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Philosophy in a Different Key: My Philosophy in Song

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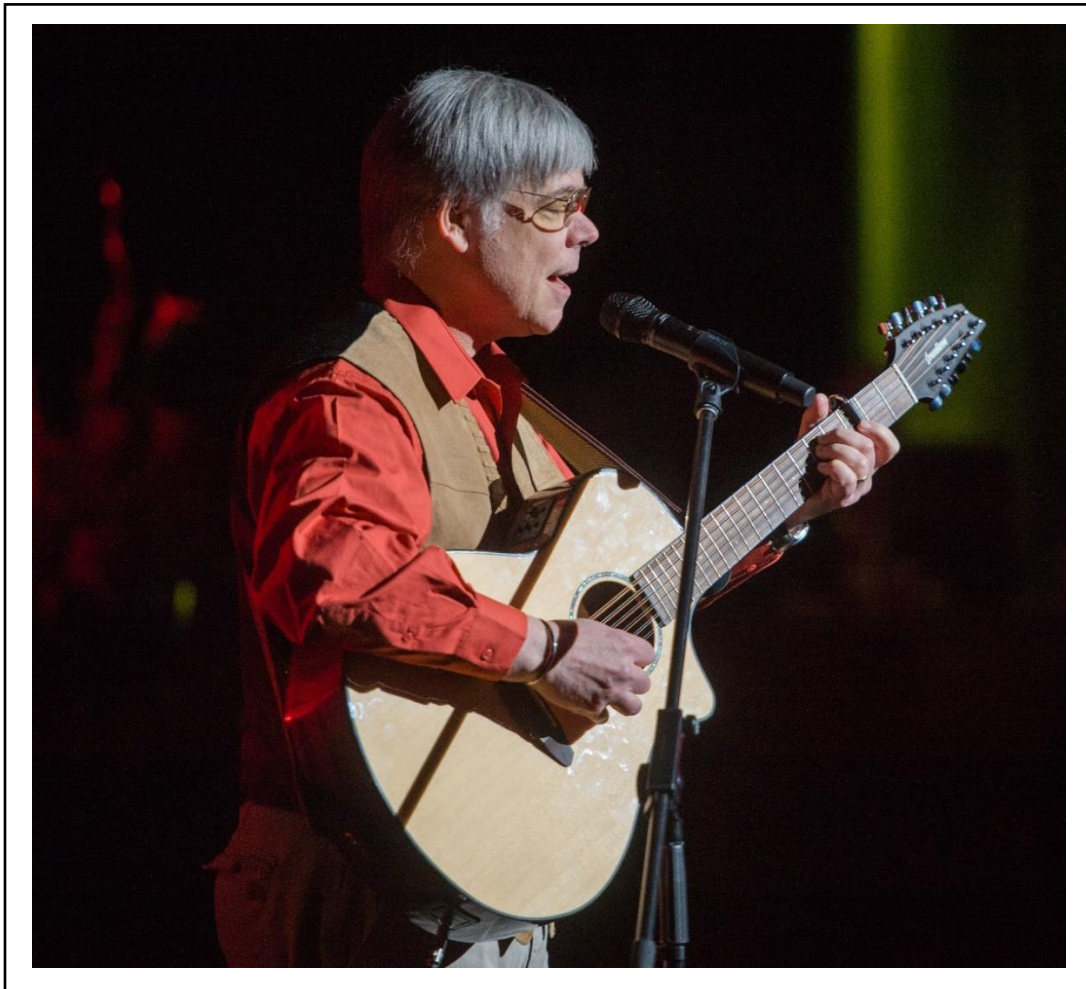
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Philosophy in a Different Key: My Philosophy in Song

Don Viney



Don Viney, January 26, 2017

Bicknell Center for the Arts, Spring Convocation

Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg, Kansas

Philosophy in a Different Key: My Philosophy in Song

Two of the blessings of my life are the joy I take in singing and the knowledge that there are people who take pleasure in listening to me sing. I began university as a music major but eventually switched to something easier: philosophy. I began teaching philosophy in graduate school in 1977. Since 1984 I have been a philosophy professor. I am occasionally asked whether my role as a philosopher has any bearing on my hobby as a singer-song writer. The answer is that much (though by no means all) of what I have composed expresses my philosophical convictions, beginning with the influences of my family on my life.

I was fortunate to be raised by parents who valued music. My mother, Wynona “Noni” Viney, was an expert pianist and a fine singer who cherished close harmonies. My father, Wayne Viney, also loves music and sings well. In their first years of marriage, they were hired by churches as a music director and pianist. Neither chose music as a career, but they taught me to think of music as integral to life and they nurtured the seeds of talent that they found in me. Our home was filled with music of many kinds—choral, instrumental, symphonic, operatic, gospel, folk, pop, and, of course, Broadway musicals. There is some truth in the remark of one of my colleagues that I grew up in a musical. In some fashion, I was “born to sing.”

I did not fully appreciate the power of music until a few years ago. My life was turned upside down by a traumatic event. One day, alone in the house with only my pets as company, I vented my anger and frustration by screaming at the top of my lungs. The poor animals were frightened and I damaged my voice so badly that I did not think that it would recover. A musician friend of mine counselled patience, saying my voice would heal. She was correct. There came a day when I sang with such joy as I had never known. From that day to the present, the singing of music is no longer, for me, a question of mere performance but of a highly individual union with the sounds, the emotions, and the thoughts that music can convey. I say “individual,” but I love *the wisdom of harmonies*. One cannot sing the “Hallelujah Chorus” by oneself. As Teilhard de Chardin was fond of saying in speaking of love, “Union differentiates.” Music is not the only way of achieving that sort of differentiating union, but I rejoice that it is open to me and that it is an opening for me to share with others.

I claim no great originality in philosophy and am generally content to be a mirror reflecting the light of others, or to use a richer metaphor more appropriate to this document, a singer who makes a certain rendering of the songs of others. My songs are my own, but I am often expressing what I have learned from others. The musician who plays another’s music adds his or her interpretation to the musical piece and I hope I have added something novel, interesting, and aesthetically pleasing to the work of those who most influenced me. One may detect, even in the title of this document, a debt to a previous philosopher, Susanne K. Langer, whose book *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) is rightly considered a classic.

From the time I started reading philosophy, I was drawn to what is known as “process-relational philosophy,” sometimes abbreviated as “process philosophy.” Process thought emphasizes the dynamic processes in nature and in human life, including the ways that relationships create novelty and often serve to refresh the zest for living. In addition, I agree with my former teacher, Donald Crosby, that *novelty* is as metaphysically foundational as *order*. Yet, with such freedom as novelty supports, there is risk, and hence, not everything necessarily happens for the best. But it can, and sometimes it does, and that must suffice for human flourishing. I *do not* believe that everything happens for a reason, but I *do* believe that anything that happens can become a reason or part of a reason for improving our lot.

Religious sensibilities are evident in the songs I compose. I hope, however, that no one can find dogmatism in my attitudes. I have long been attracted to Harry Emerson Fosdick’s idea of “adventurous religion” (the title of one of his books, published in 1946), and I endeavor to live in that spirit. Philosophy has been my chief aid in this pursuit, ever reminding me of what I do not know. The title of Alfred North Whitehead’s *Adventures of Ideas* (1933) neatly summarizes how I think of philosophy. One of the attractions of process-relational thinking is that God is conceived in dynamic terms. Charles Hartshorne, modifying a statement from Rabbi Abraham Heschel, called God “the most *and best* moved mover.” I am convinced that God, conceived in those terms, is the best way to conceive the divine *chesed* (loving kindness) so characteristic of biblical prophets.

I composed my first song in the early 1970s; however, all but one of the songs listed here were written after my fifty-fifth birthday in 2008—indeed, the vast majority of what I have composed was written since then. What follows are the lyrics to some of my songs. For each song, I’ve made comments that provide context, an explanation of the sources that I’ve used for inspiration, and what I was thinking in composing the piece. All but one of the recordings were made at Phil Ward’s Woodland Studios in Pittsburg, Kansas. “And When I Go” (pp. 37-38) was recorded at Cormac Moore’s studio in Dublin, Ireland. For that recording, Lee Gleeson took the lead vocal. On “Reason it Through” I was helped by Dr. Susan Marchant (piano), Kathryn Parke (soprano), Mary Jo Harper (alto), and William Vance (tenor). My fellow singers for “The Singer Never Sings in Vain” were Mary Jo Harper, Sang-Heui Lee, Jung-Hee Lee, and Joy Lee. I thank Thomas Viney, my youngest nephew, for the violin solo with which “Sun-Slanted Skies” opens. I thank a dear family friend and talented artist, Michelle Bakay (see page 11), for permission to use her renditions of Jules Lequyer (page 19), Charles Darwin and Teilhard de Chardin (page 23), and William James and Charles Hartshorne (page 30). Michelle’s drawings and paintings have often accompanied the works that my father, my brother, and I have written.

Don Viney
August 1, 2018

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The opening verses of this song are a tribute to Charles Viney (1836/43 – 1902), my great-great grandfather, who moved from Toronto (not Montreal) to the United States and served with the Union army during the Civil War, ferrying supplies up and down the Mississippi, before moving with his wife, Augusta (née Worther), to Wichita, Kansas. The song is, of course, also an expression of my love for some of the greatest aspects of American life, it's openness to immigrants and a reflective attitude about its checkered past. The first line is borrowed from Bruce Springsteen's "Immigrant Song."

AN AMERICAN STORY

What is this land of America, so many travel there?
I'm leaving Montreal, my dear, though I love that city fair.

I sailed the Mississippi up and down from Illinois
To ferry the supplies for the Union soldier boys
We moved out west after the war to prairies rich and grand
And we made our home in the heart of the great American land.

The night shines brightly overhead, the wind sings us a song,
We'll build a life in this new land and we'll raise a family strong.

America is a place they say with space enough for all,
It's less a place and more a dream, but you can hear her call:
"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses," cried she
"Send the wretched, the homeless, and the tempest-tossed to me."

From Emma Lazarus' "The New Colossus" at the Statue of Liberty in New York City.

