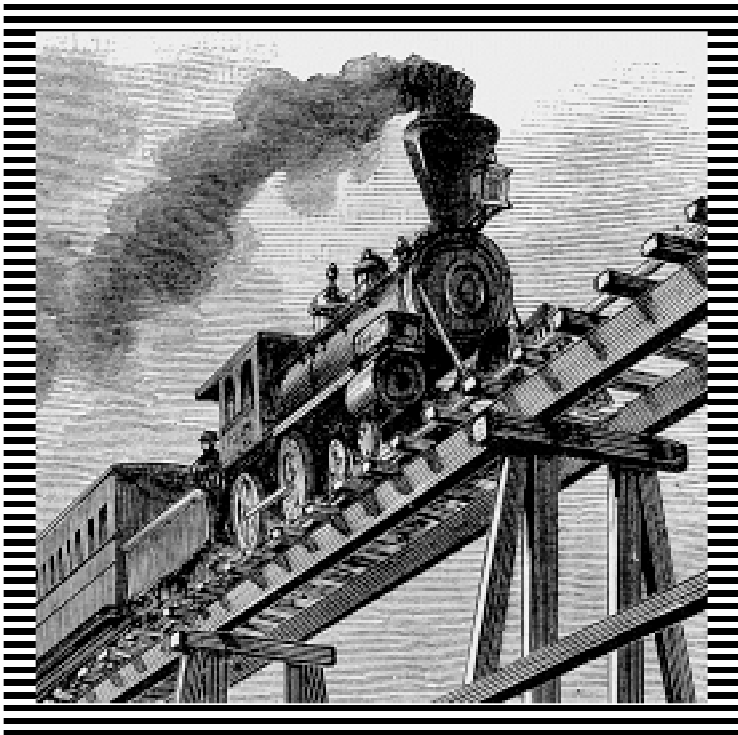


# Train Songs



A workshop by Alice Winship  
Northwest Folklife Festival  
2019

The workshop is not limited to the  
songs on these sheets.

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# Train Songs

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Homeward Bound	Nine Hundred Miles	Waiting for a Train

# The City of New Orleans

by Steve Goodman

Riding on The City of New Orleans,  
Illinois Central Monday morning rail  
There's fifteen cars and fifteen restless riders,  
Three conductors and twenty-five sacks of mail.  
All along the southbound odyssey  
The train pulls out at Kankakee  
Rolls along past houses, farms and fields.  
Passin' trains that have no names,  
And freight yards full of old black men  
And the graveyards of the rusted automobiles.

## *Chorus:*

**Good morning America how are you?  
Say, don't you know me I'm your native son,  
I'm the train they call The City of New Orleans,  
I'll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done.**

Dealin' card games with the old men in the club car.  
Penny a point ain't no one keepin' score.  
Won't you pass the paper bag that holds the bottle  
And feel the wheels rumblin' 'neath the floor.  
And the sons of pullman porters  
And the sons of engineers  
Ride their father's magic carpet made of steel.  
Mothers with their babes asleep,  
Are rockin' to the gentle beat  
And the rhythm of the rails is all they feel.

## *Chorus*

Nighttime on The City of New Orleans,  
Changing cars in Memphis, Tennessee.  
Half way home, and we'll be there by morning  
Through the Mississippi darkness  
Rolling down to the sea.  
And all the towns and people seem  
To fade into a bad dream  
And the steel rails still ain't heard the news.  
The conductor sings his song again,  
The passengers will please refrain  
This train's got the disappearing railroad blues.

**Good night, America, how are you?  
Say, don't you know me I'm your native son,  
I'm the train they call The City of New Orleans,  
I'll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done.**

**I'll be gone five hundred miles when the day is done.**

# 500 Miles

Usually credited as written by Hedy West, 1961.

Based on the traditional song '900 Miles'.

If you miss the train I'm on,  
You will know that I am gone  
You can hear the whistle blow a hundred miles,  
**A hundred miles, a hundred miles,  
A hundred miles, a hundred miles,  
You can hear the whistle blow a hundred miles.**

Lord I'm one, Lord I'm two,  
Lord I'm three, Lord I'm four,  
Lord I'm five hundred miles from my home.  
**Five hundred miles, Five hundred miles,  
Five hundred miles, Five hundred miles  
Lord I'm five hundred miles from my home.**

Not a shirt on my back, not a penny to my name  
Lord I can't go back home this a way  
**This a way, this a way, this a way, this a way  
Lord I can't go back home this a way**

Teardrops fell on mama's note  
When I read the words she wrote  
She said 'We love you & we miss you please come home'  
Well I didn't have to pack  
I had it all right on my back  
But I'm five hundred miles away from home  
**Away from home, away from home,  
Away from home, away from home,  
Lord I'm five hundred miles away from home**

**If you miss the train I'm on,  
You will know that I am gone  
You can hear the whistle blow a hundred miles,  
A hundred miles, a hundred miles,  
A hundred miles, a hundred miles,  
You can hear the whistle blow a hundred miles.**



## Engine 143 (Wreck on the C & O)

Author unknown, attributed to a worker at the Hinton railyard or a C&O engineer.

