

MadFolk News

Wisconsin Featured Artist

I wanted to highlight a musician this month who hails from Wisconsin – Door County to be exact. I first saw Katie Dahl open for Tim Grimm at the Café Carpe and I couldn't wait to hear more of her. She was one of my first picks to play Willy Street Fair this year, however, since that event won't be happening, I thought I would share a little from Katie's website and ask that you check out her music.

Katie currently makes her home in rural Door County, Wisconsin, with her husband and 3-year-old son, she travels extensively, sharing stages with the likes of Dar Williams and Peter Mulvey, and playing intimate house concerts as well as established venues like Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music. Richly steeped in the folk songwriter tradition, Katie navigates the muddy waters between the personal and the public with the skill of a writer twice her age. She is equally adept at writing about relationships (without being indulgent or myopic) and taking on the threat of chain restaurants to her own small community (without being polarizing or didactic). The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel says that Katie combines "old-fashioned populism, an abiding love of the land and wickedly smart love songs, all delivered in a rich and expressive alto."

"Poetic lyrics made even more evocative by gorgeous melodies and lovely guitar picking. Katie Dahl's low, rich voice is the real deal, and you can feel her love for the land, lakes and people of the Upper Midwest in every song." --Stephanie

Elkins, Wisconsin Public Radio

Katie was about to start touring Europe right when Covid-19 hit hard and had to cancel the tour and struggled to find flights back home, I am sure she now has many extra cds to unload that she was unable to sell on that tour, lets help her out and order a CD from her website, she has 5 titles for you to choose from.

There is not a touring schedule these days, but if you're up in the Door County area you may find her at one of the following:

- Every Wednesday 3-5 p.m. at The Cookery in Fish Creek, WI.

- Every Sunday 4 p.m.: The Jeff & Katie Show (I am the titular Katie) on Northern Sky Theater's Facebook page.

- Tuesday 8/4 from 5-7 p.m. at The White Gull Inn in Fish Creek, WI.

- Saturday 8/8:

Virtual Show via Black Hawk Folk Festival

Additional shows when added can be found at: www.katiedahlmusic.com, and she does occasional livestreams for those who subscribe to her Patreon Acct at: www.patreon.com/katiedahlmusic



During these times where we can't go out to listen to music, many musicians are putting concerts every week thru the web.

We at Madfolk are trying to post some of them on our Face Book page each week. So if you part of the Social Media world of Face Book, please "like" the page for Madison Folk Music Society and keep watch here for some great music. Looking forward to the future where we can all gather in public for music again.

My Highway Home

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The Lineage of a Song

I have on several occasions been asked to be a part of the Library of Congress, Folk Archives Challenge at the Folk Alliance International Conference. It's always an honor and a good time. It is fun, relaxed, musically interesting and always educational. Musicians from all over the US and a few from other countries dive into the L.O.C. Folk Archives and resurrect some song that has fallen by the wayside. Or they render a new version of an old chestnut, and in so doing help us hear an old song in a new way. I always enjoy the concert that is assembled from musicians who have chosen to participate. It never fails to enlighten and delight.

I have to admit in all honesty that at least once, I trolled the archives for songs I already knew, and picked one of them. Based on looking at people's albums/ song titles and comparing that to what was performed in concerts at the conference, I am clearly not the only one who has taken the road more traveled now and then.

But this year, this year I dove deep. I looked through dozens of songs and went deep down the rabbit hole of songs relating to work and chain gangs in the south, and prison yard songs. And the song I emerged with was, "Take Dis Hammer." I am glad I did not know that it was a song well known in Blues and Bluegrass circles. If so, I might have stopped there with a rendition offered by Lead Belly or Odetta, or Flatt & Scruggs. Or one of a dozen other versions done by blues artists over the last 80 years. But because I found it in the Library of Congress Folk Archives and in a Lomax field recording first, that was what I listened to.

