Most folk songs began their existence in a rural context where the immediate environment allowed time and space for them to evolve. The city environment, coupled with an increasingly powerful song writing and publishing industry precluded longevity and the opportunity for these fledglings to mature into traditional folk songs. And yet, despite the uncongenial climate, some of these songs did escape their urban framework and entered the folk repertoires in other parts of the country. Others survived within their urban setting for several decades, and still others served as a way-station for traditional tunes set to city texts.

Except for "Talking Subway Blues", all of these songs were written and published in New York City in the second half of the 19th century, in broadside, songster or sheet music form. They reflect the affairs, concerns and experiences of the folks of New York City. They are the folk songs of New York City.



The Original Bowery Boys (Circa 1887)

Honey Bee, Engine #5

Until 1865, when fire companies were organized into a salaried city department, firefighting was a volunteer operation. The companies were composed of rival gangs, often with close ties to political organizations of New York City. Firefighting was frequently less a function of quelling conflagrations than of achieving the glory of arriving first at the scene. In the process of striving for this accomplishment, the rival companies often practiced all types of sabotage on each other, with the not infrequent result that the building in question burnt to the ground in the interim.

Honey Bee is a love song to a fire engine. It was written about 1850 and set to a minstrel tune "Old Pine Tree" written by Charles White in 1849. While this particular song did not survive its immediate context, it is representative of the genre which proliferated in New York City, starting in 1848 with five "Fireman Plays" by Benjamin Baker and extending through the 1860s.



Flower Girl in front
of the Hotel Astor
(Circa 1870)

The Unconstant Lovier

The Gray Mare

These two songs are both urban versions of traditional folk songs. The Gray Mare is obviously a spin-off of "Nottingham Town"; The Unconstant Lovier, written by J.H. Collings, is an amalgam of bits and pieces of several traditional songs, with its own special urban frame of reference. Neither broadside gave any indication of tune.

"The Unconstant Lovier" is set to "The Old Orange Flute", which seems to be a variation of "Villikins and His Dinah". "The Gray Mare" takes one of the versions of a Nottingham Town melody.

The Dark Girl Dressed In Blue

Although written by Harry Clifton, an English singer who performed it in London in 1862, this song became one of the most popular songs of the sixties in New York City, spawning many parodies, answers and new texts to the tune. It was published in sheet music, broadside and songsters, with New York City publishers

placing the action in New York City, and Boston publishers locating it in their city. One version indicated Brooklyn as the locale.

Not only did this song enter the folk repertoires all over the country, but the most popular text set to its tune, "The Girl With the Waterfall" is often found along with it.

In 1959 it was revived by Charles Chilton and Stanley Holloway in England, with the action back where it started, in London.



The Thirtieth Street Murder

For many years of the mid-nineteenth century, Henry Bachus, self-styled the "Saugerties Bard", traveled up and down the Hudson and Mohawk Valleys, selling his songs for a penny apiece. Between the years 1856 and 1858 he concentrated on New York City, commenting on the disasters and dastardly deeds of the city in reams of bad verse. These were published in broadside with instructions that they be sung to some popular melody.

This tragedy of October 26, 1858, was sung to the Irish melody "The Meeting of the Waters", which acquired its title from the Thomas Moore poem to which it was set. The tune was originally known as "The Old Head of Denis".

Although "The Thirtieth Street Murder" disappeared shortly after its publication, "The Meeting of the Waters" remained popular all through the nineteenth century and continues so both here and in Ireland.



The funeral of Jim Fisk (1872)

Lather and Shave

This song, which deals with a problem familiar to many city dwellers, appeared frequently in broadside and songsters throughout the 1850s and 60s, and has been found in many parts of the country. The broadside from which this version was taken lists several possible tunes, all of which seem to be variations of the same Irish melody with a "Down Derry Down" chorus. The tune selected for this recording is "Jut Gannon".



The Chestnut Man

The Amos Street Fight

Billy Poole, called "the butcher", was the leading thug of the Native American Party in 1855, and the champion eye-gouger and ear-biter of his gang. His chief rival in politics and pugilism was John Morrissey, darling of the Tamany combine. Both men were well over six feet tall and solidly built and it was felt by both gangs that a contest between the two would be worth seeing. However, the fight never occurred. Although Poole challenged Morrissey to meet him at the Amos Street dock at seven o'clock on January morning, and Morrissey accepted, Poole never appeared. Instead, Morrissey was met by two hundred of Poole's henchman and badly mauled until some Tammany friends rescued him.

