

Gonna Rise Again! Seattle Labor Chorus

Why a “Labor” Chorus? Why a chorus at all? Isn’t there enough music around without gathering several dozen voices to render a selection of songs from various genres into 4-part harmony, largely without instrumentation? And why these particular songs? Most of them aren’t about unions or working conditions, pay rates or benefits. Isn’t that what “labor” is about?

Of course, you may already know that the Seattle Labor Chorus takes a broad view of the issues that “labor” covers – really, anything that affects the lives of working people, now or in history. Working people include the young peasant men enticed into the army in Blood and Gold and the modern downsized workers in Twenty-Four/Seven; they’re the slaves following Harriet Tubman to freedom and the immigrants seeking a refuge in Statue of Liberty; they’re the sweatshop workers in Triangle Fire and the burnt-out shoppers in Mr. Adman. They’re not the Masters of War, but they’re definitely the Lives in the Balance. They’re the thousands who came out in the San Francisco general strike in 1934 and the ones who will rise again, often using new forms of organizing outside of traditional union structures.

We’re not just singers – we’re passionate about what we sing about. We’re not academics (except for a couple of us), but many of us are enthusiasts about people’s history and current working people’s struggles, as well as being activists in those struggles. Besides our political activities, we’re involved in things like the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association and attend conferences on labor issues, festivals of workers’ and people’s songs, and “meaningful movies.” Our email listserve is full of exchanges about labor history, sharing of songs and YouTube videos, and notices about upcoming events of all sorts.

All right, you say, so you’re into people’s struggles and people’s culture, but why sing about it? And why in a chorus?

The obvious answer is that it’s fun. More than that, there’s something transcendent about singing that gives life to a story, whether it’s a triumph or a defeat, that somehow makes the singer and the listener a part of it. As for a *capella* chorus singing, the medium is the message – what better way to show that the whole of a group of people is greater than the sum of their individual parts? Soprano, alto, tenor, or bass, we could not do justice to these songs – but when those individual voices and sections combine into four-part harmony, they create something sublime.

The music we sing is both a legacy and an inspiration. Songs are the way we remember our history and recognize the truth of our present. The mass media present a history that renders invisible the story that is most important to all of us – the struggle to create a better world. Most popular music magnifies some of the worst aspects of our society while distorting the real problems and the real solutions. People’s music is a corrective to that.

If you like the music on this CD, we invite you to check our website at www.seattlelaborchorus.org for places you can come to hear us. We also encourage you, if you’re on a picket line or doing a fundraiser in the Seattle area, to give us a call – if we can, we’ll come to help. And if you like to sing, or ever thought you’d like to learn, come join us! It doesn’t matter if you don’t know how to sing – we’ll teach you!



If you are interested in more songs about justice for working people everywhere, check out our first two CDs, "Songs of Working People" and "Ring It In," available through CD Baby, <http://cdbaby.com>, or on our website, www.seattlelaborchorus.org.

Acknowledgements

In memory of Mike Yarrow and Jim Roe, who once sang in our ranks.

Special appreciation to the many talented musicians, lyricists and arrangers who brought you these songs, including our own lyricists Lou Truskoff and Mike Wold; accordion player D'vorah Kost; and our Arrangements Committee, headed by our director, the inimitable Janet Stecher.

Thanks for overall guidance to Jim Douglas, Celia Matson, Diane Morrison, Zoë Myers, Janet Stecher, Lou Truskoff, and Mike Wold; to Mike Wold for most of the writing embedded in this CD and on the cover; to Jon Williams for his inspired cover art; and to Doug Plummer and Garret Munger for their photos of the chorus.

Thanks to all our listeners. For those of you with critical ears, we're providing the following consonants for you to add to the ends of some of our lines: "n" "n" "p" "d" "l" "r."

And thanks to our dedicated singers:

Sopranos: Alice Friedman, Cindy Cole, Janet Varon, Julie Rose, Kate Speltz, Kelly Garland, Nancy Eichner, Phoebe Rounds, Sue Gibbs, Sue Moser, and Susan Clark.

