

Background Notes to the Songs on “Coming Home”

“Let There Be Music” A traditional male voice favourite in North America, its plea for tolerance and the brotherhood of man still resonates today.

“Four Strong Winds” Ian Tyson’s classic Canadian song in an especially haunting arrangement.

“Prayer of the Children” This song was inspired by the composer’s own experiences during the recent civil war in Bosnia. Its powerful message is made all the more compelling by the *a capella* arrangement.

“Klee Wyck” This song, by local composer Brian Tate, celebrates the life of the famous B.C. artist Emily Carr. Klee Wyck (“the Laughing One”) was the name given to her by the natives of Haida Gwaii where she painted many of her best-known works. The native drum helps give the song an appropriately ceremonial tone.

“Royal Hudson” In 1939 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth travelled by train across the country on a royal tour. The engine that pulled their train westward was a ‘Hudson class’ locomotive, and the monarch was so impressed by its performance that he allowed the engine from then on to carry the royal coat of arms.

More recently a sister engine to the one that carried the royal couple was restored and carried tourists from Vancouver along scenic Howe Sound to Squamish and back on daily excursions. Sadly this service has been discontinued, temporarily we hope! The song was composed by local song-writer Dave Baker and arranged by local arranger Larry Nickel.

“Away from the Roll of the Sea” We go right across the country now to Nova Scotia for Allister McGillivray’s ode to small boats bobbing quietly in a harbour. The song was arranged by local arranger Diane Loomer.

“Wood River” Now we are back in Saskatchewan for Connie Kaldor’s gentle tribute to the charms of the little river that flows through the south of the province. The arrangement is by local arranger Willi Zwozdesky.

“Shenandoah” Surely one of the loveliest of American folk songs, its origins are rather obscure, and there are many different versions to the lyrics. Our version is one of the shortest. The actual Shenandoah River is in Virginia and a long way from “the wide Missouri”!

“Bridge Over Troubled Water” Kirby Shaw’s rousing arrangement of Paul Simon’s famous song gives it something of a Gospel quality. It is one of the choir’s most popular numbers both with the choir and the audiences.

“O Mistress Mine” In this modern arrangement of the well-known song from Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” Neil Ginsberg effectively captures the spirit of the Elizabethan original.

“All the Diamonds” This poetic song by Bruce Cockburn reminds us of the importance of maintaining spiritual values in a materialistic world. The arrangement is by Larry Nickel.

“Old Lady Rose” Another Dave Baker-Larry Nickel collaboration (see “Royal Hudson”). The song tells the story of a West coast fisherman who, because of the decline in the wild salmon stocks, is forced to abandon his traditional way of life and face an uncertain future in the city.

The “Lady Rose” of the title was a small boat that for many years carried passengers and freight between Port Alberni and the outer coast of Vancouver Island. She was “honourably retired” a few years ago.

“Goin’ Home” The famous melody to this song comes from the second movement of Antonin Dvorak’s “New World” symphony. The words, which sound very like a spiritual, were actually written by one of Dvorak’s American students and designed to fit Dvorak’s melody.

“With a Voice of Singing” Another traditional male choir favourite, this song seems to show the influence of Handel’s “Messiah” in both its Biblical language and its exuberant harmonies.

“Gwahoddiad” Amazingly, this famous hymn, which sounds so quintessentially Welsh, was written in English in the nineteenth century by an American minister (although he must have been of Welsh descent!) and not translated into Welsh until some years later. Nevertheless, it quickly established itself as a firm favourite with Welsh male choirs and has remained so until this day.

“Dear Land of Home” The melody is from Jean Sibelius’s famous late nineteenth century “Finlandia” suite celebrating his love for his homeland then not totally independent of Russia. The English words were written in the early twentieth century.