



Introduction

It's a common scene the world over: a singer-songwriter with a guitar sitting on a stool in a café spinning musical tales of lost love or social commentary. Countless moments like this have been occurring daily since the 1960s in coffee shops and folk clubs in New York, Toronto, Sydney, Johannesburg and beyond.

This is by no means a new phenomenon. Indeed, the singer-songwriter tradition is practically as old as recorded human history. Perhaps you've heard of two little books called *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Thousands of years before they were required reading in high school literature classes, the wandering minstrel Homer was sitting around a campfire singing the legends of the siege of Troy and the trials of Odysseus. Centuries later, roving bards armed with lutes and dulcimers would draw crowds to hear bawdy drinking songs and musical folk tales.

Fast forward to Greenwich Village and Boston in the 1960s, when artists such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Phil Ochs drew on American folk music, blues and the work of Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and other popular balladeers to spark a mainstream singer-songwriter movement that is still going strong.

This collection features artists from the United States, Canada, South Africa and Australia who are united by their devotion to lovely melodies and poetic lyrics supported by unadorned acoustical instrumentation.

Harry Manx

Crazy Love

Born on the Isle of Man in the United Kingdom and raised in Toronto, Harry Manx is one of Canada's most respected singer-songwriters. He has been nominated for six Juno Awards, the Canadian equivalent of the GRAMMY. Manx spent many years studying Indian music and uses the 20-string Mohan veena in place of the more familiar slide guitar to create a unique fusion of blues, folk and Indian music.

Manx's rendition of the Van Morrison classic "Crazy Love" appeared on his 2002 album *Wise and Otherwise*, which, along with Manx originals, features covers of Jimi Hendrix's "Foxy Lady" and the B.B. King blues hit "The Thrill is Gone." Van Morrison first sang the iconic lyrics—"I can hear her heart beat for a thousand miles/And the heavens open every time she smiles"—on his 1970 album *Moondance*, and it has since been covered by everyone from Aaron Neville to Rod Stewart.

Brown Bird
Danger and Dread

Based in Providence, Rhode Island, Brown Bird is the duo of songwriter, guitarist, banjo player and percussionist David Lamb and violinist, cellist and upright bassist Morgan Eve Swain. As described by the *Idea of North* e-zine, "Brown Bird's sound ranges from simple sea-shanty-style folk to complex counterpoints with an eastern European flavor. Their influences of indie rock, classical music and old American hymns rise and fall within their songs like whitecaps on a dark and stormy sea." Lamb spent many years working in the shipyards of Warren, Rhode Island, and his songs often echo the dreamy, dark and lilting quality of classic American songs of the sea. Brown Bird was established in 2003 and has since toured extensively.

"Danger and Dread" is the opening track from Brown Bird's 2009 album *The Devil Dancing*, which was released by an independent record label, Peapod Recordings of Portland, Maine. "Come on baby let me take your troubles away/Some mean old mama's got your head all in a horrible way."

Trevor Hall
The World Keeps Turnin'

Singer-songwriter Trevor Hall is originally from South Carolina. He began writing and performing music at the age of 11, encouraged by his father, a drummer. Hall's 15th birthday present from his father was a recording session at a friend's studio, where he recorded his first album that he sold to family and friends. At 16, Hall moved to Southern California to study music at the Idyllwild Arts Academy; during his senior year, he signed a deal with Geffen Records. The company never released any of Hall's recordings. After he was dropped from the label, Hall and collaborator Chris Steele produced the album *This Is Blue* in 2008. Over the years, Hall has toured with Steel Pulse, Matisyahu, Stevie Nicks, Ben Harper and many others.

"The World Keeps Turnin'" appeared on *This Is Blue*. The lyrics reflect Hall's interest in Eastern philosophy, inspired by his frequent trips to India and devotion to the practice of meditation. "Seek and hide/Come along for the ride/There'll be many, many ups and downs/Like the waves of the ocean/But all things/They must pass."

