

Opal Ring CD Song Lyrics

1. Comfort Starr

©2005, Lorraine Lee Hammond, Snowy Egret Music, BMI Vocal; dulcimer; guitar; bass.

Wild columbine bloomed all around,
The air was filled with the high lonesome sound
Of Comfort Starr's fiddle. His old shack stood
In a rough-cut clearing at the edge of the woods.

Chorus:

'Ragtime Annie', 'Hole in the Wall',
Bach and Rachmaninoff, he played 'em all.
The birds sang high, the wind blew low
And the woods bore witness to Comfort Starr's soul.

"Don't go near him," the old folks said
"He's not quite right in the head.
With his wine and his fiddlin' he can get wild."
Just the words to encourage a curious child.

So we dared each other to sneak down the track
That ended up at his tarpaper shack
We could hear him playing, tried to peek in.
He stared right back at us and we ran like the wind.

Chorus

But the sound of that music kept calling to me
I went back and hid in some red cedar trees
To hear his fiddle, as dark and as sweet
As the fruit of the blackberry vines at my feet.

"He's amounted to nothing", my dad used to say
"Don't you go wasting your own life that way".
But in this world full of gimme, with so little give
It sure seems to me there are worse ways to live.

Chorus

2. Back of Yonder Mountain (New River Shore)

(trad. from Oscar Degreenia) Vocal; dulcimer; guitar.

Back of yonder mountain where the fountain does flow,
Where the wild birds do whistle and the tall alpine grow,
I spied a fair damsel, she's the one I adore,
And I will wed with her on the New River Shore.
And I will wed with her on the New River Shore.

Her old father heard those words she did say,
Saying, "I shall still keep you from your dearest dear."
He sent him away where the loud cannons roar
And he left her lie-menting on the New River Shore.
And he left her lie-menting on the New River Shore.

Young Willie being gone for a year and a day,
She's wrote him a letter, these words she did say,
Saying, "Come back dear Willie, you're the one I adore
And I will wed with you on the New River Shore.
And I will wed with you on the New River Shore.

Her old father heard those words she did say,
Saying, "I shall still keep you from your dearest dear."
He sent out an army of twenty and four
To fight against her true love on the New River Shore.
To fight against her true love on the New River Shore.

Young Willie drew his broadsword and he wove it all around.
Thirteen of them officers lie dead on the ground.
Seven and four lie bleeding in gore
And young Willie gained his true love on the New River Shore.
And young Willie gained his true love on the New River Shore.

Pretty Polly now lives in the New River Town.
She's the handsomest lady in the New River Realm.
Has servants to attend her, she sits at her ease.
Goes out when she's a mind to, returns when she's pleased.
Goes out when she's a mind to, returns when she's pleased.

3. Heart for a Song

©1978, Lorraine Lee Hammond, Snowy Egret Music, BMI Vocal; dulcimer; guitars

Old John was a fiddler in his younger years, played for dances at the Grange
Remembers when a dozen sets circled the floor, but time and people change.
Now it's Nashville live on the satellite dish, they never play a single note wrong
And it's Saturday night at the country music bar.
He'll give you his heart for a song,
He will give you his heart for a song.

He'll give you his heart for a song,
He will give you his heart for a song.

Fair Ellen's been working over at the plant, quit school when she turned sixteen.
Two long years now, on the line, in the shadow of an old machine.
She says with a smile her dreams are free, might come true before long.
She sits near the band every Saturday night,
She'll give you her heart for a song,
She will give you her heart for a song.
She'll give you her heart for a song,
She will give you her heart for a song.

Willie's a financial man, he does it well, learned to roll those dice as a kid.
Now he drives Rover, dresses in style, knows the odds and never blows a bid.
He still visits his folks back home on the farm, his love of the land is strong,
Wears cowboy boots every Saturday night.
He'll give you his heart for a song,
He will give you his heart for a song.
He'll give you his heart for a song,
He will give you his heart for a song.

Let the band play, pedal steel weep, play those country songs all night.
We come here to unwind, we're gonna feel all right.
The kids are home with the sitter, we've worked hard all week long.
We come here to lose our weary blues,
We'll give you our hearts for a song,
We will give you our hearts for a song.
We'll give you our hearts for a song,
We will give you our hearts for a song.

4. Andrew Bataan

(trad. from Oscar Degreenia) Unaccompanied vocal.

There were three brothers in Merry Scotland,
Three brothers they were all three.
And they did cast lots from one to the other
To see who the robber would be.

The lot it fell on Andrew Bataan,
The youngest of the three,
That he would go robbing all on the high sea
To maintain his two brothers and he.

As he was sailing one cold winter's night
A light did soon appear.

They saw a ship sailing far off and far off
And at length it came sailing near.

“Who art, who art,” cried Captain Charles Stewart,
“Who art that’s sailing so nigh?”
“We are the bold robbers from fair Scotland.”
Said Stewart, “Please let us pass by.”

