

# SONAS

TWO BEARN & SIMS



Twenty Golden Greats  
Original Artists





Songs to Learn  
& Sing  
WHITE LABEL



*Songs to Learn & Sing*

20 Golden Greats

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by

Original Artists



## SONGS TO LEARN & SING

With *Songs to Learn & Sing* we wanted to try something a little different. We challenged poets to choose their favourite song (or a favourite song, nobody has just one, after all) and from there they should shamelessly steal the title and then write a poem that responds to it. This response could be based on how the song makes them feel, a memory of where they heard it first or whatever it was that made it important in the first place.

This proved to be very popular and choosing Twenty from among them was all but impossible, but choose them you must and we were pleased to select Ceinwen Haydon's *I Want To Hold Your Hand* as the winner of our competition as it summed-up exactly what it was all about in the first place, although Ali Jones and Mick Yates, our Highly Commended Runners-Up, both could have taken the metaphorical Gold Disc on another day.

*Songs to Learn & Sing* is something a little different and we are sure that it will soon become a classic.

MD.

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## I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND

*for The Beatles*

*Ceinwen Haydon*

even though mine's sticky,  
smudged with ink. Under  
my wooden desk, hidden,  
I wriggle, press my thighs  
together. Nice. Thoughts  
I don't understand, but  
I want to - will you?  
You know, what I said?  
Just fingers, entwined.

## BIRDMAD GIRL

*for The Cure*

*Ali Jones*

What is it like? To wake in plumed morning,  
sprouting feathered flames, blazing hot enough  
to give the polar ice caps a run for their history.

An impossible dream of flight, lifting out  
of night rooms, into other countries,  
in a jangled tumble of words.

They say that you are mad, but maybe  
you simply have another kind of wisdom,  
found in the joy of thermals, the stab

of toothless sharp jaws, the ministry  
of hard shelled eggs, the primitive soar and dip,  
frenzied flocking, raved mobbing of roaring threats.

You open your throat to a bell of song,  
a sky canvas dreamed in reverse, fantastical,  
worlds beyond the veil of claw and tooth.

A northern child, thrown against the day's sighs,  
to dive and breast away through open windows,  
as light stepping through islands, going somewhere

in the sparring air, windward, your anchors lifted  
and stowed behind your eyes, in secret places,  
always ascending, flocking just out of reach.

## CASTLES MADE OF SAND

*for Jimi Hendrix*

*Mick Yates*

did you ever  
make sandcastles as a child  
on the endless blue hot sunny days  
in the long lost summers of childhood  
when the tide was far out to sea?  
digging deep channels for the moat  
building high turrets from buckets  
filled to the brim with still damp sand?  
remember how impenetrable they seemed?  
how firm and solid you constructed them?  
then waiting for the tide to return  
so confident in your building skills  
so defiant in the strength of your architecture?  
like the sandcastles you built way back then  
nothing in this life is permanent

## AT LAST

for Etta James

*Susan Castillo*

We drove down rose-flanked lanes  
walked hand in hand  
under the stars  
drank champagne in Antibes.

We hailed taxis in Manhattan  
You told me how you loved to say  
'Fifth and Amsterdam!'  
just like in the films.

We sailed down the Nile,  
peeked into temples, tombs,  
felt the presence of departed kings.  
The thick dark made us shiver.

We basked on Caribbean sand  
drinking cold beer in frosted bottles  
from a beachfront shack,  
Calypso tunes blaring on the radio.

In Paris, near the Musée Pompidou  
We watched a man blow bubbles  
shaped like fantastic beasts,  
shimmering in the sun.

We found each other late in life  
had such a short time to dance.  
What a dance it was

## I'M NOT IN LOVE

For 10CC

*Kerry Darbishire*

The names of the villages  
belonging to that summer  
escape me, but I remember  
cramming the car with a tent,

sleeping bags, a dog, two children  
the only cassette we could afford  
and setting off for Wales.