*C&O is pronounced 'see-no' in this song.*

Along came the FFV the swiftest on the line  
Running along that C&O road just twenty minutes behind  
Running into Sou'ville headquarters on the line  
Receiving there strict orders from the station just behind

Georgie's mother came to him with a bucket on her arm  
She said my darling boy be careful how you run  
There's many a man has lost his life in trying to make lost time  
But if you run your engine right you'll get there just on time

Up the track he darted, into a rock he crashed  
The engine she turned upside down and Georgie's breast was smashed  
His head lay 'gainst the firebox door, the flames were rolling high  
I'm proud to be born for an engineer on the C&O road to die

The doctor said to Georgie my darling boy be still  
Your life may yet be saved if it is God's blessed will  
Oh no said George that will not do I'd rather die so free  
I want to die for the engine I love one hundred and forty three

The doctor said to Georgie your life cannot be saved  
Murdered upon the railway and laid in a lonesome grave  
His face was covered up with blood his eyes they could not see  
And the very last words poor Georgie cried were nearer my God to thee



## Last Train to Clarksville

by Tommy Boyce and Bobby Hart

Take the last train to Clarksville  
And I'll meet you at the station  
You can be there by four-thirty  
'Cause I've made your reservation, don't be slow  
Oh, no, no, no  
Oh, no, no, no'

Cause I'm leaving in the morning  
And I must see you again  
We'll have one more night together  
Till the morning brings my train and I must go  
Oh, no, no, no  
Oh, no, no, no  
And I don't know if I'm ever coming home

## Hobo's Lullaby

by Goebel Reeves

### Chorus

**Go to sleep you weary hobo  
Let the towns drift slowly by  
Can't you hear the steel rail humming  
That's a hobo's lullaby**

Do not think about tomorrow  
Let tomorrow come and go  
Tonight you're in a nice warm boxcar  
Safe from all the wind and snow

### Chorus

I know the police cause you trouble  
They cause trouble every where  
But when you die and go to heaven  
You won't find no policemen there

### Chorus

I know your clothes are torn and ragged  
And your hair is turning grey  
Lift your head and smile at trouble  
You'll find happiness some day

### Chorus

Take the last train to Clarksville  
I'll be waiting at the station  
We'll have time for coffee-flavored kisses  
And a bit of conversation, oh  
Oh, no, no, no  
Oh, no, no, no

Take the last train to Clarksville  
Now I must hang up the phone  
I can't hear you in this noisy railroad station all alone  
I'm feeling low  
Oh, no, no, no  
Oh, no, no, no  
And I don't know if I'm ever coming home

*Repeat first verse and last line*

## **(I Heard That) Lonesome Whistle**

by Hank Williams and Jimmie Davis

I was ridin' No 9  
Heading south from Caroline  
**I heard that lonesome whistle blow**  
Got in trouble had to roam  
Left my gal and left my home  
**I heard that lonesome whistle blow**

Just a kid acting smart  
I went and broke my darling's heart  
I guess I was too young to know

They took me off to Georgia Main  
Locked me to a ball and chain  
**I heard that lonesome whistle blow**

All alone I bear the shame  
I'm a number not a name  
**I heard that lonesome whistle blow**  
All I do is sit and cry  
When the evening train goes by  
**I heard that lonesome whistle blow**

I'll be locked here in this cell  
Till my body's just a shell  
And my hair turns whiter than the snow

I'll never see that gal of mine  
I'm in Georgia doing time  
**I heard that lonesome whistle blow**

**I heard that lonesome whistle blow**

Freight train, freight train, run so fast  
Freight train, freight train, run so fast  
Please don't tell what train I'm on  
They won't know what route I'm gone

When I'm dead and in my grave  
No more good times here I crave  
Place the stones at my head and feet  
And tell them all I've gone to sleep

When I die, oh bury me deep  
Down at the end of old Chestnut Street  
So I can hear Old Number Nine  
As she comes rolling by

