

Joe's Jottings #7: Wither the Flowers? Part Three

By Joe "The Songfinder" Hickerson

In my last two columns, I gave a history of the creation of "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" ("Flowers") in 1956 and 1960, and its early popularity in the United States (1961 - 1966). In this final installment, I begin with an exploration of the song's popularity and significance in three other countries. The first example is from France in 1962, when Marlene Dietrich began singing the song in English, French ("Que Sont Devenues les Fleurs," translated by Guy Beart), and German ("Sag' mir, wo die Blumen Sind," translated by Max Colpet, arranged and conducted by Burt Bacharach). The German version became a

tremendous hit in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. It was also recorded by



Joan Baez on her 1965 LP, Farewell Angelina (Vanguard VSD-79200), which reached #10 on the Billboard pop LP charts.

Japan was another country which generated popular recordings of the song, both in Japanese and in English. In 2000, the New York-based Office KEI contacted me about their producing an hour-long documentary on "Flowers" for NHK (Japanese PBS). They filmed me at the Library of Congress American Folklife Center telling my story about the song's early development, and singing my 1960 version (which I still sing from time to time!). The program, titled Seiki no Kizanda Uta: Shizukanaru Inorina Hansanka and hosted by Katsuya Kobayashi, was aired during the latter part of 2000, and a revised version was released a few years later. I was sent a copy of the program and was especially moved by Marlene Dietrich's performance of her German version, Katarina Witt skating to the song at the 1994 Winter Olympics in protest of the war in Bosnia, and footage of a group of grunts around an armored vehicle in Viet Nam singing "Flowers."

"Flowers" was included in a 2-CD package issued in 1998 by Appleseed Recordings (#1024) titled *Where Have All the Flowers Gone: The Songs of Pete Seeger*. It is the opening selection and is performed by Tommy Sands with Dolores Keane (vocals), Vedran Smailovic (cello), Liam O'Flynn (uilleann pipes), and others. They are joined by a group of Catholic and Protestant school children. The accompanying booklet states that Sands (from Northern Ireland) and Smailovic (from Bosnia) joined together on this song "not only to lament the deaths at Canary Wharf and the unwillingness of the politicians to solidify the Northern Ireland peace process, but also to celebrate the hopes for a peaceful future."

Ever since "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" achieved widespread popularity in 1962, the title has spawned numerous songs and other usages with titles of the pattern "Where Has/Have All the [Something/s] Gone." But the pattern had also predated the song; e.g., Lillian Glinn sang a song entitled "Where Have All the Black Men Gone," recorded in New Orleans on April 25, 1928, by Columbia Records (CO 14315-D). I have not heard this recording.

By and large, these derivative compositions are not parodies (they don't "imitate, make fun of, or comment on an original work, its subject, author, style, or some other target, by means of satiric or ironic imitation"). But here is an exception, which I sent to Sing Out! magazine in 1962 (it appeared in the December 1962 - January 1963 issue). It asks the following questions:

Where have all the folksongs gone? Collectors have taken them every one.
Where have all the collections gone? Gone to archives every one.
Where have all the archives gone? Pop singers raided them one by one.
Where have all the pop singers gone? Gone to make records every one.
Where have all the records gone? The folk have bought them every one.
Where have all the pop songs gone? The folk are singing them every one.
Where have all the folksongs gone? etc.

I gave no indication of author. I soon forgot all about this parody until a colleague noticed its appearance in Sing Out! and showed it to me. I reported on it, and sang it, at the 50th Anniversary annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology in Atlanta, Georgia, on September 19, 2005. By then, I had begun assuming that I had written it back in 1962. My presentation was published in the March 2006 SEM Newsletter, and this elicited a letter from long-time SEM member Jerome Wenker, whom I had not heard from in a number of years. Jerome reported that he had "created that text during the Summer 1962 Summer Folklore Institute gathering [at Indiana University] and anonymously put a copy in [my] mailbox." Thank you Jerry for fessing up, you clever rogue!

At least one scholarly research project on "Flowers" has come to my attention. This was a paper delivered at the 18th annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology on November 2, 1973, in Urbana, Illinois, by William (Will) R. Schmid, a music educator at the University of Wisconsin -- Milwaukee. The paper's title was "Collected Variants of the Contemporary Folk Song, Where Have All the Flowers Gone?," the result of a research project at the University of Kansas, 1972 - 1973. Will had interviewed 92 students about how and where they had first encountered the song, what they thought was its source, and what could they remember to perform it? I was intrigued by the range of responses concerning the song's age, historical connection, and composer. As

for the last category, 51 interviewees did not know, 13 named Pete Seeger, 11 chose Peter, Paul and Mary (PP&M), and 7 posited Bob Dylan. Interestingly, neither Will Schmid nor any of the interviewees seemed to know anything about my role in the compositional process.

But this is typical. Over the years, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" has been largely attributed to Pete Seeger alone, with infrequent mention of my contributions to the song. I guess I never really minded being relegated to the ranks of the anonymous folk!

Let me mention some reference points. The first is Pete Seeger's wonderful book, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone: A Singalong Memoir* (Third edition, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: Sing Out Corporation, 2009, pp. 166 - 169). Here is a link to one of several of Marlene Dietrich's German renditions of "Flowers:" vagalume.com.br/marlene-dietrich/sag-mir-wo-die-blumen-sind.html. And here is a link to my own performance (with audience) of "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" on June 5, 2010, at the 30th Annual Washington Folk Festival in Glen Echo, Maryland: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gp5D4I0YyOk.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge my intern, Joe Seamons, for his assistance in assembling materials used in this article. And speaking of thanks, I recall the time that I was visited at the Library of Congress Archive of Folk Culture by Nick Reynolds and Bob Shane, two members of the original Kingston Trio. After introductions were made, Nick said that the name Joe Hickerson sounded familiar and wondered why. I then showed him one of the few early printings of "Flowers" that actually mentioned my name as author of "additional verses." Nick asked, "Which verses?" I answered, "The fourth and fifth." He extended his hand to shake mine and said, "Thank you." I shook his hand and replied, "Thank you!" And thank you Pete and PP&M!