



Ukulele Lady and Beyond

I suppose it's because I'm a songwriter that I like to hear stories about how certain songs were written. Had I been a plumber, not only would I have a nice car and bigger TV, but I'd probably be more interested in the theory behind the water hammer or the history of the P-trap than in finding out who wrote the lyrics to **Ukulele Lady**.

Turns out Gus Kahn wrote the lyrics to **Ukulele Lady**, and Richard Whiting wrote the music. I first heard the song performed by the Jim Kweskin Jug Band back in the sixties, but it had been a big hit many years before:

*If you like Ukulele Lady,
Ukulele Lady like-a you.
If you like to linger where it's shady,
Ukulele Lady linger too.*

What often interests me about finding the names of a song's creators is in discovering what other songs they wrote. Sometimes it's quite surprising. Richard Whiting, born in 1891, also wrote the music for a great number of popular songs, including **Ain't We Got Fun** and **On The Good Ship Lollipop**. **Ain't We Got Fun** also had lyrics by Gus Kahn, who wrote the words for such great songs as **Side By Side** (eventually the title song of a wonderful Jim Kweskin solo album), **Makin' Whoopee**, **Dream a Little Dream of Me** (in later years a mega-hit for the Mamas and Papas) and **Toot Toot Tootsie Good-Bye**. This last song has a special spot in my heart because when I was a tot in Louisiana, my parents performed it in some sort of town-wide talent show, dad on the four string banjo and mom on the piano.

The song **River Stay Way From My Door**, which I mentioned in my WZ about flood and fire songs, has lyrics written by Mort Dixon who also wrote the words for **Bye Bye Blackbird** and **I'm Looking Over A Four Leaf Clover**.

The incredible songwriter Yip Harburg's full name was Edgar Yipsel Harburg. What a wild name, Yipsel. You wonder if he ever was in Ypsilanti. According to his biography, he was named "Yipsel" after the phonetic pronunciation of the acronym YPSL for Young People's Socialist League. Harburg had a great and lifelong compassion for the common person and wrote lyrics for the amazing **Brother Can You Spare A Dime**, not to mention the beloved lyrics for all the **Wizard of Oz** songs. He won the Academy Award for **Somewhere Over The Rainbow**. In the official eye, he was controversial, from being blacklisted by McCarthy in the 50s to having his mug on a postage stamp in 2005.

There is a great deal of information available about the life and lyrics of writers like Yip Harburg. Then you come upon meager scraps like this, about the ever popular **Home On The Range**, which I found on the website bussongs.com:

"Home on the Range appears to have been written in 1885 by C.O. Swartz, Bill McCabe, Bingham Graves and other prospectors in a cabin near Leadville, Colorado."

And that's all I could find regarding that sweet song. "Appears to have been written..." is the odd part of that sentence.

Other songwriting tidbits: Willie Nelson wrote the song **Crazy** that Patsy Cline made into a hit. I saw an interview of Nelson on TV a while ago in which he said that the song originally, during its formative stages, was called **Stupid**. Just imagine Patsy Cline singing:

*Stupid; stupid for feeling so lonely
I'm stupid; stupid for feeling so blue*

Little Brown Church in the Vale was written by William Pitts, who lived in Wisconsin at the time. He happened upon a beautiful valley in Iowa and envisioned a church being built there. Incredibly, years after he had written the song, a church WAS built there and was painted brown. He dug out the song, which no one had heard at the time, and had it published; it was a hit.

The song **You Are My Sunshine** I had thought was written by Jimmie Davis, a governor of Louisiana. Turns out this is not the case. Jimmie Davis bought the rights to the song for \$35 from Paul Rice of a group called the Rice Brothers, who wrote the thing. Selling copyrights to songs was more common in years gone by than it is today. I have mentioned elsewhere that Stephen Foster sold the rights to "Oh Susannah" for \$100 before it became a hit.

Now, maybe a reader can help me find out more about two songs that have always intrigued me, and about which I've never been able to find details. The first was in one of the American Singer songbooks we used in elementary school. It begins like this:

*When night was glamorous / a fellow amorous / went out to woo a pretty little maid
Beneath her window far / he strummed his gay guitar / & sang beneath a star a serenade:*

Lady romantical, list to my canticle; Slip from your coverlet, fleecy and white. My heart's a-flutter now; open your shutter now; hear how I utter now, sighs in the night.

The other song is a country western piece that I learned from a compilation LP back in the sixties but I can't remember who wrote or performed it. I have even asked the country western expert Bill Malone and he has never heard of it. Some of the lyrics:

Don't reach 'neath the welcome mat and fumble for the key / All you'll find is dirty dirt, the kind you handed me / I'm gonna blow out the lamp in the window / And there's no need to knock upon my door

I've got your suitcase all packed on the curbstone / At the back door you'll find no sympathy / 'Cause there's four hundred dogs in the back yard / And they don't recognize a soul but me

Any help with any information about these songs would be greatly appreciated and duly acknowledged. I can then use the information to find OTHER accomplishments by their songwriters and presto! Another Whither Zither!