I was moved by the voices I heard in those old John Lomax recordings, from a prison yard in Florida in 1939. He captured something powerful. As I listened, I imagined things that had not yet transpired when these songs were recorded. Nelson Mandela on a chain gang in a prison yard on Robben Island, in South Africa. Mohandas Gandhi and the peak of the Satyagraha movement, Martin Luther King Jr. and the marches, rallies and movements for Civil Rights yet to emerge. Black Lives Matter, and so much more.

John A. Lomax was a pioneering and visionary musicologist. Much of what we know about American Folk music from various eras before recording technology was accessible to most people, is because of John Lomax, his wives Bess & Ruby and his sons John Lomax Jr., Alan Lomax and daughter Bess Lomax. They transcribed

by hand, and made field recordings of countless songs in a multitude of genres, preserving the musical styles that were endemic to certain regions or trades, or cultural sub-sets. And the Library of Congress Folk Archives are a true treasure trove of the extraordinary, including but by no means limited to the Lomax Collections.

John A. Lomax co-founded the Texas Folklore Society at the University of Texas in Austin in about 1908. The date is disputed, but in 1909, he nominated co-founder Professor Leonidas Payne to be President of the society. John A Lomax went on to help found Folklore Societies across the United States. His direct mentor at Harvard (which was at the time the center of American Folklore Studies, and was considered a subset of the field of English Literature) was George Lyman Kittredge. Kittredge was a scholar of Shakespearean Literature and of Chaucer. He had inherited the position of professor of English Literature from none other than Francis James Child. Child is known for his 8-volume lifetime work: *Popular Ballads of England and Scotland*. The work was unfinished at the time of Child's passing, and Kittredge finished the work as well as continuing to teach several of the courses Child had taught. Lomax had a fine pedigree in sound research methods, and was likely the first to transcend the idea of American Folklore as a subset of English Literature and thus is appreciated in many circles as the progenitor of a new discipline: American Folklore a.k.a. American Ethnomusicology.

In 1910, Lomax published: *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, with a forward by none other than the recently retired President of the United States and aficionado of the American West, Theodore Roosevelt. It was quite a feather in the cap of a relatively young Lomax. But his truest love were songs that rose out of African American culture. And he was soon to find his way into the pursuit of many more forms of American Folklore. Lomax was the first to present papers to the Modern Language Association about American Literature in the form of uniquely American Ballads and Songs. He took to the lecture circuit while continuing to teach, publish, and make field recordings eventually with the help of his sons Alan and John Jr., and daughter Bess. Spanning several decades, John Lomax contributed over ten-thousand recordings to the Archive of American Folk-song, at the Library of Congress.

At first the recordings were in the form

of transcriptions and transliterations of the oral traditions he encountered. Old school. Lomax wrote them down. But as recording technologies improved and became more portable, Lomax was always on the leading edge of the latest capacity to record. In 1917, he was let go from his university position in Texas, over broader political battles within the institution, and was forced to take a job in the banking industry for several years in Chicago. But he became life-long friends with poet Carl Sandberg while he was there, and is referenced many times in Sandberg's book *Songbag* (1927). In 1925, Lomax moved back to Texas to work for a larger bank there, but obviously being in banking became disastrous in the fall of 1929. In 1931, his beloved wife Bess Lomax died at age 50, and Lomax also lost his job when the bank for which he worked, failed as a result of The Great Depression.

In 1933, John A. Lomax got a grant from the American Society of Learned Studies and acquired a state-of-the-art phonograph, and uncoated aluminum disc recorder. At 315 pounds, he and Alan mounted in the trunk of the family Ford sedan, and went off adventuring. John was finally able to pursue the archiving the musical and narrative memory of a quickly passing generation of African Americans. Many of his subjects were in prisons, but that was by no means the sum of his contact with the African American community. He did however recognize that Jim Crow and other racist practices had created a Column continued on next page

*Joe Jencks is 20-year veteran of the international Folk scene, an award winning songwriter and vocalist, and a contributing writer to numerous publications. His column **My Highway Home** is a recent addition to the Mad-Folk newsletter. For more information please visit: www.joejencks.com.*

