

PRETTY POLYTUNNELS

My poor feet have travelled this country of yours
To fend for my family by working outdoors.
I've slept in a trailer or some makeshift camp –
Your hillsides are windy, your valleys are damp.... Oh ... oh
Your hillsides are windy, your valleys are damp.

I've worked in your orchards of apples and plums,
They pay us in pennies, they treat us like bums.
On the edge of your cities you'll see us and then
It's down to pull carrots and onions again Oh ... oh
Down to pull carrots and onions again.

From Kent up to Yorkshire we harvest your crops,
Like the cockneys of old came to gather the hops.
We cut herbs from the ground and the grapes from the vine
For your prize-winning English sparkling wine Oh ... oh
Prize-winning English sparkling wine.

Every county in England us migrants have been
To bring you the fruits of your pastures so green.
In pretty polytunnels that spring from the ground
We cut salads and strawberries all the year roundOh ... oh
Salads and strawberries all the year round.

We always have rambled and then we return
To a life in the east on the scraps we can earn.
Your pastures of plenty must always be free
And you will be fed thanks to people like me Oh ... oh
You will be fed thanks to people like me.

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Inspired by walking through the bounteous Kent countryside, this song looks at modern day migrant harvest workers who are following a very old tradition.

THE FRIEND

I happened to meet an old friend in a bar but I just couldn't place him at first,
And I tried hard to think as we both bought a drink and got chatting while
quenching our thirst.

"Great to see you again", "You're looking so well" – we started exchanging our
news

And then I could see that exactly like me he was frantically searching for clues.

We talked of our work and we talked of our wives, and then there was so
much to tell.

In the end we knew all about each other's lives, but nothing that rang any bell.
Then he said "My wife said 'Oh Trevor you fool'", and that was the answer,
how clever.

So I let slip my own name and then it was cool, except no-one I knew was
called Trevor.

When the glasses were empty at last we could see, in the handshake and the
look in the eyes,

That it wasn't him and it wasn't me – it must have been two other guys.

"Never mind" said the stranger as we said goodbye, "It's been good to know
you so far,

And if I'm here again and you should drop by, at least we will know who we
are".

Now twenty years on and the stranger is gone, there's a story that each of us
tells

Of how in the end we made such a good friend 'cause we thought it was
somebody else.

And there is a saying I seem to recall, though who said it of course I forget
That the stranger you see is no stranger at all but friend you just haven't met...
The stranger you see is no stranger at all but a friend you just haven't met.

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*A made up story, but the starting point is a situation that almost everyone
recognises: "I know that person from somewhere, but who is it?"*

INSOMNIAC'S LAMENT

I sit beside my curtain and I watch the darkened sky,
And now and then the coloured lights of aeroplanes going by.
And I think of the people on them, and maybe where they're bound
As they look down on the myriad sleeping lights here on the ground:
And I can't sleep; I just can't sleep.
Maybe I'm scared of dreaming, or it could be just the full moon
But it's only half-past-two and I'm hoping that it will be morning soon.

Then I try to count the places and the people that I've seen,
And then I think of all the loves there were, or might have been,
And of every chance occasion that's led somehow to today
And I think of all the chances that have chanced the other way:
And I can't sleep; I just can't sleep.
I may have had too much coffee, or it could be just the full moon
But it's only half-past-three and I'm hoping that it will be morning soon.

And my mind's tied up with problems and they just won't turn me loose
As the winged thoughts you cast out in the day come home to roost;
And I think of words I've spoken and regretted in my mind
And of all the things I would have said, had it hit me at the time:
And I can't sleep; I just can't sleep.
Maybe I'm going crazy, or it could be just the full moon
But it's only half-past-four and I'm hoping that it will be morning soon.

Then I think about tomorrow and the road that lies ahead
And hopes and fears and promises are whirling round my bed
And I start to count my blessings, till they come in twos and threes
And they merge into the blackness with the dreams and memories
And I can't wake up – I can't wake up:
And the birds are singing and I don't want to hear, and the alarm clock's
ringing right into my ear
And there's a new day beginning and it's already here and I just can't get
my brain in gear:
And I can't wake up; I can't wake up.....

THE DARK GIRL DRESSED IN BLUE

I was on St. Pancras station with a half an hour to spare
When I fell on a wheelie suitcase – it caught me fair and square.
“Sir I am so sorry, oh what have I done to you?”
Said the owner of the suitcase – she was a dark girl dressed in blue.
I saw her ankles, then her face, and I felt no sense of pain.
I said: “Oh please, it’s nothing” as I got to my feet again.
“Well let me buy you a coffee, it’s the least that I can do -
For sending you a-sprawling so.” Said the dark girl dressed in blue.

