

Ring It In! Songs of Peace and Justice For the Holiday Season

Seattle Labor Chorus

In May 1997, a nervous, exhilarated bunch of amateur singers mounted the mural amphitheater stage at the great Northwest Folklife Festival. Facing a huge late-afternoon audience behind folk legend Pete Seeger, the Seattle Labor Chorus began what is now more than a decade of spirited, thought-provoking performances.

The chorus has matured under the continuing guidance of music director Janet Stecher (of the respected folk duo Rebel Voices). A skilled crew supplies sheet music with polished, computer-aided, mainly custom arrangements. We keep improving our sound through formal training, practice and choral exchanges. And we keep singing for an ever-broadening audience.

We continue to perform at union halls and on picket lines in support of the labor movement. We have turned that first Folklife appearance into a significant contribution to the ever-growing popularity of the annual labor stage. And we participate in dozens of peace and justice actions every year, adding our voices to the work of activists in the environmental, immigrant rights and civil rights movements. We're also proud of our many opportunities to sing at victory celebrations, retirement parties and memorials for colleagues, heroes and fans we've worked with over the years, in particular moving memorials for chorus member Gary Smith and for a great mentor, the incomparable Utah Phillips.

For several years we've participated in an unlikely venue for a political chorus: the Great Figgy Pudding Street Corner Caroling Competition. This festive event, featuring more than 50 caroling teams, is an annual fundraiser for the Pike Market Senior Center, www.figgypuddingpmsc.org, which for 30 years has served one of Seattle's most vulnerable populations: homeless seniors. The Center and its downtown food bank provide a network of services, from a nutritionally balanced daily lunch to social services and wellness activities, engaging its members with the greater Seattle community.

At Figgy Pudding, we join with other choruses in a common goal of singing to help others, promote peace, and cheer ourselves through tough times. Our chorus has often sung street side, but only for Figgy do we don our trademark hardhats twinkling with colored holiday lights! In December 2004, the chorus gathered its first holiday crowd and won the Figgy Pudding Silver Platter Award for Best Choral Performance. We've hit the finalist stage every year since — honored annually as the People's Choice — and we continue to add more eye-opening holiday songs to our repertoire. Now we've added one more way in which we'll celebrate the season and help support the senior center. On choral competition night, all profits from the sale of this CD will be contributed to the Center and food bank.

During the holiday season, while our culture promotes peace in the world and universal goodwill, it is our pleasure to present this compilation of joyful and challenging songs to encourage you to raise your voice for peace and justice throughout the year.



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

Acknowledgments

In memory of Gary Smith, a brother in solidarity and song.

Special appreciation to the many talented musicians, lyricists and arrangers who brought you these delightful songs, including our own lyricists Judy Lent Moise, Zoë Myers, Lou Truskoff and Jim True.

Thanks for overall guidance to Jim Douglas, Sheri Hinshaw, Celia Matson, Zoë Myers, Janet Stecher and Lou Truskoff; for her editorial and writing skills to Judy Lent Moise; for their writing skills to Martha Cohen, Kim Holscher, JoAnn Keenan, D'Vorah Kost and Jim True.

And thanks to our dedicated singers:

Sopranos:

Beth Brunton , Cindy Cole, Nancy Eichner, Kelly Garland, Sue Gibbs, Kim Holscher, JoAnn Keenan, Sue Moser

Altos:

Sheri Hinshaw, Priya Keefe, D'vorah Kost, Celia Matson, Zoë Myers, Barbara Powers, Jamie Samplawski

Tenors:

Martha Cohen, Jim Douglas, Jackie Dupras, Sasha Harmon, Lila Smith, Karen Weisser

Basses:

Bob Barnes, John Hushagen, David Moise, Eric Nelson, Dan Roberts, Bill Rose, Jim True, Lou Truskoff, David Westphal

Additional singers on Hail-A-Union &/or Oil for World:

Anita Austin, Johanna Berking, Zoë Bermet, Sandra Coffman, Alison Eisinger, Laura Elia, Alice Friedman, Susan Gordon, Charles Imhoff, Jean Lepley, Patty Lyman, Judy Lent Moise, Danushka Northcross, Linda Novenski, Vrlina Nozlic, Edna Oberman, Brooke Richardson, Jim Roe, Hannah Ruggiero, Gary Smith, Kate Speltz, Karen Stuhldreher, Aspen Swartz, Andy Thomas, Lauren Tozzi

Lyrics

Oil for the World

Music: George Frideric Handel

Arrangement: Lowell Mason

New lyrics by workshop songwriters at a

Pacific Northwest Labor History Association Conference

Additional lyrics: Judy Lent Moise

World oil demand is surging as supplies approach their limits. How can we prevent a train wreck? By varying the source, and lowering our demand, and creating equal access.