## **I've Been Working on the Railroad**

Traditional

I've been working on the railroad  
All the live long day  
I've been working on the railroad  
Just to pass the time away  
Can't you hear the whistle blowing  
Rise up so early in the morn  
Can't you hear the Captain shouting  
"Dinah blow your horn"

Dinah won't you blow  
Dinah won't you blow  
Dinah won't you blow your horn  
Dinah won't you blow  
Dinah won't you blow  
Dinah won't you blow your horn

Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah  
Someone's in the kitchen I know  
Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah  
Strummin' on the old banjo

Fee, fie, fiddly-i-oh  
Fee-fie fiddly-i-oh-oh-oh-oh  
Fee, fie fiddly-i-oh  
Strummin' on the old banjo



## **Freight Train**

by Elizabeth Cotten

When I die, oh bury me deep  
Down at the end of old Chestnut Street  
Place the stones at my head and feet  
And tell them all I've gone to sleep

Freight train, freight train, run so fast  
Freight train, freight train, run so fast  
Please don't tell what train I'm on  
They won't know what route I'm gone

## John Henry

Traditional

When John Henry was a little baby,  
Sittin' on his daddy's knee.  
He picked up a hammer and a little piece of steel;  
Said, "Hammer be the death of me, **Lord, Lord.**  
**Hammer be the death of me."**

The captain said to John Henry  
"Gonna bring that steam drill 'round.  
Gonna bring that steam drill out on the job.  
Gonna whop that steel on down. **down, down.**  
**Whop that steel on down."**

John Henry told his captain,  
"A man ain't nothin' but a man,  
But before I let your steam drill beat me down,  
I'd die with a hammer in my hand. **Lord, Lord.**  
**I'd die with a hammer in my hand."**

John Henry said to his shaker,  
"Shaker, why don't you sing?  
I'm throwin' thirty pounds from my hips on down.  
Just listen to that cold steel ring. **Lord, Lord.**  
**Listen to that cold steel ring."**

The man that invented the steam drill  
He thought he was mighty fine,  
But John Henry made fifteen feet;  
The steam drill only made nine. **Lord, Lord.**  
**The steam drill only made nine.**

John Henry hammered in the mountain  
His hammer was striking fire.  
But he worked so hard, he broke his poor heart.  
He laid down his hammer and he died, **Lord, Lord.**  
**He laid down his hammer and he died.**

Now John Henry had him a woman.  
Her name was Polly Ann.  
John Henry took sick and went to his bed.  
Polly Ann drove steel like a man. **Lord, Lord.**  
**Polly Ann drove steel like a man.**

And they took John Henry to the graveyard  
Laid him six feet down under the sand  
And every steam locomotive comes a rushin' by.  
Says, yonder lies a steel drivin' man, **Lord, Lord.**  
**Yonder lies a steel drivin' man.**

## Little Black Train

Traditional

There's a little black train a-comin'  
Comin' down the track  
You gotta ride that little black train,  
But it ain't a gonna bring you back.

You may be a bar-room gambler  
And cheat your way through life  
You can't cheat that little black train  
Or beat this final ride.

You silken bar-room ladies,  
Dressed in your worldly pride  
But death's dark train is comin'  
Prepare to take a ride.

There's a little black train a comin'  
Set all your business right  
You've got to ride that little black train  
And it may be here tonight.

Your million dollar fortune,  
Your mansion glittering white  
You can't take it with you  
When the train pulls out that night.

You may be a corporate lawyer  
And cheat your way through life  
You can't cheat that little black train  
Or beat this final ride.

You silken wealthy ladies,  
Dressed in your worldly pride  
But death's dark train is comin'  
Prepare to take a ride.

There's a little black train a-comin'  
Comin' down the track  
You gotta ride that little black train,  
But it ain't a gonna bring you back



## Linin' Track

Traditional

Ho, boys, is you right?  
I done got right  
All I hate about linin' track  
These ol' bars 'bout to bust my back

### *Chorus:*

**Ho, boys, can't cha line 'em – trackalacka**  
**Ho, boys, can't cha line the track**  
**Ho, boys, can't cha line 'em**  
**See how a we's go linin track**

### *Chorus*

If I could I surely would  
Stand on the rock where Moses stood

### *Chorus*

Moses stood on the Red Sea shore  
Smotin at the water with a two-by-four

### *Chorus:*

Mary and the baby sittin' in the shade  
Thinking 'bout the money that I ain't made