*Joe Jencks continues to host a monthly radio show called **My Highway Home** on the new Folk Music network – **Folk Music Notebook**. This show features interviews with people Joe meets in his extensive travels along with music by many artists from the big tent that is Folk Music. Tune in on the first Monday of the month at 9:00 PM ET/ 6:00 PM PT. And rebroadcast on the following Sundays at 1:00 PM ET / 10:00 AM PT. Several past episodes are archived through **Folk Music Notebook** including shows about the Kerrville Folk Festival, Old Songs Festival, The Great Labor Arts Exchange, Ireland, and an interview with Sonny Ochs.*

Listen in online via:
www.folkmusicnotebook.com

situation where a disproportionate number of African American men were imprisoned. And because many had been there for a long time, they had not been influenced by radio and recordings. The oral traditions were still alive in the prisons of the south in particular, and in ways that they were no longer present in other parts of the country.

It was in one such Prison that Lomax met Lead Belly. And while many have accused John Lomax of somehow misappropriating ideas from Lead Belly, history from many angles suggests that Lomax was a staunch advocate for Lead Belly. Lomax advocated earnestly for Lead Belly's release from prison, and while causality is hard to trace Lead Belly was in fact released in August of 1934. The Lomax Family helped Lead Belly get work singing African American songs throughout the North Eastern US, and with the advice of legendary Western singer Tex Ritter, also helped Lead Belly get his first recording contract. John Lomax and Lead Belly had a falling out over the managing of finances in 1935, and never spoke to one another again. Alan Lomax however, remained a stalwart friend and an advocate of Lead Belly's for the next 15 years, until Lead Belly's death in 1949.

Though it is not clearly documented, it is very likely that Lead Belly himself learned Take Dis Hammer from the Lomax field recordings. He however only sang a few of the traditional verses, and invented his own version. He was prone to personalize

many of the songs he sang and recorded, and was known to embellish on the historic record from time to time if it made a good story. In short, he was a Folksinger and Bluesman in good standing.

My version of Take Dis Hammer was derived mostly from the field recordings made by John, Alan, and Ruby Terrill Lomax, John's second wife. There was no available transcription of the original field recordings which were made in 1939 at the Florida State Prison known as Raiford Penitentiary. These recordings were part of a series from the Southern States Recording Trip. So I listened, and listened, and listened again, probably at least 100 times. And I still could not discern certain words and phrases.

So, I spoke with Jennifer Cutting and Dr. Stephen Winnick (with whom I am occasionally confused in public gatherings and always take it as a compliment) at the Library of Congress Folk Archives. I explained the problem in trying to resurrect the original recorded version. They responded kindly that I should consider recovering as many of the original words as possible, and use my knowledge of the idiom, the period, and my capacity as a songwriter to fill in the gaps. And so I did. I also included a re-write of a verse that I traced to one of the Flatt & Scruggs recordings, and as a proper homage, I include a slight adaptation of one of Lead Belly's verses. But the last verse was largely unintelligible. As such, I lifted what I could and made up the rest with knowl-

edge of the context. Words I wrote to infill for inaudible words, or just invented to fit the context are italicized and in bold.

I will note that the Flatt & Scruggs influenced verse about the shackles, does not appear in any of the Lomax field recordings. But I liked it. And since it seemed like everyone else had just invented it – I invented a version that I felt was more in keeping with the original Prison Yard recordings both in cadence and language. And that is the lineage of one rendition of a Folk Song.

As a result of my work with this song, I was awarded a small grant to continue my research into the Library of Congress Folk Archives. And I will record a "tiny-desk" type concert for the Library of Congress Folk Archives this summer that will be released through the Library of Congress on Wednesday September 2nd, and remain part of the L.O.C. Archives in perpetuity. The focus of my work will continue in the vein of prison and work songs from the Lomax Recordings. We will have a watch party at 12:30 PM ET / 11:30 AM CT on Wednesday September 2nd. Si Kahn will offer a set at Noon ET/ 11:00 AM CT on the same day. Stay tuned to www.joejencks.com for more details. And do yourself a favor, troll around the Library of Congress Folk Archives and the Archive of American Folksong. But be forewarned, you will get delightfully lost.

