

LINDSAY STRAW

MY MIND FROM LOVE BEING FREE



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I didn't set out to record a collection of traditional songs about love and relationships, but when I realized I had, I thought it made sense to give it the rather contrary title of *My Mind From Love Being Free* (taken from a line of "Lurgy Stream"). The singers and albums I learned these songs from represent influences across nearly a decade of exploring the traditional songs of Britain and Ireland. I've been playing and singing half of these songs, as you hear them, for years; others are relatively fresh arrangements, created for this recording. It's largely due to the encouragement of friends and fellow musicians that I finally feel ready to release them into the world. Thank you to each and every one of you.

All songs are traditional, and arranged and performed by Lindsay Straw.
Recording and mastering by James Prendergast at Mill Pond Music Studio, Portsmouth, NH.
Cover photo by Jackie Ricciardi. Album sleeve design and liner notes by Lindsay Straw,
with editing help from Daniel Accardi.

Lindsay plays a Collings OM2HSS guitar and a Fylde Signature Longscale Archtop bouzouki.

Visit www.lindsaystraw.com for detailed song notes & lyrics, tour dates, and booking info.
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Extended Liner Notes and Lyrics for *My Mind From Love Being Free* by Lindsay Straw

Since so many of these songs were learned primarily from three singers, I feel that it's worth elaborating a bit on each.

Lizzie Higgins & Jeannie Robertson:

Nearly half come from the Scottish musical dynasty of Jeannie Robertson and Lizzie Higgins: "Far Over the Forth," "Lord Lovat," "When I Was Not But Sweet Sixteen," and "Lovely Molly." Jeannie and Lizzie's powerful, emotional singing styles and repertoire continue to move me, years after stumbling upon them in the *Voice of the People* collections.

Jeannie Robertson was a major figure in the British folk revival. She and her family were Travellers in Aberdeenshire, and were bearers of a rich musical history. Her daughter Lizzie reluctantly performed and recorded Jeannie's songs and carried on her legacy, as did many other singers who learned from her over the years. Musical Traditions' *In Memory of Lizzie Higgins* and James Porter & Herschel Gower's *Jeannie Robertson: Emergent Singer, Transformative Voice*, along with the Mainly Norfolk website, have been invaluable resources for further exploring both the songs and singers.

Rita Gallagher:

Several songs - "The Bonny Light Horseman," "The Mermaid," and "Lurgy Stream" - were learned from Rita Gallagher's albums. Rita's gorgeous voice and intricate ornamentation are hugely responsible for my love of old-style Irish singing. Rita is from Donegal, and when she was younger she learned from Paddy Tunney and other members of his family. She has also been kind enough to take the time to answer a nerdy folk singer's questions via email. If you can only own one collection of unaccompanied songs (heaven forbid!), make sure it's the double-CD release of Rita's *May Morning Dew* and *Easter Snow*.

A note on adaptations and phrasing:

I'm an American - specifically one from the Far West with no ties to old world ancestors, Irish, Scottish, or otherwise. I prefer singing in my own accent and freely adapting songs as I see fit, so I almost always alter the phrasing and wording of a song to make it feel more natural to my manner of speaking and vocabulary. The end results are Americanized, but hopefully no less traditional, versions of Scottish and Irish songs. My transcriptions of the lyrics reflect my alterations.

Far Over the Forth

Far over the forth, I look at the north
But what is the north with its highlands to me?
The south nor the east give ease to my breast
It's a far foreign land o'er the wild rolling sea.

Ah, the long summer day, amid the heather and the bracken
The joy and delight in his bonny blue eyes
It's little I knew that the wild western ocean,
Would be rolling this day between my laddie and me.

His father he frowned on the love of his boyhood
And oh, his proud mother looked cold upon me
But he still followed me to my home in the shieling
And the hills of Breadalbane rung wild with our glee.

We trysted our love on the cairn, on the mountains
The deer and the roe stood bridemaids to me
And my love's trying glass was a pure crystal fountain
What then was the world to my laddie and me?

So I look at the west as I go to my rest
That happy my dreams and my slumbers may be.
For far in the west lives a lad I love best
He is seeking a home for my baby and me.

Notes:

Roud 3360. According to the Mainly Norfolk article, this song, in some forms, is sometimes attributed to Robert Burns. It was one of many I learned from Lizzie Higgins' album *Princess of the Thistle*. Other renditions can be heard from her mother, Jeannie Robertson, and from Ray Fisher on her EP with Archie Fisher, *Far Over the Forth*.

