Simple Gifts

George & Gerry Armstrong

Anglo-American Folk Songs & Folkways Records FA 2335
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Recorded by Norman Pellegrini

SIMPLE GIFTS Anglo-American Folk Songs

/sung by GEORGE AND GERRY ARMSTRONG

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SIDE II

Band 1: DERBY RAM
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Band 1: MAIRI'S WEDDING

Property of

Side 1
George and Gerry Armstrong and their two children, Becky and Jenny, live in Wilmington, Illinois. George makes his living as a book illustrator. However, most of the social life of the family centers around the pursuit of folklore - the songs, tales, games and customs that comprise the folk heritage of the English-speaking peoples.

In this age when our entertainment is provided for us, education has become institutionalized, and almost all knowledge has become dependent on books, the ancient folk arts which rely on oral transmission are all but lost. The Armstrongs seek to recreate and incorporate into their own lives this oral tradition, which is the "natural" way of spreading ideas, going from man to man, from parent to child, from friend to friend, and relies solely on the truth and beauty of that which is shared.

The songs on this album are drawn from a tradition that is shared by the people of the British Isles and those in America who trace their origins to those islands. But in a larger sense, these songs could be considered the common heritage of all of us who speak the English language. These songs are offered not only for your listening enjoyment, but also in the hope that you will learn to sing them yourself.

The accompaniments to the songs on this recording are provided by the guitar and three Appalachian dulcimers. These dulcimers are held on the lap and plucked with the fingers or strummed with a pick, made from a goose quill. One of these instruments is a double (or courting) dulcimer played by two persons seated facing each other. All three dulcimers were made by Howard Mitchell of Lexington, Virginia.

SIDE I

1) MAIRI'S WEDDING - In 1974 while vacationing in Scotland, we heard this song at a ceilidh (pronounced kay-lee) in a building for the purpose of singing and dancing. This one was held in the local school house. Most of the singing was in Gaelic, but "Mairi's Wedding" was sung in English, so the following day, we called on the singer and took down the song. Although this song is native to the Hebrides, it is popular all over Scotland.

CHORUS: Step we gaily, on we go, Heel for heel and toe for toe, Arm in arm and row on row, All for Mairi's weddin'.

(1) Over hillways up and down, Myrthe green and bracken brown, Pasted the shellings, through the town, All for sake o' Mairi.

(2) Red her lips as rowan's are, Bright her eye as any star, Fairies of them all by far, Is our darlin' Mairi.

(3) Plenty herring, plenty meal, Plenty pate to fill her creel, Plenty bonny harris as well, That's our toast for Mairi.

(4) CORN STALK FIDDLE - This little boy (it would be hard to consider it a musical instrument) will be similar to many who have been raised on a farm. The tune which we use here sounds a lot like the old fiddle tune: "Soldier's Joy".

Corn stalk fiddle and a pea vine bow, 2
Best ol' fiddle in the county-o.

Corn stalk fiddle and a pea vine bow, 2
Prdest little girl I ever did know.

Corn stalk fiddle and a pea vine bow, 2
Granny does your dog bite? No, child, no!

(3) THE JEALOUS BROTHERS - This ballad we learned from Howie Mitchell. It was collected in 1939 in Fayetteville, Arkansas by Dr. Asher Treat of Dumont, N.J. from whom Howie learned it. This ballad was left out of Prof. Child's collection of English and Scottish Ballads but it has an ancient lineage. The ballad story was the fourth tale of the fifth night in Boccaccio's "Decameron". The story tells of the daughter of a wealthy merchant who falls in love with a servant. Her two brothers decide to put an end to this by murdering the servant. His ghost appears to her and reveals the place where his body lies.

We had the pleasure of teaching this song to the blind Virginia singer, Hruton Coor, who remarked, "I believe that's just about the prettiest ballad I've ever heard."

They sat a'courtin' one fine evening, Her brothers hearing what they say, "Oh, it's this courtship, it must be ended, For the likes of this, it will never do."

They rose up early, early next morning, A game of hunting for to go, And it's this young man they both did flatter, For to go and hunt along with them.

They rode all over the hills and valleys, In places where that they were known, Until they came to a lonesome valley, That's where they killed him and left him alone.

And when the brothers had returned, The sister asked where the servant was, Oh, it's: "We've lost him in a game of hunting, And it's him no more can we find."