~ Joe Jencks
7-21-20

Take this hammer, hammer and give it to the captain
Take this hammer, hammer and give it to the captain
Won't you Take this hammer, and give it to the captain
(Won't you) Tell him I'm gone, Lord tell him I'm gone

And if he asks you, asks you was I running
And if he asks you, asks you was I running
And if he asks you, asks you was I running
Tell 'm I was flyin', Lord I was flyin'

Captain, captain this ole hammer too heavy
Captain, captain this ole hammer too heavy
Captain, captain this ole hammer too heavy
For the **likes of** man, for the **likes of** man

Must be the hammer, hammer that killed John Henry
Must be the hammer, hammer that killed John Henry
Must be the hammer, hammer that killed John Henry
But it won't kill me, no it won't kill me

This ole hammer, hammer shines like silver
This ole hammer, hammer shines like silver
This ole hammer, hammer shines like silver
But it rings like gold, lord it rings like gold

Flatt & Scruggs Bluegrass Verse

I don't want, your old darn shackles
I don't want, your old darn shackles

I don't want, your old darn shackles
'Cause it hurts my leg, 'cause it hurts my leg

Odetta Verse

I don't want your cold iron shackles
I don't want your cold iron shackles
I don't want your cold iron shackles
Around my leg boys. Around my leg.

Joe Jencks Adaptation – in keeping with the original Prison Yard cadence and language

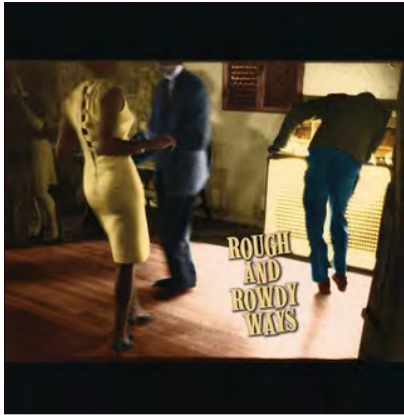
Don't you make me wear, wear these old cold shackles
Don't you make me wear, wear these old cold shackles
Don't you make me wear, wear these old cold shackles
'Cause they wound my soul, Lord they wound my soul

Lead Belly Verse... JJ Adaptation cadence of Prison Yard

Twenty-five miles, alone in Mississippi
Twenty-five miles, alone in Mississippi
Twenty-five miles, alone in Mississippi
Tell him I'm gone, oh Lord tell him I'm gone

Joe Jencks Verse – guess based on cadence and audibility of
Lord I'm coming, to that Jordan water
Lord I'm coming, to that Jordan water
Lord I'm coming, to that Jordan water
Don't you let me drown, Lord don't let me drown

ROUGH AND ROWDY WAYS - BOB DYLAN
COLUMBIA RECORDS - 2020



Review by Kiki Schueler

It must be amazing to be Bob Dylan. Well, other than obsessive fans picking through your garbage, and all those haters with their bad impersonations. *Rough and Rowdy Ways*, his 39th (!) studio album, reached number two on the Billboard chart. Meaning he's had a top forty album in each of the last seven decades. It's his first collection of original material since 2012's *Tempest*, following a pair of Sinatra tribute records and a three-disc collection of American standards. It may appear slight at first, disc one consists of only nine songs, but they range from four to nine and a half minutes long. Turns out no one tells a Nobel laureate they don't hear a single. And when said first single, the only track on disc two, turns out to be an unannounced, nearly seventeen minute epic dissecting the assassination of John F Kennedy, well, that's just fine. Perhaps even more astonishing than his sixty year recording career is how good his voice sounds right now. As he looks at eighty, his vocals sound as good as they ever have. It isn't limited to this recording; his shows last fall were stunning. It's tempting to compare this record to his seminal album of the Nineties, *Time Out of Mind*, which followed two albums of traditionals and folk songs, and I wouldn't be the first one to do it.