Sarah Jarosz
Ring Them Bells

Few musicians have received a GRAMMY nomination in their teens, but such is the case with banjo and mandolin player/guitarist/singer/songwriter Sarah Jarosz, who is fast earning fame for musical accomplishments far beyond her years. Raised near Austin, Texas, Jarosz started playing mandolin at the age of 10, and just two years later she was jamming onstage with bluegrass icons David Grisman and Ricky Skaggs. She released her debut album, *Song Up in Her Head*, as a senior in high school, which resulted in a GRAMMY nomination. For her second album, the 2010 release *Follow Me Down*, Jarosz was joined by Shawn Colvin, Béla Fleck, Vince Gill and a host of other luminaries.

"Ring Them Bells" was written by Bob Dylan and first appeared on his 1989 album *Oh Mercy*. With its spiritual lyrics and haunting melody, the song sounds like an ancient folk classic, a feeling only enhanced in Jarosz's rendition. This version features Jarosz on octave mandolin, Jerry Douglas on slide guitar, Stuart Duncan on banjo, viola and violin, Mark Schatz on bass and Vince Gill singing harmony.

Justin Townes Earle
One More Night in Brooklyn

The son of renowned troubadour Steve Earle, Justin Townes Earle has music in his blood and in his name, as he was named after legendary singer-songwriter Townes Van Zandt. Earle grew up in Nashville and began playing in the rock band The Distributors and the bluegrass-influenced group The Swindlers in his teens. Earle has also worked with his father over the years, playing in his touring band The Dukes for a while and appearing alongside him in the HBO television series *Treme*, on which his father had a recurring role.

Earle released his first solo album, *Yuma*, in 2007 and has followed it with three more critically acclaimed releases, surpassing the high expectations he faces as the son of a famous musician. "One More Night in Brooklyn" appears on his 2010 album *Harlem River Blues*. "Tired of laying in bed/listening to the water run/Ceiling's falling in/Baby's dress is covered in dust/So I don't care what it costs/Baby dust that old thing off/It's one more night in Brooklyn, Baby we're getting lost."

The Sweet Remains
Dance With Me

Crosby, Stills & Nash comes to mind when listening to the vocal harmonies of The Sweet Remains, since group members count that band's music as a strong influence alongside other supergroups Simon & Garfunkel and the Eagles. Founded by Greg Naughton from New York City, Rich Price from Burlington, Vermont, Greg Naughton from New York City and Brian Chartrand of Phoenix, Arizona, The Sweet Remains formed after a magical jam session in a hotel room in Rhode Island in 2007. While all the members had successful solo careers that included writing songs for major motion pictures, touring, playing in bands and other side projects, they began writing and recording together in a small home studio in Los Angeles whenever their schedules allowed. Their debut CD, *Laurel & Sunset*, was released in 2008 and quickly earned praise from critics and fans alike.

"Dance With Me" features the classic singer-songwriter theme of love overcoming financial struggles. "This old house is cracked and worn/The walls are faded and the curtains torn/Sometimes it feels like we're runnin' just to keep from fallin' behind/Won't you come/Leave the dishes/Turn the TV off/Dance with me."

Lucy Kaplansky
Manhattan Moon

Some people might wonder if a successful clinical psychologist who quits her practice in her thirties to devote herself to a career in folk music might herself be in need of some psychiatric evaluation, but Lucy Kaplansky is far from crazy. Indeed, based on her critically acclaimed albums and her status as one of America's finest singer-songwriters, it may have been one of the sanest decisions Kaplansky has ever made. Originally from Chicago, Kaplansky moved to New York City in the late 1970s, performing alongside Shawn Colvin and Suzanne Vega while she received her psychology degree. Since the 1990s, Kaplansky has released six solo albums and recorded with Nanci Griffith and many other well-known singer-songwriters.

