JOE GLAZER Sings · CHARLIE BYRD on Guitar

DOWN IN A COAL MINE
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DEDICATED TO GEORGE KORSON

SIDE ONE
(Recorded in 1962 in Washington, D.C. Joe Glazer with guitar; Charlie Byrd on lead guitar)

DOWN IN A COAL MINE is one of the best known miner's songs. It was originally a stage song composed by E. R. Phogehron in 1872.

MY SWEETHEART'S THE MULE IN THE MINE—Before the mules were electrified, every colliery kept a stable full of mules to haul its coal cars. The mules were driven by boys about twelve to fifteen years old who learned to control their mules with their voices, seasoning the stock cues with colorful phrases. This little ditty was a universal favorite of the driver boys. MI MULITA was sung for Korson by Eduardo Gallegos, a coal miner from New Mexico. Here is a rough translation: My little mule, do not let me down; let's get on with this little load for here comes the boss. Come, let's get on, little mule, with loads of coal.

THE YOUNG LADY WHO MARRIED A MULE DRIVER—Recorded by Korson in Steubenville, Ohio in 1940. Sung for George Korson by James J. Downer in 1926. Korson writes: "The refrain was recorded a hell of a time the way Downer, an elderly miner, had long been accustomed to singing. However, when I set up my recording machine in his parlor I had 'a hell of a time' convincing him that it was proper for him to sing 'hell'. He wanted to say 'heck.'"

WHEN THE BREAKER STARTS UP FULL TIME—catches the mining folk in a happy mood. After prolonged unemployment the miners hear a rumor that their breaker is to resume production. All the good things sung of in the ballad represent so much wishful thinking because in the 1880's when this ballad appeared, luxuries were beyond reach even when the mines were working full time.

JOLLY WEE MINER MEN—Recorded at Columbus, Ohio in 1940. Sung for George Korson by Bob Stewart of Nova Scotia. This is a Scottish/Canadian version of an old English mining ballad.

THE DEATH OF MOTHER JONES—Mother Jones was the most remarkable woman produced by the American labor movement. She organized coal miners in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Colorado and a dozen other states. She had "a caustic tongue, Irish wit, incredible nerve, indomitable courage, and sympathy for the disfranchised." This song appeared soon after her death in 1930. It was recorded by Korson in Monongah, West Virginia in 1940.

THE OLD MINER'S REFRAIN—recalls the custom of employing old miners to pick slate in the breaker alongside boys. As mechanical slate pickers have displaced manual picking, there is no longer any place for old men in the breaker. Here is the full cycle of an anthracite miner's career—from the age of eight when he first went into the breaker until he returned to it again a very old man.

SIDE TWO
(Recorded at the UMWA Convention, 1964, in Miami. Joe Glazer with guitar & UMWA Delegates.)

A MINER'S LIFE was sung for George Korson by Mrs. Luigi Gugliotta, wife of a UMWA representative in Mt. Hope, West Virginia on March 27, 1940. The refrain, "Keep your eye upon the scale," refers to the company practice in the early days of undermining the miners' coal cars before the union succeeded in appointing a union checkweighman.

THE LUDLOW MASSACRE was Woody Guthrie's great ballad of the atrocity that took place at Ludlow in the southern Colorado coal fields in 1914. The UMWA has erected a monument in Ludlow dedicated to the men, women and children who were murdered there.

COMPANY STORE—Joe Glazer learned this little ditty from Carl Sandburg's daughter, Helda, who told Glazer it was one of her father's favorite songs.

SIXTEEN TONS was written by Merle Travis in 1947. When Tennessee Ernie Ford recorded it in 1955 it became a smash hit. Folklorist Archie Green writes in Only a Miner that in the mid-1920s a man usually loaded eight to ten tons of coal. However, when a younger came to work, the old-timers socked off on their loads so that the newcomer could "make sixteen" on his very first day. It was a sign of manhood to be initiated by reaching this excessive figure.

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON? was written by Florence Reece, wife of a union coal miner in Harlan County, Kentucky, in 1931 at the height of the bloody battles between the armed company deputies and the coal miners.