“Oh no, that thing we never shall do,
That thing we never shall do.
Your ship and your cargo we’ll all take away
And salt water your bodies shall see.

The news soon came on England’s home shore
(King George he wore the crown),
That the rich merchant’s goods had been taken away
And the crew and the captain was drowned.

“Go and build me a ship,” cries Captain Charles Stewart,
“Go and build it safe and sure.
I’ll take the command from Andrew Batan
Or my life I will never endure.

As he was sailing one cold winter’s night
A light did soon appear.
They saw a ship sailing far off and far off
And soon it came sailing near.

“Who art, who art?” cried Captain Charles Stewart,
“Who art that’s sailing so nigh?”
“We are the bold robbers from fair Scotland,
Will you please for to let us pass by?

“Oh no, that thing we never shall do,
That thing we never shall do.
Your ship and your cargo we’ll all take away
And your bodies Fair England will see.

“Come on, come on,” cried Andrew Batan,
“We fear you not one pin.
For we’re brass without that makes a fine show
But we are all steel within.

Broadsides, broadsides they quickly put on,
And cannons loud did roar.

And Captain Charles Stewart took Andrew Batan
And they hung him on England's own shore.

5. *Highway Crew*

©1984, Lorraine Lee Hammond, Snowy Egret Music, Vocal; guitar.

Pennies from heaven, when the snow started falling
The jokers at the general store teased the highway crew.
Like my father, you might find it hard to join the laughter
After you had done battle with a blizzard or two.

The grey sky was thickening, darkness fell early.
Needed lights in the barn when milking time came.
Broke ice on the water for the goats and the chickens,
Then ran back to the kitchen to warm up again.

That night through my dreaming the telephone rang
Calling my father down to the highway barn.
I heard him speak softly, my mother made coffee.
The wind stole his words as he stepped into the storm.

A slippery drive down to the highway barn,
Storm's moving fast, there's a job to be done.
The plows are lined up like mounts waiting riders,
Drivers climb to the cabs and move out one by one.

Chorus:

Pennies from heaven, don't you smell the snow coming?
Did you look up last night and see haze on the moon?
Pennies from heaven, a blizzard by morning.
Mount the plows, load the sanders. It'll be snowing soon.

They remember the old days when two men with shovels
Pitched sand from the truck, the gloves froze to their hands.
Each was locked in a corner as the truck bed was tilting,
Just a few boards away from a ton of shifting sands.

Now it's spreaders, not shovels. They lay off your partner.
It's lonely and dangerous out on the road.
Eyes straining, explaining a shape in the distance,
There's a tree down, a power line arcs blue in the snow.

Chorus

No school in the morning, there's no power in the county,
But plenty of chores since my father is gone.
All the grey day the storm lanterns sputter,
Snow falls as heavy at twilight as it did at dawn.

Twenty-four hours since the crew was first called
I am lulled into sleep by a plow's distant drone.
My dreams turn that snow into dimes and then dollars,
Daddy scoops 'em all up and carries them home.

Chorus

My father comes home now, grey with exhaustion.
Says not to worry, he's feeling just fine.
Help him unlace his boots, his hands stiff with cold.
He has weathered that wild winter storm one more time.

Country people are used to hard work and low wages,
For the crew every storm means a chance for more pay.
But the true cost of 'pennies from heaven' is frozen
In lines on their faces that will not melt away.

Pennies from heaven, when the snow started falling
The jokers at the general store teased the highway crew.
Like my father, you might find it hard to join the laughter
After you had done battle with a blizzard or two.

6. House Carpenter

(Child 243) (trad. from Oscar Degreenia)

Well met, well met my own true love. Well met, well met cried he.
I have came across the sea salt sea. It was all for the sake of thee

I might have married a king's daughter fair and she would have married me,
But I slighted her and all of her gold, and it's all for the sake of thee.

Well if you might have married a king's daughter fair, I'm sure you're much to blame.
Well I have married a house carpenter and I think he's a very nice man

If you will leave your house carpenter and come along with me
I'll take you there where the grass grows green on the banks of the sweet Dundee

If I should leave my house carpenter and go along with thee
What have you there to support me on and keep me from misery?

I have three ships all loaded with gold and sailing for dry land
And a hundred and twenty sailor boys who'll be all at your demand

She picked her baby up in her arms and give him kisses three
Saying, "Stay at home with your father for he is good company."

They had not sailed a week and a half, I'm sure it was not three
Before this fair maid fell for to weep and she wept most bitterly.

Is it for gold that you do weep, or is it for my store?

It's for my darling little babe that I never will see no more.

They had not sailed three weeks and a half, I'm sure it was not four
When a hole broke out in the bottom of the ship and the boat was heard no more.

7. Mary on the Wild Moor

(trad. from Oscar Degreenia) vocal; banjos

'Twas on one cold winter night, when the wind blew across the wild moor.
Poor Mary came wandering home with her babe 'til she came to her own father's door.