Spending all that time with Frank Sinatra's music seems to have influenced Dylan's own sound. The chugging blues of recent albums, *Tempest's* "Early Roman Kings" for example, are treated with a lighter touch

here. Here he trades shuffling for strutting, the sexy "False Prophet," and for sleekly supernatural, the esoteric "Crossing the Rubicon." On the former, he denies the charge of the title, "I'm the enemy of treason, the enemy of strife/ I'm the enemy of the un-lived meaningless life/ I ain't no false prophet, I just know what I know/ I go where only the lonely can go." The latter could be the continuation of our fortuneteller's tale, "Three miles north of purgatory/ one step from the great beyond/ I prayed to the cross and I kissed the girls and I crossed the Rubicon." The Rubicon here exists both literally as Caesar's red river in Italy, and symbolically as the point of no return, the dividing line between heaven and hell, light and dark, life and death. "Goodbye Jimmy Reed" uses the titular bluesman's own distinctive electric blues style to venerate him. Glowing praise, "I'll put a jewel in your crown, I'll put out the light," exists next to winking innuendos "Can't play the record 'cause my needle got stuck." Opening track "I Contain Multitudes" is as much poetry as it barroom braggadocio. It may take its title from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," but there's drunken slur to meaningless boasts like "I'm just like Anne Frank, like Indiana Jones/ And them British bad boys the Rolling Stones." The simple genius of the rhyme scheme pairs multitudes with feuds, nudes, dudes, foods, moods and preludes.

The plaintive ballad "I've Made Up My Mind to Give Myself to You," treads a little too close to the treacly wedding fodder "Make You Feel My Love." Which makes "My Own Version of You" an even bigger surprise. Hint: it is not a love song, at least not a traditional one. No, it's a Frankensteinian tale of designed creation, "I want to bring someone to life, is what I want to do/ I want to create my own version of you." If there is one song here whose lyrics need to be read, it's this one. Unless, of course, you would rather dive straight into "Murder Most Foul." That 17 minute, 1400 word, marathon that appeared at the end of

March, right when the nation desperately needed something to talk about other than the pandemic. It's infinitely more listenable than you would expect, and I continue to find something new to appreciate. For instance, the way Kennedy says, "wait a minute boys," like he was also the cop in Dylan's "Hurricane." It's unspooling lyrical references spawned comparisons to "American Pie," though without the singalong chorus, and inspired its own slew of reviews, my favorite of which was titled "I Would Just Like to Say I'm Glad Bob Dylan Isn't Dead." I heartily concur.

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Ballad Idea

For years I have toyed with an idea for an historical ballad based on a fascinating but so far unsung figure in Wisconsin history.

First a bit of backstory. I was born in Philadelphia. When I was five, my family moved to the town of Homer, Louisiana, about fifty miles east of Shreveport.

Homer was completely segregated then. One side of town was white and the other side black. The schools were segregated. I don't think I ever spoke at length to a black person in the five years we lived there.

As a kid, I don't remember wondering about this, and we never talked about it. You're a kid, and unless you're advanced morally, which I wasn't, you just go along with stuff, unfortunately.

When I was ten, we moved to Appleton WI, where, again, there were no blacks in our vicinity. It wasn't until years later that I found this out:

(from **Wikipedia**): *"From approximately 1930–1970, Appleton was a sundown town: black people were not allowed to stay overnight...A partial exception was made for opera singer Marian Anderson when she sang at Lawrence University in 1941: she was allowed to stay overnight in the Conway Hotel but was not allowed to eat dinner in public."*

Appleton was, and still is in many ways, a conservative stronghold. It was home to the despicable Joe McCarthy and is currently world headquarters of the radical right wing John Birch Society, which among other things steadfastly opposed the civil rights movement of the 1960s and in 1964 opposed the passage of the Civil Rights Act. Reassuringly, there is a growing black community in Appleton (which had dwindled to zero in 1930 from a high of 18 in 1900; in 2010 the black population had risen to about 1200) and have been increased efforts to address racism in the city. Large George Floyd protests of great diversity have taken place there in the past weeks, so Appleton is changing.