### *Chorus*

God told Noah about the rainbow sign,  
No more water but a fire next time

### *Chorus*

Down in the holler below the field  
Angels workin' on my chariot wheel

### *Chorus*

Mary, Martha, Luke and John  
Them ol' sinners is dead and gone

### *Chorus*

Cap'n keep a-hollerin' 'bout the joint ahead,  
Ain't said nothin' 'bout my hog and bread

### *Chorus*

## The Wreck of the Old 97

Tune: The Ship That Never Returned, by Henry Clay Work, 1865.  
Lyrics: disputed. Fred Jackson Lewey/Charles Noell/Henry Whitter  
or David Graves George

Well, they give him his orders at Monroe, Virginia  
Sayin', "Steve, you're way behind time  
This is not 38, this is Old 97  
You must put her into Spencer on time."

Then he turned around and said to his black, greasy fireman  
"Shovel on a little more coal  
And when we reach that White Oak Mountain  
Watch Old 97 roll."

Well, it's a mighty rough road from Lynchburg to Danville  
And a line on a three-mile grade  
It was on that grade that he lost his airbrakes  
See what a jump he made

He was goin' down the grade making 90 miles an hour  
His whistle broke into a scream  
He was found in the wreck with his hand on the throttle  
Scalded to death by the steam

Well, a telegram come to Washington station  
And this is how it read:  
Well that brave engineer who run old 97  
He's a lyin' in old Danville, dead

Well now all you lovers had better take a warning  
From this time on and learn  
Never speak harsh words to your true lovin' darlin'  
Who may leave you and never return



## Midnight Special

Traditional

Well, you wake up in the mornin', you hear the big bell ring,  
And they march you to the table to see the same old thing.  
Knife and fork upon the table, ain't no pork up in the pan.  
If you say anything about it, you get in trouble with the man.

### *Chorus:*

**Let the Midnight Special shine a light on me,  
Let the Midnight Special shine a light on me,  
Let the Midnight Special shine a light on me,  
Let the Midnight Special shine her ever lovin' light on me.**

Yonder come my Rosie, how in the world did you know?  
By the way she wears her apron, and the dress she wore.  
Umbrella on her shoulder, piece of paper in her hand;  
She come to see the guv'nor, she wants to free her man.

### *Chorus*

If you're ever in Houston, well, you better do right;  
You better not stagger and you better not fight  
Or the sheriff will arrest ya and the judge will send you down.  
And the next thing you know, well, you're prison bound.

### *Chorus*

### *Repeat Chorus*



## Morningtown Ride

by Malvina Reynolds

Train whistle blowing, makes a sleepy noise  
Underneath their blankets go all the girls and boys  
**Rocking, rolling, riding, out along the bay  
All bound for Morningtown, many miles away**

Driver at the engine, fireman rings the bell  
Sandman swings the lantern, to show that all is well  
**Rocking, rolling, riding, out along the bay  
All bound for Morningtown, many miles away**

Maybe it is raining where our train will ride  
All the little travellers are warm and snug inside  
**Rocking, rolling, riding, out along the bay  
All bound for Morningtown, many miles away**

Somewhere there is sunshine, somewhere there is day  
Somewhere there is Morningtown, many miles away  
**Rocking, rolling, riding, out along the bay  
All bound for Morningtown, many miles away**

**Rocking, rolling, riding, out along the bay  
All bound for Morningtown, many miles away**



## Wabash Cannonball

by J. A. Roff/William Kindt/A.P. Carter

From the great Atlantic ocean to the wild Pacific shore  
She climbs the towering mountains over hills and by the shore  
She's mighty tall and handsome and know quite well by all  
She's a regular combination on the Wabash Cannonball

### *Chorus:*

**Oh listen to the jingle, the rumble and the roar  
As she glides along the woodland o'er hills and by the shore  
Hear the mighty rush of the engine hear the lonesome hobo's call  
You're traveling through the jungle on the Wabash Cannonball**

Oh the eastern states are dandy so the western people say  
Chicago Rock Island St. Louis by the way  
From the lakes of Minnesota where the rippling waters fall  
No changes can be taken on the Wabash Cannonball

### *Chorus*

She came down to Birmingham one cold December day  
As she pulled into the station you could hear all the people say  
There's that gal from Tennessee, she's long and she's tall  
She came down to Birmingham on the Wabash Cannonball

### *Chorus*

Here's to Daddy Clayton may his name forever stand  
And long be remembered in the courts of Alabam'  
For he's a good old rounder til the curtains round him fall  
We'll carry him home to victory on the Wabash Cannonball

### *Chorus*

## Sentimental Journey

Music by Les Brown and Ben Homer, Lyrics by Bud Green.