Breadalbane is an area in the Scottish Highlands; the name means "the upper part of Alba."

The Bonny Light Horseman/The Song of the Passion

When Bony commanded his troops for to stand,
He leveled his cannon all over the land.
He leveled his cannon the whole victory for to gain,
And he slew my light horseman returning from Spain.

CHORUS:

Broken hearted I will wander, broken hearted I will remain,
For my bonny light horseman in the war he was slain.

Now the dove, she laments for her mate as she flies.
“Oh, where tell me where is my true love?” she cries.
And where in this wide world is there one that can compare
With my bonny light horseman, who was slain in the war?

CHORUS

If I was a small bird and had wings to fly,
I'd fly o'er the salt seas where my true love does lie.
And with my fond wings I'd beat over his grave,
And I'd kiss the cold lips that lie dead in the clay.

CHORUS

Notes:

A common enough song with many variations, I first learned “The Bonny Light Horseman” from John Faulkner & Dolores Keane’s *Broken Hearted I’ll Wander*, and then was later influenced by Rita Gallagher’s rendition on her album *May Morning Dew*. Rita’s version has an additional verse, which I’ve decided to leave out due to the length. “The Song of the Passion” is a lovely waltz that my fiddle, concertina, and accordion-playing friend Dan Accardi shared when we arranged it for band performances with The Ivy Leaf.

Lord Lovat

Lord Lovat he stands at his stable door
He was brushing his milk steed down
When who passed by but Lady Nancy Bell
She was wishing her lover godspeed,
She was wishing her lover godspeed.

“Oh, where are you going, Lord Lovat?” she said,
“Come promise, tell me true.”
“I’m going over the seas, strange countries to see.
Lady Nancy Bell, I’ll come and see you,
Lady Nancy Bell, I’ll come and see.”

He hadn’t been gone a year or two
Scarcely had been three
When a mightful dream came into his head.
“Lady Nancy Bell, I’ll come and see you,
Lady Nancy Bell, I’ll come and see.”

Oh, he’s passed down to Capelton’s church
And down through Mary’s Hall.
And the ladies were all weeping for,
And the ladies were all weeping for.

“Oh, who is dead?” Lord Lovat, he said,
“Come promise, tell me true.”
“Lady Nancy Bell died for her true lover’s sake.
And Lord Lovat was his name,
And Lord Lovat was his name.”

Notes:

Roud 48, Child 75. I learned this song from Lizzie Higgins, who again learned it from her mother Jeannie. I’m not really much of a fan of songs where the woman dies of a broken heart, but Lizzie’s gorgeous ornamentation and expression of the melody, in those last two lines of each verse especially, made me want to learn this song. Other versions go by the title “Lord Lovel,” feature a Lady Ouncebell, and have many more verses than I sing here. Jeannie’s version has one more verse than Lizzie’s, which I may add to my live performances:

*He ordered the coffin to be opened up
And the white sheet rolled down.
He kissed her on the cold-clay lips
An’ the tears came tricklin’ down,
An’ the tears came tricklin’ down*

When I Was Not But Sweet Sixteen

When I was not but sweet sixteen
And beauty just a-blooming-o.
Oh, little, little, did I think
At nineteen I'd be grieving-o.

CHORUS:

For the ploughman lads, the gay wee lads,
They're false and they're deceiving-o.
They'll take your all and they'll go away
And they leave their lassies grieving-o

Oh, if I'd have known what I now know
I'd have taken my mother's warning-o.
And I wouldn't be sitting by your fireside,
Crying hush-a-bye my baby-o

CHORUS

Oh, hush-a-bye, for I'm your ma,
And lord knows where is your daddy-o.
But I'll take good care and I'll be aware
Of the young men in the gloaming-o.

CHORUS

Notes:

Roud 5138. This is one I learned just from Jeannie Robertson; I've actually never come across a version sung by Lizzie. It was included on *The Voice of the People, Volume 10*. I was immediately obsessed with Jeannie's emotive singing of it, which I felt was intensely sad and regretful. But Mainly Norfolk has an interesting quote from Hamish Henderson that was included in the sleeve notes of one of Jeannie's albums: "This song of the forsaken maiden is less tragic than most of the same type. The reproach levelled at the wanton and deceiving ploughboy lads is not without affection. The song is best known on Speyside, and, indeed, is often called Peggy on the Banks o' the Spey." If you listen to other versions, such as June Tabor's, you will find it is indeed a little more emotionally ambiguous, with a verse about enjoying the company and kisses of the ploughboy lads.