Our country went to war for cheap oil, paying with its sons and daughters, and still gas prices rise. There's no joy in a world careening out of balance, where essential resources can be privatized and used to subjugate those already suffering. A summer songwriting workshop sponsored by the 40-year-old PNLHA explored this idea, yielding this timely remake of an old favorite.

Oil for the world, the war drags on.

And we're still number one!

Let everyone rejoice, the West has made its choice,

We're patriots one and all, let's all drive to the mall,

In Humvees and S U Vs, drive to the mall.

Blood for more oil, the price is cheap

When someone else will pay!

To build a new world order, we marched across their border.

We'll wring out every drop, and then why should we stop?

Until we exhaust supply, why should we stop?

More war for oil? We can't sustain

Our weight upon the earth.

We need some new resources, from wind and other forces.

So let the sun shine on, and let the wind blow strong.

Let's seek independence so the earth lives on.

Solar Carol

Music: Traditional French Carol

Lyrics: Adam Austill, Court Dorsey, Charlie King, and Marcia Taylor

“Sister wind, brother river, join the sun in jubilee.” Simple answers to complex questions. This quiet alternative carol enjoins us to rejoice in nature’s gifts and embrace earth-friendly power. First learned from the inspirational cultural collective Bright Morning Star, a group which evolved through shared activism, protesting the dangers of the Seabrook nuclear power plant as members of the Clamshell Alliance.

See the sun how bright it shines
On the nations of the earth.
All who share this thing called life
Celebrate each day’s rebirth.

Chorus:

Solar power, inexpensive energy.
Solar power, inexpensive energy.

Brother river so you hear
How the valley calls you down.
Send your rushing waters near
Let the joyful hills resound.

Chorus

Sister wind we’ve heard on high
Sweetly singing o’er the plain.
And the windmills in reply
Echoing their glad refrain.

Chorus

How we love complexity
When the answer’s rather plain.
Join the sun in jubilee
Sing with us this joyous strain.

Chorus

Lo Yisa Goy/Vine and Fig Tree

Music: Traditional

Lyrics: Traditional

Arrangement: Janet Stecher

“Nation shall not lift up sword against nation.
Neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:4)

The words of an ancient Hebrew prophet echo in a joyful folk tune. Often played sizzling with klezmer instrumentals, this song’s determined message is the universal desire for peace. We must raise our voices, spread the word: fewer swords, more plowshares.

And every one ‘neath their vine and fig tree
Shall live in peace and unafraid. (2x)

And into plowshares beat their swords,
Nations shall learn war no more. (2x)

Lo yisa goy el goy cherev
Lo yilmadu od milchama. (2x)

Hevenu shalom aleichem. (x3)
Hevenu shalom, shalom, shalom aleichem.
Shalom, shalom. Come live in peace and unafraid.

Because All Men Are Brothers

Music: Hans Leo Hassler/J.S. Bach

Lyrics: Tom Glazer

*Additional changes by SLC

Originally published as a church hymn in 1613, the music for this song is best known as the "Passion Chorale" by Johann Sebastian Bach. Tom Glazer (1914-2003), who listened to it as a boy, borrowed it when asked to write a song about brotherhood. Published in 1947 in the Daily Worker, the song didn't gain popularity until the Weavers recorded it 20 years later. However, Peter, Paul and Mary's 1965 version is the most familiar.

Because all men are brothers wherever they may be
One Union shall unite us forever proud and free
No tyrant shall defeat us, no nation strike us down
All those who toil shall greet us the whole wide world around.

All others are my kindred forever hand in hand
Where chimes the bell of freedom there is my native land
My brother's fears are my fears - yellow, white or brown
My sister's tears are my tears, the whole wide world around.

Let every voice be thunder, let every heart beat strong
Until all tyrants perish, our work shall not be done
Let not our memories fail us the lost year shall be found
Let slavery's chains be broken the whole wide world around.*

O Little Town of New Orleans

Music: Lewis H. Redner

Lyrics: Judy Lent Moise

The New Orleans tragedy is not over. Nothing can erase the spectacle of government betrayal: people herded and penned in filth like animals; Bush playing golf while people starved and died; a levee breaking against FEMA assurance that it couldn't happen. Hurricane Katrina hit once, and FEMA's apathetic negligence finished the job, despite the citizens' resilience. New Orleans is a living metaphor for how our government has failed us all, and a message to join together to set things right.

