



## One Two Three, One Two Three

A few Wither Zithers ago I talked about the song *Happy Birthday To You* and how it was proven to be in the public domain. As I thought about the song for that column, and sang it, and goofed around with the lyrics, it never dawned on me that the little ditty is a waltz: three beats to a measure. As with most of us, I have sung that song hundreds if not thousands of times, but had never really considered the time signature. This got me to wondering how many other songs in the tattered songbag of my brain I have neglected to peg as waltzes over the years.

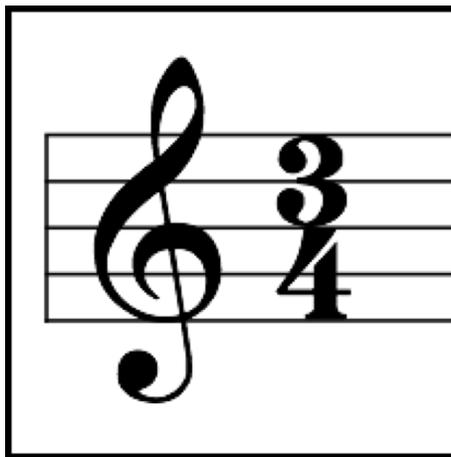
I can think of quite a few, as it turns out, and I know there are probably hundreds more that are familiar to all of us but not occurring to me at the moment. The first one that popped into my mind's ear was our national anthem, *The Star Spangled Banner*. It's a waltz, which is rare for an anthem, and not only that, it weirdly does not contain the name of this nation, though it's hard to misinterpret the "star spangled banner" reference. Francis S. Key gave the poem to his brother-in-law, who linked the words to the melody of a popular drinking song, and the rest is waltz history.

So. *Happy Birthday To You* and the *Star Spangled Banner*. Any other special songs in waltz time? How about holiday songs?

Well, there's *Silent Night* and *Away In a Manger*. *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*. *We Wish You A Merry Christmas*. *O Holy Night*. *Silver Bells*. *We Three Kings of Orient Are*.

And cowboy songs! I don't mean country western, though there are lots of those in 3/4 time too (*Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Be Cowboys*); I mean the old standards from a zillion years ago. *Home On The Range*. *Goodbye Old Paint*. *Strawberry Roan*. *Git Along Little Dogies*. *Streets of Laredo*.

*Streets of Laredo* has an interesting lineage. Apparently it is descended from an Irish folk song of the 1700s called *The Unfortunate Rake* (I'm thinking of writing *The Disappointed Shovel*). Another descendent of this waltzing folk song is *St James Infirmary*, made popular by Satchmo Armstrong and others. The Infirmary song and the Laredo song are similar in many ways, but *St James Infirmary* has been changed from a major key to a minor key, the time signature switched from 3/4 to 4/4, and the poor dying (dead?) subject of the song is a woman, instead of the dying cowboy of *Streets of Laredo*. The overall theme of these two songs is similar though, of a sexually careless person dying of a venereal disease, just like the original *Unfortunate Rake*. Not exactly a perky dance theme, waltz or no waltz.



There are fewer decidedly grim examples bouncing around my memory, though many folk waltzes do involve missing a loved one. I should compare these to similar themed songs in 4/4 time to get a real feeling for whether 3/4 time elicits such emotions to a disproportionate degree. *My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean* is certainly sad ("Bring back my bonnie to me"). *On Top Of Old Smoky* ("I lost my true lover"). *Oh My Darling Clementine* ("...So I lost my Clementine"), and *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry*, by Hank Williams Sr., maybe the most heartbroken waltz ever written.

There's *Goodnight Irene* ("Now me and my wife are parted"). *Tennessee Waltz* ("My true love was stolen away"). *The Man on the Flying Trapeze* ("I'm left in this wide world to fret

and to mourn, betrayed by a maid in her teens"); *Botany Bay* ("Oh, had I the wings of a turtle-dove, I'd soar on my pinions so high, Straight back to the arms of my Polly love, And in her sweet presence I'd die")...

Many 3/4 songs, if not sad, are at least dreamy, like *Moon River* ("Oh, dream maker, you heart breaker..."), *Mockingbird Hill* ("Only me and the sky and an old whippoorwill, singing songs in the twilight on Mockingbird Hill"). There are just plain happy songs, many from musicals, like *Oh What A Beautiful Morning* from **Oklahoma**, *My Favorite Things* from **Sound of Music**...

[Pause for a short anecdote: My music partner Lou introduced herself to a woman a few years ago who said, "Lou Berryman! I've had your song *Pflaum Road* bouncing around in my head all day!" Lou said, "I'm glad you like it; I'll tell Peter." The woman said, "I didn't say I LIKED it..." Same here. Just because I mention a 3/4 metered song that is stuck in my head doesn't mean I necessarily like it.]

...*Que Sera, Sera* from **The Man Who Knew Too Much**; *That's Amore* from **The Caddy**. *It's A Grand Night For Singin'* from **State Fair**, *Hello Young Lovers* from **The King and I**, *Oom Pah Pah* from **Oliver**, *Good Night My Someone* from **The Music Man**, *I Feel Pretty* from **West Side Story**, *I Could Have Danced All Night* from **My Fair Lady**.

The waltzes keep coming to me from all angles: *Greensleeves*. *Norwegian Wood*. *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*. *Cockles and Mussels*. *Lullaby and Good Night*. *Rock A Bye Baby*. *Are You Lonesome Tonight*. *Love Me Tender*. *You've Got To Be Carefully Taught*. *What's New Pussycat*. *Nita, Juanita*. *Away Away With Rum By Gum*. *Amazing Grace*. *Natural Woman*. *Mr. Bojangles*. *What A Wonderful World*. *Chim Chim Cheree*. *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*.

And if I were younger I have a hunch I'd know a few more recent examples. Like from the 1970s maybe. Meanwhile, c'mon kids, gather 'round and let's sing that old beloved waltz, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*.