Altos: Babs Luetke, Barb Powers, Catherine Carter, Celia Matson, D'vorah Kost, Gunnel Clark, JoAnn Keenan, Janet Van Fleet, Patty Lyman, Terri Pollock, and Zoë Myers.

Tenors: Diane Morrison, Edna Oberman, Ginger Garner, Jim Douglas, Karen Weisser, Martha Cohen, and Sasha Harmon.

Basses: Bob Barnes, Dan Belenky, Dan Roberts, David Westphal, Eric Nelson, Jim Roe, Lou Truskoff, Michael Laslett, Mike Wold, and Richard Groomer.

All songs were licensed through Harry Fox or with the composers.

Lyrics

These lyrics are those in our renditions of the songs. Some lyrics, melodies, and arrangements have been changed slightly from the originals to make them more timely, more specifically about our area, or for other reasons.

Statue of Liberty

If there is any progressive component to the ideology of “America,” it’s the idea that we welcome everyone seeking freedom, particularly those who have suffered from poverty and inequality in their home countries. The reality, of course, has been very different. But dreams have power, the more so if they’ve never been realized. As Langston Hughes put it, “let America be America again – The land that never has been yet – And yet must be.”

Music & lyrics: Mike Wold; chorus quotes Emma Lazarus (“The New Colossus”)

I was taking the ferry in New York harbor
Right by the torch of Liberty
Past the words that she’s said over and over
Written down so everyone could see

Chorus:

“Give me your tired, your poor
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore
Send these the homeless, tempest-tossed to me”

I was crossing the bridge on the Rio Grande
I saw what they’re building there today
A wall to keep poor immigrants out of our land
I wonder if that lady still could say

(Chorus)

And you could even say
That it never was that way
That we really weren’t a refuge for the poor
You could ask a founder’s slave
Or the natives what they gave
Or the landless how they suffered in the war
This truth can’t be denied, but the vision still abides
Even if it never did exist before

(Chorus)

People from all lands were this country’s brick and mortar
Imagine if they never let us stay
Would you even have been born if someone hadn’t crossed the border?
I say we welcome everyone today

(Chorus)

Harriet Tubman

You could ask Harriet Tubman what freedom means. She was an iconic figure of people’s history – the escaped slave who returned to free other slaves, showing them the way to freedom. She was also an active feminist and abolitionist. John McCutcheon added the bridge, which comes from the traditional spiritual, Wade in the Water; the Labor Chorus’ Lou Truskoff updated McCutcheon’s third verse, about refugees from U.S. intervention in the 1980s in Central America, to ask if we’re going to be there for the economic refugees of the present era.

Music and lyrics: Walter Robinson; third verse John McCutcheon and Lou Truskoff

One night I dreamed I was in slavery
‘Bout 1850 was the time
Sorrow was the only sign
Nothing about to ease my mind
Out of the night appeared a lady
Leading a distant pilgrim band
First mate, she cried pointing her hand
Make room aboard for this young woman, she said:

Chorus:

Come on up, uh huh huh, I’ve got a lifeline
Come on up to this train of mine
Come on up, uh huh huh, I’ve got a lifeline
Come on up to this train of mine
She said her name was Harriet Tubman
And she drove for the Underground Railroad

Hundreds of miles we traveled onward
Gathering slaves from town to town
Seeking every lost and found
Setting those free that once were bound
Somehow my heart was growing weaker
I fell by the wayside, sinking sand
Firmly did that lady stand
Lifted me up and took my hand, and she said

(Chorus)

Who are these children dressed in red
They must be the ones that Moses led
And who are these children at the door
They must be the ones from El Salvador

(Chorus)

Then I awoke, no more I faltered
Finding new strength for the task we're shown
Sisters and brothers leaving their homes
Their history, their people, all they've known
Bidding farewell in Guatemala, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador
Leaving all their loved ones behind
They arrive at our border, what will they find, will we say

(Chorus)

Masters of War

Written in the shadow of the potential nuclear holocaust, Dylan said that Masters of War was in part referring to the then-new term "military-industrial" complex. It's been 50 years since Dylan wrote the song, and, despite the brief respite caused by the "Vietnam syndrome," Republicans and Democrats have found unity in the notion that we need our huge military to maintain corporate domination of the world. Dylan's lyrics pull aside the platitudes about "defense" to show what being "Masters of War" means.