The song text, obviously wishful thinking, was probably written by one of Poole's friends. The melody was taken from "I'll Throw Myself Away", a popular minstrel song performed in New York City in 1852.

This song, which remained popular in New York City for over thirty years, bears no relationship to the Billy Barlow found in traditional folk song. This character first appeared in an 1836 songster as a ragged but beloved roving commentator, drawing upon all aspects of the social and political New York City scene. He was New York's Everyman from that year through 1869, cocky, irreverent, resigned to his poverty but never humble because of it --- certainly an appealing formula for a large section of New York City's population to identify with.

The 1836 text gave no indication of melody, but the 1840 publication presented the tune in shape notes. Subsequent texts gave no melody, but were obviously intended to be sung to the original tune. This version of 1861 concentrates on the most compelling subject of that year --- the impending civil war.

The Brooklyn Theater Fire (The Two Orphans)

On December 5, 1876, the Conway Theater in Brooklyn was presenting the play "The Two Orphans". The theater, which had only five narrow exits, was filled to capacity with nine hundred people. As the curtain rose for the last act, a fire started on the stage and quickly spread into the audience. In the ensuing panic, three hundred people were burned or trampled to death.

For several weeks after, the newspapers were filled with reports of the tragedy, interviews with survivors and graphic descriptions of the victims and their families. Lyrics by P.J. Downey were set to a current favorite, David Braham's "Over the Hill to the Poor House" and published in sheet music. Two years later another

sheet music version was published with Downey's text set to a different melody by C.A. Fuller.

Versions appeared in broadside and in songster for several years after the event, and eventually this song was carried from the city to many parts of this country. As late as 1940 a version was found by Owens in Texas, where, in true folk tradition, the text had been so garbled as to imply that the fire was set by two orphans. (See Folk Songs of New York City, Vol. I).



THEY COULD TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES.

A PARTY OF GAY GIRLS OF NEW YORK BOHEMIAN CIRCLES DECLARE THEIR INDEPENDENCE BY DISPENSING WITH MALE SOCIETY AT THE MASQUERADE BALL SEASON, AND ENJOY A PERIOD OF PLEASURE UNADULTERATED BY MASCULINE RESTRAINT.

Change For a \$10 Bill

The theme of this song is a common one in folklore. The setting of this version is urban however, and the finale is consistent with its more sophisticated context.

The tune indicated on the original broadside was "Monkey Turned Barber". This song, in its turn, was printed in broadside by Catnach in London sometime between 1780 and 1820 with no indication of tune at all. The common practice, both in England and in this country, was to set the text to any contemporary tune with a matching meter.

"Monkey Turned Barber" still appears in traditional folk repertoires in this country. The melody used here is taken from a song entitled "Wild Irishman", which carries the same text as "Monkey Turned Barber".



This typical street-vendor is demonstrating the advantages of his wares to a group of people. (Circa 1870)

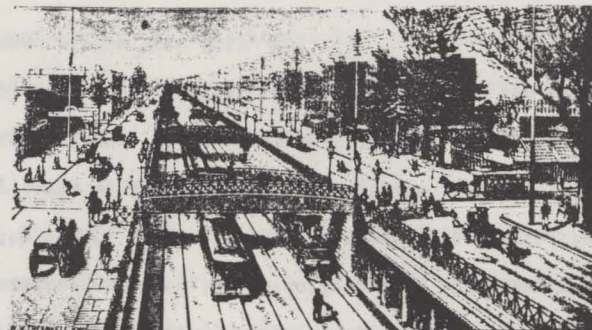


Interior of a Dance House (1880)

Talking Subway Blues

This Woody Guthrie gem is the only representative of twentieth century urban folk song. It is included in this album as a sort of out-reach---an example of musical folklore that continues to appear and to chronical the life of the urban folk.

The Saugerties Bard wrote about the events of his day. Woody Guthrie expanded on this theme, celebrating the entire country and its people as well as commenting on local items such as the New York subway system of the thirties.