We queued at Pret-a-manger for two lattes, one to go.
Then she rummaged in her handbag and I heard her cry “Oh no...
I only have a fifty euro note whatever shall I do?
I’ve just got in from Paris,” said the dark girl dressed in blue.
I saw her situation and I acted in a flash.
“Give me your fifty euro note – I’ve got plenty of cash.
Say I give you forty pounds and I’ll pay for the coffee too?”
“Oh, you are so sweet, and clever!” said the dark girl dressed in blue.

I sat down with the coffee and just then they called her train –
She scribbled down a number saying: “Hey, let’s talk again”.
Then hauling the wheelie suitcase she disappeared from view,
And off to Market Harborough went the dark girl dressed in blue.
I drank the latte on my own, feeling slightly strange,
Then I took the fifty euro note down to the money change.
“Blimey, not another one – we can’t change this for you;
It’s a fake, where did you get it from?” “A dark girl dressed in blue.”

I thought of the smile she gave me at the moment that I fell,
And then the caffe latte and the forty pounds as well.
I called her scribbled number and a voice said “Who are you?”
And “No, this phone does not belong to a dark girl dressed in blue”.

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I don't know why the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the new St. Pancras brought to mind a song of 1862 by George Leybourn and Harry Clifton about a young man on the sixpenny omnibus who was beguiled by a girl who only had a five-pound note. This story is my modern day equivalent, fortunately also fictitious.

THE CLERICAL WORKER'S SONG

You young school-leavers who roam so free, with your O-level, A-level, GCSE:
Going to join the bureaucracy – what does the future promise?

A five-day week and a nine-to-five day, regular work and regular pay,
But all the old clerks to their children say: “Don’t go down to the office.”

(chorus) Push that paper, push that pen. Stamp that rubber stamp again –
You clerical women and clerical men, working in an office.

Now the office worker on an average wage is pushing paper to a ripe old age,
And if you added up every page it’s the equivalent of a fair sized forest.
But the only thing that he ever makes is gallons of tea and a few mistakes.
If you want adventure and you’ve got what it takes – don’t go down to the office.
(chorus) Push that paper, etc.

You’ve got writer’s cramp and a telephone jaw. Paper-clips are breeding in your
desk drawer –

With your in-tray out-tray your brain feels sore - you’ve got the occupational
disease:

Boredom strikes at the very soul till you think that you’d rather be mining coal,
Hunting the whale or the herring-shoal but you’re working in an office.

(chorus) Push that paper, etc.

Like the hand-loom weaver and the ploughman’s mate, your clerical skills go out
of date,

For every office must automate, with information technology.

Then your only ambition will be taken away, for that was to reach retirement day
And you’ve had to take early severance pay and you don’t go down to the office.

(chorus) Push that paper, etc.

When you’ve finally ceased your clerical toil and shaken off this mortal coil,
You think there’s nothing can ever spoil the eternal holiday.

But when you arrive it’s hard to tell whether you’ve come to heaven or hell
For you’re met by a clerical archangel, working in an office.

(chorus) Push that paper, etc.

© Allan Richardson 1989

*I was struck by ironic image of late 20th century office workers piling out of their
trains back in the suburbs, changing into their grubby sweaters and heading down*

to the folk club to sing songs of work – in the mines and factories and on the high seas. Not realising that all the time they were writing their own chapter in our industrial history. Now their story can be told!

COLOURS OF BARNET FAIR

When I was but a young man, footloose and fancy-free,
Dark or fair or redhead, it was all the same to me.
I played it cool, I played the fool with every girl I met
Then I gave my heart completely to a lovely young brunette:
I gave my heart completely, I gave my heart completely,
I gave my heart completely to a lovely young brunette.

But time moves on and so do we, and change was in the air.
I was always with a woman with different coloured hair.
Sometimes for a year or more, or just on party nights
With Hazel Nut and Honey Glow or maybe Amber Lights.
Hazel Nut and Honey Glow, Hazel Nut and Honey Glow,
Hazel Nut and Honey Glow or maybe Amber Lights.

Now as we all grow older, they say that we mature,
Though having seen how people carry on I'm not so sure;
And no-one ever told me, and I don't think they told her
That I'd be settled with a blonde, as gentlemen prefer.
I'd be settled with a blonde, I'd be settled with a blonde,
I'd be settled with a blonde as gentlemen prefer.

Now I am in my dotage, much older than I feel,
I love a head of silver, with just a hint of steel.
But as I told that young brunette and surely you recall,
I'll always love you even if you had no hair at all.
I will always love you, I will always love you,
I'll always love you even if you had no hair at all.

© Allan Richardson 2015

A little piece of nonsense maybe, but fun to sing as a jaunty jig.

CRUISING CALYPSO

Doctor told me I needed a rest: “OK, Doc, what do you suggest?”

He said “Move on, groove on, take a trip” so

Here I am, Cruising Calypso.

(chorus) Aah – Cruising Calypso easy, aah cruising, easy Cruising Calypso.

