

**THE RETUNE
OF THE
MAD SCIENTIST**

Songs and essays by Gary McGath

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Edition 1.0

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<http://www.mcgath.com/retune.pdf>

PDFilk

PDFilk: A filk book intended for distribution as a PDF file. I Ariel Cinii invented the term.

This isn't the first filk book to be distributed as PDF, but I've tried out some innovations in the format here. This isn't intended to be printed out from beginning to end, otherwise I wouldn't have been so profligate with white space. I'm expecting that you'll print out the songs which you want to sing, or you'll just keep the whole thing on a computer or digital reader that you take to filksings.

With page counts not being a problem, I decided to include essays with a lot of the songs. After all, if you aren't even paying for the book, I can take the opportunity to go on at length about why I wrote them!

There are clickable URLs in some of the essays.

The order of the songs is roughly chronological, though ordering within a calendar year is mostly guesswork and bad memory. Most of the songs were written after I published *The Mad Scientist's Songbook* in 1998.

The Strongest Man in the World

“Doctor Stockmann’s Song” is a rather old song of mine, which somehow didn’t make it into *The Mad Scientist’s Songbook*. It’s based on Henrik Ibsen’s play, *An Enemy of the People*. In that play, Dr. Stockmann discovers that his town’s highly-valued springs are contaminated with bacteria, and fixing the problem will be expensive. His scheming brother, the mayor, wants to cover up the problem and manipulates the population against him, to the point that he’s physically mistreated by a mob and formally declared an “enemy of the people.”

But Dr. Stockmann comes to see how cowardly the mob is, and recognizes that his independence of mind will ultimately let him win. At the end, he declares that he is the strongest man in the town, if not the whole world, because “the strongest man is the one who stands most alone.”

He makes plans to start a school of his own, with the best of the young minds in the town. In this song, I present him as he might be a few years later, having brought this plan to fruition.

An Enemy of the People has been an important influence in my life since I first read it. See, for instance, my 1990 article in *The Freeman*, “The Strongest Man.” (<http://www.thefreemanonline.org/columns/the-strongest-man/>)

Doctor Stockmann's Song

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 1991

Come gather close to me, my boys,
I want to tell a story to you all.
It was five years ago today
That reason was attacked in this old hall.

I dared to speak the truth back then,
And I believed the truth would set them free.
Instead they turned on me in fear
And branded me the people's enemy.

I learned then what I should have learned in youth:
Don't wear your best suit when you fight for truth.

No matter that I had the facts;
They said I had no right to criticize,
Majorities, they said, are gods,
And no dissenter should offend their eyes.

They chased me out; I lost my job.
They even barred my children from the schools.
I thought I'd have to cross the sea
To find a home that wasn't ruled by fools.

But there was something which I should have known:
The strongest man's the one who stands alone.

Not one of them was strong in hate;
It was their civic duty, nothing more,
And when they sought a doctor's care,
They soon came knocking humbly at my door.

But I had seen the ugliness;
They'd branded me the people's enemy.
The wolves in ermine clothes still ruled,
But I could fight the things I now could see.

For there was something which they should have known:
The strongest man's the one who fights alone.

By now each one of you has learned
That you are strong and they are old and blind.
The weapon which you've learned to wield
Is reason and your trust in your own mind.

And one day you will drive them out,
And you will turn me out as well, I fear,
For you'll surpass the truths I teach,
As you discover new ones every year.

It's just the journey's start which I have shown,
As you'll discover as you go alone.

Doctor Stockmann's Song

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 1991

In a bardic style

The musical score consists of six staves of music in G minor (indicated by a treble clef and a key signature of one flat). The time signature is common time (indicated by a 'C'). The lyrics are integrated into the music, with chords indicated above the staff.

Chords: Gm, Dm, E♭, Dm, F, B♭, Gm, Dm, F, Gm, Dm, A, Gm, Dm, Gm.

Lyrics:

Come gath - er close to me, my boys. I want to tell a sto - ry to you
all. It was five years a - go to - day That rea - son was at-tacked in this old
hall. I dared to speak the truth back then, And
I be - lieved the truth would set them free. In - stead, they turned on me in fear And
brand-ed me the peo-ple's en - e - my. I learned then what I should have learned in
youth: Don't wear your best suit when you fight for truth.

Barnum's Pride

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 1998

Music: Duane Elms, "Dawson's Christian"

"Dawson's Christian" includes the lines: "There are stories of the Dutchman, the Celeste, and Barnham's Pride, / There are stories of the Horseman and the lady at his side." This has resulted in many spin-off songs, of which this is one.

Em G

P. T. Barnum was a showman in the nineteenth century,

D Em D

And he ran the greatest spectacle you'd ever hope to see.

Em G

All the folks who bought their tickets for his circus could attest

D Em

That the show of P. T. Barnum was the best.

On a quiet summer evening, back in eighteen ninety-one,

There appeared a flying saucer, glowing brightly as the sun.

As he stood out in the open and looked up with great alarm,

P. T. Barnum thought he'd finally bought the farm.

No one human saw what happened, though the neighbors saw the light.

When they came out of their houses they beheld a startling sight.

In the yard there was a circle filled with burned-out, smoking ground,

But no sign of P. T. Barnum could be found.

G Em G Em

There are stories of the Christian, of the Dutchman and Celeste;

D Em D

There are stories of the horseman and the lady and the rest.

G Em G Em

But the strangest tale in show biz, it can never be denied,

D Em

Is the tale of P. T. Barnum and his Pride,

D Em

Yes, the tale of P. T. Barnum and his Pride.

We were on a tour of duty on the station Downbelow,

And we faced another evening without anywhere to go.

There was just a third-rate circus, a most uneventful sight,

But we went out to it anyway that night.

Now to me there was no question, it was just an awful bore.
The performers were incompetent; the benches made me sore.
So we stood up to go back and read, or sleep, or anything,
When another act strode out into the ring.

First we thought it was some actors wearing suits to look like cats,
But their bearing proud and haughty said that they were more than that.
When a man in old Earth garb came forth, we felt an unknown thrill,
For this new troupe started in with expert skill.

Now the cat-like grace the strangers had is shown by very few,
For we'd never seen a trapeze do the things they made it do.
Never fearing death or falling, leaping nimbly through the air,
Those acrobats did stunts beyond compare.

They did tricks upon a cycle far more tricky than I'd seen,
They had clowns that were so funny that I nearly burst my spleen.
With one act upon another, going on without a pause,
The audience broke out in wild applause.
The audience broke out in wild applause.

One short hour after starting, the performance was all done;
Now the cheap show had departed and the stranger's show had won;
The ringmaster held his hand up, and we all sat still to hear,
And this is what he told us loud and clear:

"Well, I hope you liked our circus, for today I've come to say
That I'm glad to see some humans after centuries away.
It's the greatest show in Hani space, it cannot be denied.
This is Phineas Tully Barnum and the Pride.
Yes, I'm Phineas Tully Barnum with the Pride."

There are stories of the Christian, of the Dutchman and Celeste;
There are stories of the horseman and the lady and the rest.
But the finest entertainment, it can never be denied,
Is the show of P. T. Barnum and his Pride.
Yes, the show of P. T. Barnum and his Pride.

The Microcosm Philosophy

“The Starting Point” says something central to my philosophy, but I get the impression it’s been misunderstood more often than not. It needs the further explanation of an essay, and this is a good place to put it.

We all live in a social context. The opportunities on a desert island are very limited. The kind of life we can hope to live depends greatly on the world around us. Accordingly, it’s in the interest of each individual to shape what he can of his world to a form that lets him live and flourish. The issue of physical existence is compounded by a psychological issue: You need to know that your actions aim toward the kind of world you want, or else you’re on a self-destructive course.

Naturally, it isn’t possible to change the whole world. Too many people set out trying to fix the world, then burn out and become cynical when they realize they can’t. What you have to do is determine what you can affect with the resources available to you. This can be as much a matter of selection as of actual change. It’s more effective to find people who share your values than to bash them into agreeing with you. And it’s more important to maintain your own integrity than to build a movement toward some goal. It’s more important to fill your life with people who think than with people who think like you. The aim I’m talking about isn’t a changed world, but a microcosm. A piece of what that changed world might be, and perhaps a step toward it.

Is that impractical idealism? No, it’s the one practical way to keep an ideal alive. The “practical”—or rather pragmatic—focus on tactics and narrow outcomes leads too often to meaningless paper successes, or to futile grasping at the illusion of success. See the Libertarian Party for an example. It’s too easy for a movement to become its own goal, to put the gaining of adherents and the winning of tactical victories over the vision which was its original reason.

The building of a microcosm can lead to unexpected successes, ones which you haven’t directly instigated. Setting a concrete example in your life may attract more support than waging a campaign.

Sometimes campaigns are appropriate, when you can join efforts with other people toward a specific set of goals. Sometimes things fall into place so that you

can make a major difference. But a focus on the world you can build, not on the campaign itself, is necessary to keep you from getting you dragged down if the campaign loses sight of the reason you joined it.

