

DR SPOCK, or sons and daughters of the revolution 0'22
Sydney Carter

Paul Revere was quite ok;
things are different today.
Freedom grew from rebel power
but the root is not the flower.
Revolution was our glory
Dr Spock's another story.
Treason built the USA —
now it's better to obey.
Paul was patriotic but
Dr Spock is just a nut.

SOCIALISM IN OUR TIME (Sydney Carter) Bron 1'34
Sydney Carter

Socialism in our time was a thing to fight for.
Nationalisation I shout with all my might for.

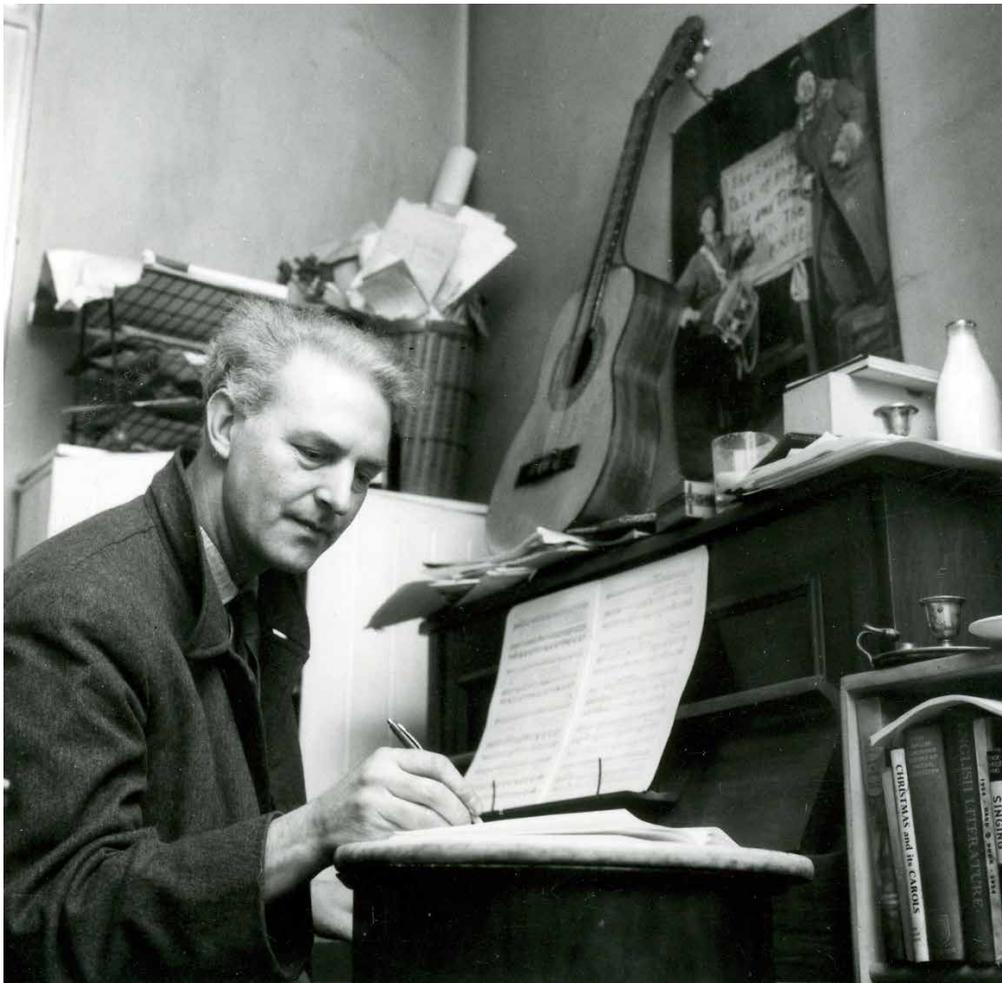
*You can have my hammer, Jack
you can keep that sickle.
Leave me lying on my back
with a girl to tickle.*

Round and round Trafalgar Square with that ruddy banner.
Up the proletariat, up the five-year planner.

I was keen on culture once, Bach and Botticelli.
Saw Potempkin forty times, now I've got the telly.

I was read when I was young, it's the same old story.
Now I never vote at all, no not even Tory.

“You write a song and you sing a song and people stick the labels on afterwards saying it’s ‘religious’ or it’s ‘anti-religious’ or it’s a ‘carol’ or it’s ‘folk’ or ‘pop’ or something. When you write a song and think a song and feel a song, you don’t care what it is.”



EROS (one leg up and one leg down) (Sydney Carter) Bron 2'01
Sydney Carter

My father was a cupid and my mother wheeled a barrow
I was born in Piccadilly with a bow and arrow.