Our first holiday, the song  
that almost didn't happen,  
rolled us along lanes, woods  
by glimmering lakes, you smiling,

hand warm in mine mile after mile  
past rivers smooth as the lyrics  
and chords whispering hours to minutes

the sun tipping pine trees lipstick pink  
until by starlight we could barely see  
the road signs, unpronounceable  
beginning and ending in 10cc.

## QUICKSAND

For David Bowie

*Steve Xerri*

Shall I know you among the many who muster  
beside me in colourless ranks in the holding bay?  
Are there replacement names issued, should we

grab a face from the dressing-up box and stand  
in line, re-enacting the jittery wait to step  
from the wings to the stage? This time

we could be born beneath the same roof and live  
quiet lives : or arrive in time of war, terrified  
of gunfire wasting our young blood on the grass.

Shall I again see you from a seat in the gods  
at the start of your career, meet you just the once  
at an art show in your mint-green suit?

And will your new songs run a gold thread  
through my days, so that I feel your next death  
unravel something deep inside me, too? Or

are we so reshuffled that when you drop a coin  
in my busker's cap you'll fail to recognise  
the mismatched eyes that peer back out at you?

## ALL THAT (BOTH SIDES NOW)

For Joni Mitchell

*Mara Adamitz Scrupe*

all that's severed & snapped & raggedy thrown down now  
*all that*

all that's in & out tufts & wisps & never saw it coming numbed  
& scarred/ one root's sooty one soft spot  
one's missed the boat or blazing yellow

magic songbird fluted chill  
(another's furnace fever) & me misty-eyed

all my loved & lost & lived *I know* day in day out  
don't my voice grown thick  
as smoke aside angels dreamt up late *too late*

as prancing on a pinhead prick & semblance & false starts  
gelato on a stick & how my many *many*

& all that wake me up  
suckler & despot & divine disorder *all that*

all that's

don't the spring scent of old roses & go-betweens  
my good witch past selves' have me slid a little closer  
to the middle

my annals & archives wised-up humbled still I shiver  
& sway all that shimmy & braggy full proud once in a blue  
balancing the books

## LETTER TO ME

For Brad Paisley

*Gaynor Kane*

Do not take advice from me.  
You have foresight  
and everything  
happens for a reason.

Aren't you stronger  
for knowing how close you came  
to replicating the mistake  
of your mother

but having the strength  
to grab your bag and run  
to the roundabout in bare feet  
and nightie, never looking back?

Isn't your leg more interesting  
for having the little dot-dot-dot, dash  
dot-dot-dot faded stitch scar,  
cut by a falling vase, as the phone cord

tried to strangle it,  
when the Dubliner that you'd spent  
a handful of hours face to face with  
was proposing marriage?

Didn't you find out the fear  
of being out of your depth  
was irrelevant, when you were dragged  
through the deep blue and survived?

How light you felt  
moments before that, suspended  
hundreds of metres above the coast of Zakynthos,  
harnessed to your best friend?

Don't change  
your wedding plans,  
or doublecheck  
that everything is packed.

## RHAPSODY IN BLUE

For George Gershwin

*Peter Francis Peggall*

if you were music I would switch you off,  
you hypnotize me, you lull me like opium,  
you net me like gossamer on gorse  
you spider my soul into your private place  
then you leave me to dry out and die.

I do not die, I join the circle  
where lovers flap in the wind, chase their tails,  
echo the same, dull song ad infinitum:  
there they go again, getting older  
gracelessly, beaten before they start.

You are music and I adore you,  
the more you play, the less I choose:  
why should a fish fly? An orange blush?  
You become the notes I don't recognize  
in the wrong order. Bent, but not broken.

**FLIP, FLOP, FLY.**

For Ellis Hall

*Zoë Siobhan Howarth-Lowe*

Head-bob vibe music  
mime to the man.