She lay across her bedside weeping, It came to her as in a dream, That they'd carried him beyond the regions, That's where they'd killed him and left him alone.

She rose up early, early next morning, She dressed herself in rich array, Saying, "I'm going to find my lost true lover, Or spend the balance of my days."

She rode all over the hills and valleys, In places where that she was known,
Corn stalk hog made by Gerry Armstrong

Corn stalk fiddle made by Richard Chase

bow
This version comes from Fred High of Berryville, Arkansas.

There was a lady lived in the West Country
And children she had three.
She sent them away to the North Country
For to learn their grammar.

They hadn't been gone but a very small while
Saw them coming back to their home,
After being gone a very long time,
The little children three.

"Ah, my dear, how you have grown,
And you look so tall and strong.
But you must be careful how you go,
And keep from losing your way.

"I'm an honest lad though I be poor,
And I never was in love before.
But Mother will come to see you,
And I can fancy none but you."

"If I consent to be your bride,
Pray how for me would you provide?
For to make you happy in your home,
And I can fancy none but you."

"If I consent to be your bride,
Pray how for me would you provide?
For to make you happy in your home,
And I can fancy none but you."
(8) **FROGGY WENT A' Courting** - Versions of this song can be found in many parts of the English-speaking world. It was known in the British Isles in the 16th century and is probably a good deal older than that. The tune we use here is rather an accident. Some years ago, we attended a concert by Mr. John Jacob Niles who sang the "Frogg's Courthship." A year or so later while strumming the dulcimer, this tune came to mind. We thought it was Mr. Niles' version, but later upon hearing him sing it again, we discovered that we had remembered only the tune for the first, fourth, seventh and eighth lines of his eight-line stanzas.

Froggy went a' courtin' and he did ride,
Sword and a pistol by his side,
Hi diddle, diddle, dolly day.

He rode up to Miss Mousie's door,
Where he had often been before,
He knocked and knocked till his fists got sore,
Hi diddle, diddle, dolly day.

He set Miss Mousie on his knee,
Said, "Miss Mousie, will you marry me?"
Hi diddle, diddle, dolly day.

"Without my Uncle Rat's consent,
I would not marry the President." (2)
Hi, diddle, etc.

Now Uncle Rat has gone to town,
To buy Miss Mouse a wedding gown.
Hi, diddle, etc.

Where shall the wedding breakfast be?
Way down yonder in a hollow tree.
(2)

What shall the wedding breakfast be?
Two green beans and a black-eyed pea.
(2)

First to come in was a little white moth,
He spread his wings like a tablecloth.
(2)

The next to come in was a spotted snake,
Passing around the wedding cake.
Hi, diddle, diddle, dolly day.

Next to come in was a little black chick,
He et so much it made him sick.
Hi, diddle, diddle, dolly day.

Next to come in was Dr. Fly
He said that chick would surely die.
Hi, diddle, diddle, dolly day.

Next to come in was a bumblebee,
Tattin' his banjo on his knee.

Next to come in were two little ants,
Fixin' for to have a dance.
(2)

Next to come in was Mrs. Goose,
She kicked up her heels and she really cut loose.
And after that they sailed for France,
And that is the end of our romance.
Frog and the mouse they sailed for France.
Hi, diddle, diddle, dolly day.

(9) **BLACK JACK DAVY** - Here is an Ozark version of the ancient story ballad: "The Gypsy Laddie". This comes from Mrs. Lula Davis of Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Black Jack Davy come a' riding through the woods,
Singing a song so gayly,
And will you be my honey?
I swear by the sword that I wear by side,
You never will want for money." (2)

Her old man came home late that night,
Inquiring for his lady,
"She's gone with Black Jack Davy." (2)

"Go saddle up my milk white steed,
Saddle him slow and easy,
I'll ride all night till the broad daylight,
Till I overtake my lady." (2)

So he rode all night till the broad daylight,
He rode to the edge of the water.
He crossed and he looked on the other side,
And there he spied his darlin'.
(2)

"Will you pull off my snow-white gloves,
All made of Spanish leather.
And I'll give you my lily-white hand
To bid farewell forever." (2)

"Last night I slept in a goosefeather bed,
Last night I slept with my baby.
But tonight I'll sleep on cold,
cold, ground
In the arms of Black Jack Davy." (2)

(10) **DERBY RAM** - We learned this song from Mrs. Abigail Ritchie of Viper, Kentucky. She was the mother of fourteen children (the youngest being Jean Ritchie, a dear friend and famous folksinger and dulcimer player) and this song was often used as a lullaby.