Building a microcosm instead of planning a utopia keeps your choices subject to a constant reality check. When you live by the values you've chosen, you experience their consequences. The cost may be heavy, but you'll know if it's worth it. Joining in mass movements can lead to demanding that the world adopt ways which, conveniently, you personally never have to live by.

Science fiction fandom provides fertile ground for living by the microcosm philosophy. It includes many people who value reason, accept personal differences, and think about ways of living which are different from current ones.

A good friend objected that the song doesn't say what "the vision you love" is. What would this song mean if heard by a Nazi? One answer to this is that a single song can't cover everything. It isn't a treatise on ethics. It doesn't say anything specifically about the value of reason. Even so, if more Germans had lived by the idea of the song, the Nazis might have found it harder to take a foothold. The hard-core members of the party lived their philosophy of brutality, but far more Germans let themselves be swept along by a movement that expected them to put national values above their own. Fanatical mass movements always demand the suppression of individual values.

If you've read through this, I thank you. Hopefully you now see that the message of the song isn't "Get involved in politics," but rather that politics is secondary to living your own values.

The Starting Point

Music and Lyrics: Gary McGath, Copyright 1998

Chorus:

G

Build a little piece of the vision you love.

D

G

Build it up with your own hands.

G

It may not reach to the skies above

D

Or span a thousand lands;

G

Em

But everything starts with one person,

Am

D

Then grows from just a few.

G

Em

Build a little piece of the vision you love.

D7

G

It has to start with you.

Em

You once had a dream of tomorrow,

B

But life got in the way.

Am

B

Too many defeats, too much sorrow,

Em

And here you are today.

C

D

But if there is something you treasure,

G

That you can get to grow,

Am

D

Then you'll live your dream in full measure,

D7

G

And never let it go.

Chorus

You once put your trust in your leaders,
And then you found they lied.
The stories you learned in school readers
Were hopes that quickly died.
Though everything may have turned sour,
As all your dreams came due,
You still have it in your own power
To build one life that's true.

Chorus

You fought and felt wounds deep inside you,
And wondered what it's for,
You looked for the answers denied you,
Till you could search no more.
But truth grew with every defender
Throughout our history;
Integrity that won't surrender
Is living victory.

Chorus

The road keeps on going forever,
From where you have begun,
And you keep on walking but never
Can come to where it's done.
But every new mile that you cover
Makes living worth the cost,
And every new truth you discover
Is wealth that can't be lost.

Chorus

The Starting Point

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 1998

A musical score for 'The Starting Point' in G major, common time. The lyrics are integrated into the music, with chords indicated above the staff.

Chords used: G, C, D, Gm, Em, Am, D7, G, B, Em, B, Am, Bm, Em, C, D, G, Am, D, D7, G.

Lyrics:

Build a lit - tle piece of the vi - sion you love. Build it up with your own hands.

It may not reach to the skies a - bove Or span a thou - sand lands; But

ev - ery - thing starts with one person, Then grows from just a few.

Build a lit - tle piece of the vi - sion you love. It has to start with you. You

once had a dream of to - mor - row. But life got in the way. Too

man - y de - feats, too much sor - row, And here you are to - day. But

if there is some - thing you treas - ure, That you can get to grow, Then

you'll live your dream in full meas - ure, And nev - er let it go.

How Dare He Be Right!

“When Your Dream Dies” is inspired by Vernor Vinge’s novel, *A Deepness in the Sky*. A major character makes a discovery which forces him to accept that the course he’s been pursuing is wrong, horribly wrong. He asks himself repeatedly: “What do you do when your dream dies?” When I came to this passage, I stopped reading the book and immediately wrote the first two verses of this song. I had to finish reading the book to decide what the third verse should be.

Some people consider this song tragic, and it’s easy to understand why. But it isn’t; it presents a crisis without a resolution, the single critical moment by itself. In fact, the character has caught himself in time and is able to change course; but to do it, he has to face the agony of recognition that he was destroying everything he really wanted. My favorite line, one of my favorites in any song I’ve written, is “How dare he be right!” With those words (not from the book, though many other words in the song are) he comes to a crash, not against any external opposition, but against the fact that the man he was damning, whom he nearly killed for telling him the truth, was right. In performance, I pause after this line, as if his own words are sinking in.

It’s a powerful moment in the novel, which could lead to his death or redemption. It might be compared with Javert’s discovery, in *Les Misérables*, that his obsessive pursuit of Jean Valjean was a terrible misjudgment. Javert, however, cannot find or will not accept any redemption of his error.

When Your Dream Dies

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 1999

I dreamed a great dream for humanity,
Where justice was lasting and worlds were free.
The price would be high and the battle hard,
And some would not gather the reward.
But now I have looked on the enemy;
I've seen what she was, what she came to be.
There's nowhere to hide from what I now see—
What do you do when your dream dies?

I thought I could turn evil means for right,
To wield as a sword in a noble fight.
For five hundred light years, three thousand years,
I held to the dream despite my fears.
Now who dares to tell me the price is too high,
And how dare he tell me I've dreamed a lie.
How dare he be right! Now let me die—
What do you do when your dream dies?

The choice was to kill or to lose it all,
But she too had fought, and was now a thrall.
They made her a tool, shaped to serve their aim—
And what's worse, I would have done the same.
The goal which I fought for cannot be so.
Now I must protect my most deadly foe.
But can I buy justice with slavery? No.
What do you do when your dream dies?

When Your Dream Dies

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 1999

The musical score consists of five staves of music for a single voice. The key signature changes throughout the piece, indicated by Roman numerals above the staff:

- Staff 1: Dm (G minor) - Gm (C major) - Dm (G minor)
- Staff 2: Gm (C major) - Dm (G minor) - Gm (C major)
- Staff 3: Dm (G minor) - Gm (C major) - A (A major)
- Staff 4: Dm (G minor) - Gm (C major) - Dm (G minor) - Gm (C major)
- Staff 5: Dm (G minor) - Gm (C major) - Ddim (D minor dim) - Gm (C major) - Dm (G minor)

The lyrics are as follows:

I dreamed a great dream for hu - man - i - ty,
I thought I could turn e - vil means for right,
The choice was to kill or to lose it all,
Where To But
The
jus - tice was last - ing and worlds were free.
wield as a sword in a no - ble fight.
she too had fought, and was now a thrall.
The price would be high and the
For five hund - red light years, three
They made her a tool, shaped to
bat - tle hard,
thou - sand years,
serve their aim—
And some would not gath - er the re - ward.
I held to the dream des - pite my fears.
And what's worse, I would have done the same.
But Now The
now I have looked on the en - e - my,
who dares to tell me the price is too high,
goal which I fought for can - not be so.
I've seen what she was, what she me I've
And how dare he tell must pro - tect my most
Now I
came to be.
There's no where to hide from what
dreamed dead - ly foe. How But can he buy jus - tice Now with
A
I now see - What do you do when your dream dies?
let me die - No.
slave - ry?

The Hobbit from the Brandywine

Words: Gary McGath, © 2000

Music: Garvey and Garvey, "The Blacksmith of Brandywine"

Chorus:

C Am C G7

Make it seven for the Dwarf Lords, within their halls of stone

C Am G7

For the Elves, make it three; for Humans nine;

C Am C G7

Make it one for the Dark Lord, who sits on his dark throne,

C F C G7 C

And don't forget the Hobbit from the Brandywine!

C G7

As we rode down into the Shire, it was a sight to see:

C F C F C G7 C

A tiny little man with a horn in his hand, beside a sawed-down tree.

C F C G7

And all around him on the ground, by sword and arrow-stroke,

C F C F C G7 C

A score of men who'll never fight again, or loot the Hobbit folk.

C G7

There many other Hobbits stood, and they let out a cheer,

C F C F C G7 C

We heard the crowd shout praise out loud to four who had no fear.

C F C G7

From them we learned the story of a short but gallant man,

C F C F C G7 C

Who one day overthrew the Great Enemy with a Ring upon his hand.

Chorus

In Hobbiton a Hobbit lived within a simple hole,

To sit and smoke and tell a joke had been his only goal.

But the wizard said that a toy he had was a great and mighty thing,

And he left his home for a distant land and destroyed the Dark Lord's Ring.

His errand done, he journeyed home, but sorrow there he found:

For Saruman had taken o'er, and was boss now of his town.

The Hobbit band set free their land, and they drove the robbers out,

And along the line of the Brandywine, you could hear the vict'ry shout:

Chorus

Illegal Aliens

These are the words I posted to the newsgroup rec.music.filk when I first posted the words to “Elian”:

This one is fresh today. The starting point, other than the obvious news sources, was an outrageous pun; even though this ended up being a serious song, the pun is still buried in the song.

Some people will undoubtedly disagree with the evaluations expressed in the song. Any rebuttals should rhyme and scan or be taken outside the newsgroup. I’m aware that the final resolution is still in doubt, and that may affect a future revision. But I’ve tried to come up with a song which is effective beyond the specific incident it addresses, and which doesn’t resort to caricature of any side. If it makes people uncomfortable in the process ... sometimes a song should.