Music: Jean Ritchie ("Nottamun Town")

Lyrics: Bob Dylan

Accordion: D'Vorah Kost

Bob Dylan's music company donated the license for us to record this song, but requested that we not print the lyrics. You can find the complete lyrics online at <http://www.bobdylan.com/us/songs/masters-war>, including verses not included on this recording.

Mr. Adman

One of the problems in our economy is that it's based on ever-increasing production of consumer goods. But how do you get people to keep buying at the same time that you're cutting their salaries and laying them off?

Enter Mr. Adman.

Music: Pat Ballard ("Mr. Sandman")

Lyrics: Lou Truskoff

Mister Adman, bring us a dream
Help us succeed with our marketing scheme
We want to make them shop and just keep shopping
And pick them up again just when they're dropping
Adman, convince everyone
They really need this stuff or life is no fun
So please help us fulfill our scheme
Mister Adman, bring us a dream

Mister Adman, bring us a dream
We'll pay you big bucks to be part of our team
We'll make the widgets with cheap foreign labor
Then you'll create demand from friends and neighbors
Adman, your skills we adore
Your brilliant ads will have them pleading for more
Our profits this year will be obscene

Adman, they're not spending enough
Scrimping and saving 'cause times are so tough
Put back in their eyes that shoppers' gleam
Mister Adman, bring us, please, please bring us
Mister Adman, bring us a dream

Twenty-Four/Seven

*When a man tells you that he got rich through hard work, ask him:
"Whose?" – Don Marquis*

In Lester Simpson's UK, and in the USA to an even greater extent, the number of people who manage to get rich by "hard work" (as compared to those who started out rich) has never been lower. So why do they keep telling us to work harder? Well, profits have never been higher; that probably has something to do with it!

Music & lyrics: Lester Simpson (learned from Coope, Boyes, & Simpson; lyrics changed slightly)

A century of struggle disappearing down the drain
The honest day for decent pay our parents fought to claim
Now global spin rotates the world, brands get ever stronger
As corporations waive the rules to work us ever longer

Chorus:

Twenty-four/seven and three-six-five
You gotta work a little harder if you're ever gonna thrive
Check the way you do it, try a bit more and then
You're gonna burn out long before your threescore and ten

In an endless quest for bigger bucks, you really ought to know
The men in suits will move the work to where the pay is low
The suits are sewn by nimble hands that have no time for clapping
Designer names, no wage claims, shoppers go home happy

(Chorus)

Constantly improving, always checking your demeanor
Singing from the same hymn sheet, always being keener
Then you're downsized, not prized, seems that you were off course
Outsourced, no discourse, you're just another resource

We must ensure the margin's bigger
We know you're not the one to shirk
We didn't want to pull the trigger
It's just the way the markets work

Though now you're working twice as hard, profits start to stumble
They move the cursor, click the mouse and stocks begin to tumble
The stake you have been holding has been driven through your dreams
And the big man who had the plan has walked off with the cream

Twenty-four/seven and three-six-five

You gotta work a little harder if you're ever gonna thrive
Check the way you do it, try a bit more and then
You're gonna burn out long before your threescore and ten
You're gonna burn out long before your threescore and ten
You're gonna burn out

Lives in the Balance

This song is as relevant today as when it was written nearly 30 years ago. Only the countries have changed, as the wars have shifted from Latin America to the Middle East and Africa. And the selling of the President has only intensified. What does it take to remember?

