

## Tom Lehrer "The Irish Ballad"

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Now I'd like to turn to the folk song, which has become in recent years the particularly fashionable form of idiocy among the self-styled intellectual. We find that people who deplore the level of current popular songs -- although I admit they do seem to be recording almost anything these days. Have you heard Sesue Hayakawa's record of Remember Pearl Harbor? These same people who deplore the level of current popular songs and yet will sit around enthralled singing Jimmy Crack Corn and I Don't Care or Green Grow the Rushes, Oh! -- whatever that means. At any rate, for this elite I have an ancient Irish ballad, which was written a few years ago, and which is replete with all the accoutrements of this art form. In particular, it has a sort of idiotic refrain, in this case ricket kety-tin you'll notice cropping up from time to time, running through, I might add, interminable verses. The large number of verses being a feature expressly designed to please the true devotees. He folk song who seem to find singing fifty verses of On Top of Old Smokey is twice as enjoyable as singing twenty-five.

This type of song also has what is known technically in music as a modal tune, which means -- for the benefit of any layman who may have wandered in this evening -- that I play a wrong note ever

And then.

[piano]

This song though does differ strikingly from the genuine folk ballad in that in this song the words which are supposed to rhyme - actually do.

[piano]

I, ah, I really should say that - I do not direct these remarks against the vast army of folk song lovers, but merely against that peculiar hard core who seem to equate authenticity with artist

It and illiteracy with charm.

[piano]

Oh, one more thing. One of the more important aspects of public folk singing is audience participation, and this

happens to be a good song for group singing. so if any  
of you feel like joining i  
H me on this song, I'd appreciate it if you would leave --  
right now.

About a maid I'll sing a song,  
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,  
About a maid I'll sing a song  
Who didn't have her family long.  
Not only did she do them wrong,  
She did ev'ryone of them in, them in,  
She did ev'ryone of them in.

One morning in a fit of pique,  
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,  
One morning in a fit of pique,  
She drowned her father in the creek.  
The water tasted bad for a week,  
And we had to make do with gin, with gin,  
We had to make do with gin.

Her mother she could never stand,  
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,  
Her mother she cold never stand,  
And so a cyanide soup she planned.  
The mother died with a spoon in her hand,  
And her face in a hideous grin, a grin,  
Her face in a hideous grin.  
She set her sister's hair on fire,  
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,  
She set her sister's hair on fire,  
And as the smoke and flame rose high'r,  
Danced around the funeral pyre,  
Playin' a violin, -olin,  
Playin' a violin.

She weighted her brother down with stones,  
Rickety-tickety-tin,  
She weighted her brother down with stones,  
And sent him off to davy jones.  
All they ever found were some bones,  
And occasional pieces of skin, of skin,  
Occasional pieces of skin.

One day when she had nothing to do,  
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,  
One day when she had nothing to do,  
She cut her baby brother in two,  
And served him up as an irish stew,  
And invited the neighbors in, -bors in,  
Invited the neighbors in.

And when at last the police came by,  
Sing rickety-tickety-tin,  
And when at last the police came by,  
Her little pranks she did not deny,  
To do so she would have had to lie,  
And lying, she knew, was a sin, a sin,  
Lying, she knew, was a sin.

My tragic tale, I won't prolong,  
Rickety-tickety-tin,  
My tragic tale I won't prolong,  
And if you do not enjoy the song,  
You've yourselves to blame if it's too long,  
You should never have let me begin, begin,  
You should never have let me begin.

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