This isn’t a parody of “Ferryman,” except in the old-fashioned sense which calls any reuse of a tune a parody; but it treats Lackey’s “Ferryman” lyrics as a shadow text, relying on recollections of the original words for part of its effect. This isn’t a technique I’ve ever seen discussed, but I think it applies to quite a few re-uses of tunes which aren’t parodies.

Here are the bare facts, excerpted from a PBS web page:

November 25, 1999: A five-year-old Cuban boy, Elian Gonzalez, is found on Thanksgiving Day clinging to an inner tube three miles off the coast of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Fishermen rescue him and he is taken to a hospital for treatment. But his mother and 11 others on the raft had drowned in their attempt to come to the U.S. from Cuba.

November 28: Juan Miguel Gonzalez, Elian’s father, files a complaint with the UN to get attention for his custody demands.

December 10: Attorneys for Elian’s relatives in Miami file a request for his political asylum.

January 10, 2000: A Circuit Court judge grants emergency custody of Elian to Lazaro Gonzalez.

January 12: Attorney General Janet Reno rejects the family court jurisdiction, tells the Gonzalez family it must file in federal court and she lifts the January 14 deadline to return Elian to his father in Cuba.

April 7: After meeting with Juan Miguel Gonzalez, Attorney General Janet Reno announces that U.S. officials will move to transfer Elian to his father.

April 19: The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals grants a request by Elian’s Miami relatives

to block his return to Cuba.

April 22: In a pre-dawn raid, armed U.S. federal agents seize Elian Gonzalez from the home of his Miami relatives. Elian is reunited with his father a few hours later. But it will take two months before Elian and his father would go back to Cuba—two months of court procedures and demonstrations and counter-demonstrations in Miami.

There are, believe it or not, people who applaud the return of fugitive slaves. One person wrote a song “apologizing” to Elian for not returning him to his masters more quickly.

Elian

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2000

Music: Leslie Fish, “Ferryman”

A storm had broken off Florida's coast
As the passengers clung to the boat.
A young boy sat watching in silence and fear
As the waves came up, drenching his coat.
He clung to his mother and stepfather there
And asked with his eyes when they'd land;
She looked for the seashore, still far out of sight,
And said as he held to her hand:

Chorus:

Elian, Elian, be strong of heart;
We must risk a stormy and dangerous sea.
Elian, Elian, we'll get across,
And we'll come to a land where we're free.

A fisherman found him on Thanksgiving day,
Adrift and still clinging to life.
The small craft had capsized and most of them
drowned,
The sea claimed the man and the wife.
The boy reached the land which they'd risked all
to reach,
But nothing remained of his own;
Nothing but hope and a new chance to live,
And the knowledge he was not alone.

Chorus

The aged tyrant of his native land
Demanded the boy be returned.
He said, "He is ours, and our own he'll remain;
The homeland's claim may not be spurned."
The boy's father pleaded, "With me he belongs,
Not out on the sea and the foam.
He's lived through such danger, too much for a
child.
Now let him return to his home."

Chorus

Retune of the Mad Scientist

The givers of blind Justice declared
The law said the boy could not stay.
His grandmothers and his cousin declared
That they never would give him away.
But with battering ram and with gun came the
men
To send him to his former state;
For all that he'd been through, he had to
submit
To an illegal alien's fate.

Chorus

Today the ghosts are walking again,
The shades out of many an age.
The Hebrews who fled from the Nile Delta
 land,
The fugitives from Caesar's rage,
The slaves who escaped by the Underground
 Rail,
The Jews out of old Germany;
They all are awake and remember today
The price of the ferryman's fee.

Chorus

Eternal Dutchman

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2000

My twist on the Flying Dutchman legend. The chorus uses a motif from Wagner's Fliegende Holländer overture.

Am E
A youth looks out on a stormy sea as fog fills up the air.

He thinks he glimpses a lofty ship with sails unfurled out there.

C F C
“Oh, father, tell me, what is that ship, why does it sail today?”
G Am E Am
The father looks to the sea and shouts, “Come, son, we must not stay!”

The two return to the father's home. The son asks, "Now tell me, Why did that vessel so frighten you? Why was it on the sea?" The father answers, "That craft we saw—the Flying Dutchman's ship. He's cursed forever to sail and sail, and never end his trip."

Chorus:

Am
He sails out upon the sea,
E
Beneath the stormy sky.
Am
Through all of eternity
E Am
Defiance in his eye.

“One day, when sailing against the storm, the Dutchman took an oath:
“I’ll beat the sea, and I hurl defiance at God and Devil both!”
Then God and Devil, they both agreed, to answer what he swore,
And so they cursed him— ’twas well deserved—to never reach the shore.”

The son is spellbound to hear the tale and goes outside that night,
And hopes that evening the ghostly ship will come again to sight.
He watches patiently, till he sees the vessel there afloat,
And on the waves to the place he stands there comes a pilot's boat.

Chorus

The pilot is not a ghostly form, but smiling, tall, and strong,
And reaching out with a friendly hand, says, "Young man, come along.
If you are eager to sail the sea and pass the farthest shore,
Then you can come on our ship and see what none have seen before!"

The youth asks, "Why is your Captain cursed to sail eternally?"
The laughing pilot says, "Curse be damned, we journey far and free.
When God and Devil forsook their claim to hold him to the land,
He set his course to begin the greatest journey ever planned."

Chorus

The youth asks, "Where are you going now, if I should join your crew?"
The pilot answers, "We've sailed on every sea the whole world through.
And now we start on a greater quest, into a greater dark,
This is our last night upon the sea. Tomorrow we embark!"

The youth steps boldly into the boat, with glad and fearless eye,
And soon the Dutchman has welcomed him, and says, "Prepare to fly!
The name they've given me now I earn—no more of sails and spars.
And welcome now to our journey's start. We voyage to the stars!"

Final Chorus:

He sails out beyond the sea,
Into the starry sky,
Through all of eternity,
Defiance in his eye.

Eternal Dutchman

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2000

Allegro Am

A youth looks out on a storm - y sea as fog fills up — the
air. — He thinks he glimps - es a lof - ty ship with sails un-furled out
there. — “Oh, fath - er, tell me, what is that ship? Why does it sail — to -
day?” — The fath - er looks to the sea and shouts, “Come, son, we must not
stay!” — He sails out up - on the sea, — Be -
neath the storm - y sky. — For all of e -
ter - ni - ty, — De - fi - ance in his eye.

Music of the Right

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2000

Music: "Music of the Night" from *Phantom of the Opera*

Tipper Gore was notorious for advocating a mandatory system of warning labels for music recordings. She's a Democrat, but the title points out the irony in her advocating what's normally considered a "right-wing" variety of chilling of expression. The labels "left" and "right" are mostly meaningless as characterizations of ideas, and the "left" has often been the more deadly enemy of free speech.

Once you thought that I was rather shady,
But now see me, I'm the second lady.
You can't fight the censors, abandon your defenses,
I am the one who'll bring you to the light,
For I control the music of the right.

All your folksongs, put them on the table,
I will give each one a warning label.
You must be protected, Guided and directed,
And harmful songs must stay out of your sight.
They don't fit with the music of the right.

Close your ears, for your ears will only tell the truth,
And the truth's not what I want you to hear.
You will find it is easy to pretend
That the truth is mine to commandeer.

"Ladyhawke" is bestial, though Platonic.
"Bloodchild"'s gross; "Hellraiser" is demonic.
What's that song you've got there
About a chocolate eclair?
All these songs I'm longing to ignite,
For I control the music of the right.

A German Adventure

In 1999 I decided to go to FilkContinental, the German filk convention. I'd met Juliane Honisch and Katy Dröge and liked them, and going to a filk con in a foreign country sounded like fun. It would be just my second trip to Europe. The effect on my life was bigger than I ever expected. I have a certain skill with languages and knew a little German from operas and other classical music. In preparation for the trip, I worked a bit more on the language, and could read a little by the time I got there. When I got to the hostel in Gütersloh, I announced myself to the people around the registration desk by saying, "Mein Name ist Gary." Of course, the English of just about everyone there was better than my German, but I think my effort won me points right away. In any case, I loved it there and made a number of new friends. And I decided to seriously learn German in order to keep in touch with them. Since then I've reached the point that I can read novels in the language and can get around in Germany without being answered in English (usually).

The 2001 British filk convention had a contest for the best German-language song by an Anglophone, and I decided to give it a try. The result was "Wo Riesen Sind" (where giants are), the first complete song lyric I ever wrote in German. I sang it at the con, and Kathy Mar provided the accompaniment to my filk of her own song. To tell the truth, the German is pretty poor by my current standards, but it got me a standing ovation from the German row in the audience! It was the only serious entry in the contest, and it won me a German rhyming dictionary which I still use.

Since then I've been to Germany six more times, and the castle in Freusburg feels like a second home to me.