Awake, Awake

Awake, awake, you drowsy sleeper
Awake, awake, it is almost day
How can you sleep, you cruel creature
Since you have stolen my heart away?

Oh, hush, hush, hush, don't you wake my mother
No songs of love will she let me hear
If you sing songs, go pray court some other
Or whisper lowly in my ear

My father lies in the next room simple
Taking of his natural rest
And in his right hand he holds a weapon
He says he'll kill the one I love best

Come Polly Von, come, you'll stop my pining
Sit you down by the side of me
And put your loving arms around me
And say you'll love no one but me

I'll go with you in some lonesome valley
There I will spend my days with you
Though all my meals will be of the freshest berries
And the water I drink of the morning dew

Pretty flowers were made to bloom, love
Pretty stars were made to shine
Pretty girls were made for boys to love
And maybe you were made for mine

Notes:

Roud catalogues most of the English versions of this song as Roud 22620 and the American versions as Roud 22621. Some variations include "Arise, Arise," "The Silver Dagger," and "The Drowsy Sleeper." I learned it from Elizabeth LaPrelle's *Lizard in the Spring*. At the moment this version is my favorite because of the concise, happy ending, and for the melodic variation on the fourth and fifth verses.

When I Was In My Prime

When I was in my prime, I flourished like a vine
There came along a false young man that stole the heart of mine,
That stole the heart of mine.

The gardener standing by, three offers he made to me
The pink, the violet, and red rose, but I refused all three,
But I refused all three.

For the pink's no flower at all, for it fades away too soon
And the violet is too pale a hue, I think I'll wait 'til June,
I think I'll wait 'til June.

In June the red rose blooms, that's not the flower for me
For then I'll pluck the red rose up and plant a willow tree,
And plant a willow tree.

And the willow tree shall weep, and the willow tree shall wind
I wish I was in the young man's arms that stole the heart of mine,
That stole the heart of mine.

Notes:

Out of all these songs, this is the one I've known for the longest time. I learned this at first in a high school choir class, around the time I was first discovering traditional songs through Joan Baez and Simon & Garfunkel. I loved the unusual melody and text, but unfortunately, no one else in my group did. I think I made a photocopy and held onto it, never sure what in the world to do for an arrangement. A bit later on, I discovered that Jacqui McShee sang it unaccompanied on the Pentangle's *Cruel Sister*. If not for that album, I might have forgotten about it altogether.

For some inexplicable reason, I left off the final verse in my recording. I'd say it was the folk process, but in all honesty, it just slipped my mind:

*If I'm spared for one year more, and if God should grant me grace
I'll weep a bowl of crystal tears to wash his deceitful face,
To wash his deceitful face.*

Lovely Molly

I once was a ploughboy, but a soldier I am now
I courted with lovely Molly as I followed the plough
I courted with lovely Molly at the age of sixteen
But now I must leave her and serve James my king.

Lovely Molly, lovely Molly, despite all your charms
There is many's a night you have laid in my arms
And if ever I return again it will be in the spring
Where the mavis and the turtledove and the nightingale sing.

You may go to the market, you may go to the fair
You may go to the church Sunday and meet your new love there.
And if anybody loves you half as much as I do
Then I won't stop your marriage, farewell love, adieu

Lovely Molly, lovely Molly, despite all your charms
There is many's a night you have laid in my arms
And if ever I return again it will be in the spring
Where the mavis and the turtledove and the nightingale sing.

Notes:

It was in researching this song that I first started to feel okay with the concept of adapting and re-phrasing songs. On the Mainly Norfolk site, I found this quote from James Porter and Herschel Gower's biography of Jeannie Robertson:

"Hamish Henderson learned this song from Jock MacShannon while engaged in fieldwork in Kintyre (Stephanie Smith 1975: 241). He then taught it to Jeannie, who substituted 'James' for MacShannon's 'George' in the first stanza, presumably because of the number of Stuart kings in Scotland with that name. She subsequently taught it to [her daughter] Lizzie, who had recorded the song on disc. Smith has suggested that the change in names was to make the text more Scottish, or more local, and the presence of words like 'mavis' (thrush) hints at a nineteenth-century reworking and localization of a text such as that recorded by Sam Henry (1923-29, 2:282) from a County Antrim informant."

The Mermaid

It seems you've withered and forsaken sport
The snow is higher along the port
Your mouth mellifluous and your ringlets gold,
You're weary, Mary Kinney, and the Erne is cold.