Gonna take a sentimental journey  
Gonna set my heart at ease  
Gonna make a sentimental journey  
To renew old memories

Got my bag, got my reservation  
Spent each dime I could afford  
Like a child in wild anticipation  
Long to hear that all aboard

Seven, that's the time we leave, at seven  
I'll be waitin' up for heaven  
Countin' every mile of railroad track  
That takes me back

Never thought my heart could be so yearny  
Why did I decide to roam  
Gonna take a sentimental journey  
Sentimental journey home



## Railroading On The Great Divide

by Sara Carter

### *Chorus:*

**Railroading on the Great Divide  
Nothing around me but the Rockies and sky  
It's there you'll find me as the years roll by  
Railroading on the Great Divide**

When I was 16 I left my old home  
Out westward to Denver I started to roam  
I went drifting along with the tide  
Till I landed on the Great Divide

### *Chorus*

Ask any rounder that hails from Cheyenne  
Railroading Wyoming's the best in the land  
Those long steel rails and short cross ties  
That I laid across the Great Divide

### *Chorus*

Look out to the westward and what do you see  
Number 3 running, she's the fastest on wheels  
Through old Laramie she rolls with pride  
Fastest train on the Great Divide

### *Chorus*

## Steel Rail Blues

by Gordon Lightfoot

Well I got my mail late last night  
A letter from a girl who found the time to write  
To her lonesome boy somewheres in the night  
She sent me a railroad ticket too  
To take me to her lovin' arms  
**And the big steel rail gonna carry me home to the one I love**

### *Chorus:*

**Oooh oooh ooo whu hu hooh  
Ooo ooo ooo ooo oooh oooh oooh**

Well I been out here many long days  
I haven't found a place that I could call my own  
Not a two-bit bed to lay my body on  
I been stood up I been shook down  
I been dragged into the sand  
**And the big steel rail gonna carry me home to the one I love**

### *Chorus*

Well I been uptight most every night  
Walkin' along the streets of this old town  
Not a friend around to tell my troubles to  
My good old car she done broke down  
'Cause I drove it into the ground  
**And the big steel rail gonna carry me home to the one I love**

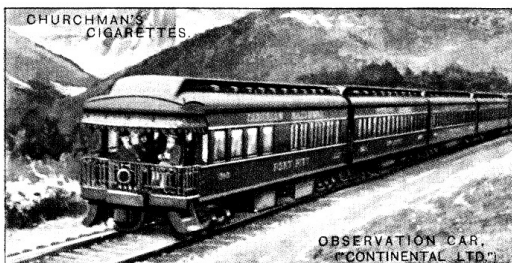
### *Chorus*

Well look over yonder across the plain  
The big drive wheels are poundin' along the ground  
Gonna get on board and I'll be homeward bound  
Now I ain't had a home cooked meal  
And Lord I need one now  
**And the big steel rail gonna carry me home to the one I love**

### *Chorus*

Now here I am with my hat in my hand  
Standin' on the broad highway will you give a ride  
To a lonesome boy who missed the train last night  
I went in town for one last round  
And I gambled my ticket away  
And the big steel rail won't carry me home to the one I love

### *Chorus*



## Paddy Works on the Railway

Traditional

### *Chorus:*

**Fil-i-me-oo-ree-eye-ri-ay  
Fil-i-me-oo-ree-eye-ri-ay  
Fil-i-me-oo-ree-eye-ri-ay  
To work upon the railway**

In eighteen hundred and forty-one  
I put me corduroy breeches on  
I put me corduroy breeches on  
To work upon the railway

### *Repeat chorus after each verse*

In eighteen hundred and forty-two  
I left the Old World for the new  
Bad cess to the luck that brought me through  
To work upon the railway

It's "Pat do this" and "Pat do that"  
Without a stocking or cravat  
And nothing but an old straw hat  
To work upon the railway

In eighteen hundred and forty-three  
'Twas then I met sweet Biddy MacGhee  
And an ellygant wife she's been to me  
While workin' on the railway

In eighteen hundred and forty-four  
I worked upon that Great Lake shore  
My back was bent, my hands were sore  
From working on the railway

In eighteen hundred and forty-five  
I found I was more dead than live  
I found I was more dead than live  
From working on the railway

In eighteen hundred and forty seven  
Sweet Biddy MacGhee, she went to heaven  
If she left one child, she left eleven  
To work upon the railway

In eighteen hundred and forty eight  
I learned to take my whiskey straight  
'Tis an ellygant drink and can't be bate  
For working on the railway