"The "Derby Ram" is English in origin and to this day in certain villages in Derbyshire, it is sung as part of aummer's play in which one of the characters is dressed up as a ram named "Old Tup," who is symbolically slaughtered by the butcher. The song used at Staveley commences:

"As I was going to Derby all on a market day,
I met the finest tup, sir, that ever was fed upon hay.
Pay-s-a-day, laddigo day."

The Staveley tune is quite similar to that sung by the Ritchies.

I went down to Derby's house all on the market day,
There I saw the finest ram that ever was fed on hay.

CHORUS: Fol-108-day.
Fol-lol-diddle-lolly day.

The first tooth he had held a hundred of a horn,
The next tooth he had held sixty barrels of corn.

(1) **GROUND HOG** - This song is popular throughout the Southern Appalachians and seems to be purely American in origin. We learned this song from Hovie Mitchell.

Load up your gun and whistle up your dog,
We're off to the woods to hunt ground hog. Ground hog!

Too many rocks and too many logs,
Too much trouble to hunt ground hogs. Ground hog!

He's in here, boys, the hole's wore slick,
C'mon, Sam, with your forked stick.

Load up your gun and whistle up your dog,
We're off to the woods to hunt ground hog. Ground hog!

Stand back, boys, and let's be wise.
I think I see his beady eyes.

Here comes Sam with a ten foot pole.
Gonna rout that ground hog out'n his hole. Ground hog!

Work, boys, work just as hard as you can tear.

The meat'll do to eat, and the hide'll do to wear. Ground Hog!

Stand back, boys, and lemme get my breath.
Catchin' this ground hog's might nigh death. Ground hog!

Out he comes all in a whirl,
Biggest old ground hog in this world. Ground hog!
They put him in a pot and the young'uns start to smile. (2)
They stir that ground hog 'fore he
struck a boil. Ground hog!
Up come Sal with a snigger and a
grin.
Ground hog grease all over her
chin. Ground hog!
The children screamed and the
children cried,
I love that ground hog cooked or
fried! Ground hog!

(2) DEAR COMPANION - This tragic love
song from North Carolina is one of
the most beautiful of our folk songs,
both in melody and lyric. This was
collected by the English folklorist,
Cecil Sharp in 1910. The melody
is related to that of the sacred
song: 'The Wayfaring Stranger'.

I once did have a dear companion,
Indeed I thought his love my
own,
But then a black-eyed girl betrayed
me,
Indeed I thought his love my
own.

"But you're the man that I adore,
Handsome Willy-o",
"You're the man that I adore, but
fortune is too low,
I'm afraid my mother would be
angry."
"Come a-trippin' down the stair,
pretty Peggy-o
Come a-trippin' down the stair and
tie up your yellow hair,
Bid a last farewell to handsome
Willy-o."

"If ever I return, Pretty Peggy-o(2)
If ever I return the city I will
burn,
And destroy all the ladies in
the areo!"

"Our captain, he is dead, pretty
Peggy-o,
Our captain he is dead and he
died for a maid,
And he's buried in the Louisiana
Country-o."

(4) POLLY VAUGHN - This was learned
from folk singer, Paul Clayton, who
collected it in Massachusetts. It
is also known in the British Isles.
The situation in this song in which
a young man mistakes his love for
a swan and shoots her is quite possi-
bly a reflection of the swan-scaled
motif of ancient Irish legend.

Oh, all you young huntresses that
follow,
Beware of shooting at the setting of
the sun.
Jimmy Ranald went a-hunting and he
shot in the dark,
But oh, and alas, Polly Vaughn was
his mark.

CHORUS:
She'd (I'd) my apron wrapped around
her (me),
And he took her (me) for a
swan,
His legs they grew weak and his
eyes they filled with tears.
He embraced her in his arms, when
he found she was dead,
A fountain of tears for his true-love,
he shed.

Then Jimmy ran home and straight
home ran he,
Crying, "Uncle, dear uncle, I've
killed fair Polly.
I shot that fair maiden in the bloom
of her life,
And I always intended to make her my
wife."