No patriotic fog or mist must blind us to the cost
To those betrayed, displaced, enslaved, and countless lives were lost.
Cast light upon our darkness, let no history remand
The storied lives, who fought and died upon the American land.

The night shines brightly overhead, the wind sings us a song,
We'll build a life in this new land and we'll raise a family strong.

Now that we are older, our sons and daughters grown,
And they, with sons and daughters, and families of their own.
The fabric of the nation in a million woven strands,
There shines forth the promises of a great American land.

The night shines brightly overhead, the wind sings us a song,
We'll build a life in this new land and we'll raise a family strong.
We'll build a life in this new land and we'll raise our families strong.

Orpha's Song

Tune: Brendan Graham (Isle of Hope, Isle of Tears)

At seventeen she married.
 The century was new.
 Full of hope to build a life,
 to raise a family too.
 The two of them went westward
 to the Colorado hills
 to the mining town of Calcite,
 their dreams there to fulfill.

Say a prayer and face the test,
 And to heaven leave the rest.
 There's no room to be faint of heart.
 See your journey to the end.
 Leave behind what might have been.
 It's not too late to make another start.

In time she had two children
 and another on the way,
 Life, it's true, was rugged,
 but these were happy days,
 until the seasons turned around,
 not four years since she'd wed.
 Water from a poison well
 left her beloved dead.

Fifty-five years later
 to the ghost town she returned.
 She stood awhile remembering
 how here her heart had burned.
 She smiled, no feelings of regret,
 when all was said and done.
 This town was not the end for her,
 her life had just begun.

Orpha's children by Wayne Brown:

Ruth Muriel [Cocking] (1907-1982)
 Grace Wayne [Roe] (1909-2002)
 Dean Orville Brown (1910-1980)

"Orpha's Song" is a true story from the early life of my great grandmother, Orpha Adaline Buxton [née Sawhill] (1889-1978). She married Arthur Wayne Brown (1883-1910) in Wichita, Kansas in 1906. The two moved to Calcite in southern Colorado where Wayne clerked for the mines. They had three children, the second was the mother of my father, Wayne Viney. Wayne Brown and Orpha's younger sister, also named Grace (1891-1977), drank from a contaminated well. Grace survived but Wayne died in a Pueblo, Colorado hospital. Orpha did not go to the funeral because her third child was ill and he was not expected to live—although he did. Orpha returned to Wichita, married Theodore Buxton (1877-1949), and bore five more children. All of her children survived her. In 1965, while she visited family in Pueblo, conversation turned to her days in Calcite. The town was not on the road maps but, following the contours of the hills and of her memory, she guided them to her old homestead. Although she found the foundation of her house, nothing remained standing in the town except a single bread oven. I was twelve years old and I was there. The experience was one of the most memorable of my childhood. The refrain expresses her philosophy, and mine.

Orpha's children by Theodore Buxton:

Donald [Don] Walter Buxton (1915-2000)
 Theo Sue [Tjaden] (1916-2006)
 Bonnie Orpha [Ashworth] (1918-2011)
 Marjorie Lucille [Strickland] (1921-2009)
 James [Jim] Joseph Buxton (1924-1994)



**Orpha and Wayne Brown and their children, Ruth and Grace
Calcite Colorado, 1909**



**Wayne and Orpha Brown
unknown date**



Orpha (Brown) Buxton, Summer 1965

The Sun-Slanted Skies of November

The sun-slanted skies of November,
The leaves and the grass turned to brown.
And we, heading north on the highway,
Return to my parents' hometown.

The farmers, their families, remember,
At Grandma's they'd all gather 'round.
A blessing and heads bowing to pray,
And then pass the food all around.

Freshly baked goods set before us,
The stories, the kidding, the sounds,
An atmosphere smelling of heaven,
And none but a mock gentle frown.

A Wesleyan grace for a chorus
The giving of thanks did abound
Music and laughter, the leaven,
A sweet memory to have found.

The sun-slanted skies of November,
The leaves and the grass turned to brown.
And we, heading north on the highway,
Return to my parents' hometown.

Until I was thirteen, my family would spend the Thanksgiving holiday in Wichita, Kansas and have Thanksgiving meal at Grandma (Orpha) Buxton's house. It was about a three and a half hour drive north from where we lived in central Oklahoma. Mom and Dad were raised in Wichita and most of both of their families were in that area and in the little farming community of Kechi nearby. Thanks to Mom, there was always piano accompaniment to what we sang. Thanks to Grandma and many others, there was always plenty of food. Harsh words and squabbles were unknown, I've often thought that these gatherings were like a tangent, where heaven and earth touched.

Many of my attitudes, if not my actual philosophical views, are informed by the example of my mother, Noni Viney (1934-2009). A talented pianist and singer who spent her life teaching small children in the Head Start program, she invariably approached life with compassion and joy. Even on the day of her death, through her pain, she laughed. I wrote the following trilogy of songs in her memory.

The Music of Her Life

Laughter that would hide no guile, sparkling just like your smile.
 What we'd give to laugh with you like the way we used to do.
 Your fingers played across the keys, improvising with such ease.
 How we miss your gaiety, like the way it used to be,

We have our day in the sun. All too soon the day is done.
 Who we were and dreamed to be—fugitives of memory.
 You're no longer by our sides. Who you were still abides.
 On other voices, other tongues, the music of your life is sung.

Children smiling everywhere, choral voices fill the air.
 Trouble is a stranger here. Nothing more for you to fear.
 These our hopes, that you may find gentleness and peace of mind.
 In the measure that you loved, may you in turn feel loved.

Horizons Far From Sight

Stars are circling round about, the day as in the night,
 Counted and uncounted, unseen just as bright,
 Reminding us of horizons away and far from sight,
 Distant suns and galaxies of fire and of light.
 We hope not knowing if we're wrong or if we're right.
 We rise on small, frail wings, but boldly take to flight.

Beneath the layers of each life, hidden from our eyes,
 There's a hearth aglow with warmth when embers seem to die.
 As great the revolutions of the earth and sky,
 In the heart of matter something greater lies.
 We are the stuff of stars that came to question why,
 to strive to dream the dreams on which we can rely.

The planets breathe, the oceans teem, and the atoms leap.
 The universe, as though alive, never seems to sleep.
 What we have cherished is so very hard for us to keep.
 What we've sown is, at last, for others to reap.
 We learn to laugh, to love, and then we learn to weep.
 We feel the currents as we try to sound the deep.

This song sets the problem of death within a cosmic context, emphasizing bold flights of the imagination in the face of unanswered questions and in view of the staggering fecundity of nature. It expresses the faith that we are indeed children of this universe but not, as it were, abandoned by it like cosmic orphans.

A Sleeping StarTune: Variations on the theme from the film *Joe Versus the Volcano*

What will fit in the blink of an eye,
expanses of sky,
a sleeping star?
Searching with the breath of a sigh
when we say good-bye
for where you are.

Gentle the waves of a life lived well.
Happy the ebb and the flow.
Charmed by its rhythms, caught in its spell,
we feel the undertow.

Quietly, the evening draws nigh.
We're born, so we die,
a whisper, gone.
Joy, the seed, in tears that we cry
will grow by and by
and greet the dawn.

The opening lines of this song contrast the brevity of life with the richness of experience that characterizes every life, like my mother's, that is well-lived. Hers was a gentle spirit which charmed those who knew her, yet the tug of her personality, like an unseen "undertow" continues to exert its "spell." The image of a sleeping star may capture something of the sense that her "light" continues even in death. For the longest time, the tune of this song stayed with my mother, but she couldn't recall where she'd heard it. She would play it on the piano and ask others if they recognized it. One day, my brother brought the film "Joe Versus the Volcano" for us to watch. Mom was delighted to finally identify the source of her memory.

"Song of the Rockies" is a tribute to family. We moved from Oklahoma to Colorado in 1966. Almost everything that is most sane and reliable in my approach to life, I owe to Mom, Dad, and to "little" brother Mike, now a fine father, grandfather, teacher, and scientist.

Song of the Rockies

I'll sing a song of the Rockies out west,
the mountains where I used to roam.
I'll sing a song of a life deeply blessed;
I'll sing a song of my home.
 High in the hills, by night or by day,
 the vista would take your breath away.

No air so crisp, no water so clear,
the sunlight would dance on the stream.
If I tell the truth of a family so dear,
you'll say it sounds like a dream.
 Nevertheless, my yesterdays,
 glow like the dawn of today.

Shadows of the past, outlines of futures,
we live in the half-light between,
ever upon the verge of the dawn,
facing horizons unseen.

Don't get me wrong, I'd never go back.
I'd not raise the past from the dead.
That is because there is nothing I lack,
from those days to face days ahead.
 Present no more, it's real just the same
 the embers remain after the flame.

Shadows of the past, outlines of futures,
we live in the half-light between,
ever upon the verge of the dawn,
facing horizons unseen.

I'll sing a song of the Rockies out west,
the mountains where I used to roam.
I'll sing a song of a life deeply blessed;
I'll sing a song of my home.
I'll sing a song of my home.



Noni Viney, Christmas Day 1996



Wayne and Noni Viney, November 2003



Michelle Bakay and Noni Viney, 1995



With my Mom, Dad, and Brother, August 1980



Singing for one of my mother's Head Start classes; the little girl to my mother's left is my daughter Jenny, ca. 1984



Atop Longs Peak with my brother, Mike and my friend, Marc Smith, August 1977

In March 1952, a month after my mother and father were married and eleven months before I was born, my father composed a hymn titled “I’ll live with him.” My mother produced a musical score for the hymn, written for piano. My father says that she would often play the hymn in church services. In 2016, I recovered the musical score, which was in my mother’s music cabinet. It was clear to me—and my father confirmed this—that he (also Mom) had long ago abandoned the fundamentalist theology expressed in the lyrics. However, I considered the music of the hymn to be worth preserving. I wrote lyrics for the tune that reflect thoughts about my mother and I retitled the piece, “Her Graceful Ways.”

Her Graceful Ways

Tune: Wayne Viney

Lyrics: Don Viney

Sometimes I feel that she is here beside me,
Her gentle touch, her presence soft and kind.
She taught me love, a love that knows no boundaries,
The secret of the beauty of her mind.