Here's the translation:

*They said, "Please write a song,
A little song in the German language.
It really isn't so hard,"
And I cry or laugh.
For old giants stand like a mighty fortress before me,
The great composers, I see them here!*

*They said, "Please write a song,"
And now they fall silent like mice.
I come to the song festival,
And whom do I see? Tannhäuser!
Then where can I find the courage? When this song is over,
I hope the audience forgets!*

*Oh, filkers, how hard it is To write a German song here!
How can I create a verse, When I see Schubert's shadow?
I think of Mozart and Brahms, And tremble like a child
Where giants are.*

Wo Riesen Sind

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2000

Music: Kathy Mar, “When Giants Walked”

C
Sie sagten, "Bitte, schreib ein Lied,
D
Ein Liedchen in der Deutschen Sprache.
C
Es ist wirklich nicht so schwer,"
D
Und ich weine oder lache.
G Bm
Denn alte Riesen stehen wie ein' Feste Burg vor mir,
C G D
Die großen Komponisten sehe ich hier!
C
Sie sagten, "Bitte, schreib ein Lied,"
D
Und nun sie schweigen still, wie Mäuse.
C
Ich komme jetzt zum Sängerfest,
D
Und dann wen sehe ich? Tannhäuser!
G Bm
Wo denn finde ich den Mut? Wenn dieses Lied aus ist
C G D
Ich hoffe daß das Publikum vergißt!
D
Oh, Filker, wie ist es so schwer,
G
Zu schreiben hier ein deutsches Lied!
Bm
Wie kann man eine Strophe machen,
C A
Wenn man Schuberts Schatten sieht?
D
Ich denke an Mozart und Brahms,
G Em
Und zittre wie ein Kind
C D
Wo Riesen sind.

Cyberstalkers

In 1996, two Internet sleazes named Dan Schulz and Scott Wirkus formed a long-lasting obsession with me. Living under the delusion that they were famous entertainers, they apparently regarded my failure to regard them as anything but harassing dirt as the one obstacle to their imaginary fame's becoming real. They made phone calls to me in the middle of the night and had followers of theirs threaten me and forge my name to spam.

They reached their greatest sleaziness with a website called eyada.com, which somehow blew millions of dollars in investor money in a single year. (Among other things, eyada.com head Bob Meyrowitz put their office space in the most expensive part of New York City.) Using computer technology, Schulz, Wirkus, and eyada.com made threatening phone calls to various people, taking clips of my voice, including my name, to give the impression to the victims that I was harassing them.

The lawyer I retained was totally inept, and hadn't even managed to file court papers by the time eyada.com abruptly shut down, leaving its investors with nothing. Eyada's collapse was a silver lining in the "dot bomb" of 2001, when investors thought that a registered domain name was sufficient proof of money to be made, only to learn better than hard way.

At least I have this song to show for my trouble.

Red Fields of Ink

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2001

Music: Eric Bogle, "No Man's Land"

Well, how do you do, eyada.com?
It's seems that you've gone and blown up like a bomb.
You soaked up those millions as if they were booze,
And all those you suckered now find that they lose.
Investors in Two Thousand thought it was fun,
And never thought forward to Two Thousand One.
Well, I'm glad you died quick and are gone from the scene,
For the stuff that you pulled was much worse than obscene.

Chorus:

Where'd you go with the money?
Did you think it was funny
To make threatening calls and invade people's lives?
Did you think your harassment was clever?
Did you think you could fool folks forever?

Now the phrase "to make money" should mean something fine;
It should mean to create, to bring forth from the vine.
But too many believe it's just waving a wand,
Or sucking the wealth out of people they've conned.
Now in Two Thousand One many of them have learned
That it's just an illusion unless it is earned,
And they're forced for the first time to stop and to think
That they're digging their grave 'neath the red fields of ink.

Chorus

eyada.com, I must wonder why
You thought you could get rich by selling a lie.
But there always is someone who thinks there's a trick
To get instant money by means that are sick.
And the cheaters, the sleazes, all out for quick gain
Cause losses and lawsuits and ulcers and pain,
And we know that some bozo will try it again...
And again and again and again and again.

Chorus

The Magic of Reality

It's a common theme to wish for a world where magic really works. A well-written example of this wish, expressed as a song, is "Where the Magic Is Real" by Paul Kwinn. It's a great place to read about, but would you really want to live there? Magic in fantasy literature is always something reserved to the few, who have mysterious powers unattainable to the rest of us and don't even get paid very well for it. Magic is unpredictable, "tricky, and apt to go wrong." In most magical settings, enchanted items are handmade; there's no hope of getting one in every household.

Magic is a bending of the laws of nature, and as such has to be rare. If it becomes common, then it really becomes just a different technology, based on a different science. Tales such as Heinlein's *Magic, Incorporated*, Poul Anderson's *Operation Chaos*, and to a lesser extent the Harry Potter series, treat magic as just a different science, which can be used reliably and repeatably.

But the most reliable magic is the kind we actually have—the magic of science and technology. And it gives us far more than wizards' magic ever can. Right now I'm typing this essay at a device that lets me access vast amounts of the world's knowledge and communicate with friends in other parts of the world. It didn't cost much more than a thousand dollars. Isn't that better than a Palantir? I have a vehicle in which I can travel hundreds of miles in a day, and I can pay for passage on one which will take me across the ocean in a few hours. Why would I want to ride a broom, with no protection from the elements and probably painful seating?

What if someone living in a magical world found out about ours? Might he not be jealous of all that we have?

A Greater Magic

Words and music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2002

C

G

Just last night I dreamed of a vision of a world that inspired me with awe.

C7

F

C7

F

C G

Do not hold my words in derision till I tell you of all that I saw.

C

G

It made daily life seem so dreary, such wonders that place had to show,

C7

F

D

G

C

Such hope it raised up for the weary, that I only wished I could go.

Its people had countless devices to travel, to learn and to build,
That did not require the prices of mages in wizardry skilled.

Their broomsticks were only for sweeping, and yet they were able to fly
In ships that rose heavenward leaping, for thousands of miles in the sky.

Caprices of spirits of power would never compel them to pause;
To wait for the stars' proper hour or aspect, they never had cause.
And yes, they had folly and error, though no more than we have right here,
But spirit realms brought them no terror, and curses could cause them no fear.

A universe lawful and ordered, obedient once understood,
Where what they can do is unbordered, for evil but also for good.
Our lot in real life is so tragic, beneath supernatural powers;
Then let me escape to that magic, a magic far greater than ours.

C

G

Our lot in real life is so tragic, beneath supernatural powers;

C7

F

D

G

C

Then let me escape to that magic, a magic far greater than ours.

A Greater Magic

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2002

Just last night I dreamed of a vision of a world that in -

spired me with awe. Do not hold my words in de -

ri - sion till I tell you of all that I saw. It

made our own world seem so drear - y, such won - ders that

place had to show, Such hope it raised up for the

wear - y After last verse That I on - ly wished I could go.

Our lot in real life is so tra - gic, be -neath su - per -

nat - ur - al powers; Then let me es - cape to that

mag - ic, a mag - ic far great - er than ours.

The Program

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2002

After Rudyard Kipling's "The Palace" (May be sung to Leslie Fish's tune)

It's remarkable how little I had to change "The Palace" to make it fit a common scenario in software development.

When I was a geek and a hacker, a coder proven and skilled,
I drew up the specs for a program, such as a geek should build.
Then I searched for old code in the archive; presently, deep in the disk,
I came on the wreck of a program, such as a fool might risk.

There was no worth in the fashion; there was no wit in the plan;
Hither and thither with GOTO's the wild spaghetti ran;
O.O.P. brute and mishandled, but written in every file:
"After me cometh a hacker; tell him I know it's vile."

Swift to my use in the branches, where my well-planned classes grew,
I pulled out the best algorithms, and then compiled them anew.
Lines I grabbed from the headers, made them ANSI correct,
Taking and leaving at pleasure what wasn't flatly wrecked.

Yet I despised not nor gloried, yet, as I wrenched them apart,
I read in the broken framework the heart of that hacker's heart.
As he had risen and pleaded, so did I understand
The form of the dream he had followed in the face of the code he planned.

When I was a geek and a hacker, in the open noon of my pride,
They sent me a word from the VP; they whispered and called me aside.
They said, "We've run out of money." They said, "The contract's been killed.
Thy program shall stand as that other's, the spoil of a buyer to build."

I stored my code in the archive, my headers, my makefiles, and scripts.
All I had wrought I abandoned to their fate in the software crypts.
Only I wrote in the labels—only I marked in each file:
"After me cometh a hacker. Tell him it STILL is vile."

Your Crook's Name Here

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2002

Music: Lou and Peter Berryman, "Your State's Name Here"

Censorship is often called "campaign finance reform," especially when it's designed to prohibit criticism of office holders. The words in brackets are sung by a second performer or the audience.

The campaign reform laws say when we complain,
They won't let us cite politicians by name,
And so I have written a few lyrics here,
Of a rat you all know, [Your crook's name here].