Railroad station at 125th Street; The Harlem Open Cut and Cross-Street Bridges. (Circa 1875)

B I O G R A P H Y

Some years ago, June Lazare was asked by The New York Historical Society to present a program of New York City folk songs for an annual conference. She agreed, but after searching through her extensive collection of folk songs for appropriate material, she found no suitable songs. Thus began a research project which culminated in this, the second album of Folk Songs of New York City.

As an ethnomusicologist, Ms. Lazare is particularly interested in the development of urban folk song, and has written and lectured extensively on this subject. She researched and organized a program of parlor music for the Old Bethpage Village Restoration, Long Island, New York; For several years, in Civil War costume, she sang these songs while playing an 1866 parlor organ at the Village. At present she is completing an historically and musically annotated book on The New York City Folk Song Collection.

Although never completing her training as a concert pianist, Ms. Lazare has played semi-professionally in chamber groups. Ms. Lazare is a member of the International Folk Music Society and the Sonneck Society for American Music, ^{and} has contributed research papers at many of their conferences.

In resurrecting these songs, Ms. Lazare hopes to generate interest in the concept that the urban folk song is alive and well and living in the city.

Credits

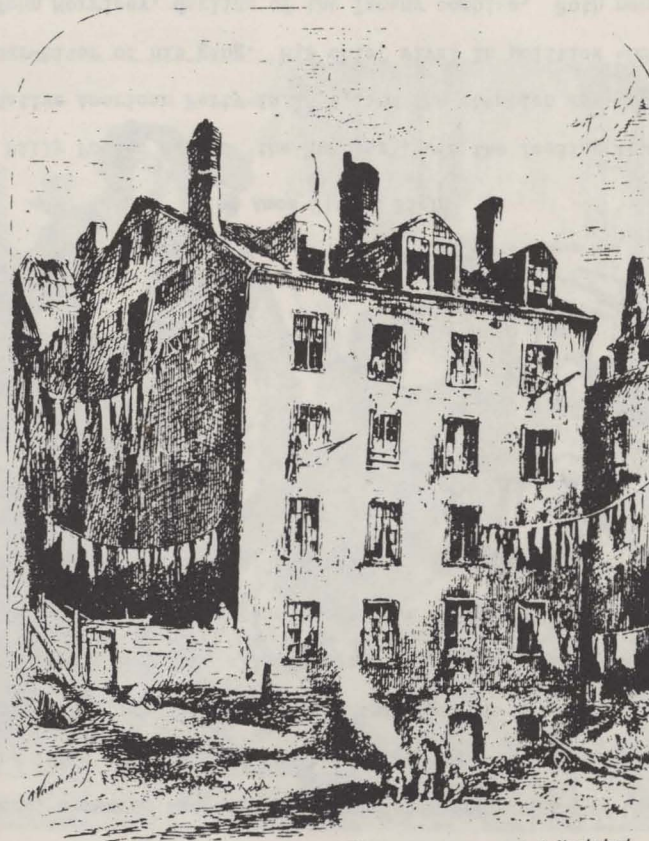
Lee Goldenberg provided back up guitar for "Honey Bee" and "The Amos St. Fight", and feature guitar for "Talking Subway Blues".

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FH 5276

FOLK SONGS OF NEW YORK CITY

Volume I

Michael Roy
Hicks The Pirate **COMPILED AND SUNG BY JUNE LAZARE**
Express Song
The Two Orphans (William A. Owens Texas Folk Songs)
The Patriotic Diggers
Magistrate's Song
Jolly Old Rogers (Folk Songs of New England Eloise H. Linscott)
The Brooklyn Strike (Delaney #9)
The New York 'Prentice Boy
Down In Dear Old Greenwich Village
Westfield Disaster
Billy Barlow
The Castle By The Sea (Frontiers Ballads-Charles J. Finge)
The Three Sisters (A Book of Nonsense Songs (Norman Caydon)
Dead Rabbits Fight With The Bowery Boys
The Knickerbocker Line (The Alabard Folk Song Book Cayden)
The Great Police Fight (Riot At City Hall) J. Andrews
Jim Fish
The Shoddy Contractor (DeMarsan)
Mrs. Cunningham's Darling Baby (J. Andrews)



C. A. Vanderhoof

A Mulberry Street Tenement (Circa 1871)