UNION MAN is another fine coal mining song collected by George Korson. Albert Morgan, the man who composed it, sang it for him in the Newkirk Tunnel Mine in Pennsylvania in 1946. "Mr. Lewis" is, of course, John L. Lewis, long-time president of the United Mine Workers.

ORILL MAN BLUES was recorded by Korson in 1940 at the home of George C. "Curley" Sizemore at Lochgelly, West Virginia. Sizemore was a rock driller in the mines and he suffered from silicosis. "There were frequent breaks in his singing," recalled Korson, "as Sizemore paused for breath. He told me that new ballads formed themselves in his mind as he drilled but he could not sing them because he would get a mouthful of dust if he parted his lips."

COAL MINER'S HEAVEN—This is a coal miner's version of Glazer's The Mill Was Made of Marble which tells the story of a marble worker's dream. Glazer wrote this version at the UMWA 1964 Convention.

COVER DESIGNED BY DOROTHY FALL

This album of coal mining songs is dedicated to George Korson, a gentle and sensitive man, who grew up in the coal fields of Pennsylvania, saw the miners at work and at play, recorded their songs and their stories, shared their bread in their homes, laughed with them, cried with them, grieved with them and helped bury their dead.

This album is as much George Korson's as it is Joe Glazer's even though George does not sing a line or play a note on it. Eleven of these songs were first recorded by Korson on a back porch in some mine-patch or in a coal miner's kitchen or down in a mine—wherever he could plug in his recording machine and get an old miner to sing a ballad. Many of these songs would have been lost if Korson had not searched them out and set them down.

I first met George Korson and his wife, Rae, in 1961. We talked about recording some of his most interesting material in a good studio, with some effective but simple back-up music, to complement the raw field recordings he had made. We were fortunate to get the great guitarist, Charlie Byrd, to back up my voice and guitar.

We recorded the songs in the spring of 1962. We spent hours in the studio because every time I sang Korson's sharp ear would catch something wrong. "That's not the way old Bill Keating sang it," he would tell me ever so gently, and we went at it once again.

For various reasons, the songs were not put out on a disc until now. Eight of the songs we recorded in 1962 make up SIDE ONE. SIDE TWO is a shortened version of a recording I made at the United Mine Workers' convention in 1964. Three of the songs on side two were also collected by Korson.

The notes describing the songs are taken or paraphrased from Korson's great books, Minstrels of the Mine Patch and Coal Dust on the Fiddle, available from Gayle Research Company, Detroit, and Black Rock, John Hopkins Press.

I want to thank George Korson's wife, Rae, who was head of the Archive of Folk Song at the Library of Congress for many years, for her assistance in putting out this album.

Joe Glazer

I REMEMBER DADDY AND HIS COAL MINERS

By Betsy Korson Glazer

George Korson's daughter, Betsy, wrote this tribute to him when he died in May, 1967. It was published in the United Mine Workers Journal in a somewhat longer version.

I didn't grow up in a coal camp, but coal miners and their lives were as close to me as if I had been born and raised among them. Their songs, stories, joys, sorrows, problems and sometimes the miners themselves filled our home ever since I can remember.

Many of the miners whose songs Daddy recorded became lifelong friends. To this day I remember the tension and concern that filled our home whenever there was news of a mine disaster. We sat glued to the radio and Daddy would run out for all the papers, anxious to find out how many lives had been lost. We worried and grieved as much as those who were there. Actually we were there in mind, heart and spirit.

Did I mind having so much of my father with his miners? As a child I accepted it naturally as our way of life. As an adult, I realized even if he had tried, he couldn't have lived any other way. From the moment he heard his first ballad on the porch of a miner's home in Pottsville, until he died 45 years later with the almost completed History of the United Mine Worker's of America, close to his typewriter, he was "hooked." There is no better way to describe it.

My only regret is that I was too young to share this thrill of discovery and sense of dedication with him. He gave much to the coal miners of America, but not nearly as much as they gave to him.

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