The muffled slang,

Hey guys, high-fives

jack-step, swish, jig jig;

yeah - fusion.

Ingenuity, throw in the moves,

high-kicks by the bagful

mock-spins and turns - go go go;

Jive baby.

## GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

For The Sex Pistols

*Chris Hemingway*

The traditional English zeitgeist  
was invented in 1977.

I woke up one morning  
to the smell of hogs roasting,  
and a tweed implosion  
of morris bells and maypoles.

The traditional English zeitgeist  
left me cold, but also fevered.  
In my room, with the curtains drawn,  
furiously turning the dial.  
And it's 10cc, on the hour, but

not this one.

This black disc, blue sleeve,  
is an institution too.  
And if colour, sunshine, and melody  
are pressed into national service,  
then I'll take the grey,  
the rain, this Detroit noise.  
Under the skin, or torn into jackets.

And if the pins shine silver when they catch the light,  
then it's my light,  
my anthem.

## RAGLAN ROAD

For Patrick Kavanagh

*Marilyn Francis*

It was early  
and late, the glasses empty,  
fire down to ash. You sang a poem,  
a gift, you said, a present without strings.

When day came,  
white and sharp as razors,  
we walked to where the road began  
and turned our separate ways.

But I still have the song  
sometimes it catches me  
when I'm walking somewhere  
or looking out of the window  
on rainy days.

It's like finding a pebble  
in an old overcoat pocket  
and it still tasting salt  
and smelling of sea.

You sang me a poem.  
A gift, you said.

## WE ALL LIVE IN A YELLOW SUBMARINE

For The Beatles

*Betty Hasler*

They did live in a yellow submarine then,  
and told each other fairy tales,  
and waved from pink portholes  
at those who did not live in the sun of their certainties;  
not noticing that the sea was not really green  
but shit brown, rank,  
putrid with the stink of human nature  
and clogged with the litter of intentions.

Of course the submarine sank.

Most of them survived,  
struggling through tangled green weed  
and crawling out  
to find a wife and 2.2 kids  
in a life of ordinary despair behind double glazing.

But some never made it:  
and their bodies float face up  
on the oceans of social history,  
bloated and bruised blue,  
their glazed white eyes wide  
as if gazing through shattered glass  
at a yellow submarine in the sun.

## STATION TO STATION

For David Bowie 1947 - 2016

*Clare O'Brien*

The black star blossoms red, by gaslight and sodium  
on wet tarmac. He beckons, but I am safe by my window.  
The towers of asylum bloom dark as death  
beyond the town, on a green hill far away.

I am driven in bright arterial flow  
from the city to the sea. The red lights stalk me in my seat.  
On school days I crossed the line by the bridge, down to the trolls  
and the dead men in the morning.

I stole, like you, while sweeter girls held roses.  
I hoarded up my swag. I did not see the electric fear,  
the bloodflow north and south, hid what was burning bright  
on either side of the Brighton line.

Now, I have lost my bearings.  
The lines have closed, the stations shifted.  
In the dead days following your reversed resurrection,  
I am carbonised in black, when red was what I wanted.

## POKER FACE

For Lady Gaga

*Amy Alexander*

You and me in our meat dress  
face the world, and it's less  
blistering, less black and blue,  
we're weird, and it's true--  
it keeps the creeps away.  
I never wanted to play  
the sex doll, though you did,  
sometimes, still, I noted,  
it was never for the candy eyes,  
from the makeup stool, you realized  
you were hot sky  
magic, this was all just dressing,  
a hiding face, proud, no fessing  
up, giant woman claiming her power  
and poked fun at, still, not a care  
in the world, Catholic girl, you go back  
home and show up, your hair black  
like it was when you were little  
and they take you in, cattle  
call school, Sister-What's-Her-Name  
still loved you, there is no shame,  
and that is mercy, the part of God  
the men don't want to share, odd  
girls together, bow our heads in prayer

## ONE OF THESE NIGHTS .....

For The Eagles

*Mary Gilmore*

when heat bears down like a plummeting hawk,  
and cows lounge in long heavy shadows. When  
a gloam hangs on our hills as if grassed slopes  
are glimmering slate and boundaries lost,  
I'll leave you.