So I bought me a book and a pair of shades. I packed my bag,

I was on my way –

I went to the coast and I got on the ship so

Here I am, Cruising Calypso.

(chorus) Aah – Cruising Calypso easy, aah cruising, easy Cruising Calypso.

Sitting here watching the coastline slip - so

Slowly by, till they tie up the ship so

You can do shopping or sightseeing trips – though

You can stay on board just having a kip, so

Warm in the sunshine, or fancy a dip – so

Dive in the pool and then dry off the drips

Over cocktails with cherries while spitting the pips

Overboard in the ocean or lie there and sip

Soda spritzers till dusk then it’s time for the disco

And everyone’s there, just letting it rip, so

There’s singing and swinging and swaying of hips oh

I’m losing my grip so I’m just moving my lips – oh

Here I am Cruising Calypso.

(chorus) Aah – Cruising Calypso easy, aah cruising, easy Cruising Calypso.

I got back to an empty town. I went to the doctor’s, there’s no-one around

He says “They needed a rest and they all took my tip – so

Everybody’s gone Cruising Calypso.

(chorus) Aah – Cruising Calypso easy, aah cruising, easy Cruising Calypso.

© Allan Richardson 2005

A seafaring song for the average modern traveller. No creaking timbers or hoisting of topsails.

PHILIP'S SONG

When one falls in love with a Princess, one hasn't just her to convince.

There's the King and the Queen and the Powers that Be –

It's a good job that I was a prince.

Not all could agree what we lovers could see – that ours was a match made in heaven.

But our wedding, my dear was the do of the year, in nineteen-forty-seven.

I fell in love with a Princess, but I've spent sixty years with a Queen,

As a Duke, not a King, which was hardly my thing –

I can't tell you what fun it has been.

All the good works, the people, the places, and sometimes expressing my views:

But it's quite hard to know just how far one should go – when I'm on the front page it's Bad News.

When we started out you had an Empire, now that's all behind us – or is it?

We're no longer in charge but the Commonwealth's large,

And it's great for the children to visit.

The children – now there's a mixed blessing, but they've not all been bad lads and lasses,

And the media go ga-ga over our family saga, which keeps us in touch with the masses.

Yes, I fell in love with a Princess, and look how it's turned out to be:

Every high, every low – we've seen it all come and go

But no-one has loved you like me.

And as you look forwards to the rest of your reign, the one thing I promise you'll find –

Is whatever betide, I'll be right by your side – walking three paces behind –
Walking three paces behind.

© Allan Richardson 2002

This monologue with musical accompaniment was first done in the Jubilee Year of 2002 and has since been refreshed for Philip's 90th birthday in 2011 and the Diamond Jubilee of 2012. Like its subject, still going strong!

I HAVE NO MUSIC

I have no music sad enough, no uplifting refrain
For all the wartime heroes, for the fallen, for the slain;
For the factories and living rooms that became the battlefield,
Battered, burnt and weary until something had to yield.
And as with poppies silently the Albert Hall is filled,
Time to spare a thought for all the good folk we have killed –
Time to spare a thought for all the good folk we have killed.

I have no music sad enough, no soothing words to say
For all the gentle souls caught up in acts of war today;
And in the ruins, grieving lovers, shattered families -
No medals and no poppies for civilian casualties;
But the hollow voice of spokesmen regretting each mistake
While leaders blame the enemy and find no amends to make –
Leaders blame the enemy and find no amends to make.

It matters not who started it or what they think it's for,
For as the poets tell us there is no Just War just war.
For victims without number and suffering without name,
For killing love and innocence we all stand here in shame.
Where can we seek forgiveness what can we do but pray
That somehow all the children can find a better way?
That somehow all the children can find a better way.

© Allan Richardson 2014

My songs are generally aimed at giving pleasure and I had no music that reflected my thoughts on Remembrance 2014. While World War 1 was horrific enough in itself, it also paved the way for almost constant warfare somewhere in the world throughout the 20th and 21st centuries which has been devastating for anyone caught up in it. We all know it shouldn't really be like this but nobody seems able to do anything about it. That is what is behind this song which I sang in various places in November 2014, including on BBC Radio Kent's "Kent Folk" programme.

KEEP THE BLUES AWAY

You take a look in a favourite book,
Sweet music you can play,
These things you do to keep the Blues away.

Glass half empty, glass half full –
No matter what you say
A glass or two, to keep the Blues away.

Soul searching in the dead of night, hope you might not find
Blues hiding out of sight round the corners of your mind.

Up and out in the morning,
So hard at work and play,
So much to do to keep the Blues away.

Soul searching in the dead of night, hope you might not find
Blues hiding out of sight round the corners of your mind.

I look out in the morning,
It's a lovely day
Then I think of you and I can't keep the Blues away –
I think of you and I can't keep the Blues away.