O little town of New Orleans, your head held high in pain.
You sent strong pleas through our TVs for help with the hurricane.
No one could guess its power - the force of rain and gust.
And who could guess our government would so betray your trust?

The weather folks did not foresee the fatal levee break;
How Pontchartrain rushed with the rain to form a toxic lake.
The engineers were halted by tax cuts, fear and war
From stopping a calamity which FEMA would ignore.

We watched disaster spread without a federal reply
While everyday lives washed away, the poorest left to die.
Men crying for assistance while Bush improved his game
Your poor and hungry searched for food and FEMA hid from blame.

O little town of New Orleans, you're vaster than before;
Your people spread to every state, your borders shore to shore.
You stand for all our nation's survived through this regime.
Together we'll restore our lives and fight our way upstream.

Picketline Chanukah

Music: Traditional
Lyrics: Judy Lent Moise

*When workers of the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild (PNNG) struck Seattle's largest paper, the **Seattle Times**, during Chanukah, 2001, the Seattle Labor Chorus treated them to some musical picketline solidarity, complete with the traditional potato pancakes.*

Chanukah, oh Chanukah we're lighting the barrel.
Come march and join in our Chanukah carol.
Gather at the table, there'll be no retreat;
Let's get this thing settled, then go home to eat.
And while they are talking, our candles delight all who see
What's jarring to Mason is likely to hasten a win for the PNNG.
(2x)

Chanukah, oh Chanukah a month, maybe longer,
As we keep fighting, our spirit grows stronger.
When the Union Record first hit the Net
Seattle learned how good real reporting can get.
And while talks continue, reporters write stories that hint
A miracle's fine, but we're holding the line
'Til there's bargaining news fit to print. (2x)

Chanukah, oh Chanukah the Guild's Maccabbeus
Led us when management would not even see us.
If Hearst at its worst couldn't break up our strike
We can still hold out for an offer we like.
It's raining, it's snowing, our pickets stand fast in the street;
Pass me a pancake, together we can take
The stress and the scabs and the heat. (2x)

O Peaceful Night

Music: Adolphe-Charles Adam
Words: Inspired by Holly Near's revised version of *Oh Holy Night*,
recorded on *Still We Sing*, www.hollynear.com; additional lyrics by
Lou Truskoff and Zoë Myers
Arrangement: Sally DeFord with modifications by Janet Stecher

A classic carol becomes a fervent plea for peace on earth.

O peaceful night the stars are brightly shining
This is the time that we need peace on earth.
Long has lived the world in fear and error pining
When peace appears then each soul knows its worth.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and peaceful morn.

Chorus:
O, rise from your knees and hear the peoples' voices.
We need peace on earth, yes this night, let peace be born.
O night of peace, O night, let peace be born.

Called by the cry of those who long for justice
We gather here and we sing in freedom's name.
Our songs of peace bear witness to their sorrow
Let us together a new day proclaim.

We must have peace the people now demand it
And justice will ensure that peace will come.

Chorus

Hark! The WalMart Banners Say

Music: Felix Mendelssohn
Lyrics: Dan Rodman (Raging Grannies)
*Additional changes by SLC

The Raging Grannies sang this at a WalMart protest. We tweaked their lyrics and have sung it at every Figgy Pudding festival since. In 2007, a crowd member posted a cell phone recording of our performance on YouTube, making us screen stars. Thank you, Raging Grannies.

Hark! The WalMart banners say: “It’s made in the USA.”
But read the fine print and you’ll see most things come from overseas.
Sweatshop factories exploit children, while the Waltons*
rake in billions.

Chorus:
Tell us where your factories are.
Do they exploit the working poor?*

Hark! To WalMart we do say, people deserve a living wage!

A quarter an hour in Honduras; just five cents in Bangladesh.
Seven-day weeks in Guatemala; Indonesians earn ten cents.
Workers beaten for mistakes; WalMart this is a disgrace.

Chorus:
WalMart sweatshops won’t stay secret; we will let the whole world see.
We don’t want our hard-earned money siphoned off by corporate greed.
We want human rights today; WalMart we won’t go away.

Chorus

Homeless Wassail

Music and Lyrics: Ian Robb & Finest Kind
Arrangement: Earle Peach

Ottawa composer Ian Robb, of the group Finest Kind, borrowed a timeless melody known as Gloucestershire Wassail, to tell how the holidays touch the haves and have nots. When Earle Peach introduced us to Homeless Wassail, he specified a tempo of “restrained rage.” As we revel in the food, drink, and comfort of our holidays, this song resounds as a reminder of the poor and homeless whose circumstances bar them from the “royal hall” and merry toasts to the season.