If I could tell her how she lives within me still
A flame so warm, a light that never dies,
Perhaps she knows, and I yet hope that I will
See her again and meet her smiling eyes.

Her graceful ways affected all around her,
Like music scored for every voice to sing.
Never a word designed to hurt or injure,
Only her laughter and its joyful ring.

If I could tell her how she lives within me still
A flame so warm, a light that never dies
Perhaps she knows, and I yet hope that I will
See her again and meet her smiling eyes.
See her again and meet her smiling eyes.

Far Away From Stephen's Green

She left home at the age of nineteen
bound for a country she'd never seen.
Far away from familiar faces
Far away from Stephen's Green.
Was it duty to her father's business
or the wander lust of youth?
Did she know or did it matter?
She might not know, to tell the truth.

But the future is unknown.

Where to turn, what to do?

A father's plans can break in two.

The choices always seem too few.

And now his daughter fully grown

Who am I? Who are you?

considered what she had to do.

Can we forgive each other too?

Back home her mother, bedridden then,
sent her children to unite again,
They came to live with her eldest daughter
and to follow where she'd been.
Looking back, it seems unlikely
this story would have a happy end.
Yet, scattered across three countries
They're still as close as they were then.

With the future comes a past.

What becomes of what we've made?

But does the past a future make?

Of what we've made and left unmade?

Even when the die is cast,

When we from memory fade

There are other roads to take.

who we have been will yet remain.

She left home at the age of nineteen
bound for a country she'd never seen.
Far away from familiar faces
Far away from Stephen's Green.

*I have learned much from my wife,
Maeve Cummings, and from her
family, especially her mother,
Dolores "Abi" Lyons (1933-2018).
This song tells Maeve's story, the
tale of a young girl from Dublin who
makes her way in the world, from
Ireland, to Germany, and later, the
United States of America. The words
in boldface are sung as counterpoint.
Maeve has extended my family, as
well as my identity, far beyond the
borders of America.*

*Many songs in this document would
not have existed had Maeve and I not
found each other. After a painful
separation from my former wife, I
literally lost my voice and any
thought of writing music of my own
was far from my mind. Maeve
changed all of that, and I am happy
to say that my mother, and my
daughter, Jennifer Smith, were
the first to discern the grand
possibilities in the new relationship.
When I regained the ability to sing, I
had new songs to sing.*

*A musical inspiration of this piece is
Cat Stevens' "Father and Son" from
his 1970 album Tea for the
Tillerman, with its haunting
contrapuntal conversation between
father and son.*



**Maeve Cummings and her mother,
Dolores “Abi” Lyons, Dallgow, Germany,
summer 2017**



**Don Viney and Maeve Cummings,
Germany, 2008**

This song is a light-hearted treatment of various philosophers and their ideas. It would require a paragraph or more for each stanza to explain the ideas expressed here. Suffice it to say, that for the most part, these are persons and concepts I teach to lure students into the world of philosophical questions. The final stanza points out that one of the necessary tools of the trade of philosophy is formal logic, a class I teach on a regular basis.

**It takes a thought to laugh,
It takes a brain to cry**

To the tune of Bob Dylan's "It takes a lot to laugh,
it takes a train to cry"

I run a classroom, babe,
I teach philosophy.
I raise a lot more questions
than there can answers be.
If your mind starts a-buzzin'
like a hive of bees
just try readin' Plato
and follow Socrates.

Pure reason self-destructs
in Kant's antinomies.
But there's still God and freedom
and immortality.
You can always depend
on practicalities
and transcendental conditions
of sensibility.

There's a lot to be said
for Aristotle's thought.
At least that's what the sainted
Thomas Aquinas taught.
Reason neatly tied
with faith in a knot
If it don't unravel,
you'll know for sure what's what.

Are your decisions free babe
or fated by the past?
Is there a contradiction
that you just can't get passed?
Don't ya sweat it babe,
it doesn't have to last,
Nietzsche's will-to-power
is a dynamite blast.

There's a brain in a vat somewhere,
you wonder if it's you.
Someone's feedin' your mind, babe,
with what you think is true.
If you've got no body,
there's nothing you can do,
just remember Descartes,
and the *cogito* too.

If you're puzzled by
the language games we play
Wittgenstein can help
with what he has to say.
You're a fly in a bottle
tryin' to find your way,
He'll show you the exit,
or you'll be there all day.

Your dogmatic slumber,
is disturbed by Hume.
All your doubts and questions
are easily exhumed.
Every cause is a fiction,
certainties entombed,
Even science is a casualty,
religion also doomed.

What flavor ya gonna pick,
what theory will you choose?
Don't sit out the game babe,
you've got nothing to lose.
Where to begin,
there's a million clues.
But logic's a must babe,
you've got to pay your dues



Don Viney, Jim Boyd, Bernard Rollin, and Donald Crosby, June 18, 2016, Fort Collins, Colorado. Boyd, Rollin, and Crosby were three of the professors at Colorado State University who had the greatest influence on me.



Don Viney, Mary Jo Harper, Susan Marchant, Kathryn Parke, and William “Bill” Vance at Phil Ward’s Woodland Studios, Pittsburg, Kansas on December 3, 2014 to record “Reason it Through.”

Faith and trust are rightly the themes of many hymns, but it seems to me that reason too often takes a back seat where spirituality is concerned, as though faith alone should be the guide of life and theology. With so many philosophies, religions, faiths, creeds, and theologies on offer, one must also “reason it through.” This is the earliest song in this collection, written in 1996.

Reason it Through

To the tune of Daniel Towner’s “Trust and Obey”

You should think for yourself and not let someone else
think for you or tell you what’s true.
Don’t you be a fool, let your dignity rule.
All you need is to reason it through.

Refrain: Reason it through
and you know if you do,
you will gain self respect,
just to reason it through.

When authorities reign and your mind is in chains
and you never question what they do.
There is one remedy for your soul’s malady,
use logic and reason it through.

Your faith you can bet that God gets upset
with everyone Gentile and Jew,
asking to be absolved with their problems unsolved
just because they’d not reason it through.

When religious folk say that you should obey
and sit without questions in pews,
just remember it’s odd that a brain given by God
would be told not to reason it through.

What sets you above the sheep and the dove
is the convoluted brain given you.
You should make use of it, you should not be a twit;
use logic and reason it through.

Don’t be given to think that your faith is the link
that is weakest in reasoning you do.
No god of the gaps will save the collapse
of dogmas you won’t reason through.

Additional verses:

The wisdom you reach,
as philosophers teach
is reason has its limits too.
But there’s no substitute
for belief that the truth
is best served when reasoning
it through.

There is no guarantee
that we will agree
in all of the reasoning we do.
But there is no excuse
for not making use
of logic and reasoning
it through.

If you want to be wise
just remember your size
of the universe compared to you.
The endless expanse
of this cosmic dance
will continue when
your days are through.

Jules Lequyer or Lequier (1814-1862) drowned in the bay of St.-Brieuc in northwestern France. His was a troubled spirit, tormented by philosophical thoughts on freedom and by his love for Anne Deszille, who twice refused his hand in marriage. The last page that he wrote expresses in allegory some of his inner struggles. Within a lonely pine whipped by the wind from the sea [Lequyer himself] there seeps a resin that glows phosphorescent [his philosophical and literary work]. The substance must be properly molded to assume its true shape [Lequyer dreams of publishing his work]. A drop of the resin falls to the ground revealing a drop of blood on the tree, a ferocious wound [perhaps Lequyer's unrequited love, associated in his mind with the failure of his work]. If only the branch can extend itself, the drop of blood will not fall and the resin will illuminate the branch and the tree. Lequyer concludes the allegory with these words: "It is necessary to tell the tree to once more lift its . . ."

The quatrains of the poem draw on the imagery Lequyer expressed in his "last page." The two couplets of the poem are references to Lequyer's own life and the way he saw it. He confused his dreams of philosophical glory with his love of Deszille. In the cold of February 1862, he swam into the bay of St.-Brieuc, swam to the limits of his strength, and did not return alive. Much debate surrounded his death, some calling it suicide, others calling it a cry of desperation to God to preserve his dreams of glory by saving him. Based on an account of his final days, it seems clear that the poor soul was having a mental breakdown that mixed visions and religious exaltation. I performed this song at the St.-Brieuc Municipal Library on October 13, 2012 to close a conference on Lequyer—Les Chemins de la liberté.

The Last Page of Jules Lequyer

Along the coast of Breton France
winter blows in from the bay.
A lonely pine, its branches outstretched
who can its anguish allay?

Swimming, this bold traveler braves,
freedom's abyss and the waves.

Its trunk is gnarled; its top is bowed,
but resin within it still flows.
If it can be gathered and molded, it will
shine with an unequaled glow.

Love unrequited, a desperate cry:
remnants of a glory denied.

Glinting, some sap falls to the earth—
blood from the tree—like a tear.
Tell it to reach its branch for the sky
though storm clouds are gathering near.

*Note: Lequyer wrote to Anne Deszille:
"Bold traveler in the worlds of thought.
I have explored more than one route, I
have sounded more than one abyss."*

*Note: Lequyer's last words: "Adieu
Nanine." [his name for Anne]*



Only known likeness of Jules Lequyer, drawn by his friend Mathurin Le Gal le Salle



Don Viney and Goulven Le Brech next to Lequyer's grave, August 2009



Jules Lequyer, based on the grave monument, by Michelle Bakay



Don Viney playing “La dernière page” at the École Normale Supérieure, September 30, 2014, and playing for French school children.

I translated the original version of “The Last Page of Jules Lequyer” into French—effectively writing a new poem. Myriam Krepps and Goulven Le Brech helped me to avoid infelicities and grammatical mistakes. As in the original, the quatrains are identical to or closely parallel Lequyer’s own words. For example, he wrote « Je vois un pin solitaire. » Also, he said of the pine, « Sa tête est penchée, son tronc est rugueux, mais sous le tronc coule une résine rare, précieuse, qui tombe à terre et qu’il laisse perdre. Sa résine jette une lueur phosphorescente, mêlée à une fumée blanchâtre. » He speaks of the resin: « Elle jettera des lueurs vives, inégales . . . » I have here provided a translation to show its close relation to the English original. In recording the song, I used two guitars to play two lines—one descending and one ascending—to express the contrast between the despair and the hope at the basis of Lequyer’s tragic death.