No robber's so rotten, no crimes quite so clear
As those acts committed by [your crook's name here].
He'll soon stab your back, although I don't know when.
There's no one so false as [your crook's name again].

Chorus:

Oh, [your crook's name here], oh, [again], what a crook.
I've read of his misdeeds in [name of a book].
And the asshole tells us a new lie every year,
In the stale campaign speeches of [your crook's name here].

The papers reported his robbing the plate,
A scandal we all know as [fill the blank] gate,
His bills have provisions that go on for hours,
Ignoring restrictions on [specified powers].

The pledges he makes are two-faced and obscure.
He learned from the last thief in office, I'm sure.
The words that he uses are linguistic rape,
Like [expletive deleted] all over the tape.

Chorus

His friends pile up fortunes while we pay the tax,
And he manufactures [a few so-called facts].
The web pages make their opinion quite clear
With an eye, and a pyramid, and [your crook's name here].

Whisper it softly, so no one will hear.
[Your crook's name here, your crook's name here]
In office he sits and it's there he'll grow old
By the barrels of pork and the mountains of gold.

Chorus

The God of Word

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2002

Music: Cat Faber, "The Word of God"

From manual and CD-ROM, we trace the wide design.

User guide and reference, examples line by line.

We gaze upon the software where tech writers make it known
And count the countless errors in the quickstart card alone.

Odd long-vanished features in the scripts and shells are found,
And truth is often lacking when the text is set and bound.
The patient user can go mad traversing such a road.
Dummies wrote the manual; we wrote the code.

We are software architects, who do our work by night,
Seeking out the most caffeine to better make it right.
Long ago, when Windows broke the remnant of his will,
John Sculley recanted, but the Lisa's living still.

Hours past the evening rush, when only hackers wake,
The truth is found in open source which you are free to take.
You may read the guidebooks, and may shudder at such fools;
Dummies wrote the manual; we wrote the tools.

With demo, doc, and patient help, with insults, threats, and guns,
We still can't make the writers understand just how it runs.
Though they may give examples and most carefully advise,
These highly trusted printed books are going to tell you lies.

They are dumb as beasts, no other answer can we see.
But truth has left its fingerprints within the E-X-E.
Those who trust the documents will never find the facts.
Dummies wrote the manual; we wrote the hacks.

And we who backwards-engineer the system byte by byte,
Who break the raw machine code down to hold it in our sight,
Or study distribution kits, test every last command.
The profoundest acts of reading still won't help you understand.

Deep in source and subroutine, in vector, tree, and stack,
The truth has left its living word if you just have the knack.
So turn and look where best you think the answer's going to be.
Dummies wrote the manual; we wrote the C.

The Bridge of Khazad-dûm

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2004

Music: "Roddy McCorley," traditional

A bridge, a man facing doom for a great cause ... it's an obvious adaptation.

D A D Bm G A D

O see the weary travelers who march with faces pale,

D G A Bm Em A

Out of the dark they come at last to light in Dimrill Dale.

D G D Bm Em A

Their eyes are now cast down with grief, their faces filled with gloom,

D A D Bm G A D

For Gandalf Mithrandir fell today at the Bridge of Khazad-dûm.

Where late the dwarven halls he trod, his glowing staff in hand,
Behind him marched, in grim array, an earnest stalwart band.

Through Moria, through Moria, they came to Balin's tomb,
But Gandalf Mithrandir fell today at the Bridge of Khazad-dûm.

Onto the narrow arch he stepped, his sword held gleaming white,
To stand against the fire that came of shadow and of night,
To guard the brave Ringbearer's quest, that he might reach Mount Doom,
As Gandalf Mithrandir fell today at the Bridge of Khazad-dûm.

There's never a one of all your dead more bravely fell in fray
Than he who faced the hellish foe and stood to guard the way
So that Free Folk might not be lost, so hope again might bloom,
So Gandalf Mithrandir fell today at the Bridge of Khazad-dûm.

When Winter Hits Arisia

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2005

Music: Cheryl Wheeler, "When Fall Comes to New England"

A blizzard hit Boston on Sunday of Arisia 2005, shutting down the city and forcing nearly everyone to stay through Monday. I wrote this song at the con, and Mary Ellen Wessels sang it the same day.

When winter hits Arisia

The snow comes down so grand,
And the air's so cold
You can almost hold
Your frozen breath in hand.

The streets are free of traffic,
For each time they try to plow,
Down from the gray sky overhead
There falls another soft white bed,
And all we fen gaze out in dread
When winter hits Arisia.

When winter hits Arisia

And the wind at gale force blows,
Howling gusts say remain we must.
The hotel's engulfed in snows.

When the drifts fill up the sidewalks
You know you can't get far.
Don't go outside in that miniskirt.
The thought of travel really hurts.
The dealers' room sells Monday shirts
When winter hits Arisia.

Bridge:

The trains are off their schedule,
The filk guest's lost his voice,
And travel warnings scream on the TV.
The gophers are on to something
And they work, cause there's no choice.
The guests all blink and stare in misery.

'Cause when winter hits Arisia,
Oh, I can't get away.
You can't get out by prayer or wing,
And drivers can't do anything.
Stay for the last sled dog filksing
When winter hits Arisia.

One Day More

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2005

Music: "One Day More" from Les Miserables

I wrote this for Debbie Ohi on the occasion of her and Jeff's eagerly anticipated move to their new house.

DEBBIE:

One day more!
A brand-new house, a brand-new destiny
With never-ending domesticity.
When they hand Jeff and me the keys
I'll surely jump above the trees.
One day more!

JEFF:

We cannot move in yet today.
We still need renovations.

DEBBIE:

One day more.

DEBBIE AND JEFF:

Till they are done we have to stay
But we're filled with elation.

SELLER:

One more day till I get paid.

DEBBIE AND JEFF:

We will not pay rent again.

SELLER:

One more day and good-bye, mortgage!

DEBBIE AND JEFF:

We were born to live in here.

SELLER:

For a buyer I had prayed.

DEBBIE AND JEFF:

And we'll fix it without fear.

SELLER:

And at last my dream's come true!

CONTRACTOR:

One more day before the job!

JEFF:

Should I keep him on his toes?

CONTRACTOR:

At the barricaded driveway!

JEFF:

Should I watch him do the work?

CONTRACTOR:

We'll make sure you do not sob.

JEFF:

Will they do it, will they shirk?

CONTRACTOR:

We'll make sure we do it right!

FILKER CHORUS:

The time is now, the day is here.

DEBBIE:

One day more!

BANKER:

One more day to start the mortgage
We'll collect our monthly due.
We'll be ready for this couple
And they'll pay till they are through!

DEBBIE:

One day more!

ALLISON AND JODI:

Watch 'em run inside,
Catch 'em if they fall.
They are full of pride
As they look down the hall.
Here a little paint,
There a little touch.
Most of it's in good shape
So it won't take much!

FILKER CHORUS:

One day to a new beginning,
(Raise the maple leaf flag high.)
Through the whole house we will sing,
(Through the whole house we will sing,
It's a new house they are winning,
(It's a new house to live in.)
And we'll make the rafters ring.

JEFF:

My place is here
To live with you.

DEBBIE:

One day more.

DEBBIE AND JEFF:

We cannot move in yet today.
We still need renovations.

BANKER:

We'll get principal and interest.
We'll collect all that they earn.
If they pay late we'll get extra
So prompt payment they will learn.

SELLER:

One more day till I get paid.

DEBBIE AND JEFF:

Till they are done we have to stay
But we're filled with elation.

BANKER:

One more day to start the mortgage
We'll collect our monthly due.
We'll be ready for this couple.

ALLISON AND JODI:

Watch 'em run inside,
Catch 'em if they fall.
They are full of pride
As they look down the hall.

DEBBIE:

Tomorrow seems so far away.
We wish it was the moving day.
We wish it was the moving day.

ALL:

Tomorrow we'll discover
What our (their) brand-new dwelling has in
store!

One more dawn —

One more day —

One day more!

Rebuttals in Song

The following is based on a LiveJournal post I wrote in February 2010:

In the newsgroup *rec.music.filk*, which is the source of a lot of filk tradition, there's a custom that rebuttals to songs should rhyme and scan. This makes sense for the medium; newsgroups lend themselves to interminable debate threads that keep wandering farther from the original topic.

I've followed this approach a few times myself, with "Pinocchio" (a rebuttal to Kathy Mar's "Velveteen"), and "Lullaby for a Benevolent Despot" (a response to T. J. Burnside Clapp's "Lullaby for a Weary World"). But in an appropriate venue, there's no legitimate objection to prose criticism of a song for what it says.

There are songs which take straightforward positions on issues, which I might disagree with. But more interesting to talk about are songs which take harmful philosophical positions. Songs can be an effective way to make broad ideas meaningful to people, and they can do this with either good or bad ideas.