Music & lyrics: Jackson Browne
Arrangement: New York City Labor Chorus

I've been waiting for something to happen
For a week or a month or a year
With the blood in the ink of the headlines
And the sound of the crowd in my ear

You might ask what it takes to remember
When you know that you've seen it before
Where a government lies to a people
And the country is mired in war

And there's a shadow on the faces
Of the men who send the guns
To the wars that are fought in places
Where their business interests run

On radio talk shows and TV
You hear one thing again and again
How the USA stands for freedom
And will come to the aid of a friend

Ah, but who are the ones that we call our friends
These governments killing their own
Or the people who find they can't take any more
So they pick up a gun or a brick or a stone

Chorus:

And there are lives in the balance
There are people under fire
There are children at the cannon
And there is blood on the wire

And there's a shadow on the faces
Of the men who fan the flames
Of the wars that are fought in places
Where they can't even say the names

They sell us the President the same way
That they sell us our clothes and our cars
They sell us everything from youth to religion
The same way they sell us our wars

I want to know who the men in the shadows are
I want to hear somebody asking them why
They can be counted on to tell us who our enemies are
But they're never the ones to fight and to die

(Chorus)

Blood and Gold

Based on a Romanian folk song, Andy Irvine & Jane Cassidy evoke the historical senselessness and class basis of the wars that devastated Central Europe through much of history. The captain at least has something to win, if he survives. The common soldiers sold their lives for a bit of gold, leaving their weeping families and lovers behind them.

Story and music originally based on a Romanian song and a Bulgarian dance tune. English lyrics and current melody by Jane Cassidy and Andy Irvine. Learned from sheet music from Village Harmony, arrangement attributed to Maca.

On rides the captain and three hundred soldier lads
Out of the morning mist and through the silence go
Whistling gaily rides the captain at the head
Behind him soldier boys sadly weeping go
For when you took my gold and swore to follow me,
You sold away your lives and your liberty
No more you'll till the soil; no more you'll work the land
No more to the dance you'll go and take girls by the hand
Oh, Mother, weep.....for your son
He is gone.....to kill and die

You'll weep; you'll die by the keen edge of the sword
All alone by the muddy Danube shore
He gave the order for the drummers to beat their drums
That mothers all might know the life a soldier lives
Unfurl your ragged banner and raise your pale young face,
You'll all go in the fire; there'll be no hiding place
Oh, mother, hear the drumbeat in the village square
Oh mother, the drum's for me to go for a soldier there
Mothers, sisters, wives, weep for us
Marked as Cain, we die alone

Triangle Fire

No doubt in 1911 the owners of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company would have given you good reasons for why they had to lock the fire exit doors of their factory. No doubt the owners of the Tazreen Factory in Bangladesh would have given you similar reasons in 2012 – having to do with keeping costs down – for the inadequate fire exits in that building. The degree to which corporations and businesspeople can devalue the lives of their workers, given the latitude to do so, seemingly has no maximum. These examples of the heartlessness of the system are not exceptional – they are simply the profit motive taken to its logical extreme.

Music & lyrics: John O'Connor

Come gather around and I'll sing you a song
Of a sight that I saw long ago
Oh the weather was fair down in Washington Square
It was spring, I was on my way home

It was 1911 on March 25
I remember as if yesterday
At the Triangle Shirtwaist Company where the girls
Were all waiting to pick up their pay

Chorus:

And “fire” was the cry from the windows up high
I saw but I could not believe
Two girls on the ledge, as they jumped from the edge
Into the arms of eternity

On the 8th and the 9th and the 10th floor of this factory
Of workers from the garment trade
Packed ‘em into the rooms where so many were doomed
At the end of the Sabbath day

Oh the doors were all locked and the fire escapes weak
The whole building was a trap and a peril
Just to save a few bucks for the rich runamucks
Who made money from the lives of young girls

(Chorus)

What choice for a young girl of 16 or so
But the sweatshops for the shirtwaists they sell
And what choice for a soul in a 10-story hole
But the pavement or the fires of hell

Now the question still looms in the workshops and rooms
And the question I’ll pose it to you
When you stand to defend all the capitalists and their friends
What price for the profit of few?