That night in his chamber, Polly
Vaughn did appear,
Crying, "Jimmy, oh Jimmy, you've
nothing to fear,
Stay in this country till your
trial does come on,
You shall not be convicted for
what you have done."

In the middle of his trial, Polly
Vaughn did appear,
Crying, "Uncle, oh uncle, Jimmy
Ranald think clear."
The judges and the lawyers stood
there in a row,
Polly Vaughn in the middle like a
mountain of snow.
The next joy of Mary was the joy of seven,
That her Son, Jesus, could open the gates of heaven,
Open the gates of heaven, O, Emanuel in glory, open the gates of heaven.

(7) THE DEAF WOMAN'S COURTSHIP - Richard Chase, who taught us this song, has put it together from several sources. The tune used here was known in Scotland in the 17th century and went with the song called: "Maggie Lauder."

"Old woman, old woman, will you go a-shearing?"
"Speak a little louder, sir, I'm rather thick of hearing."
"Old woman, old woman, are you good at weaving?"
"Pray speak a little louder, sir, my hearing is deceiving."

"Old woman, old woman, will you go a-walking?"
"Speak a little louder, sir, or what's the use of talking?"
"Old woman, old woman, are you fond of spinning?"
"Pray speak a little louder, sir, I only see you grinning!

"Old woman, old woman, will you do my knitting?"
"My hearing's getting better now, come closer where I'm sitting."
"Old woman, old woman, shall I kiss you dearly?" (in a whisper)
"Lord-a-mercy on my soul! I hear you now quite clearly!"

(8) BLOW YE WINDS I-O - This song is from the north of England where we learned it while visiting Jack and Jennie Armstrong (no relation) who live near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A very similar version of this song with the refrain: "Clear away the morning dew" comes from Somerset in the west of England and was used by Ralph Vaughan Williams as the final theme in this "English Folk Song Suite."

There was a country lad kept sheep onBlooms hill,
He laid his pipe and crook aside
And there he slept his fill.

CHORUS:
And sing blow ye winds I-o,
Sing blow ye winds I-o,
Clear away the morning dew,
And Blow ye winds I-o.

He looked east, he looked west,
He took another look,
And there he spied a lady gay,
a-dippin' in a brook.
"Oh, sir, don't touch my mantle;
Pray let my clothes alone,
And I will give you as much white money as you can carry home."

"I will not touch your mantle; I'll let your clothes alone,
I'll take you out of the water clear,
your dear, so be my own."

He put her on his milk-white steed,
himself upon another,
They rode along the country lane
like sister and like brother.

And as they rode along the lane,
they saw some pooks of hay.
She said, "Wouldn't that be a very pretty place for boys and girls to play?"

And when they came to her father's gate, the lady jumped in.
She said, "There stands a fool without and I'm a maid within.
"There is a flower in our garden, we call it marigold;
And if you would not, when you might; you shall not, when you would.

"Good morrow to you, honest lad, I thank you for your care.
If you had been what you should have been, I would not have left you there."

The shepherd doffed his shoon.*
"My feet they will run bare,
But if I meet another pretty maid, I redeem that maid beware!"
(* shoes)

(9) THE WIND AND THE RAIN - This comes from the collection of Fletcher Collins of Staunton, Virginia. It is a fragment of a longer, ancient ballad usually called: "The Two Sisters" or "Emmorie. Versions of this ballad have been collected all over the United States, The British Isles and Scandinavia. In most of the old world versions of the story, the older sister drowns the younger out of jealousy over a young man. The body of the drowned girl is found by a harpist or fiddler who fashions a musical instrument from her hair and bones. He takes the instrument to the court of the king (who is the father of the sisters), and there the instrument, made of the magic bones, sings by itself and accuses the older sister of the murder. However, in almost all the American versions, the supernatural element has been lost. The haunting fragment sung here is one of the rare American texts that retains this motif.

Two little sisters went a-walkin' one fine day, Oh, the wind and the rain.
One pushed the other into the waters, waters deep, And she cried the dreadful wind
And the rain.

Along came a miller with his old grab-hook, Oh, the wind and the rain.
He fetched her up from the bottom of the brook, And she cried the dreadful wind and the rain.

He made fiddle strings from her long yellow hair, Oh, the wind and the rain.
He made fiddle pegs from her long finger bones, And she cried the dreadful wind and the rain.

The only tune that my fiddle can play, Is: Oh, the wind and the rain.

Notes by George Armstrong