Wassail, wassail all over the town; our cup is white and our ale is brown.
But huddled on this iron grate, we poor and hungry curse our fate.

Chorus:
No wassail bowl for such as these, no turkey scraps, no ale nor cheese
This Christmas Eve our heart's desire is a bottle of gin and a trash-can fire.

Good Christian, mind as home you go with dreams of holly and mistletoe
That the holly bears a dreadful thorn for those who wake to a frozen dawn.

Chorus

Oh where is he, that holy child, once born of Mary, meek and mild;
And whither peace, good will to men, now and forever more, amen?

Chorus

All ye who dine with face aglow, *in Reginency atrio*,
Pray pause a while at pleasure’s door and sup some sorrow with the poor.

Chorus

Wassail, wassail all over the town; our cup is white and our ale is brown.
This pain and hunger cold and care—sweet Jesus Christ, it’s hard to bear.

Ring It In!

Music and Lyrics: Alix Herrmanns

Years ago at a chorus New Year's Eve gathering, a tradition was born when our director began to sing this song at the stroke of midnight. The rest of us picked it up immediately, and pretty soon we were engulfed by the round's joyous four-part harmony. We've sung it every New Year's Eve since, and now you can too. In keeping with the well-known tradition, we still follow it with Auld Lang Syne. Ring it in!

Ring it in. Ring in the New Year (2x)
Bells are ringing. Bells are ringing. (2x)
Peace and love throughout the New Year. (2x)
Joy! Joy! Joy! (2x)

O Ye Who Toil at Midnight Hour

Music: Richard Storrs Willis

Lyrics: Jim True

Picture yourself as a janitor working the Christmas Eve graveyard shift on the twentieth floor of some nameless office building. The boss is not around, so you step onto the balcony to enjoy the view while you eat lunch.

Suddenly, up from the streets far below, you faintly hear the words of a song that speaks directly to you, saying: you should earn a fair wage to mop these floors; you deserve dignity and security in your life regardless of where you were born or what work you do.

O ye who toil at midnight hour
Come join our hopeful song.
Arise ye bending o'er those brooms
Sing out with voices strong.
Throw off wage slavery's hated chains
Come join us as we sing.
'Tis vision of a living wage
To all the world we bring.

Share joyous holidays with your kids
Have health care when you're old,
Fear not your boss' vicious pen,
With union power be bold!
You built their fortunes with your hands
It's time you claimed your share.
Link arms with unionists singing proud
To show the world what's fair.

No angel wing can lift your wage
But you don't walk alone.
A host of workers by your side
Walk though that valley unknown.
'Tis dark and dangerous ground we tread
Just see how the angels have fled.
But we shrink not from noble task
We fight for roses and bread!

Our job is lighting the road ahead
The walking is up to you.
Just sign your name on that union card,
You know it's right that you do.
Your family's future is in your hands,
Come get what is rightfully yours.
Then raise your voice in powerful song,
Get paid fair wage to mop floors!

Hail-A-Union Chorus

Music: George Frideric Handel

Lyrics: Paul McKenna

Who says labor music can't be soulful? The original lyric, drawn from the New Testament Book of Revelations, now urges us to Join The Union! The union happens to be the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) because of its lyricist's affiliation, but every other union that's heard it would be happy to insert its initials. The intricate harmonies, the ear-flooding rush of passion uplift us to unite to better the world in a fervor that's as close as some of us get to singing in church.

Join the union! (x4)

Join SEIU.

Get a contract; a union contract.

Join the union. Join the union. Join SEIU.

Win job security and fair wages.

Join the union (x4)

What they've been paying us is outrageous.

Join the union (x4)

If we're to stay in line with inflation, join the union.

Backed by a mighty organization.

Join the union - SEIU.

In union there is strength. Unity.

Together we'll achieve industrial democracy!

Get on the road to fair compensation.

Eliminate unjust termination.

Improve your daily work situation.

Sign up for union representation.

All for one. And one for all.

All for one. Together, forever.

And one for all.

Join the union. Join the union.

Come on out, and heed the call.

And we shall stand together for ever and ever.

All for one and one for all.

United we stand, divided we fall.

We've won, we'll sing with joy and elation.

Together, forever. Join the union - SEIU.



And we'll let you in on a secret:

Santa's elves are organizing at the North Pole!