

Folk & Traditional Song Lyrics

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Shantyman (2)

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(Bob Watson)

Now modern ships carry mighty funny gear,
And away, get away, you shantyman.
Ain't seen a halyard in many's a year,
An' they got no use for a shantyman.
Slick new fittings are all your style,
And away, get away, you shantyman.
All very clever, but it just ain't right;

An' they got no use for a shantyman.
Shantyman, oh, shantyman,
Who's got a berth for a shantyman?
Sing you a song of a world gone wrong,
When they got no use for a shantyman.

Levers to jerk and buttons to press
And real live sailors they need them less;
Pushing on the buttons and hauling on the levers
And they got no use for horny-handed heavers.

The cargo is stored in a polythene pack,
Raised and lowered by a dry b*****ks jack;
Floating computer dressed like a ship,
Skippered and crewed by a micro chip.

Soon they'll be sailing by remote control,
An' that'll be pleasing to the owners' souls;
They'll send their ships from dock to dock,
All sat upon their arses in an office block.

New-fangled gear's no use to you
When you're off Cape Horn with your fuses blew;
Then's the time for to curse the day
You sent your shantyman away.

A sailor's life it once was hard,
Laid out aloft on a tops'l yard;
Now it don't matter if the winds blow high;
You can take force ten with your feet still dry.

Old-time ways are forgotten and gone,
For no-one listens to a shantyman's song.

Things no longer as they used to be;
It's the knacker's yard for the likes of me.

Listen at night and you might hear
A ghostly sound on the quiet air;
Is it a ghost from the distant past,
Or just a breeze in the radar mast?

Bob Watson has this to say about his song:

"Somewhere about 1983 I heard Jim Lloyd on the BBC (Folk on Two) interviewing The Spinners, one of whom remarked that there was a demand for new sea songs written in the style of the old. I remember thinking; "What on earth would one write new sea songs about?" It took a year before any constructive ideas were formed, then suddenly a load of songs came pouring out of me. Amongst them was The Shantyman, although I don't know exactly what was the inspiration behind it. Most of my songs take a long time from first draft to finished version, sometimes years, but this song progressed faster because of the interest shown by Tony O'Neil when he saw a rough draft. Tony liked the song, but not all the verses, so I went home and rewrote some of them. This led to the song making its debut at Bracknell Folk Festival in 1984, sung by Tony, and its live recording is a treasured possession. From that first performance other people heard it and have taken to singing it..."

Text and notes are quoted from The Shanty Crew's 1989 recording, Stand To Yer Ground (PROP 1885A)

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