"Oh, Father, dear father," she cried, "Come down and open the door,
Or the babe in my arms, he will perish and die, by the wind that blows 'cross the wild moor."

But the old man was deaf to hear her cry. Not a sound from her lips reached his ear.
The watchdog did howl and the village bells tolled, and the wind blew across the wild moor.

Oh, how the old man must have felt, when he came to the door in the morn',
Poor Mary was dead, but the child was alive, safely clutched in its poor mother's arms.

The old man in grief pined away, and the child, to its mother, went soon.
And no one, they say, has lived there to this day, and the cottage to ruin has gone.

And the villagers point to the spot where the willows grow over the door, saying,
"There Mary died, once a gay village bride, by the wind that blows 'cross the wild moor."

8. The Old Road

©1983, Lorraine Lee Hammond, Snowy Egret Music, BMI Vocal; dulcimer; guitar; bass

Chorus:

There lies the old road, it winds like a river
Through woodlot and farmland, and on into town.
Your fine superhighways are faster and bigger,
But give me the old road, I want to slow down.

Mist on the meadow, it's a fine springtime morning.
A small child gathers wild strawberries, still wet with dew.
There's a face at the window, I hear a mother's voice calling.
The swallowtails dance with the daisies, the earth is renewed.

Chorus

A farmer on his front porch, another harvest is over.
The corn crib's near full, there'll be enough to get by.
Squeak of the screen door, a woman's hand on his shoulder,
The sun sets behind the mountain, sets fire to the sky.

Chorus

I am a child of this city, but highways and high rises
Changed the place I was born have torn this old neighborhood apart.
And now I 'm being forced out by high rents and high prices.
I will let my dreams lead me from here, I will follow my heart.

9. Pretty Betty Martin

(New England traditional) Dulcimer; guitar; vocal.

Pretty Betty Martin, tiptoe, tiptoe.
Pretty Betty Martin, tiptoe fine.
Never found a man to suit her fancy.
Never found a man to suit her mind.

10. Young but Daily Growing

(trad. from Oscar Degreenia Banjos; bass.

“Father, dearest father, you've done me much wrong.
You've married me with a man much too young.
For I am twice twelve, he's barely thirteen.
He's young but he's daily a-growing.”

“Daughter, dearest daughter, I've done you no wrong.
I've married you with a rich lord's son.
A rich lord's son, it's a bride you'd ought to be.
He's young but he's daily a-growing.”

“Father, dearest father, if you think it best,
We'll send him to school for a year or two years.
I'll tie a blue ribbon all around his hat
To tell all the girls that he's married.”

She's made him a shirt of the linen so fine
And stitched it all over with her own hand.
And every stitch that she put in said,
"He's young and he's so long a-growing."

As she was a-walking by her father's castle wall
She's seen the schoolboys a-tossing at the ball
And her own beany boy, he's the fairest of 'em all.
He's young but he's daily a-growing.

At the age of thirteen He was a married man,
At the age of fourteen His first son was born
At the age of fifteen His grave was growing green
And that put an end to his growing.

11. My Mother's Opal Ring

©2011, Lorraine Lee Hammond, Snowy Egret Music, BMI Vocal; guitar; bass

I wear my mother's opal ring, the one my father gave to her.
Opal was her birthstone, she was October's girl.
Newlywed and window-shopping he saw her wistful gaze
And on her birthday he surprised her with this ring.

Planting, harvest, putting by. Decades unfurled.
They lived simply, and they taught me to embrace this wild world.
She was a farm wife, it's a hard life,
But jubilation or lament, when she gazed at this ring
My mother smiled.

Chorus:

Ring around the silver moon, around the golden sun.
The hand, the heart, the promise, so fragile and so strong.
Today, tomorrow, yesterday flow through these stones,
And love comes full circle in this ring.

She wore the ring so many years the gold band simply fell apart.
By then she hardly knew my Dad. It slowly broke his heart.
Still he cared for her tenderly, the ring lost in some drawer,
And then they both were gone, the circle broken now.

But a goldsmith worked the magic, and this little ring is mine
For a not so different hand and heart, In such a different time.
The careful people warn me, 'It will break, lock it away,'
But this ring and I are dancing out the door.

Chorus

And like my Mom, I gaze at these two stones where, deep inside,
Brilliant shards of color sparkle and collide.
Just as hearts and minds and bodies, fired with incandescent light,
Sparkle and collide and love ignites.

Chorus

Real folk music: old ballads and contemporary songs, sung with expert accompaniment on acoustic instruments.

The 11 songs on “The Opal Ring,” represent a deliciously melodious memoir. Lorraine Lee Hammond, a multi-instrumentalist acclaimed as one of the nation’s finest mountain dulcimer players, and no stranger to coffeehouse stages, returns to her earliest musical roots around Sharon Mountain in Connecticut, in the overlooked northern section of the otherwise musically celebrated Appalachians.