La dernière page de Jules Lequyer

Le long de la côte bretonne du nord
Je vois un pin solitaire—
ses branches, ses aiguilles, agitées au vent,
l’hiver souffle de la mer.

Along the north coast of Brittany
I see a solitary pine—
its branches, its needles, whipped by the wind
winter blows in from the sea.

Sondant l’abîme de la liberté,
le nageur vers les vagues s’est jeté.

Sounding the abyss of freedom,
the swimmer throws himself to the waves.

La tête penchée, le tronc rugueux,
toujours une résine rare coule.
Elle jettera des lueurs inégales
si on la préserve et la moule.

Bowed head, gnarled trunk,
a rare resin flows.
It will cast an unequalled glow
if it can be preserved and moulded.

Amour sans retour, cri désespéré,
vestige d’une gloire refusée.

Unrequited love, desperate cry,
remnant of a glory denied.

La sève lumineuse tombe sur la terre:
Larmes des yeux qui se baissent.
Dites à l’arbre d’étendre sa branche
bien que les orages apparaissent.

The luminous sap falls to the earth:
Tears from downcast eyes.
Tell the tree to extend its branch
‘though the storms are appearing.

I performed “La Dernière Page de Jules Lequyer” on September 30, 2014 at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. The performance (and the paper I presented) was part of an international gathering of Lequyer scholars to commemorate the two-hundred year anniversary of the philosopher’s birth. The conference, organized by Goulven Le Brech and Frédéric Worms, was titled Jules Lequier: une philosophie de la liberté. The papers from the conference are published in a book by the same title issued by Les Perséides in 2016.

On Teilhard and “Teilhard’s Fire”

Few life stories can match that of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) for drama, passion, and intellectual ferment. The piety of his Catholic upbringing along with an early interest in geology set him on a collision course with the Church of his time but also presented an opportunity for creative transformation within the religious community as a whole. A Jesuit priest, a decorated veteran of World War I, and a distinguished scientist, Teilhard lived through some of the great crises of the twentieth century. Best known during his life as a member of the team that discovered Peking Man and as the priest who embraced evolution, he was ever restless to convey his vision of cosmogenesis, the creative unfolding of the universe. For Teilhard, the physical universe, permeated to its most elementary parts by “the within” of experience, crossed the threshold of thought in human evolution and is destined to converge on a supremely personal “Omega Point.” Omega, of which Teilhard sometimes whispered, is God considered as the lure to unification with others and with creation itself in what Teilhard called “the divine milieu”—a present reality and a future promise.

Teilhard’s religious superiors never permitted him to publish anything but strictly scientific articles, so he shared his vision through “clandestins”—as they were called—that he distributed in mimeographed form. Only after his death were these published, thanks to the efforts of Jeanne Mortier who volunteered her services as Teilhard’s secretary. Published in thirteen volumes between 1955 and 1976, the “clandestins” represent about a third of his oeuvres—the other two thirds being his extensive correspondence and his collected scientific articles.

Teilhard’s posthumously published work created a sensation in scientific, religious, and philosophical circles. As they were being published, the spirit of *aggiornamento* gripped the Church and Vatican II was in session. While Teilhard remained a theological outsider, the Church softened its opposition to evolutionary thinking; forty-six years after Teilhard’s death Pope John Paul II used Teilhardian language to declare evolution to be more than a hypothesis, but a theory confirmed by all of the deliverances of science. Many within the Church and outside of it took inspiration from the Teilhardian vision of a cosmos in the making. The biologist and anthropologist, David Sloan Wilson maintains that Teilhard was, in some respects, ahead of his time, both in terms of his science and his spirituality; Wilson says, “Let his scientific flame burn brightly again!” (Wilson, *The Neighborhood Project*, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011, p. 120).

Teilhard’s works secured his reputation as a world-class thinker and visionary. To be sure, from the beginning, some religious writers as well as a couple of well-known scientists questioned the value of his thought. Teilhard anticipated that he would be criticized as offering, on the one hand, something less than religious orthodoxy (or even something heretical) and, on the other hand, something more than science (or even something opposed to it). Teilhard advocated, above all, a way of *seeing* the world, a new perspective that invites one to transcend disciplinary boundaries by considering humanity not as an anomalous branch on an evolutionary

bush but as the shoot of an evolutionary tree through which is most visible the inner workings of the cosmos, divinely transformed at its heart. Darwin left his own religious thinking in what he described as a “muddle,” unable to completely agree with either theism or atheism. For his part, Teilhard sought to give evolution its God.

In 1927, Teilhard wrote to his friend Ida Treat that he wished he could translate his vision into music. My aim is not so audacious, although I hope that something of Teilhard survives in my composition beyond the words themselves.

The images of the lyrics are drawn, more or less directly, from Teilhard's own words. He wrote, “The day will come when, after mastering the ether, the winds, gravitation, we will capture for God the energies of love.—And then, for a second time in the history of the world, Man will have discovered Fire.” In the French verse, I've adapted Teilhard's language: « Quelque jour, après l'éther, les vents, les marées, la gravitation, nous capterons, pour Dieu, les énergies de l'amour.—Et alors, une deuxième fois dans l'histoire du Monde, l'Homme aura trouvé le Feu ». Teilhard de Chardin, « L'Evolution de la Chasteté, » (1934), Les Directions de l'Avenir (Paris : Éditions de Seuil, 1973), p. 92.

The phrase “l'union différencie” is drawn directly from Teilhard. For Teilhard, true love unites in such a way as to augment rather than to diminish the personalities of those caught in its Fire. He writes, “In whatever domain . . . Union differentiates.” Teilhard de Chardin, The Human Phenomenon, translated by Sarah Appleton-Weber (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), p. 186.

Teilhard's Fire

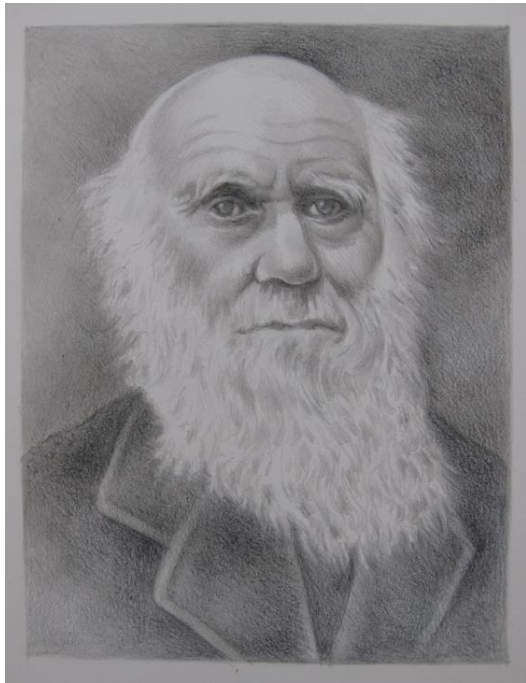
Come the day, when mastering
The winds, the tides, and space,
Gravity itself within our power.
We will tap, release, for God,
Love's energies entire,
Such, our hope
 and our most beautiful hour.
And then, for a second time,
In the history of the world,
We'll have once again
Discovered fire.

As sun is scattered in the rain
Just so is love divine:
No two droplets quite the same
Yet in union shine.

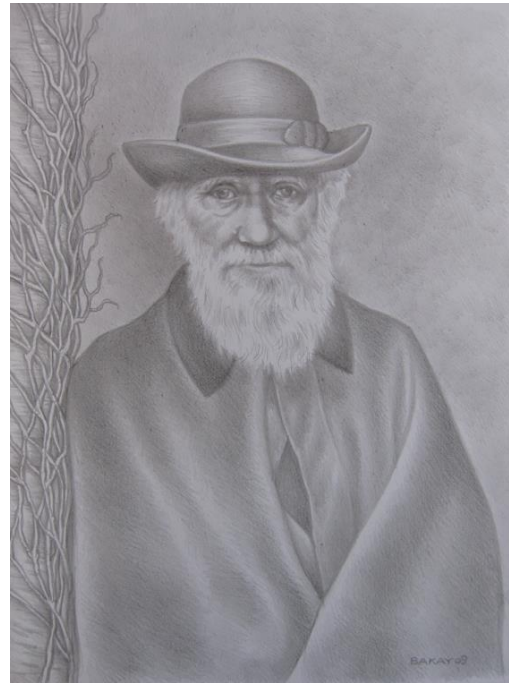
Quelque jour, après l'espace,
Les vents et les marées,
Et même la gravitation,
Nous capterons, pour Dieu,
Les énergies de l'amour,
C'est l'étoile de nos espérances.
Et alors, une deuxième fois
Dans l'histoire du Monde,
Nous aurons encore trouvé le Feu.

L'amour divin aura grandi
En nous, et par lequel
L'union différencie—
Une règle universelle.

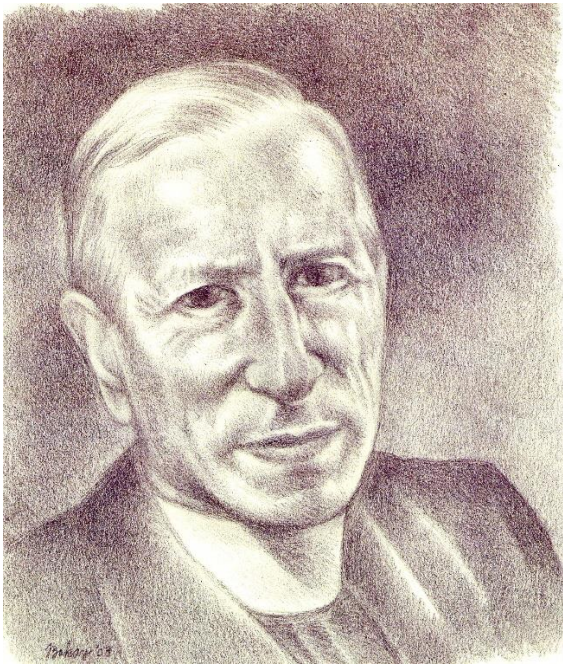
And then for a second time,
In the history of the world,
We'll have once again
discovered fire.



