

# Folk Images

## Paul Lansky

The instruments are guitar, violin, computer, occasional voice; the music, some settings and arrangements of well-known folk songs as well as several original folk-like pieces. Folk music lovers will undoubtedly say it's not *really* folk music (they're right); computer music aficionados and cyberspace cadets may not think of it as computer music (maybe they're right too), and guitar freaks will say our guitar is not nearly as good as Leo Kottke's (oh boy are they right). Though it's not a bad thing to defy description, the best way to understand the music is probably found in the title, *Folk Images*. At the risk of seeming overly metaphorical I'll say that these *images* are not photographs, but rather *paintings* of folk music, with some awkward and blurry features, and just enough peculiarity to make them seem unusual, even though they strain to appear realistic--not unlike the work of some recent painters whose canvasses have a photographic quality but still are obviously paintings.

This is also folk music filtered through the ears of a composer (and folk music lover, senior cyberspace cadet, certified guitar-freak) with his own particular history: growing up in N.Y.C. in the 1950's; High School of Music and Art, Buck's Rock Work Camp, Ethical Culture Society; Sundays in Washington Square Park listening to Eric Weissberg and Dave Van Ronk (and hoping to meet girls); enjoying The New Lost City Ramblers, Reverend Gary Davis, Pete Seeger, Elizabeth Cotton, WWVA, Earl Scruggs, Lester Flatt, Merle Travis; struggling on his own to master 3-finger picking; hearing Berio, Wolpe, Cage, Feldman, and Vivaldi at the New School; meeting Varèse taking his evening

stroll on Bleeker Street; playing Berlioz and Mendelssohn with the All City Orchestra on Saturday mornings.

These pieces, arrangements, and settings attempt to distill, emulate, and paraphrase some of the things I love best about folk music: jangling, frantic guitar sounds; melancholy tunes which have aged just enough to sound distant and odd; triumphant displays of 'sold your soul to the devil' virtuosity; nostalgia for the 1930's (I recently heard a prominent rock critic quip that the folk music revival in the 50's was probably a plot of the Communist Party and the M.L.A..) Finally, as in many of my other pieces, where I attempt to confront our perceptions of things which we take for granted, these highly filtered images of folk music are meant to develop new perspectives. But, in order to capture the feel of sweaty, human effort, which is such an important aspect of this music, they avoid the leap into the domain of the experimental or avant-garde. All but two of the pieces are purely instrumental. (I never did work up an interest in the words; so many of the texts, three in this set, in fact, are about lovers killing each other.)

The pieces can be taken in on many levels: from the complex--the rhythm in *Delia*, the intonation in *Pretty Polly* and *Barbara Allen*, or some of the computer techniques--to the simple: *Ash Grove* and *Wayfaring Stranger* are just great tunes. There should be something here for folk music lovers, computer music fans and guitar junkies. In the end, however, I hope the listener can just enjoy these pieces with the same kind of basic pleasure that one gets from listening to the best of folk music--sit back and sing along.

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**1 *Strut*:** An original piece, inspired by, and emulating, an image of feverish 12-string guitar picking. An overture and warm-up for the set.

**2 *Tender Ladies*:** A setting of *Come all ye fair and tender ladies*, made famous by Pete Seeger. This slightly different version is taken from the extraordinary anthology by Cecil

Sharp, **English Folk Songs From the Southern Appalachians**; Oxford University Press [1932, reprinted 1966].

**3 *Delia*:** A setting of a song about a poor young woman, shot by her lover, Tony, on Christmas eve. '*First time he shot her, she bowed her head and died*'. (Oh brother). Johnny Cash; Peter, Paul and Mary; as well as a number of others have recorded versions of this.

**4 *Ash Grove*:** A famous English tune. That's me singing in the distant background. Don't try to make out the words.

**5 *Hammer*:** An original piece, wistfully imagining a horde of busy hammer dulcimer players having fun.

**6 *Barbara Allen*:** A setting of a very famous tune. The version here is one of the lesser-known variants, taken from Cecil Sharp's anthology--young lovers dying young. This setting attempts to be a little more gritty than most (usually lush) settings of this tune I've heard. (Check out the digital jaws harp).

**7 *Howl*:** An original piece which attempts to tune into the spirit of low, funky, exuberant blues, inspired by the master of that genre, Howling Wolf.

**8 *Pine Ridge*:** An original piece based on a simple pentatonic tune, dedicated to the memory of the awful event at Wounded Knee.

**9 *Wayfaring Stranger*:** *I'm just a poor, wayfaring stranger...*, a setting of a song made famous by Burl Ives, who occasionally went by this handle as well.

**10 *Pretty Polly*:** A setting of a famous tune, sometimes known as *The Demon Lover*. This is one of several versions from Cecil Sharp's anthology. The text deals with pregnancy, delusion, murder, ghosts. (What is it with these guys.)

**11 *Blue Wine*:** An original piece which tries, with a great deal of effort, to capture some of the spirit of a bending, whining, blues guitar. Something different emerges, but that's ok.

**12 *Motherless Child*:** A setting of one of the most famous and beautiful spirituals. The barely intelligible voice is mine. You know the words.

**Some technical details:** These pieces are culled from two suites. *Tender Ladies*, *Pretty Polly*, *Pine Ridge*, and *Barbara Allen* were made in 1981 on an IBM mainframe, using linear predictive coding to model the violin playing of Cyrus Stevens. The rest were all done in 1991-1993 on a NeXT computer using a variety of sources and techniques: the composer's voice, his trusty Gibson LG-3 guitar, midi data capture, digital modelling, synthesis, mixing, editing, and other good stuff. (For more information tune your web browser to <http://www.music.princeton.edu/~paul>).

*Paul Lansky, 7/95*

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Executive Producer: David Starobin  
Photo: *Becky Singing*, Lida Walker Askew  
Cover Design: Digital Chameleon  
Typography: Robert Starobin

## Other recordings of music by Paul Lansky

**Smalltalk:** New Albion Records, CD NA030: *Smalltalk, Guy's Harp, Late August, Not So Heavy Metal*

**Homebrew:** Bridge Records Inc., BCD 9035: *Table's Clear, Night Traffic, Now and Then, Quakerbridge, The Sound of Two Hands*

**More Than Idle Chatter:** Bridge Records Inc., BCD 9050 *Idle Chatter, Word Color, just\_more\_idle\_chatter, The Lesson, Notjustmoreidlechatter, Memory Pages*

**Fantasies and Tableaux:** CRI, CD 683: *Six Fantasies on a poem by Thomas Campion, Still Time*

in collections...

*As it grew dark:* Wergo 2031-2 **Computer Music Currents, vol.11**

*Wasting:* (With Brad Garton and Andy Milburn) Centaur CRC 2076, **Inner Voices**

*As If:* (string trio and computer): Centaur CRC 2110, **Virtuoso in the Computer Age-I**

*Stroll:* (chamber ensemble and computer): Centaur CRC 2213 **Composer In the Computer Age- III**

*Hop:* (marimba and violin): Marimolin, BMG/Catalyst 62667-2, **Combo Platter**

# Folk Images

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1	Swing	2:00
2	Tender Ladies	6:30
3	Delia	4:49
4	Ash Grove	2:50
5	Delia	4:49
6	Barbara Allen	3:29
7	Howl	4:32
8	Pine Ridge	4:40
9	Mountain Stream	4:09
10	Pretty Polly	3:09
11	Blue Wine	3:36

Total Time: 51:22

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