

# CDSS Sings—Swing and Turn, Jubilee

by Lorraine Lee Hammond



*Jubilee* (also known as *Swing and Turn, Jubilee*) is a lively Appalachian song that I learned from Kentucky treasure, the late Jean Ritchie, in the early 1970s at CDSS Folk Music Week at Pinewoods. Jean invited me to teach dulcimer and that week was my introduction to Pinewoods and to CDSS. May Gadd taught English country dance wearing white gloves and keeping rhythm with a snare drum. As my students were learning from me, I was learning from May and from Jean in a continuum that is at the heart of CDSS.

*Jubilee* is a year round song, welcome in a song circle by the winter fire and equally at home as a gamesong danced on the lawn in the cool of a summer evening. The “Swing and turn” chorus makes this a singing call in durable song form that is the signature of a play-party standard.

The stanzas are quatrains with an end rhyme match for the second and fourth line. This familiar verse form welcomes what Tony Saletan taught me to refer to as “zipper” verses;

verses that wander from song to song. Perhaps a singer loves a verse and includes it at any opportunity in any song. Perhaps a singer wants the song to last longer, or can’t remember a verse and pulls in a fast substitute. This is a song that has survived and even thrived with such treatment.

Regarding the song’s origin, I turned to Mudcat Café online for help and was richly rewarded. I recommend this Digital Tradition resource to all singers of traditional song as a place of conversation and inquiry about traditional music.

Concerning the origins of the song, I quote Jean Ritchie, from an exchange on that site with the late Sandy Paton of Folk Legacy Records in March, 2001:

*“Well, Jubilee IS a Ritchie Family gamesong, but I never did a (copyright) on it because it was collected from another source in the community—everyone*

Above Photo: Jean Ritchie at the Nantucket family home of John C. and Olive Dame Campbell. The children are (left to right) Richard Cary, Marcia Butman, Lorin Cary, and Brad Butman. Marcia and Brad are the great niece and nephew of Olive Dame Campbell, who was largely responsible for inspiring Cecil Sharp to take his Appalachian travels and start collecting. (Photo by Robert Butman)

around knew it. A lady named Marian Skein wrote it down at Ary, KY, and it was published by (Mr.) Lynn Rohrbough, Cooperative Recreation Service, Delaware, OH in 1939.

*The verses we sing are pretty well set, as we sang just the number to get us through one turn of the game (circle for as many as will, but our living rooms would hold just about six or seven couples). There's a reel down between the lines at the end, then another couple leads out, as in the Virginia Reel. If anyone needs my verses, holler."*

Jean Ritchie—Mudcat Café, Digital Tradition online:  
<https://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=31807>

The verses wed flawlessly with the tune for *Jubilee*, and suit both lively dance tempo and slower song circle tempo. But the tune itself has traveled many paths. It is a common choice for the ballad of the *Gypsy Davy*, and on our CDSS website (see Web Extras at the end of this article) you will find a link for Woody Guthrie's recording that pairs what I think of as the *Jubilee* tune and the *Gypsy Davy* text. "All out on the old railroad" becomes, "The master he came home last night, inquiring for his lady" and this durable melody has acquired an entirely different storyline.

Take it further back in time and listen to Scottish traveller Jeannie Robertson's superb singing. In her distinctly Scottish version of *The Gypsy Laddies*, the opening line of the verse is again the familiar musical phrase used by Jean Ritchie and Woody Guthrie. That link is also on the website (again, see Web Extras) along with a link to Jean Ritchie's own performance of *Swing and Turn, Jubilee*. The song also appears in Jean's book, *Folksongs of the Southern Appalachians as Sung by Jean Ritchie*, reissued by University of Kentucky Press in 2016.

On this page, you'll find the notation for *Jubilee* along with a smattering of the verses that have found their way in over time.

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**WEB EXTRAS:** Listen to *Jubilee* (sung by Jean Ritchie), *Gypsy Davy* (sung by Woody Guthrie), and *The Gypsy Laddies* (sung by Jeannie Robertson) at [www.cdss.org/news](http://www.cdss.org/news)

## Jubilee

American Traditional  
 From the singing of Jean Ritchie

C

All out on the old rail - road All out on the sea.

5 F C

All out on the old rail - road, Far as I can see.

9 Chorus: F C F C

Swing and turn, ju - bi-lee, Live and learn, ju - bi-lee.

### VERSES:

Hardest work I ever done, working on the farm,  
 Easiest work I ever done swing in my true love's arm.

Saddle up the old gray mare, who will be the rider?  
 Ride on down to the cider mill, fetch a jug of cider.

Wish I had a big white horse, corn to feed him on,  
 Pretty little boy to stay at home and feed him when I'm gone.

Some will come on Saturday night, some will come on Sunday.  
 If you give 'em half a chance they'll be back on Monday.