And “murder” I’ll cry till the day that I die
For I saw but I could not believe
Two girls on the ledge, as they jumped from the edge
Into the arms of eternity
Into the arms of eternity

Take off Your Hats

The San Francisco General Strike was the culmination of one of the defining labor struggles of the 1930s and established the ILWU as one of the most powerful and radical unions on the West Coast. It showed the power that working people, acting in solidarity with each other, can have.

Music & lyrics: Jon Fromer

Chorus:

So take a look at these docks, where the water meets the land
Take a moment to remember, thousands took a stand
Take courage from the workers brother Harry Bridges led
Take off your hats for the martyred dead

For a dollar an hour talkin’ union pay
For a hirin’ hall and a 6 hour day
For a life of security, a life without fear
We stood our ground in front of that pier

Strikers were arrested, beaten and gassed
Hundreds of police tried to get the strike breakers past
Ships lay empty, shut down in port
They knew the power of the union in 1934

Thousand police lined up near Rincon Hill
With sawed-off shotguns they aimed to kill
Hundreds were wounded in Bloody Thursday’s attack
Howard Speary and Nick Bordoio lay dead, bullets in their back

People were outraged, called a general strike
Not a shop was open, not a bus or cab in sight
Fifty thousand marched in silence, behind their brothers slain
Up Market Street to victory, they did not die in vain

(Chorus)

I'll Organize

Seattle native Al Bradbury is an organizer, the editor of Labor Notes, and a prolific songwriter. Her rewrite of I Will Survive is always a crowd-pleaser when the chorus performs it. And it makes an important point – that the best way out of a bad relationship with your boss is to organize!

Music: Dino Fekaris, Freddie Perrin (“I Will Survive”)

Lyrics: Al Bradbury

At first I was afraid, I was petrified
I thought if I opened up my mouth, I would get fired
But I spent all those angry nights thinking how you had done me wrong
And I grew strong and brought my co-workers along

And now you're back with hat in hand
You say that you can make it up to us, you say you understand
I should have seen it from the start; I used to fall for all your lies
But now I recognize your tricks and I can see through your disguise

Go on now, go, walk out the door
We formed a union now; you're not the king here anymore
Weren't you the one who tried to conquer and divide?
Did you think we'd crumble? Did you think we'd lay down and die?

Oh no, not I; I'll organize
I'm never turning back now that you've opened up my eyes
I've got my life to live
I've got more than work to give
I'll organize, I'll organize, hey, hey

Rise Again

Tom Juravich wrote this song over 30 years ago, during Ronald Reagan's first term. In many ways, we have been “going back to where we began” since then – rates of unionism are as low as they were in the 1920s, and the gap between rich and poor is greater than at any time since the Depression. But it's only now that we can see Juravich was right – the working folks of this country WILL rise again.

Music & lyrics: Tom Juravich

I can feel the spirit building,
Soft as a whisper, loud as a roar
I can feel something a-stirrin',
Like I never have before
We've been quiet too long my friend
And the working folks of this country will rise again

We've been quiet for forty years now
You had the work, you gave us the pay
But with hard times round the corner
You think we've seen our better day
But we're not going back to where we began
And the working folks of this country will rise again

Now you tell me that you don't need me
You lay me off, no work you say
But you expect to see my head a-hangin'
As I pack and walk away
But with my brothers and sisters so proudly we'll stand
And the working folks of this country will rise again

Mother Jones and Lucy Parsons,
Old Joe Hill and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn
They were old time union warriors
They gave no thought to givin' in
We will rekindle that spirit my friend
And the working folks of this country will rise again

I can feel the spirit building,
Soft as a whisper, loud as a roar
I can feel something a-stirrin',
Like I never have before
We've been quiet too long my friend
And the working folks of this country will rise again
We will rekindle that spirit my friend
And the working folks of this country will rise again