Oh, faithful mother, cried her daughter fair
I've searched the seashore and the rocks bone bare
But my mermaid mother I failed to find
You were swimming the Erne through the wave and wind.

I am so weary as night turns day
With my Mary and Patrick, I'd feign to stay
On the crest of the billow through froth and foam
Pity poor Mary Kinney in her watery home.

Notes:

The Mermaid is "An Mhaighdean Mhara" in Irish. It was translated into English by Paddy Tunney, and Brigid Tunney was the first to record the translated version. I learned it from Rita Gallagher's recording on her album *May Morning Dew*, though it was hearing my friend Armand Aromin sing it at one of our gigs last summer that inspired me to do so.

Yarrow

There was a lady in the north
You scarce would find her marrow.
She was courted by nine gentlemen
And the ploughboy lad from Yarrow.

These nine sat drinking at the wine
As oft they'd done before-o.
And they made a vow among them all
To fight for her on Yarrow.

He's come over hill and over dale
Down by the streams so narrow.
And there he spied nine armed men
Come to fight with him on Yarrow.

"There's nine of you and but one of me,
It's an unequal marrow.
But I'll fight you all one by one
On the dewy dens of Yarrow."

So it's three he slew and three withdrew,
And three he wounded sorely.
'Til her brother he came from behind
And he wounded him most cruelly.

"Go home, go home, you false young man
And bring your sister sorrow.
For her true love John lies pale and wan
On the dewy dens of Yarrow."

"Oh, brother I have dreamed a dream,
A dream of grief and sorrow.
I dreamed I was pulling the heather bells
On the dewy dens of Yarrow."

"Oh, sister, dear, I can read your dream
Read in it grief and sorrow.
Your true love John lies dead and gone
On the dewy dens of Yarrow."

She wrung her hands and tore her hair
All in grief and sorrow
She tore a ribbon from out her hair
That she had received in Yarrow.

Then over hill and over dale
And to the streams so narrow,
'Til she came upon her true love John,
All dead and gone in Yarrow.

Her hair it was three quarters long
The color it was yellow.
She tied it round his middle so small
And she bore him home from Yarrow.

"Oh, daughter dear, don't weep and mourn
In mortal grief and sorrow.
I can marry you to a much nobler man
Than the one you lost in Yarrow."

"Oh, father, you have seven sons,
You can wed them each tomorrow.
But the fairest flower among them all
Was the one I lost in Yarrow."

"Oh, mother, mother, go make my bed,
Go make it long and narrow.
For my love has died for me this day,
I will die for him tomorrow."

Notes:

Roud 13, Child 214. It is also known as "The Dowie Dens of Yarrow" and as "The Braes of Yarrow." I've always loved this song in its Scottish iterations, especially sung by Karine Polwart on her album *Fairest Floo'er*, but it wasn't until I heard Tim Eriksen's version on *Banjo, Fiddle and Voice* that I felt compelled to arrange it for myself. Lyrically, I more or less combined their two versions.

Lurgy Stream

When to this country I first came, my mind from love being free
'Til the beauty of a female fair it so enticed me
Her cheeks were like the roses red and her breath it smelled perfumed
Her golden hair waved in the air, most comely to be seen.

It being a Monday evening, my love I chanced to meet
I took her in my arms and gave her kisses sweet
I asked her if she would marry me or single would remain
And if she'd cross over the seas with me and leave sweet Lurgy Stream.

If I would cross over the seas with you, I might be much to blame
If I'd cross over the seas with you, and leave sweet Lurgy Stream
Young men are false and general, perhaps you are the same
You might leave me there to rue the day I left sweet Lurgy Stream.

Oh, that the sun it may withdraw, no more to show us light
And that the moon it may refrain, no more to rule the night
That the twinkling stars they may fall down and never more be seen
The day or the hour that I'd prove false when far from Lurgy Stream.

Farewell to Letterkenny, it's a place of sport and fame
Likewise to Kilmacrennan that stands near Lurgy Stream
Farewell awhile to sweet Errigal, likewise to Swilly shore
Where I spent many's a happy day, will I ever see you more?

Notes:

The album title comes from the first line of this song, and it was learned from Rita Gallagher's album *Easter Snow*. Lurgy Stream, Letterkenny (town), Kilmacrennan (village), Errigal (mountain), and Swilly (a lake and river) are all locations and geographical features in Donegal. You can hear a similar but slightly different and longer version by Charles McGonigle on the Irish Traditional Music Archive's Inishowen Song Project website.