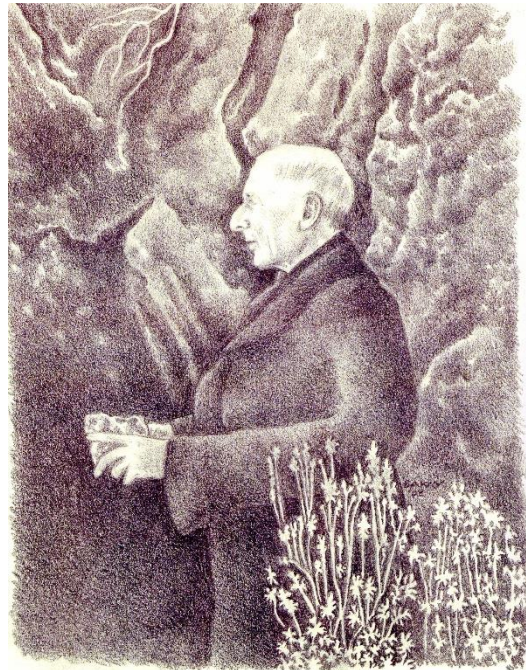
Charles Darwin, by Michelle Bakay



Charles Darwin, by Michelle Bakay



Teilhard de Chardin, by Michelle Bakay



Teilhard de Chardin, by Michelle Bakay

The following two songs treat of nothing, or rather, the subject of nothing. A famous philosophical question is “Why is there something rather than nothing?” I maintain that the question should be answered: “Because something must be, for the idea of absolute nonbeing is the idea of, literally, nothing.

Nothing

To the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”

Nothing is,
As nothing was,
And as nothing that will be.

If nothing is,
Then what it does,
Is of no concern to me.

Nothing’s not
And that’s because,
There is nothing it could be.

Donut Song

I went into the donut shop and ate a donut whole,
Then I began to wonder, did I eat the donut’s hole?
‘Cause if-n you don’t eat it, where in heaven does it go?
Does the donut, *ipso facto*, include the donut’s hole?

The hole that’s in the center is nothin’ don’t ya know
So you’re really eatin’ nothin’ if ya eat the donut’s hole.
It’s a puzzle for consumption, how nothin’ tastes so good,
As somethin’ that has nothin’ in the center as it should.

The dimensions of the food are crafted ever so
—a torus self-enclosed to make a little tube of dough—
giving the appearance in the middle of a hole,
yet the hole is not a part of the donut as a whole.

The hole that’s in the center is nothin’ don’t ya know
So you’re really eatin’ nothin’ if ya eat the donut’s hole.
It’s a puzzle for consumption, how nothin’ tastes so good,
As somethin’ that has nothin’ in the center as it should.

There’s a question rather deep, concerning parts and wholes:
Are the parts just equal to or are they lesser than the whole?
But a donut hole is not a part of the pastry as a whole
Speaking merelogically, that’s not the *status quo*.

The hole that’s in the center is nothin’ don’t ya know
So you’re really eatin’ nothin’ if ya eat the donut’s hole.
It’s a puzzle for consumption, how nothin’ tastes so good,
As somethin’ that has nothin’ in the center as it should.

I always appreciated the fact that Merl Salesbury would supply the Methodist Church I attend with donuts from his donut shop every Sunday morning—and I let him know it, often. Merl has passed on and I now frequent Daylight Donuts. I continue the spirit of Merl’s work by supplying donuts to my colleagues at work. The ontological question of holes—not unrelated to the question of nonbeing—provides the basis of this playful meditation on donuts, parts and wholes, and holes.

Gun Philosophy

When I was a boy, I had toys,
And some of them were guns.
I'd shoot only bad guys
For the bad things they had done,
For the bad things they had done.

I never shot Aunt Ginny,
My cousins or Uncle Joe,
I never inadvertently,
Shot myself you know.
I never shot my mother,
Or my baby brother Mike,
I never, even accidentally,
Shot someone I liked.

Could I kill another, even my brother?
A thought that weighs a ton.
Be the Cain to his Abel,
When all is said and done,
Of the human race I'm one.

Now I know there is crime, all the time,
And I know what's been done.
Heros, victims, villains,
And many had their guns.
And many had their guns.
I recall a pastor
In Denver, killed his wife.
A young man shot in Texas,
Breakin' up a fight.
If there's a silver bullet
I kinda doubt that it will come
From forging lots of weapons
Or the barrel of a gun.

Could I kill another, etc.

Now that I'm a man, I have plans
But none includes a gun.
Soldiers and police have
My respect but I'm not one.
I don't even shoot for fun.

I'll never shoot my friends
Nor the people I don't like.
I'll never shoot at shadows,
That move about at night.
I'll never shoot my father,
Or the woman who's my wife.
In fact I'll never accidentally
Shoot someone I like.

When I was a boy, I had toys,
And some of them were guns.
I'd shoot only bad guys,
For the bad things they had done,
For the bad things they had done.

The person shot in Denver (actually, in Westminster) was Rev. Regina Falletti Kobak (1950-1991), my former student and a friend. Her estranged husband—himself a minister—gunned her down in the church parking lot after a Bible study class. The young man shot in Texas was Tyler Viney (1977-2001), son of my father's half-brother, Walt Viney and the grandson of Maxine Viney (1912-2001) who lived to hear of Tyler's murder. I do not advocate the abolition of firearms, but there are those who fear that liberals like me want to take their guns away. I'd prefer, if possible, to take away their love of guns. The NRA, feeding their paranoia, has opposed every reasonable bit of legislation that would limit the sort of guns that citizens can own and the ammunition they can use. There is no undoing the carnage enabled by the NRA's intransience. I dare say that I will not live to see the day when so many Americans have less love for their "right to bear arms" than they do for the countless victims and victim's families that could have been spared the misery of gun violence.

Because I consider some values not to be determined by our preferences, but to inhere in the very nature of the universe, I may suffer from what Jean-Paul Sartre called “the spirit of seriousness.” I cannot, however, be rightly accused of forgetting that we are creatures with feet of clay, and that this has its humorous aspects. The following song was inspired by watching my grandson, Walter Lee Smith, successfully negotiate a new potty seat. It called to mind an experience from my childhood—related in the third quatrain—when my mother and aunt rescued me when I got stuck. The final quatrain is what justifies including this song as an expression of philosophy. For Aristotle, we are essentially rational animals; but we best remember how occasionally incongruent the genus (animal) and the species (rational) can be.

Potty Seat Song

I wish I had a potty seat—'cause I don't have one yet—
so I could sit above the bowl, and not get my bottom wet.
The seat should have a little shield—I shan't pee as I please—
and a small cake of deodorant in case I cut the cheese.

The sound effects are not polite, so I will pass them by,
but you can just imagine them; it's easy if you try.
A trumpet blast, staccato style, a very squeaky flute—
Wind instruments of varied kinds or anything that toots.

Rooty-toot-toot and fuity-toot-toot and too-rah-loorah-loo
if I am on my potty seat my aim is always true.

Once I sat upon the pot, there to my business do,
but I was just not big enough and so I fell right through.
It causes me to shutter and, so embarrassed, blush,
to think of what would happen if the toilet were to flush.

I doubt that I'd be scarred for life should my training go awry.
No emotional constipation would develop by and by;
but it couldn't hurt to have a special seat to potty through
when nature calls and I must make a visit to the loo.

Rooty-toot-toot and fruity-toot-toot and too-rah-loorah-loo
if I am on my potty seat my aim is always true.

Humans are the only beasts who train their young ones thus.
What other creature that we know raises such a fuss?
So consider my request, a humble plea to be well-placed,
I'll sit upon a porcelain throne and join the human race.

Rooty-toot-toot and fruity-toot-toot and too-rah-loorah-loo
if I am on my potty seat my aim is always true.

A stranger to Pittsburg, Kansas in 2016 might have supposed that it was one of the most religiously faithful cities in the country judging by all of the yards with “God Bless America” signs. This song tells the story of a controversy that began when a large “God Bless America” sign on the Post Office was removed because it violated a federal law against posting religious messages on federal buildings. Jake’s Fireworks provided, free of charge, “God Bless America” yard signs. I confess I found the whole affair humorous.

On the serious side, I distrust the marriage of patriotism with religion implied in these signs. Patriotism in this form is idolatry. The God in whom I believe stands above national identity. It is fine to ask God to bless the country, but God’s blessings are not what allowed this country to avoid the mischief of clergy wielding political power. It was, rather, the brilliance of the country’s founders who found a way around sectarianism by, among other things, adopting the First Amendment to the Constitution. Thus, the somewhat ironic title of my song.

God Bless the First Amendment

There’s a controversy brewin’ in a southeast Kansas town.
A sign on the U.S. Postal Office had to be taken down.
Some veterans had put it there some fifteen years ago,
but someone finally noticed it and so it had to go.

“God Bless America” in bright red, white, and blue.
Provide whatever concept of God you think is true.
Does he love it when you wave the flag, Old Glory to unveil?
Invoke the Glory of the Lord, post letters to the mail.

But now there is a backlash, and patriotism swells:
who dare question Americans’ right to claim God for themselves?
So “God Bless America” now sprouts in many yards,
provided by Jake’s Fireworks on two by three foot cards.

I suspect it is a statement of what some folks suppose,
that God’s also a patriot and we’re the ones he chose.
But I can’t help but wonderin’ how someone claims to know
that God is really on their side more than their friends and foes.

*This is an additional
verse that is not part
of the original
recording.*

Can a skeptic be a patriot, non-Christians, Muslims, Jews?
Was the Bill of Rights extracted from the Holy Bible too?
The founders just could not agree on a creed for all to say.
We’ve had freedom of religion from their time to this day.

“God Bless the First Amendment,” is a sign *I’d* like to see.
What better way to celebrate with a smile that we’re free?
Free to be religious or to non-religious be,
“God Bless the First Amendment” a sight *I’d* like to see. Amen.

The Captain of the Cosmos

The Captain of the Cosmos is
Our good Captain too.
In all of cosmic space and time
We're His beloved few.