"Manhattan Moon" is the opening track of her 2007 album, *Over the Hills*. The recording was dedicated to the memory of her late father, mathematician Irving Kaplansky. "You say you wanna see the moon/Outside of our living room/Over the Manhattan sky/Like we saw last night/I used to travel in a straight line/Now I'm walking on a road that winds/You take my hand and we take our time."

Gregory Alan Isakov
The Stable Song

Now based in Boulder, Colorado, Gregory Alan Isakov was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, and raised in Philadelphia after his parents moved there when he was 7 because of their opposition to apartheid. His parents' music collection consisted of two records: *Simon & Garfunkel's Greatest Hits* and *We Are the World*, which he listened to endlessly as a child. As he matured, his influences broadened, and he now points to Leonard Cohen, Iron and Wine and Bruce Springsteen as inspirations. He has performed alongside Calexico, Fiona Apple, Mumford & Sons and others. He performs with his band The Freight and has released four albums since 2003.

"The Stable Song" is from Isakov's 2007 release *That Sea, the Gambler*. "Remember when our songs were just like prayers/Like gospel hymns that you called in the air/Come down, come down sweet reverence/Unto my simple house and ring/Ring like silver, ring like gold/Ring out those ghosts on the Ohio."

Fences
From Russia With ...

Fences is an indie band from Seattle, the brainchild of Seattle native and Berklee College of Music graduate Christopher Mansfield. While Mansfield was working as a breakfast cook in Seattle, Sara Quin of the popular Canadian band Tegan and Sara discovered his demos on MySpace. Quin went on to produce and collaborate on Fences' self-titled debut album, which was released in 2010 and ended up in *SPIN* magazine's annual roundup, "Albums You May Have Missed." Drawing on inspirations that range from the eighties alternative pop sound of The Cure, Kate Bush and Morrissey, Mansfield is also a fan of Johnny Cash and classic jazz.

Balancing between folkie Americana and hipster emo, "From Russia With..." is a simple acoustic song with introspective lyrics. "I was alone on the sidewalk when you came/And there wasn't anything that I wouldn't say/Somewhere there's an in-between place/A place where my face hasn't been erased."

Jon and Roy
Any Day Now

This four-member band from Vancouver Island, British Columbia, got its start in 2003 when singer-songwriter Jon Middleton and percussionist Roy Vizer met at the University of Victoria and began performing together. Eventually they added two more musicians and recorded the albums *Sittin' Back* (2005) and *Another Noon* (2007). The latter was a surprise success in the new folk scene, and when one of the songs from the album was licensed for a major Volkswagen commercial, Jon and Roy found their fan base growing beyond their wildest expectations. The group went on to tour alongside Xavier Rudd, The Cat Empire and Buck 65. It released a third album, *Homes*, in 2010.

To record *Homes*, Jon and Roy returned to Vancouver Island, which is close to the city but has a more rural landscape of old-growth forests, mountains and rugged coastline. A destination for travelers, surfers and artists, Vancouver Island served as an ideal setting for the recording sessions that led to "Any Day Now," and the laid-back vibe can be heard in the song's easygoing melody.

The Waifs
Love Serenade

Founded in 1992 in Western Australia, The Waifs has become one of Australia's most successful international bands. The group is based around the trio of Josh Cunningham on guitar and vocals and sisters Vikki Thorn on harmonica, guitar and vocals and Donna Simpson on guitar and vocals. The daughters of a salmon fisherman, Thorn and Simpson met Cunningham when they were performing in Broome, and their musical and personal connection was so strong they decided to join forces. They are accompanied on tour by bassist Ben Franz and drummer David Ross Macdonald. They opened for Bob Dylan on his Australian tour, and he was so impressed, he offered them an opening slot on his next U.S. tour. The Waifs released a sixth studio album, *Temptation*, in March of 2011.

The bouncy love song "Love Serenade" can be found on the 2000 release *Sink or Swim*. "When the nighttime comes, you can hear my heart calling/I'm calling out to you, my one true love/Thinking about you all of the while/Thinking about you, it's making me smile/Honey, I'm sitting on top of the world/Just thinking about you."