For example, Rob Balder's "Rich Fantasy Lives" glorifies people who let their wandering imaginations interfere with their work, and who find real life boring. They're just waiting "until something better than this world arrives." How do they think it will—maybe by wishing on a star? There's a rebuttal to this song, though it was written first: Kathy Mar's "Give My Children Wings" ("but not the ghosts of wings / I have found in the words of the dreamers"). It embarrasses me when most of the people in a room join in singing RFL.

The filk song I dislike the most on philosophical grounds is "Lullaby for a Weary World." It proposes that because the world is so violent, it should just go to sleep while the singer heals its wounds. "I wish the power to stop it all / Could rest within my hands." This is a perfect expression of the "nice" totalitarian impulse, the belief that authority over a passive population, viewed as children, is the way to create a utopia. The song is built around images of the world as a child that just needs to be lulled by its philosopher-queen. There's something ominous behind the lines: "Make my arms strong enough to hold her when she wakes / And make me a lullaby so sweet and fine / That I can sing my weary world to sleep."

In "Lullaby for a Benevolent Despot," I show how this amounts to totalitarian intent. Lee Gold's "Reveille" uses the same tune to urge the sleeping world to wake up.

Both "Rich Fantasy Lives" and "Lullaby for a Weary World" are well-written and enjoyable to hear, which is all the more reason for exercising alert judgment of their messages.

Lullaby for a Benevolent Despot

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2005

Music: T. J. Burnside Clapp, "Lullaby for a Weary World"

I wonder how my world can live with all her different factions.

Let me rule the world.

And I'm scared of all that people do and how they often come to blows,
And I wish the power to change it all could rest within my hands.

I've seen her people dying for such bold and bloody causes.

Let me rule the world.

For the bodies of the innocent are crushed by hist'ry's turning wheel,
And I want to bring it to a halt before it turns again.

Chorus:

Oh, give me the power to rule my weary world.

Give me a charming voice to soothe those who distrust.

Make my arms strong enough to stop those who resist.

And make me a government so pure and fine

That it will bring this weary world some peace.

I'd like to legislate away each ling'ring cause of hatred.

Let me rule the world.

And although I'd have to break some eggs, that's how you make an omelet,
For when I'd put down all resistance, peace would reign again.

Bridge:

And if her fighting will not stop, I'll send the troops to stop it,

And sing my song of peace above the noise and pain of war.

And if the violence still won't end, I might curtail some freedoms,

But you know I'll give them back. Yes, I swear I'll give them back.

And if my plan should go all wrong, I'll answer in the darkness.

Let me rule the world.

And pray a tender god will grant forgiveness for all that I've done

And grant the world I tried to rescue one more chance to live.

May God please forgive me, for I did it all for love.

Chorus

The Velveteen Menace

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2005

Music: Kathy Mar, "Velveteen"

Inspired by "The Cuddly Menace":

<http://www.whatisdeepfried.com/zogg/zogg1.html>

G CMaj7 D B7

When I was found and taken home all snuggled close and warm,

Em Am Asus4 D

I knew that I must guard against all defects in my form,

G Am B7 Em

They think me just a shabby toy within a small child's room,

Am G D G

But if someone should find me out, then that could spell my doom.

Am G B7 Em

I must be alert so no one will learn the truth and warn

C G D G

The humans of my nature, of the fact that I am Zorn.

I know the need for secrecy in our invasion plan.

We must reach every household without being known to man.

I sit here, only watching, none suspect that I have life.

But the danger of discovery hangs o'er me like a knife.

I must be alert so no one will learn the truth and warn

The humans of my nature, of the fact that I am Zorn.

Now someone special in my life has somehow learned the truth,

In spite of my toy rabbit form and his unpracticed youth.

I knew he understood as soon as I beheld his eyes.

He'd learned I am alive in ways that nothing could disguise.

I destroyed him in a moment, so that he could not warn

The humans of my nature, of the fact that I am Zorn.

Now all you Zorn who worry that your shape is not quite true,

And all with worn-out cotton fur and scales now showing through,

And all who make a careless move and fear someone will see,

Remember this instruction from your sector leader—me.

You must be alert so no one will learn the truth and warn

The humans of our nature, of the fact that we are Zorn.

We must wait until the day to strike, when it's too late to warn

The humans of our nature, of the fact that we are Zorn.

The Last Saskatchewan Idiot

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2006

Music: Stan Rogers, "The Idiot"

Inspired by "The Last Saskatchewan Pirate" by the Arrogant Worms

D A Bm D G Bsus4

I often make these sneak attacks when the Mounties aren't around.

G D G D Em A

Some barge I'll find, sneak from behind, and approach without a sound.

D A D G Bsus4

We aim the gun, watch the farmers run, jumping off to hit the ground.

G D G D A D

No need to shoot, we grab the loot, and then I'm homeward bound.

I remember back six months ago, this outlaw life I chose,
When I couldn't pay to keep the farm and the bank came to foreclose.
Well, I could have had a measly dole, but I'm not one of those.
I take stuff for free, and that makes me a pirate, I suppose.

G D Bm A D

So bid farewell to the corn and wheat you never more will see.

G A D Bm Em A

I'll sell it all for a buck an ear—now that's real piracy.

D A D G Bsus4

Oh, the winter's cold and there's not much gold and there's only stupid foes,

G D G D A D

But I live tax free, and that makes me a pirate, I suppose.

So come all you fine young Mounties, if you just have lost your job,
We'll give you fame and a dashing name to use, like "Salty Bob."
Oh, you won't see waves or hidden caves near tropic island coves,
But the stuff you stole will meet your goal, if you dream of treasure troves.

So bid farewell to the honest job you never more will see.

Come on the deck, and you'll get respect when you live by piracy.

You'll get lots of loot and a chance to shoot and to wear some pirate clothes,
And live tax free—screw the GST—a pirate, I suppose!

Father Roche's Song

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2006

Inspired by *Doomsday Book* by Connie Willis

Father Roche's views aren't mine, but I'm fascinated by his struggle with ideas that go beyond the world he understands.

Dm Am Dm C Dm
O Lord, O Lord! Do you hear me? You are far away.
C F C Bb C F
You cannot come, so she tells me. But you hear me pray.
C F C F Bb C
The times are hard and folk are dying; what are we to do?
Dm C Dm Am Dm
Though we are weak and know little, we must act for you.

For you have sent one to guide us from your realm above.
I saw her come out of nowhere, brought here by your love.
Her words are strange, and strange her manner, but her soul is true.
She comes to warn, speaks to comfort, knows what we must do.

O Lord, O Lord! You are with me, though I soon may die.
A village priest, not a scholar, but I still will try.
She speaks of things past understanding to a man like me,
But I know this: You have helped us in our misery.

This is, she says, not your judgment, nor the Devil's curse.
An earthly ill, like so many, only so much worse.
But some will live on, though we perish; not all life will end.
And those to come will see blessings you will one day send.

Father Roche's Song

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2006



A musical score for 'Father Roche's Song' in common time, key of C minor. The score consists of eight staves of music with lyrics underneath each staff. Chords indicated above the staff include Dm, Am, C, F, B♭, and C. The lyrics are:

O Lord, O Lord! Do you hear me?
You are far away. You can - not come,
so she tells me. But you hear me pray. The
times are hard and folk are dy - ing;
what are we to do? Though we are weak
and know lit - tle, we must act for you.

Twilight and Starlight

“Bury Me Under a Star” started in a very different place from where it ended. I first thought of the title in connection with a controversy over veterans’ graves, in which Pagan families were lobbying to have the five-pointed star accepted as one of the symbols that could be used on a gravestone, while the Alliance Defense Fund was campaigning for soldiers’ “right” to be buried under Christian symbols, whether they and their families wanted it or not.

As I thought of ideas for the song, I thought of the difference between the star and the cross as symbols. The cross is an instrument of execution. It stands for the idea that humans are inherently sinful but are redeemed by the suffering and death of one who is not. This is a repulsive idea in multiple ways. It makes no sense to hold people morally responsible for a condition which is allegedly built-in and unchangeable. It makes no sense to punish the innocent and count it as atonement for the sins of the guilty.

The star, on the other hand, has two important meanings: It is a source of light and a goal to be reached. Thus, the idea of burial under a star is more than the recognition of a minority religion’s under the law; it’s a symbol of a way of thinking that honors the best in us, even in death. Dave Alway’s death just after he returned home from GAFilk 9 further impelled me to create a song that rejects despair. The light we shed in life is an important part of what we are, and this part of us can go on after our lives are over. If others share the values we have and continue to live for them and realize them in new ways, then to that extent we live on. By the same token, if we see a future that carries our hopes beyond what is possible in our lifetimes, then the purposes we live for aren’t cut off by death.

While we’re alive, our values take on a life of their own. The joy of those who share what we rejoice in, the triumphs of those who hope for what we hope for, extend our own joy while we’re alive. They can also extend our hopes to a time when we won’t personally be there to experience those joys and triumphs. We know they will go on.

The star stands for light and hope, created in this life but shining beyond its end.

Bury Me Under a Star

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2007

In memory of Dick Eney and Dave Alway

F Bb F

When finally my life is done,

Bb Gm C

When no road's left for me to run,

Dm F Dm

Beyond the final setting sun,

Bb C7 F

Bury me under a star.