Our book is the best
That has ever been writ
Though some don't believe
They are so full of it.

He laid down the law for us
Our duty to obey
Clearly there is nothing more
For us to say.

His middle name is Mercy
He'd never raise a stink.
Provided you submit
And agree with what we think.

He's the greatest of Captains
The world has ever seen.
And if you don't believe it,
We'll blow you all to smithereens.

The Captain of the Cosmos is
So peaceful we can tell.
His followers get Paradise,
The rest forever burn in . . . well.

To the tune of the Kingston Trio's "Merry Minuet"

Perhaps the message of this song is clear enough: Religions based on fear, intimidation, and the threat of violence are parochial expressions of the all-to-human glorification of brute force. They may try to disguise their theology with talk of a just and merciful God, but they are little more than theological versions of "might makes right."

Alfred North Whitehead understood the problem better than most. He wrote, "The worship of glory arising from power is not only dangerous: it arises from a barbaric conception of God. I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the bones of those slaughtered because of men intoxicated by its attraction. This view of the universe, in the guise of an Eastern empire ruled by a glorious tyrant, may have served its purpose. In its historical setting, it marks a religious ascent. [Psalm 24] gives us its noblest expression. The other side comes out in the psalms expressing hate, psalms now generally withdrawn from public worship. The glorification of power has broken more hearts than it has healed." Whitehead, Religion in the Making (New York: Macmillan, 1926), p. 55.

The Raft of the Little I Know
(for Wayne Viney)

Well, I'm thinkin' about the springtime,
In the midst of a wintertime snow.
And I'm pinin' for the longer days,
When the gentle breezes blow.
And I'm longin' for the sunshine,
For to bask in its yellow glow.
I'm floatin' on a sea of ignorance
On the raft of the little I know.

Well, it's a cold and dark December
But I'm thinkin' 'bout the month of May.
For every mean, unkind word or deed
There's a price that someone pays.
We make ourselves in part
By what we do and think and say.
We never every really merely follow a path,
We must also make our way.

We'll I'm drinkin' in the universe
And the beauty in each part.
And I'm dreamin' about the treasures
That are deep in the human heart,
Deep in the human heart.

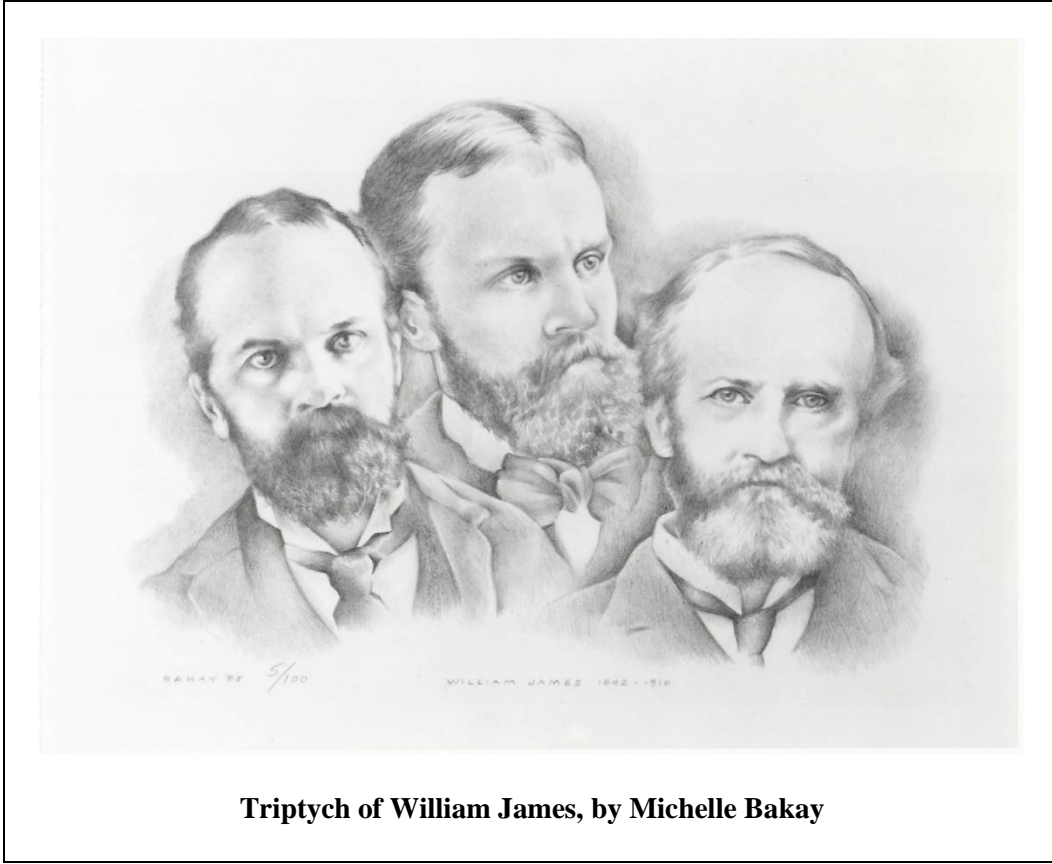
I'm thinkin' about the peaceful days
Midst the sounds of the cries of war.
But I wonder how many are thinkin' about
What's really worth fightin' for.
Must we repeat the same mistakes
Today and forevermore?
Not all for good that may be done
Has ever been done before.

Well, I'm thinkin' about the sunshine
With the dark clouds overhead.
And I'm wonderin' if great power
Can to great love be wed.
Whatever storms befall us,
Where some great fool has led,
May we brave the winds, the blasts of air,
And say what must be said.

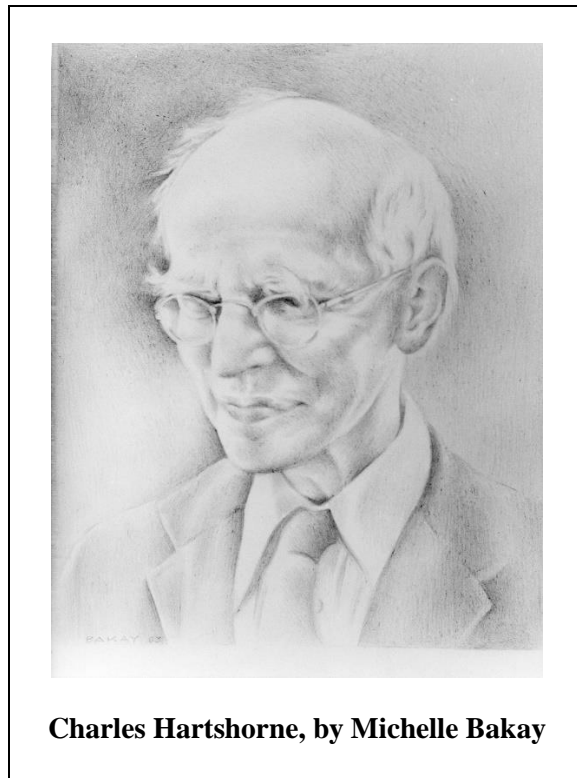
Well, I'm drinkin' in the universe
And the beauty of each part.
And I'm dreamin' about the treasures
That are deep in the human heart,
Deep in the human heart.

Well, I'm thinkin' about the springtime,
In the midst of a wintertime snow.
And I'm pinin' for the longer days,
When the gentle breezes blow.
And I'm longin' for the sunshine,
For to bask in its yellow glow.
I'm floatin' on a sea of ignorance
On the raft of the little I know.

William James (1842-1910) believed that the universe is not completely finished but is ever in the making, and we, as parts of that universe, are part-makers of it. He added, however, that our knowledge is a drop, our ignorance a sea. I modified that image for this song. Jamesian ideas are also expressed by saying that we are part-makers of our own characters and that the paths we follow are partly our own doing. But we make something in others as well, and not always for the good: "someone pays" for our misdeeds. For James, values are ideals that we make actual by our decisions. He was against all demagoguery (alluded to here as the "great fool"). The power of great leaders is not in the force they wield but in the virtue they inspire. James sought a "moral equivalent of war" that engenders courage and loyalty, minus the carnage. He was no fatalist, but a meliorist. The future is not a field of possibility exhausted by past achievements. "Not all for good that may be done . . ." I dedicated this song to my father—a first rate James scholar—who was living the lessons of James's philosophy before he found them articulated there.



Triptych of William James, by Michelle Bakay



Charles Hartshorne, by Michelle Bakay

The themes running through the following five songs will surprise no one who knows that I adopt a version of what is called process-relational theism, much informed by Jules Lequyer, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, and Charles Hartshorne. What is known as process-relational philosophy emphasizes the dynamic and interrelated nature of the elements of reality, including God and God's relation to the world.

A New Rubayyat

And who can then, I ask, rejoice?
And who pray then can grieve?
Who never made the smallest choice
Save by the Maker's leave?

Sorry, I think, would be our lot
A play rigged in advance.
The entire story and the plot
And nothing left to chance.

What'er small thing do we create
The Maker has not done?
What hand do we have in our fate
The Maker's left undone?

What game of human genius this:
A power unsurpassed?
Not one surprise and nothing missed,
The future like the past.

The divine is no unfeeling stone,
No cries or tears can touch.
Whenever we feel we're alone,
There's one who feels as much.

What tiny freedoms we possess
How little they may be
Are really nothing more nor less
Than shares of deity.

The Rubayyat was composed by the Persian mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher, Omar Khayyam (1048-1131). His poem became famous in the West because of Edward Fitzgerald's memorable English language translation and interpretation. Khayyam reflects as an older man how he had solved many puzzles and fixed the calendar, but he was unable to unravel "the Master-Knot of Human Fate." He doubts the afterlife and questions the justifiability of rewards and punishments in an afterlife. His skepticism is driven in large measure by revulsion at the thought of a God who decides our destinies based on the way God has made us. Hartshorne maintained that no other writer of the early Middle Ages so precisely criticized classical religion by striking at its two most vulnerable points: the commitment to unqualified theological determinism and belief in endless posthumous careers.

