

# VESSEL

Recording, Editing and Mastering by  
Brian Claflin. Produced by  
Saro Lynch-Thomason and Brian Claflin.

Hear Brian Claflin's work at:  
<http://www.reverbnation.com/brianclaflin>  
Copyright of recordings belongs to Saro Lynch-Thomason. No recordings may be reproduced without express permission of Saro. However, ballad singing is a democratic, non-capitalist tradition, so please listen, learn and sing these songs everywhere!

For questions about performances, ballad workshops, copyright etc. please contact Saro at [blairpathways@gmail.com](mailto:blairpathways@gmail.com).  
Copyright 2013.

This CD is dedicated to Folklorist and Ballad Singer Bobby McMillon. A great friend and keeper of the songs.

This CD is called "Vessel" as a way to recognize the role taken on by ballad, or "love song" singers, as they are called in parts of Appalachia. Love songs are held, taught and passed from person to person, body to body. With each transfer the song is molded and refitted to the character of the singer. Thus, each song is at once unique and ubiquitous, ancient and new. I am honored to be a vessel for these songs for my short time here, to let them pass through my body onto others, connecting to a community across years uncountable and yet uncounted.

## 1} May Nothing Evil

**Cross this Door-** This song was a hymn I grew up singing in the Unitarian Universalist (UU) Church. The strong ritual aspect of this piece- in this case a blessing on a home or communal space- has always moved me deeply. I have altered the melody as I learned it but have kept the original words, which were written by Louis Untermeyer.

**2} Tailor and the Merchant-** I learned this song from a recording by New Zealand native Helena Triplett on a CD of West Virginia ballads. Compared to other ballads involving adultery- humorous and non-humorous- this song has little bloodshed. We might assume the tailor emerges from the ocean, bruised and a little wiser.

**3} True Thomas-** This is a rare song I found in the Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore. The text was originally provided by a Mrs. Sutton who heard it sung by a Mrs. Becky Gordon of Cat's Head, Sugar Loaf Mountain, Henderson County. Unfortunately no melody is given in the Brown Collection. This song is an eclipsed version of "Thomas Rhymer" or "Thomas of Erceldoune," an old ballad with roots at least as far back as the 13th century. I created a melody for this piece in order to bring it into the oral tradition.

**4} Farewell to Old Bedford-** I first learned this song from Tim Eriksen, but it can be sourced to Lee Monroe Presnell of Beech Mountain, NC.

I draw somewhat from Presnell's singing style which emphasizes short phrases and ornamentation. This song has always struck me as a strong character sketch of a young man alternately full of hubris and self-doubt.

**5} Lady Margaret-** I learned this ballad from Sheila Kay Adams, of Sodom, NC. Also known as "Fair Margaret and Sweet William," this song has roots at least as far back as the 17th century. In many versions Sweet William dies, but this one leaves him asleep, as if enchanted.

**6} Adieu False Heart-** Asheville Community Singing Group- I learned this Appalachian melody through Suzannah Park's West Asheville Community Chorus and passed it on to my community singing group.

**7} Song of Myself-** This autobiographical song was composed by Peggy Seeger. I feel it reflects the lives of many who are born into a privileged class but learn in time to work to end social inequalities.

**8} Little Soldier Boy-** Called "The Soldier's Wooing" in the Frank C. Brown collection, this ballad was also learned from Sheila Kay Adams. Going back at least to the 17th century, this song also seems related to "Earl Brand" in which the suitor, the maid, her seven brothers and her father all die by the end of the story. "Little Soldier Boy" has a more pleasing ending, with the young couple defeating the cruel father, and evidently winning a good deal of money.

**9} Donald Og-** This song was translated from Irish Gaelic, though little seems known about its age or origins. I learned this version from a recording of Suzannah Park. For me, the song captures the desperation a lover can feel when he or she has lost all sense of independence and desperately clings to the beloved.

**10} Good Old Way-** Asheville Community Singing Group- A Primitive Methodist hymn, "Good Old Way" became popular during the British folk revival and is now sung in several traditional singing circles across the U.S. I learned this version from a Watersons recording.

**11} Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah-** This song is from Baptist lining-out traditions. Lining-out practices date back to the 17th century, in which a preacher or another leader would speak or sing out a line and the congregation would sing it back. Though often following a single melody, individuals in the congregation gave different interpretations of the same line with their own ornamentations. I learned this version from the singing of Suzannah Park.

**12} Cold Mountains-** I learned this song from friend Sam Gleaves who in turn learned it from a recording of Virginia ballad singer Texas Gladden. The spectral portrayal of the mountains adds to the sense of loneliness and anxiety in the song.

**13} How It Feels to Be Free-** Asheville Community Singing Group-This is another hymn I grew up singing in UU Church. It was originally written by Billy Taylor and Dick Dallas in the early 1960s and became a popular anthem in the Civil Rights movement.

**14} James Connolly-** James Connolly, a Socialist and Irish nationalist, helped to launch the Easter Uprising of 1916. The Uprising was an attempt by the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Citizen's Army to overthrow British rule. Connolly, along with other leaders, was captured and executed by firing squad. The martyrdom of all 7 leaders of the rebellion infuriated much of the Irish public, and led to greater efforts for independence in coming years. This song is attributed to Irish poet and writer Patrick Galvin and was taught to me by friend Neala Byrne.

**15} Little Black Train-** Asheville Community Singing Group- This song comes from African-American singing traditions, and has been covered by a wide variety of white folk revivalist singers. It was brought to the singing group by Michael Garner.

**16} Camp A Little While in the Wilderness-** I learned this song from Sheila Kay Adams. It is a camp-meeting tune, a type of song popular during the Great Awakening periods in Appalachia.

**17} Bonus Track- Camp A Little While in the Wilderness Polyphony**

### **More on the Asheville Community Singing Group:**

The group was founded in Asheville, NC in the summer of 2010 by Saro LT and friend Rachel Rudi. Ever since, the group has gotten together two to four times a month to share communal songs from a variety of traditions including gospel, sea shanties, balladry, work songs and hymnody. The group is open to any and everyone! E-mail saralyncht@gmail.com to learn more. The voices in these recordings include Steve Dodd, Meredith French, Brian Claflin, Johanna Anderson and Michael Garner.