© Allan Richardson 2014

This little song was meant to reflect that bitter-sweet aspect of blues music – the music may be about sadness, or driven by it, but it is also joyful. We sing to lose our sorrows, not to magnify them

THREE SEASONS

These three songs were written at different times but hang together as a small suite, each portraying images of a particular time of year.

1. Prelude in Ice / For the Spring

Fish are sleeping under the ice;
The insects are gone, wherever it is they go.
Dead Christmas trees await the recycling truck in the snow;
The North Wind cuts through your coat, sends you shivering so;
Cold comfort indoors by a log-effect fire's glow

Snowdrops through the mud come clean, branches dress themselves in green
Having stood so naked for so long.
Out of hiding slugs come sliding, toads cross roads to join the throng
And pretty small birds fill the air with song.
In the park bare-shouldered girls go by and catch the young men's eye,
Busy mowers mow and strimmers strim.
An Old Man lets his dog run free and glances up in time to see
A stately Lady coyly smile at him.

They bend their steps together and talk of the weather and everything
As hungry flies and bumble bees take wing,
Blossoms blow like scented snow and catkins gaily swing
And the dog sends courting pigeons scattering.
Children playing, glasses clinking music jangling,
And workmen stop to hear the church bells ring.
Then the Lady sheds her gloves and the Old Man starts to sing
And the dog says with a grin "It must be the Spring."
You smile in the sunshine and my heart can't help but sing
And the dog say with a grin "It must be the Spring".

2. Dog Daisy Days

A dog daisy meadow, and daydreamers look to the sky.
The azure is laced with holiday trails as they fly.
The insects have their day, and
The ice-cream van sounds far away.

Walking round the garden fete all on a summer's day,
Morris men go jingling and a band begins to play:
It's a family event, sideshows till the money's spent,
Cream teas in the tent, and everyone says "Jolly glad we went."

City-folk go paddling in the fountains to keep cool,
Shops are out of sun-screen and the kids are out of school.
A soldier and his bride linger by the waterside,
Where swallows dive and skim; he finds the words to make her smile at him.

Walking round the corner with a bottle and a card,
Then all sit sipping Pimm's until the chicken legs are charred;
And the smoke that makes you sneeze, blackbirds singing in the trees,
The draught around your knees and party music floating on the breeze....

Moths catch the moonbeams and dangerous dreams come to play,
The sound and the scent of a simmering night soon give way
To another shimmering day
Can a hosepipe ban be far away?

3. Already September

Already September, and the little country lane
Is free of combine harvesters again;
You ramble by the brambles, teasels, nettles standing tall,
A whiff of diesel settles around it all,
It seems you're all alone amid the early morning cool
But for mums in four-by-fours who're late for school.

Already October, and the little country lane
Teems with golden leaves that fall like rain.
Dancing to and fro you go and catch a leaf for luck,
Miss your footing, did not see the truck;
Just a little shaken from a quickly taken fall,
And so the leaf was lucky after all.

Already November, and the little country lane
Sparkles with the early frost again.
The whizz-bangs and the starshells fade, the poppies sadly strewn,
Carol singing will be starting soon.
And now the sky at teatime is much darker than before
And the calendar's days are numbered once more.

© Allan Richardson 2012

O CAROL (Let's sing a Door-hymn)

Send Auntie a card, it's that time of year,
Good people rejoice and be glad about that.
Let's pull our crackers and be of good cheer
With a bad joke, a trinket and a paper hat.
(chorus) Put up a tree let the flashing lights play

And carol, oh carol, oh carol away!

Now deck the halls with bright silver balls,
And wrap up your gifts while the kids are in bed.
Cash-tills are ringing, the glad tidings bringing
Of God's little boy that was born in a shed.

(chorus)

Believers crushed doubters, crusaders slew Muslims,
Protestants fought Catholics and are fighting them still,
And all for the baby that came with the message
To love one another in peace and goodwill.

(chorus)

It can't be much fun being born the messiah,
Birthday and Christmas all on the same day,
And who would prefer all that incense and myrrh,
When Santa has chocolate and toys on his sleigh.

(chorus)

Now more than ever the world needs his message –
Oh come all ye faithful, and ye who have doubts,
Make peace before him and let's sing a door-hymn
Then eat all our turkey and stuffing and sprouts.

(chorus)

Feast while ye may on this Christmas day
Till into a new year the calendar runs.
Who now glorify him will soon crucify him,
Where now are mince-pies there'll be just hot cross buns.

(chorus)

©Allan Richardson 2012

At age 4½ no-one had told me what "a door hymn" was but the Christmas card imagery suggested a group of singers with mufflers and lanterns, gathered in the snow and bathed in the golden light from a doorway. Now at last I have written a door hymn of my own. The tune resembles a traditional Victorian carol (a bit).