

POETRY in MUSIC



Class 3: Sept 23, 2025

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Class 3: Songs of the People

A. The Flavor of Folk

The particular timbre of much folk music comes from using scales or modes not commonly found in the classical repertoire and, in performance, a comparative freedom from the tyranny of rhythm and a bending of pitch.

- **Luciano Berio: *Loosin Yelav***, from *Folk Songs* (1964—see final item), Magdalena Kožená with Sir Simon Rattle.
- **Traditional, collected by Grieg: *Gjendine's Lullaby***. Trio Medieval.
- **Burns: *Green grow the rushes, O***. Words and music by Robert Burns (1784). The Band of Burns.
- **Traditional: *Barbara Allen***. A story song with many variants. Sung by Andreas Scholl and, in an Appalachian version, by Jean Ritchie.

B. Folksong in Context

Various contexts in which folksong may be heard, and the different purposes such songs serve: teaching, storytelling, work songs, spirituals, and protest songs—the latter mainly the work of singer-songwriters in folk style.

- **Anon: *Green grow the rushes, O***. Counting song. King Solomon's Singers.
- **Traditional, arr. Britten: *O waly, waly***. Kathleen Ferrier. Another story song. Text probably from Scotland; tune collected by Cecil Sharp in Somerset. [Note: this version begins with the words "The water is wide," and does not contain the "O waly, waly" verse that gives the song its name.]
- **Traditional: *Boney was a warrior***. The story of Napoleon, with the refrain "A warrior, a terrier, John François." Sea shanty, sung by Paul Clayton.
- **Traditional: *It's a long John***. Work song in the call/response pattern, recorded from a prison chain gang in 1934.
- **Traditional: *The Gospel Train***. As sung by the US Navy Sea Chanters.
- **Traditional: *Roll, Jordan, Roll***. From the movie *12 Years a Slave* (featuring Topsy Chapman and Chiwetel Ejiofor)

- **Bob Dylan: *Blowin' in the Wind***.
- **Pete Seeger: *Where have all the flowers gone?*** Cover of 1955 song sung by Joan Baez in the Vietnam War era. Posters by Sister Corita Kent.

C. Folksong in Performance

Finally, a very brief account of how folksong has entered the classical repertoire of opera house and concert hall.

- **Gay/Pepusch: *The Beggar's Opera***, choruses. (Film by Peter Brook, 1953).
- **Traditional: *High Germany***, song collected by Cecil Sharp in Somerset, sung by Martin Carthy.
- **Holst: *Somerset Rhapsody*** (1907). The "High Germany" section in a band arrangement, all the instruments played by Sam Vanderwoude.
- **Vaughan Williams: *Folk Songs from Somerset***, the last movement of his *Folk Song Suite* (1923). Orchestra of Saint Martins in the Fields, conducted by Sir Neville Marriner.
- **Luciano Berio: *Folk Songs*** (1964), final number, *Azerbaijani Love Song*. An Azerbaijani folk song taken from an old 78 rpm record and transcribed phonetically, with no idea what the text means! Cathy Berberian with Luciano Berio, her husband.

Luciano **Berio** (1925–2003, *Italian composer*), Benjamin **Britten** (1913–76, *English composer*), Robert **Burns** (1759–96, *Scottish poet*), Sister **Corita** Kent (1918–86, *American artist*), Bob **Dylan** (b.1941, *American singer-songwriter*), John **Gay** (1685–1732, *English poet*), Gustav **Holst** (1874–1934, *English composer*), Johann **Pepusch** (1667–1752, *German-born English musician*), Pete **Seeger** (1919–2014, *American folk musician*), Cecil **Sharp** (1859–1924, *English folksong collector*), Ralph **Vaughan Williams** (1872–1958, *English composer*)

www.brunyate.com/RenInstPoetry
rogerbrunyate@gmail.com