For me no cross of guilt and pain,
When I'm beyond all loss and gain.
Just let this sign of hope remain:
Bury me under a star.

Bridge 1:

F7 Bb Eb F7 Bb

Take up the best you saw in me

F F7

For life, not just in memory,

Eb Bb G7 C

And when you win some victory,

C9 C7

Then I'll be where you are.

The treasures I will leave behind
Are those which reach some other mind.
I'll put them down for you to find.
Bury me under a star.

For even in the final night,
A dream that was can shed a light
And bring another dream to flight.
Bury me under a star.

Bridge 2:

From life to life, we pass it on,
So that the best is never gone,
And after darkness comes a dawn,
Though it may seem so far.

Not all I've done will go away
If something of my light can stay,
So till you see another day,
Bb C7 F F7
Bury me under a star.
Bb C7 F
Bury me under a star.

Bury Me Under a Star

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2007

In memory of Dick Eney and David Alway

The musical score consists of ten staves of music in common time (indicated by '3/4') and F major (indicated by a treble clef and a key signature of one flat). The lyrics are written below each staff, corresponding to the chords indicated above the notes.

Chords: F, B♭, Gm, C, Dm, F, C7, F, B♭, E♭, F7, B♭, F, F7, E♭, B♭, G7, C, C9, C7, D.C. al Fine.

Lyrics:

When For me final no - cross my of life guilt is and done, pain, When When
no road's left for me to run, Be -
I'm be - yond all loss and gain. Just
Dm F
yond let the this fi sign - nal of set hope - ting re - sun, main:
B♭ C7 F
Bu - ry me un - der a star.

Take up the best—— you saw—— in me For
F
life, not just—— in mem - o - ry, And
E♭ B♭ G7 C
when you win some vic - to - ry,
C9 C7 D.C. al Fine
Then I'll be where you are.

Löwenzahn und Weinen

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2007

Music: "The Lion Sleeps Tonight"

The song contest for FilkContinental 2007 was "Dandelion Wine," in honor of the convention guests Dave Clement and Tom Jeffers, performing as Dandelion Wine. The German word for dandelion is "Löwenzahn," which, like the French "dent-de-lion," means "lion's tooth." So let the puns flow, bilingually!

In dem Dschungel, dem stillen Dschungel, der arme Löwe weint.
In the jungle, the quiet jungle, the lion weeps tonight.

Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh,
Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh.
Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh,
Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh.

Er hat Schmerzen, er hat Zahnschmerzen, der arme Löwe weint.
He is aching, his tooth is aching, the lion weeps tonight.

Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh,
Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh.
My tooth, oy vay, my tooth, oy vay, my tooth, oy vay, my tooth, oy vay,
My tooth, oy vay, my tooth, oy vay, my tooth, oy vay, my tooth, oy vay,

Wer kann ziehen, wer kann ihn ziehen? Der arme Löwe weint.
Who can pull it, oh, who can pull it? The lion weeps tonight.

Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh,
Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh,
Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh,
Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh, Mein Zahn, oh, weh,
Oh WEH!!

The Turtle Moves!

Terry Pratchett is one of my favorite authors, and *Small Gods* is my favorite Pratchett novel. It's part of the Discworld series, but isn't closely connected to any of the other novels; aside from a cameo appearance by the Librarian, the only character it has in common with the other novels is Death.

When I heard Les Barker's "Will the Turtle Be Unbroken," I knew there needed to be a Discworld version. This song presents the story of *Small Gods* as it might have been retold in legends, centuries after Brutha's time.

At the time of this writing, Terry Pratchett is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. This is a disease which kills the mind but not (directly) the body, and I consider it more frightening than any disease which kills outright. It's considered the "fifth leading killer," and its burden grows as people live longer. There is no known cure so far. Yet much less money is spent on it than on other widespread diseases.

If you've enjoyed this book and would like to offer something in return, I'd like you to help me in fighting Alzheimer's by giving to the Fisher Center for Alzheimer's Research. Visit (<http://www.alzinfo.org/>) for more information.

May the Turtle Be Unbroken

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2007

Music: "Will the Circle Be Unbroken"

Gather round and hear a story
Of a time from long ago,
Of how Om came to his glory
And the people came to know.

In the days when priests were wicked
And the people were deceived,
Om looked sadly on his nation.
All felt fear but none believed.

Chorus:

May the Turtle be unbroken
By and by, Om, by and by.
Guide the Turtle as it hurtles
From the sky, Om, from the sky.

From his realm up in the heavens,
From his dwelling near the sun,
Om came down here as a Turtle,
Spoke to Brutha, the Chosen One.

Brutha was a humble servant,
But his faith was strong and true,
And he listened to the Turtle,
And he learned what he must do.

Chorus

Deacon Vorbis held great power,
And his heart was dark and cold.
Vorbis claimed to be a Prophet,
Like the ones from days of old.

He and Brutha crossed the desert,
And to bishop did Brutha rise.
Vorbis now was Cenobiarch;
Brutha knew his words were lies.

Chorus

Retune of the Mad Scientist

He told Vorbis he was wicked;
Vorbis bound him up in chains,
He said, "Brutha, none can fight me.
You will die now for your pains."

Brutha only smiled at Vorbis,
Then he looked up at the sky.
He said, "Vorbis, you're mistaken.
I am sorry. You will die."

Chorus

And when Brutha's words were spoken,
Fell the Turtle, like a shot,
And the Turtle was unbroken.
As for Vorbis—he was not.

When the people saw what happened,
All at once now they believed.
They knew Brutha for a prophet,
And his teaching they received.

Chorus

Lois Mangan's Ghost

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2008

Music: Leslie Fish, "Carmen Miranda's Ghost"

Lois Mangan's death from Parkinson's disease was a sad loss to MASSFILC. "Carmen Miranda's Ghost" was one of her favorite songs, so it was an obvious choice for this memorial. Lois was "Ghost of Honor" at ConCertino 2009, held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Worcester, where she had been both con chair and hotel liaison.

<http://www.massfilc.org/loismangan.html>

Lois Mangan's ghost is haunting the con hotel.
Half the staff has seen her, and the concom has as well.
And if you think it's just that Tully's made our senses numb,
Just tell me where those NESFA Hymnals all are coming from!

Don't go to the breakout room when not a filker's there.
You just might hear a three-part round and get a nasty scare.
And if you hear an off-key chorus, don't go near the din;
She's got a chaos circle going and may drag you in.

It's no surprise the Worcester, Mass., Crowne Plaza's where she haunts.
To sit in on a filksing is the best thing that she wants.
But there's one wish that she still has which gives her force and drive:
She never was a Guest of Honor while she was alive.

Lois Mangan's ghost is haunting the con hotel.
Now she's on the guest list, and it suits her very well.
There is no doubt of one thing, when we see her at the con:
That those who helped to shape our lives are never really gone.

Starborn

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2008

Based on the movie Stardust, this was the winning song in the Contata 2008 song contest, with the theme "To life."

Light in the darkness above the world,
Circling far from the air,
Ever the same through the sky I whirled,
Far from all human care,
Till I was thrown from my changeless sphere,
Cast down to land on the earth,
Down from celestial eternity.
This was the day of my birth.

Chorus:

I was the light you see from afar,
Dwelling by creatures that never are,
I was the glow of a distant star,
But now I have come to life.

Watching the world for a million years,
Gazing on ceaseless change,
Life upon life, and death on death,
People and nations range.
Now I am living among those lives,
Not knowing what I should do.
Where can I go and whom can I trust?
Can there be one who is true?

Chorus

Here life is mortal and all too brief,
Here are no kin to call mine.
Yet there is someone who understands,
Someone to let me shine.
Someone who always will be the same,
True as a star up above,
Someone to share all the changing years,
Filling each day with love.

Chorus

Starborn

Words and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2008

Am E Am E Dm G
 Light in the dark - ness a - bove the world, Cir - cl - ing far from the
 Watch - ing the world for a mil - lion years, Gaz - ing on cease - less
 Here life is mor - tal and all too brief, Her are no kin to call
 Dm G Dm G Am E
 air, Ev - er the same through the sky I whirled,
 change, Life up - on life, and who death on death,
 mine. Yet there is some - one who un - der - stands,
 Am G E Am
 Far from all hu - man care, Till I was thrown from my
 Peo - ple and na - tions range. Now I am liv - ing a -
 Some - one to let me shine. Some - one who al - ways will
 E Am E Dm G Dm
 change - less sphere, Cast down to land on the earth,
 mong be those lives, Not know - ing what I should do.
 G Dm G Am E
 Down from ce - les - tial e - ter ni - ty.
 Where can I go and whom can I trust?
 Some one to share all the can - ing years,
 Am E Am
 This was the day of my birth.
 Can there be one who is true?
 Fill ing each day with love.

A Gut-Wenching Experience

If any song of mine has made a concrete difference in filk, this one has.

