

Some Songs

I started writing songs back in the 60's. There never has been much to it. I play an interesting chord progression on my guitar, and then fill in a melody that fits my mood. After a while, words fall out of my head, onto my lips and into my voice. It might take a few hours or days, while around and around through the chord sequence I sing a melody over and over and over. Sometimes soft and mellow, sometimes in a yell. Always well out of earshot. Back in the pre-wife, pre-children days, when I could disappear for long stretches of time, this was my method of "reality escape". The method hasn't changed much, just the time available. When my daughter was a colicky infant, I found that once again I had long stretches of time in the middle of the night which needed to be filled with a steady flow of sound. I wrote songs in this period also. More recently, when I can steal a few moments here and there, I manage to pull together some bits and pieces. I have many unfinished bits and pieces.

I think of my songs as some might think of an old wardrobe. I visit each one from time to time just to see if they still fit, and to enjoy the feel. I have the old ones and the new ones, some that are out of style, and others that never seem to grow old. Some take me back to a particular time and place, or remind me of an experience. One, in particular, is like putting on my Dress Blues, White Cover and Sword, and standing at attention. Another takes me back to a quiet afternoon with an old friend. Many of them remind me of my father.

My father loved to fish. I never have. I do, however, love being outside, and the more extreme the weather, the more acute the memory. One very sharp memory involved a summer morning in the Adirondack mountains. The myth perpetrated by my father was that trout take to the dry fly best at dawn. And so, on this particular morning I was awakened in the dark and dragged from the warmth of a moth eaten blanket. After

a stop at the outhouse, I was soon stumbling through the high, wet grass, my sneakers "squishing" with every step and my teeth chattering like a plastic wind-up toy. First we traveled a few hundred yards along the bank of the narrow trout stream. Then my father directed me down into the river, at the mouth of a small brook which deposited ice cold water into the larger stream. Thus, hip high in the freezing water, feet stabilizing on slippery rocks, with fly rod flailing, I watched the sunrise. Some days, or perhaps months later, that image fell out of my head and into the following song:

There's a sunrise over the mountains
 As the stars fade from the sky
 There's a gray mist rising from our peaceful
 stream
 As the water meanders by
 Birds start their songs from dew covered trees
 As fish begin to rise
 And the babbling brook seems to call one forth
 To worship the dawn with your very own eyes

So come venture forth through the brisk morning
 air
 Wet your feet in the dew
 Come walk with me through the woods by the stream
 And worship the day as it dawns anew. . .For

There's a sunrise over the mountains
 As the stars fade from the sky
 There's a gray mist rising from our peaceful
 stream
 As the water meanders by
 Birds start their songs from dew covered trees
 As fish begin to rise
 And the babbling brook seems to call one forth
 To worship the dawn with your very own eyes

But don't take my word come see for yourself
 Witness what I've tried to name
 But don't hesitate for the dawn won't last long
 And will never come again quite the same

We live here in Cincinnati where the Ohio River forms a centerpiece. The River is an essential ingredient in the recipe that is our history. It is a backdrop to our sports, and has been a defining line to our politics. To some the River provides a means of transportation, while to others it becomes a daily obstacle to overcome while getting to work. Each of us sees the many things that happen on the River, and sees something different in that which is seen.

In the late 90's one of my favorite Aunts died after a long illness. At her funeral, my cousin noted that his mother had always loved the Ohio River which she had grown up beside, and then returned to in her later years. He said that she had only recently told him that of the many things that she loved to watch passing on the river below, her favorite was the Angels.

Slowly, over the following months, Aunt Dot Reed's thoughts worked their way out of my head and into this song.

As a child she'd often waken in the darkness of the night

And stare out the windows of her room
Down upon the river that swept before her sight
A distant stage lit softly by the moon
And there upon the river, beneath her gaze
With silver strands of starlight in their hair
Were angels dancing in the mist that was there.

She'd watch the angels dancing on the river
Dancing on the river
In the mist beneath her room
She'd watch the angels dancing on the river
Dancing on the river in the late night
Under silver strands of starlight
And the moon

Late night always gave way to daylight
And things kept changing as they do
Then starlight gave way to streetlight
As she moved from the river that she knew

And season to season and year after year
As winters springs and summers turned to fall
Through good and bad throughout the life that she
had
She'd always recall

The angels dancing on the river
Dancing on the river
In the mist beneath her room
She'd remember the angels dancing on the river
Dancing on the river in the late night
Under silver strands of starlight
And the moon

But as old age turned to the last page
She was living by the river once again
In a house with many windows to the broad stage
Glad to be there in the end
And though she didn't say
What her thoughts would convey
To friends and family when they'd call
If I'm not here
there's no need to fear for me at all

For I'll be with the angels dancing on the river
Dancing on the river
In the mist beneath my room
I'll be with the angels dancing on the river
Dancing on the river in the late night
Under silver strands of starlight
And the moon

As a child she'd often waken in the darkness of
the night
And Stare at the angels dancing on the River
Beneath the Moon

John L. Campbell