When from bed to wall lies a litter of windowed  
moons to use as stepping-stones, and light slices  
through our kitchen thrum, as if your voice and mine  
cut blunt with metallic glints of old licked knives.  
I'll leave you.

When hands become so hollow that a wolf could hide  
its prey, and uneasy trees shift with the bedded dark  
of haunted things. When we disremember our earthy  
days, and my garden lies scentless, empty as a cup.  
I'll leave you.

One of these nights.....

## I'M NOT IN LOVE

For 10CC

*C.R. Smith*

Staring meaningfully into space  
fixating on photographs

screen-saved — wallpaper-displayed  
surreptitiously taken. His messages

bombarding her mobile 24/7 — his poker face  
denying midnight declarations.

This thing between them — something more?  
These mixed messages confuse her.

What outcome does he internally debate?  
Emoji daisies sent, received, erased.

Plucked petals  
procrastinating fate 🌼

## LA MER

For Charles Trenet

*David Mark Williams*

An ear worm we can't stop,  
soundtrack to our days,  
along the Promenade Des Anglais,  
film star police on horseback  
poised to be snapped,  
angels on roller blades brushing by,  
their wings folded tight.

La Mer, the only words we know.  
The rest we hum.

And our hearts go boum.  
How well it fits that strip of blue  
between the palm trees,  
shading to jade at the littoral.

Across the carriageway  
the sex workers cry,  
flaunting sculpted bodies,  
directing traffic.

Every evening the light softens,  
dusted to gold, a large white bed.

La Mer becomes a black mirror  
for whatever is bright,  
gulls ghosting the dark sky.

A tea dance orchestra strikes up  
in the ballroom of the bombed  
and long gone pavilion,  
a tune edged with the hiss of surf.

Clown-faced Trenet croons  
into the Shure microphone  
compelled to sing,  
what else could he do?

La Mer, the only words we know.  
The rest we hum.

And our hearts go boum.

## WAY DOWN WE GO

For Kaleo

*Kerri Anne Stebbins*

[She learned to put on airs, to avoid stares  
meant to catalogue and categorize her. She's more  
resilient than she looks, but she's tired.  
The truth makes you dig for it.]

She looks at strangers and friends staring  
and dares them to do something:  
Save her  
Save themselves  
Drown her in empathy  
Show her how not to be  
the girl returning to her seventh-grade classroom with death stuck in her hair. Show her

silver linings lodged in throats like the sediment that rushed into her father's lungs  
before he had a chance to teach her how to lose him so young.

Show her how not to be the woman with her dad at the bottom of a river.

I don't pretend to be surprised when she dives into her madness and finds him there.  
He's always been waiting, writhing, sinking  
ahead of her,  
his water-logged body rocking gently  
in rhythm with waves that drowned him.

When I ask her why she says she's always been here:  
This room with shattered glass  
thrown across the bed like blankets.

## THE SOUND OF SILENCE

For Simon & Garfunkel

*Dave Murray*

In the restaurant that ranks  
number one in the online search  
a couple are separated by a candle  
that the waiter has only just lit  
but neither says thank you.

Their downward faces are illuminated  
by their screens, filter memories  
of the places they've snapped  
as they strolled through the city  
their hands never made contact.

At times they forget where they are  
they fill their mouths with slivers  
of photos they feed to the world  
a bicycle leant on a graffiti façade  
a language they cannot translate.

They utter only in hashtags  
to catch your fleeting attention  
monochrome shadows in alleyways  
a lone figure waiting on a platform  
for the afternoon train home.



20 Golden Greats  
Poetry For Pleasure

*PFP*



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*Ali Jones*
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