But when I was a high school senior in 1965, considering the tone of things at the time, it was with great interest that I discovered, in a big ol' book at the Lawrence College (now University) Library in Appleton called **History of Outagamie County**, that the first non-native person to settle in Appleton was an African American man named Andrew J. Jackson, whose story would make a marvelous ballad.

The first mention I found of Mr. Jackson was on page 55:

"In response to a general call for a meeting of the pioneers of the county, signed by John Stephens... and others, a large number met at the hall of J.C. Smith in Appleton on Washington's birthday, 1872... "General" A.J. Jackson, and old colored man, was called out. Mr. Stephens introduced him as 'the first white settler [!] in the county.' He was reared in Tennessee, near Nashville; could not tell when he came here; lived for a time in a wigwam with Winnebago Indians where Madison is; then lived in Oshkosh before it had a name; and then at Neenah; secured a wife from the Stockbridge Indians; had six children, but all died. 'I was the first settler this side of the Oneida line; I chopped and cleared many farms...'"

On the next page, page 56, in a list of "...pioneers prepared and published at this time..." it lists "James Jackson (colored) 1830." Which is the earliest by far of all other "pioneers" listed.

The next mention I found of Mr. Jackson was in a letter by J. F. Johnston "...read at the old settlers' meeting, August, 1878."

"We commenced sometime in August, 1848, to get out timber for the frame of the Lawrence Institute..."

...The first stop I made was at 'General Jackson's' clearing, in what is now Freedom, where I stopped to get a drink of water (Jackson was a colored man). Here I will say that I always stopped at the general's on my trips to the Oneida settlement or Duck Creek and he was always faithful to return my visits. I am glad to hear that the ninety odd year old veteran still lives."

So if A. J. Jackson was about 90 in 1878, that means he was born in about 1788, and was about 42 when he landed in what is now Appleton.

The next mention was in a section discussing the various towns of Outagamie County:

"Town of Freedom. -- The first clearing in the town of Freedom was made by a negro named Jackson. Mr. Beebe, who came next, found Jackson here. He had an Indian wife and one child, and had a clearing of nine acres. The negro lived for a while on the Oneida reservation, leasing from the Indians. Beebe settled on section 1. E. B. Abbot came next, in 1842, and bought the Jackson claim...After removing to Appleton Jackson acquired the title "General." He claimed his settlement was made in May, 1830. He died in September, 1879."

In a broadcast by Wisconsin's CW Television in 2009, in a series called "Celebrate Black History," in a short piece titled The town of Freedom and Black History Month, reporter Kristen Rietz asked the Freedom Historical Society's president Pat Konkle how the town got its name:

"The first [non-native] settler in the Freedom area was a James Andrew Jackson [Note: I think it was Andrew James Jackson]. He was the first [non-native] person that was here and actually cleared land and lived there... They say that the people from the town, went to him and asked him... if they could name the town "Jackson" after him. And he said, 'No, call it Freedom, because this is where I got my freedom,' when he left the South."

Over the years, as my songwriting career stumbles along, now and then I think about this story and try to figure out how, as a white guy, I could legitimately write a ballad about Mr. Jackson, but I feel unqualified. It seems more appropriately handled by an African American songwriter. But I do hate to see this intriguing story fade away, and that's why I'm writing this Whither Zither, in the hope that someone who feels more comfortable writing the song will read this and give it a try. And of course there's the Native American side of the story. Another ballad I don't feel right writing...

Sources

History of Outagamie County Wisconsin
W. Goodspeed, K. Goodspeed, M. Bothwell, Goodspeed Historical Assoc., Chicago, 1911. Online at <https://hathitrust.org/>

WI CW broadcast mentioned:
<https://youtu.be/nEevO0Tq3D4>

Wikipedia for Freedom, WI

WZ July 2020

"WHEN IS MY RENEWAL DUE?"

(Hint: It is NOT the date on the mailing label!)

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