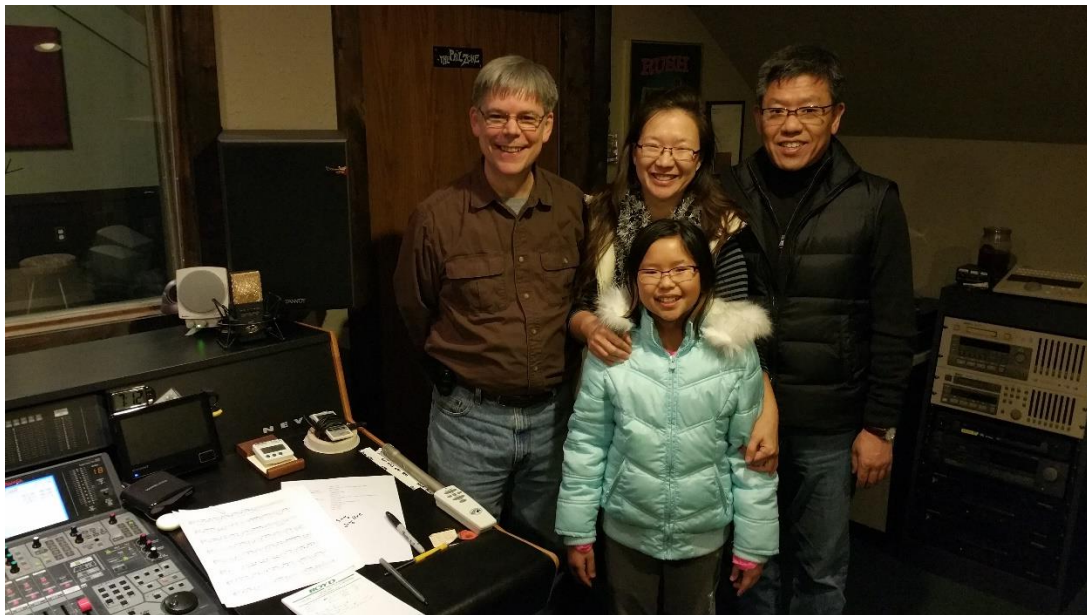
In this song, I attempt to continue Khayyam's line of thought by asking what a theology would look like that takes account of Khayyam's criticisms. The first three quatrains repeat Khayyam's complaints. "The next three propose a concept of God for whom the future is not like the past (i.e. not solely eternal), who is affected by the weal and woe of the creatures (i.e. not entirely impassible), and whose creative freedom is reflected in the "tiny freedoms we possess" (i.e. with contingent qualities). I borrow "game of human genius" from Lequyer. A consequence of this theology is that one can dispense with the superstition that, from a divine perspective, chance events never occur. Chance entails the unforeseen, the tragic, the comic, the beautiful.



**Wayne Viney and Charles Hartshorne,
Atlanta, Georgia, April 1983**



**Charles Hartshorne and Don Viney,
Norman, Oklahoma, February 1981**



**Don Viney with Jung-Hee, Sang-Heui, and Joy Lee at Phil Ward's Woodland Studios in
Pittsburg Kansas to record "The Singer Never Sings in Vain."**

The Singer Never Sings in Vain

I raised my voice to Heav'n above,
 Pray let me hear your lovely song.
 And Heav'n replied, My name is Love,
 It's lovely if you sing along.
 It's lovelier if you sing along.
 It's lovelier if you sing along.
 It's lovelier if you sing along.
 So sing along with me.

'Twas not composed simply for me,
 this song you ask for me to sing.
 I most delight in harmonies,
 the sounds that many voices bring,
 the sounds that many voices bring,
 the sounds that many voices bring,
 the sounds that many voices bring,
 So sing along with me.

Refrain:

I am Maker but also Made
 I am the Mover and Moved.
 To risk discord, be not afraid—
 What surer way can love be proved?

I am the light midst the shadows you see,
 the stars glimpsed through the leafy tree
 I am the rest before the “amen,”
 the way a thousand voices blend.
 the way a thousand voices blend,
 the way a thousand voices blend,
 the way a thousand voices blend,
 So sing along with me.

And when the silence gathers 'round
 Listen for the soft refrain.
 It echoes ev'n when there's no sound,
 The singer never sings in vain.
 The singer never sings in vain.
 The singer never sings in vain.
 The singer never sings in vain.
 So sing along with me.

I long to find in hymns and in music expressions of process-relational types of thinking. Classical theology has had its share of hymn writers, but now it is time to make new music which reflects, I hope, a healthier and more rationally and emotionally compelling vision of God. Those are some of the goals in the more religious songs that I compose. The American philosopher, Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000), was fond of calling God “the most and best moved mover.” He wrote: “Rabbi [Abraham] Heschel has said what some Christians ought to have said long before . . . : ‘God is the most moved mover’. By adding two words, these six words virtually cover the subject to perfection: God is the most and best moved mover. Surely of the ancient Greeks, Plato came closest to this. It precisely corrects Aristotle just where he was most definitely wrong, but where he was followed all too definitely by nearly two millennia of writers in the three principal schools of Western theology.” Hartshorne also emphasizes God’s memory which ensures that nothing we do is entirely in vain. In addition to Hartshorne’s phraseology, I have borrowed from a letter from Voltaire to Frederick the Great in which he speaks of his doubts and of his belief in God: “’tis a light that strikes me amid a thousand shadows.” The line about “stars glimpsed through the leafy tree” is inspired by Georgia O’Keefe’s painting, the Lawrence Tree. The idea of a musical rest before the “amen” is an allusion to Arthur Sullivan’s “Lost Chord,” lyrics by Adelaine Anne Proctor. “My name is Love” alludes to I John 4:7, “God is love” and calls to mind a line from Charles Wesley’s “Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown”—“thy name is Love.”

Anthem to Recovery

There's no darkness so black
that the dawn won't come back.
So have faith in that light
throughout the night.

There's no silence within,
where our song can't be sung.
Welcome hope to come in;
our song is young.

There's no wall we can't scale.
So take heart, we won't fail.
Together we'll stand.
Take my hand.

Though the winter is grey,
there's a promise of spring.
Banish doubt far away
and let us sing.

There's no darkness so black
that the dawn won't come back.
Let our love be the light
drives out the night.

We can fight side by side,
To bear the weight of pain
In the end, love abides
and fear is slain.

There's no darkness so black
that the dawn won't come back.
Let our love be the light
drives out the night.

*Is there anything more sad than
an unheeded cry for help? Is there
anything more hopeful than a
reply that help may come? Is there
anything so ennobling as helping
one in need? We are called upon by
the great religions, the most humane
philosophies, and by the demands of
common decency to help one
another. Our greatest darkness is
our isolation from the bonds that
tie us together in love. And the light
that dispels the darkness, however
much it often flickers, is the kindness
we show to one another.*

Higher Ground

Have you ever climbed a mountain peak,
gained perspective on the world?
The plains, the valleys, the rivers, and creeks,
before you there unfurled.
Have you sought out in one another,
what's highest in them, in you,
done for others what you'd have others
in kindness do for you?
In kindness do for you, my friend,
no thought for what you're due,
Done for others what you'd have others
in kindness do for you?

Can you shed your prejudice and hate,
your indifference sacrifice,
care for the stranger at your gate,
show mercy, let it suffice?
It's not so hard to understand
this journey from the start
Open your fists, extend your hands,
offer your contrite hearts.
Offer your contrite hearts, my friends,
join your paths apart,
Open your fists, extend your hands,
offer your contrite hearts.

Your sun is a star
that is gleaming at night.
But there's more than one,
some unseen, just as bright.

It's easier said than done I know:
just hear the victims' cries.
But from all great traditions flow,
some truths mixed in with lies.
Take care in thought, and word, and deed,
the gods of vengeance quell.
Bury your superstitious creeds,
raise up good-will as well.
Raise up good-will as well, my friend,
ring freedom's joyous bell,
Bury your superstitious creeds,
raise up good-will as well.

The holy book does not exist
that's holy through and through.
Yet, through the errors, still the gist
is clear as day and true.
How peculiar is the blindness
and not to see how odd:
Seek justice and love kindness
and walk humbly with your God.
Walk humbly with your God, my friend,
walk humbly where you trod,
Seek justice and love kindness
and walk humbly with your God.

Your sun is a star
that is gleaming at night.
But there's more than one,
some unseen, just as bright.

Have you ever climbed a mountain peak,
gained perspective on the world?

I've been told by two people, both women, that this song is a sermon. I accept that it can be so construed. I've never been a fan of the classic creeds (which invariably omit what is vital in religion and include much of its most objectional elements). I care deeply about the Scriptures of the world's religions, but have absolutely no use for "Bible belief" (or Qur'an belief, or Book of Mormon belief). If one cannot see such works as humanly made, then one must mistakenly characterize one of the most distinctive of human characteristics—to sense a divine presence in our lives. But the "sense" is imperfect and can only be rightly discerned by paying attention to what is highest in ourselves. The idea of offering "contrite hearts" alludes to Psalm 51:17. The words in the final verse are from Micah 6:8, which many rabbis view as a summary of all the Mitzvot (Commands).

Heart of All Hearts

Lost in the heavens, circling around,
Mute in their course, with no complaint or sound,
Earth and ourselves, the very stuff of stars
Dimly aware, reflect on what we are.

Is there a Life, larger than our noisy days,
Close as the night yet so very far away?

Meteors in the dark, no sooner here than gone,
A memory no mortal can keep.
Each one its own deep,
Each whispers, "I belong."
A brief breath of life is what we will have drawn.

The length of night's watch measures out the pain
Of each broken life, of all that seems in vain,
Each day that dawns, another life will end,
Each fall of night, another life begins.

Is there a Soul, everlasting, ever wise,
One in whose memory we will never die?

Meteors in the dark, no sooner here than gone,
A memory no mortal can keep.
Each one its own deep,
Each whispers, "I belong."
A brief breath of life is all we will have drawn.

Under the sun, it's said, nothing's ever new,
Yet once was a time when the sun itself was new.
Forever the past remains the way it was,
Growing so slowly by what the present does.
Heart of All Hearts of all that has been and will be.
Use what is worthy—all we can offer Thee.

