

Bright Morning Stars Are Rising

Appalachian folk song

Background

Not much is known about this song, not even its origins. In true folk tradition, there are variations in the lyrics and variations in the melody. We do know that it is one of the songs collected in Ruth Crawford Seeger's "American Folk Songs for Christmas" (Doubleday, 1953). Seeger credits it to "AAFS 1379 A1", which would be a reference to the Archive of American Folk Song (now the American Folklife Center) in the Library of Congress.

Frank Staplin found the song in several sources, including "On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Religion in the South: A Southern Exposure Profile," edit. Samuel S. Hill, 1983, Mercer University Press, An Advent SourceBook, Thomas O' Gorman, editor, and "Folk Songs of the Blue Ridge Mountains", compiled by Herbert Shellans. Staplin is a contributor to *The Mudcat Café* (Mudcat.org), a website dedicated to conversations and research related to folk music and blues.). These references were posted to Mudcat:

<https://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=70273#3586118>

Several aspects of this song support the suggestion that it is Appalachian in origin:

- The pentatonic scale upon which the melody is constructed
- The simple melody with limited range (a 6th) and repetition
- Its appearance in the Shellans collection and the Hill book.

Program Notes

Not much is known about this song, not even its origins. In true folk tradition, there are many variations in the lyrics and variations in the melody. We do know that it is one of the songs collected in Ruth Crawford Seeger's "American Folk Songs for Christmas" (Doubleday, 1953). Seeger credits it to "AAFS 1379 A1", which would be a reference to the Archive of American Folk Song (now the American Folklife Center) in the Library of Congress.

Several aspects of this song support the suggestion that it is Appalachian in origin, including the fact that the melody is built upon a pentatonic scale, that the melody is very simple with a range of only a 6th and a great deal of repetition, and finally, its appearance in two important collections of Appalachian traditional music, *On Jordan's Stormy Banks: Religion in the South: A Southern Exposure Profile*, edited by Samuel S. Hill and *Folk Songs of the Blue Ridge Mountains*, compiled by Herbert Shellans.

Recordings

None of these are exactly what you will be singing, but they will give you a feel for it.

Lawrence University Viking Chorale, Stephen Lieck, conductor: <https://youtu.be/PlpNwKDVXYk>

Gillian Welch: <https://youtu.be/4PVGIWKXMLU>

Alexandra Sauser-Monnig, Amelia Meath, Molly Sarle: <https://youtu.be/CQ8023BPm04>

Analysis

Key: Eb Major

Meter: in this arrangement, 2/4, but flexible tempo and very free – one transcription I found was in mixed meter to accommodate this freedom

Texture: Homophonic, homorhythmic

Structure: Strophic, each phrase of basically equal length. This arrangement has added measures at cadences to allow for a more flexible feel.

Melodic pattern of each strophe: a b a c.

Each strophe ends with same lyrics on the final phrase – “Day is a’breaking in my soul”

SECTION	Measure	EVENT AND SCORING
Verse 1	1-19	Unison until the final phrase, which is in three-part harmony
Verse 2	20-39	Duet between S/T until final phrase, which is in three-part harmony
Verse 3	40-59	Trio – S/A/T
Verse 4	60-end	Trio plus bass pedal point on tonic