An organization called Interfilk raises money to bring filk guests to conventions outside the area where they're known. Its principal source of income is auctions which are held at conventions. A tradition has developed of having "Interfilk wenches" at the auctions, runners who flirt with the bidders in an effort to get them to bid higher. The style varies a lot with the convention and the individual wenches.

I'd become reluctant to bid on items at auctions because of the possibility of being "wenched." With me, it's that I don't like having pressure put on me to do something. I'm not the only one who's uncomfortable with it. For some, it's a religious issue. Sometimes a person's significant other objects. Sometimes it's just a matter of shyness. Whatever the reason, if wenching is discouraging people from bidding, it's defeating its own purpose.

To get people to think about it, I wrote this song. I issued it under a Creative Commons license, since I wanted it spread about as much as possible. Since then, there have been definite changes in wenching practice at Interfilk auctions. Various approaches have been tried, and things are starting to settle down. One thing that's been offered is a segregated section for people who don't want to be wenched. This is a seriously bad solution. It's making people sit in the corner for being different.

A better solution has been the no-wenching gesture. This consists of arms held over one's chest, crossed at mid-forearm, with the hands clenched into fists. It's a pretty clear "stay back" gesture. I hope that this is the one which will catch on. Accordingly, I've changed the song slightly here to mention the gesture.

Interfilk Wench Rant

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2009

Music: “The Marvelous Toy” (verse); “Alice’s Restaurant” (chorus)

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There's a hard-working group called Interfilk
That brings filkers from afar,
Whom you wouldn't see as a G. O. H.
The kind who's not a star.
They run an auction to pay the fare,
With wenches to spice the bid,
They'll rub your back or sit in your lap
So you'll fork out another quid. BUT—

Chorus:

It's your own choice if you want
An Interfilk wench on you.
It's your own choice if you want
An Interfilk wench on you.
They may pile on in a stack,
But cross your fists and they'll stay back.
It's your own choice if you want
An Interfilk wench on you.

Now filkers mostly think it's fun
To play the wenching game,
And though we all know what it's for,
We aren't all quite the same.
Some folks decline on religious grounds
And others are just shy,
So wenches try to read the signs
And keep an open eye. 'Cause—

Chorus

Spoken: And friends, the only reason I'm singing this song now is that you may know somebody in a similar situation. Or you may be in a similar situation. And if you are, then the only thing to do is to look at the wenches as they're running toward you and sing,

It's my own choice if I want
An Interfilk wench on me.

Spoken: You know, if just one person does it, they may think you're really sick—but they won't wench you. And if two people do it, in harmony, they may think—well, you might have to wave off the menches as well. And can you imagine fifty people—I said fifty—saying they don't want to be wenched?

I didn't think so. Neither can I.

But all I'm saying is that different people have different styles, different boundaries of comfort. And we can all support the anti-unwanted wenching movement. All you have to do to join it is to sing it when it comes around on the keyboard [*substitute musical instrument in use*]. With feeling:

It's your own choice if you want
An Interfilk wench on you.
It's your own choice if you want
An Interfilk wench on you.
They may pile on in a stack,
But cross your fists and they'll stay back.
It's your own choice if you want
An Interfilk wench on you.

Stone Song

Words: Gary McGath, Copyright 2009

Music: "Siren Song" by Michelle Dockrey

And Vixy thought sirens had it tough...

E A E
You've heard of my cousin and her sad career,

E B
Her tale is much less than inspirin'.

B B7
At her vocal chords' sound each audience drowned,

B A E
And she found that's the fate of the siren.

E E/B E E/B
But if you think my cousin had problems,

E A B
Then just listen to my tragic tale.

A A E E
Her audience leaves, but my fans stay around,

E E/B E E/B
Six encores or more without fail.

E E/B E E/B
The people who come to my concerts

E A B
Are rapt and attentive for sure,

A A E E
But the lack of applause when I finish my set

F# B E
Is not what I want to endure.

Oh, there's some who won't come when my name's on the bill,
Not for all the wealth of J. P. Morgan.

You can't get them to go 'cause there's something they know
'Bout a show where the star is a Gorgon.

Perhaps I should just do recording,
And shouldn't go out on the stage.
It's hard work to empty the theatre,
The workers all want double wage.

When I sang in Berkeley last summer,
The cops and detectives all moaned,
Though I swore that no drugs had been brought in,
The audience all wound up stoned.

For classical music just isn't my style,
Not violin, oboe, or organ.
I don't care for Bach, I deliver hard rock.
Don't knock it: the song of a Gorgon.

The girls I meet all think it's glamorous
That my fanboys are solid and firm,
But if you want someone who's amorous,
Well, none of them merit that term.

Oh, and don't talk to me about Perseus
And my sister who ended up dead.
Medusa was thrilled that he'd visit at all,
But before long, she just lost her head.

The silence of men couldn't be any worse,
Not even if you sent the Borg in.
Resistance is futile, conditions are brutal,
When you utilize tunes by a Gorgon.

So I gave up on singing for writing,
Things began to go passably well.
My pen name, Gorgon Zola, got good sales at first,
Then autograph sessions were hell.

But now I have got a new venue
And it's really just perfect, I find,
As I go on the benefit circuit
And give concerts at homes for the blind.

That's the end of my problems, the show will go on,
And I'm keeping my end of the bargain,
I stay out of sight, everything is all right,
Now Hodur is looking to handle my bookings,
And next month I'll be sent to sing with Dave Clement.
Don't get bent out of shape for a Gorgon!

Treason

“Rahab’s Lament” is the second song I’ve written based on the Book of Joshua. The first was “The Proud City,” which is in *The Mad Scientist’s Songbook*.

According to that book of the Bible, divine assistance destroyed the walls of Jericho, and Joshua’s forces proceeded to massacre every man, woman, and infant in the city, with God’s approval. “The Proud City” looks at what it would be like to be a boy in Jericho when this happened. This one focuses on one character and extrapolates. Traditional Christians admire Rahab; yet how could she have lived with herself knowing that she’d betrayed the lives of everyone in her city to the followers of the bloodthirsty god Yawheh?

The Book of Joshua says that not only her life, but her family’s, was spared. This suggests a picture of someone who acted out of fear, yet cared about her family and still had enough of her wits to drive a bargain with enemy agents. None of this is an excuse, but it makes her character more interesting.

According to most historians, the Biblical story of Jericho is probably fiction. Rahab’s part may or may not be based on some historical event. Regardless, “Rahab’s Lament” gave me an opportunity to get away from the usual sickening admiration for her, yet still reflect on what could have motivated such an act of treason.

This isn’t a song which is suited to my voice. I’m hoping some female singer with a strong voice will adopt it. Juanita Coulson has expressed an interest in it; I think she could do a great job with it.

Rahab's Lament

Lyrics and Music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2010

Dm A

My trade is the kind that some people despise,

Gm A

But I am a woman and sell what man buys.

Dm A Gm A

I gave honest service, and comfort as well,

Dm A Dm

And this was my city, the city that fell.

Gm Dm

We'd heard of an army out raiding the lands

E7 A Dm A

And feared that our city would fall to their hands.

Dm A Gm A

They killed all they conquered, or so it was said —

D A Dm

And two of their spies came to visit my bed.

They said our defenders were all going to die,

But that we could work out a deal, they and I.

If I would be quiet and help them to flee,

They promised that nothing would happen to me.

I said, "Do you think, just because I'm a whore,

My treason you'll buy with my life and no more?

If you want my help, this is what you must do:

Safe passage for me, and my family too!"

They hardly believed one like me could have kin.

They said that I was just a creature of sin.

I asked then what they were, by coming to me.

The lives of my family: that was my blood fee.

And finally they promised my price would be paid.

I now wish I'd died, but I was so afraid.

So back to their camp they had good news to bring.

The king asked what happened. I lied to my king.

The city was sacked, but the spies kept their vow.
My family came out, and they're all living now,
But in my dear homeland, the raiders ran wild,
And killed every man, every woman and child!
I cried to their captain: "What is this you've done?
I never expected you'd kill everyone!"
The captain responded: "We keep God's command,
And He has decreed that we take all this land!"

So now I am living, my people all dead,
The blood of a city is all on my head.
Now what do I have for my wretched attempt?
Not even the comfort of knowing contempt!
I once thought that nothing on Earth could be worse
Than to have my name known as the name of a curse.
But now I have found, to my shame and distress,
The worst is a name that my enemies bless.

Rahab's Lament

Words and music: Gary McGath, Copyright 2010

Energetically

Dm
My trade is the kind that some people despise, But
Gm I am a wo - man and sell what man buys. I
Dm A Gm Dm
gave hon - est ser - vice, and com - fort as well, And
Dm A Dm
this Gm was my ci - ty, the ci - ty that fell. We'd
Dm
heard E7 of an ar - my out raid - ing the lands And
Dm A Dm A
feared Dm that our A ci - ty would fall Gm to their hands. They
Dm A Dm
killed Dm all they A con - quered, or so it was said— And
Dm
two of their spies came to vis - it my bed.