Both William James (1842-1910) and Albert Camus (1913-1960) spoke of the tension between our desire that our lives amount to something, however small, and the apparent indifference of the universe. It is this tension that these lyrics express and address using metaphors drawn from astronomy. The refrain likens our lives to the line in the sky made by a meteor as it falls to earth. Despite our very fugitive existence, we long to be at home in the universe. Each individual is a "deep" containing depths of unexpressed longing and feeling. The first verse characterizes the cosmos in its unthinking, but regular, movements, as encompassed by a larger Life, near but paradoxically unattainable. The second verse speaks to ways that our lives are unsatisfactory, in need of healing—the third and fourth lines are a cry of despair at the endless wheel of samsara. Resolution is found in the final verse in two ways: The "wheel" has direction. If even the sun was once new, it cannot be true that there is nothing new under the sun. Deeds once done cannot be changed—the past "remains the way it was" but, by increments, it is added to by what we accomplish in the present—"what the present does." More important is that the "Heart of All Hearts"—the "Life" mentioned in the opening verse—can gather our accomplishments into its life. In the words of a Jewish prayer, our days may in this way, by God's grace, be endowed with abiding worth. As the refrain says, no mortal can retain the memory of who we have been and what we have done, but the one addressed as "Thee" answers our plea for significance.

The Spring in His Step

To tell you the truth there's no fountain of youth
 The years flyin' by make him dizzy.
 Blessings all counted, adventures recounted
 Sure, this growin' old is not for sissies.

The shock and surprise you can see in his eyes
 When the mirror shows how he appears.
 The wrinkles and sags, the grey hair and the bags
 His mind plumb forgot to count the years.

He knows where he's been, and he will not pretend
 The beginning is closer than the end.
 There may be a hitch in his get-along yet,
 But watch for the spring that is still in his step.

They say there's no gain if there isn't the pain
 He's had more than his share, I'm afraid.
 The time that has flown and the seeds that he's sewn,
 He wonders at the differences he made.

He grins at his reflection, asking the questions:
 What's left in this old fella's noodle?
 In history's span, just a flash in the pan?
 The caboose in the whole kitten-caboodle?

He knows where he's been, and he will not pretend,
 His winter must soon come to an end.
 There may be a hitch in his get-along yet,
 But watch for the spring that is still in his step.

The meaning of this song is perhaps self-explanatory. The experience of looking in a mirror in your later years and seeing the person you have become can be a bit disconcerting but not wholly unpleasant, and certainly not without its humorous side.

And When I Go

And when I go, there goes only a part of me,
 Your warmth remains with me when I have gone.
 And when I cry, there cries just a part of me,
 The rest is laughing with you, although I am alone.

Years go by so fast, but the hours seem so slow,
 Such a hurry to get nowhere, to and fro.
 In latitude and longitude
 There's something of an attitude,
 Memories keep you near where 'er I go.

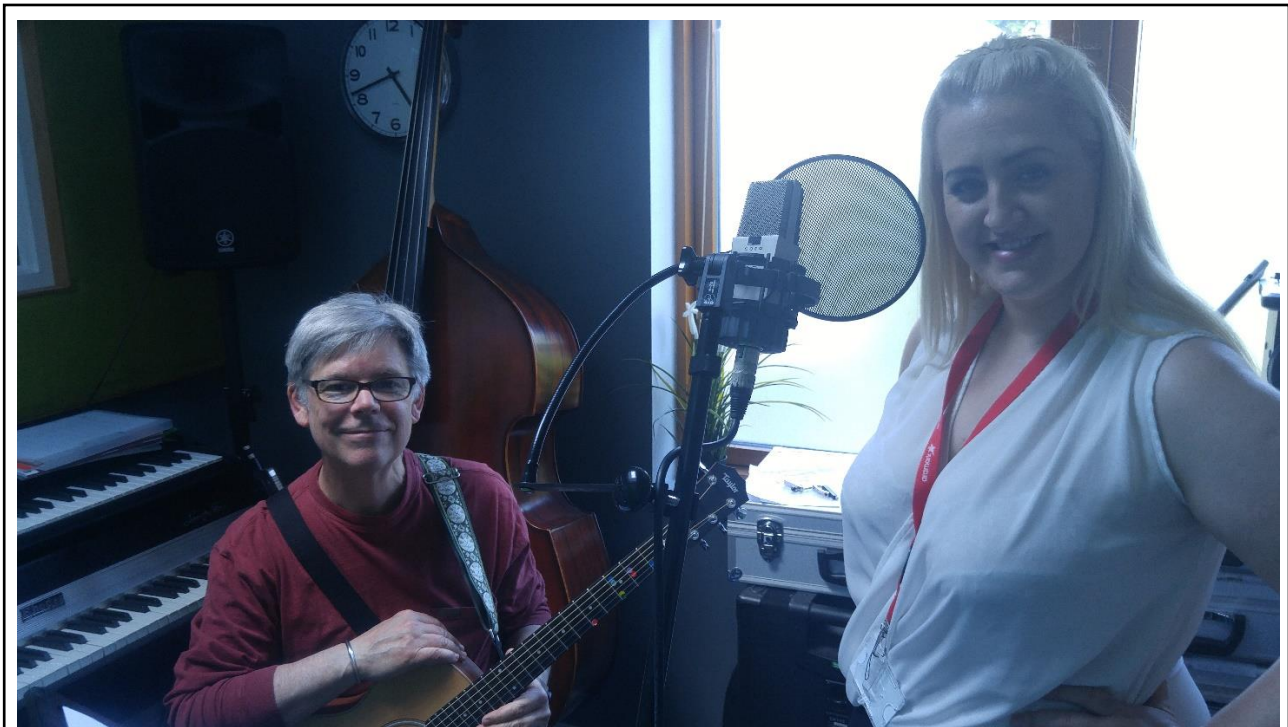
And when I go, there goes only a part of me,
 Your warmth remains with me when I have gone.
 And when I cry, there cries just a part of me,
 The rest is laughing with you, although I am alone.

What's lost of what we've loved, I simply do not know
 So many from whom we've learned, to whom we owe,
 Smiles so long ago we knew
 Long forgotten may yet renew
 The secret springs of kindness in our souls.

And when I go, there goes only a part of me,
 Your warmth remains with me when I have gone.
 And when I cry, there cries just a part of me,
 The rest is laughing with you, although I am alone.

The lyrics of the chorus are inspired by Peter Maffay's "So bist du" (So are you), a German song to which my sister-in-law, Fiona Jurtan, introduced me. The philosophy I accept is one in which it is not only true to say that we are in the world but that the world is in us. More importantly, our individualities are not wholly isolated from each other; they interpenetrate in such a way that each of us contributes, to a greater or lesser extent, to the individuality of every other person we meet. Our own creative responses to others is who we become. In this way, we make ourselves and we make each other.

The lead vocal on “And When I Go” is Lee Gleeson, one of my wife’s cousins who is a professional singer. We sang the song on June 9, 2018 at the memorial service for my mother-in-law, Delores “Abi” Lyons (see above, pp. 13 and 14), in Dallgow, Germany. Later in the month, on June 26th, Lee and I teamed up in Dublin, Ireland at Cormac Moore’s studio to make a recording of the song.



Don Viney and Lee Gleeson, Dublin, Ireland, June 26, 2018

Gather 'Round

Oh gather 'round, while you're around
 The days are fleeting, they fly away.
 So gather 'round, gather 'round, while they're around.

Oh you're a part of every heart
 That you hear beating every day.
 So gather 'round, gather 'round, while they're around.

Voices whisper in the night, "You're made to seek the light."
 It flickers in the shadows, but you know they are right.

Find all the faces, in all the places,
 Whose very greeting, your ills allay,
 And gather 'round, gather 'round, while they're around.

Find every friend, time and again,
 In all your meetings along the way
 And gather 'round, gather 'round, while they're around.

Voices whisper in the night, "You're made to seek the light."
 It flickers in the shadows, but you know they are right.

Oh gather 'round, while you're around
 The days are fleeting, they fly away.
 So gather 'round, gather 'round, while they're around.

I had decided to title a CD of mine "Gather 'Round" and I needed a title song. This song was the result. The lyrics, I think, wear their meaning on their sleeve. The whispers in the night are a sublime, even divine, voice that calls us to reconciliation and forgiveness so that we can live fulfilled lives together. At the time I composed this piece, I was experimenting with different tunings on the guitar, having been inspired by the instrumental pieces of John Fahey and the music of the film Oh Brother Where Art Thou.

I close this collection with a light-hearted, Disneyesque, song inspired by the walks that my wife and I often take around Lakeside Park in Pittsburg, Kansas. The graceful flight of the geese is contrasted with what they deposit on the ground, and this serves as a metaphor for the sublime and the ridiculous aspects of nature and society that permeate our lives.

The Ducks Want Somethin' to Eat

We're walkin' up the street today
To see the ducks around the pond.
The birds, the squirrels, and the kids at play,
A bench to sit upon.
There's a smile upon the face of every
Creature that we meet,
It's a friendly place in every way,
And the ducks want somethin' to eat.
Yes, the ducks want somethin' to eat.

Is it my imagination
Hearing music in the air,
Just a hint of a sensation
Of a chorus singing there?
There's a symphony of noises
In the honks, the quacks, the tweets,
From birds of varied voices,
And the ducks want somethin' to eat.
Yes, the ducks want somethin' to eat.

The geese make for such contrast
On land and in the air,
Chevrons in the sky so vast,
Watch where you're steppin' there!

The geese make for such contrast
On the land and in the air,
Chevrons in the sky so vast,
Watch where you're steppin' there!

It's just a trip on down the glade,
Castin' fish lines in the lake,
It's a lazy day and in the shade,
It's hard to stay awake.
There are people havin' picnics and there's
Sandwiches and sweets,
There's a couple spoonin on the swings,
And the ducks want somethin' to eat.
Yes, the ducks want somethin' to eat.

The sun goes up and the sun goes down
And the politicians tweet.
The seasons yearly make their rounds,
Disgruntled voters bleat.
Nature's laws seem not to change,
Forever to repeat.
Human nature stays the same,
And the ducks want somethin' to eat.
Yes, the ducks want somethin' to eat.