*One leg up and one leg down
Like an old cock sparrow
Flying over Piccadilly
with a bow and arrow.*

Caesar came to London town, he saw the girls were pretty
Look at all the Roman noses walking round the city

Up the river came a load of whiskers long and flaxen
If your eyes are china blue, blame it on a Saxon

Up the river came a Viking breathing blood and thunder
found a lady to his liking and then began to plunder

William came to conquer us, now we've got the Yanks, sir
If you look like Davy Crockett, you know who to thank, sir

Where's your cockney pedigree? I'm surprised you asked it
Everybody's been and put a bun into the basket

I've got feathers on my back and I got a quiver
Just because my father came a flying up the river

The man upstairs is a neighbour. He walks around in hob-nailed boots. The woman downstairs is a neighbour. She cooks queer food, makes the whole place smell of garlic. Foreigners are neighbours; and most of the people in the world are foreigners. Even the English came from somewhere else.

THE WHITE BUCK OF EPPING (*Sydney Carter*) Chappell 2'53
Sydney Carter with Jeremy Taylor

In the forest of Epping the wild deer were black.
They'd all been that color for centuries back
till into the wood came a buck that was white
the keepers of Epping were shocked at the sight.

*Good luck to the buck, good luck to the doe
to the forest of Epping together they go.*

The does they all followed wherever he went
so up to headquarters this message was sent
"There's a white buck a-wandering where he should not".
Back came the answer: "the buck must be shot".

But a fair forest maiden with hair that was red
and a waist that was slim, to the keeper she said:
"Oh why should you shoot him? I don't think it fair
you can't kill a buck for the hue of his hair".

"Oh your heart may be tender, your hair may be red.
Your waist may be slender, me darling," he said
"but the black and white we must keep them apart
for they won't look the same as they did at the start".

"Please try to look at this matter more sanely.
I'll stalk him with care and I'll kill him humanely.
You think I'm hard-hearted, but really I'm not
I'm an animal lover — and a bloody good shot".

They've hunted him here and they've hunted him there.
They can't catch the buck with the wrong colored hair.
And if you go down to the forest today
they're black and they're white and they're silvery-grey.

Your hair may be black or your hair may be white
there'll always be somebody shocked at the sight.
But if I were the white buck and you were the doe
to the forest of Epping together we go.

A true parable: it happened about ten years ago. Society (or the keepers of society); the laws, the judges, the police, can be merciless to the man or the woman with the face that doesn't fit. In South Africa or in Mississippi it can be a dangerous disadvantage to be black.



THE HOLY MOUNTAIN 0'38
Sydney Carter

Excepting in
the Saturnalia
the slave is not the master.

There is no
equality between
the rich and poor, the

Ugly and beautiful,
the young and old,
the living and the dead.

The lion will not
lie down with the lamb
in Central Africa.

So each must learn
to keep his proper place.
What that may be

Is problematical,
for this does not
rule out a revolution.

Even so, you're
either up or down,
you cannot be

both male and female,
black and yellow or
stupid and brilliant

excepting in
that Holy Mountain which
is only found

Upon the map of love.

NEVER CAN TELL (Sydney Carter) Bron 2'06
Sheila Hancock

I went to work in a big hotel.
Whenever a traveller rang the bell
and wanted whisky and me as well
I said I wasn't that kind of a girl.
Watch it, Nell, you never can tell!

I remember my mother's advice.
"All of them like your sugar and spice
but none of them want to pay the price.
The trouble is, they're awfully nice."
So watch it, Nell, you never can tell!

In nineteen eleven the summer was hot.
One young traveller said he'd got
some lilac he wanted to put in a pot.
I fell for that, believe it or not.
Watch it, Nell, you never can tell!

So up I gathered the lilac Nell
For I was an unsuspecting girl
What happened next I never can tell
but sooner or later the lilac fell
Watch it, Nell, you never can tell!

Oh, what a nice young fellow was he!
Full of respectability.
He bought a ring and he married me,
and that's the way that it ought to be.
But watch it, Nell, you never can tell!

Fifty summers, and how they've flown!
Fifteen kids, and how they've grown.
Willie is under a marble stone,
and now the travellers leave me alone.
But watch it, Nell, you never can tell!

Lilac has a lovely smell.
Whenever I look at the lilac, Nell,
I think of the Marine Hotel.
I know you're not that kind of a girl.
But watch it, Nell, you never can tell!

The old were young once and some of them would like to tell
you what they would do if they were young again. Old women
are full of memories and good advice. Some tell you to be good,
and some say if you can't be good be careful. The trouble with
all this good advice is that it doesn't all point in the same
direction. Don't make the mistake I made, people will tell you.

BRITISH MUSEUM WALTZ (Sydney Carter) Essex 1'27
Sydney Carter

When I was a young man I used to read books
in a place called the British Museum.
There were plenty of women who gave me strange looks
but somehow I just didn't see 'em.

Now I am ninety and weary of books
of knowledge I think I have plenty.
Now I'm beginning to notice the girls
they are most of them round about twenty.

If I polish my glasses I see them quite well
and some are exceedingly pretty.
It occurs to me that I have wasted my life . . .
and there goes the bell (what a pity!)

This is a song of warning.

BETTER TAKE A BOOK TO BED (Sydney Carter)
Sydney Carter and Sheila Hancock

Love's a thing that's over-rated,
Study hard and get ahead!
Many is the man I've dated,
Better take a book to bed.

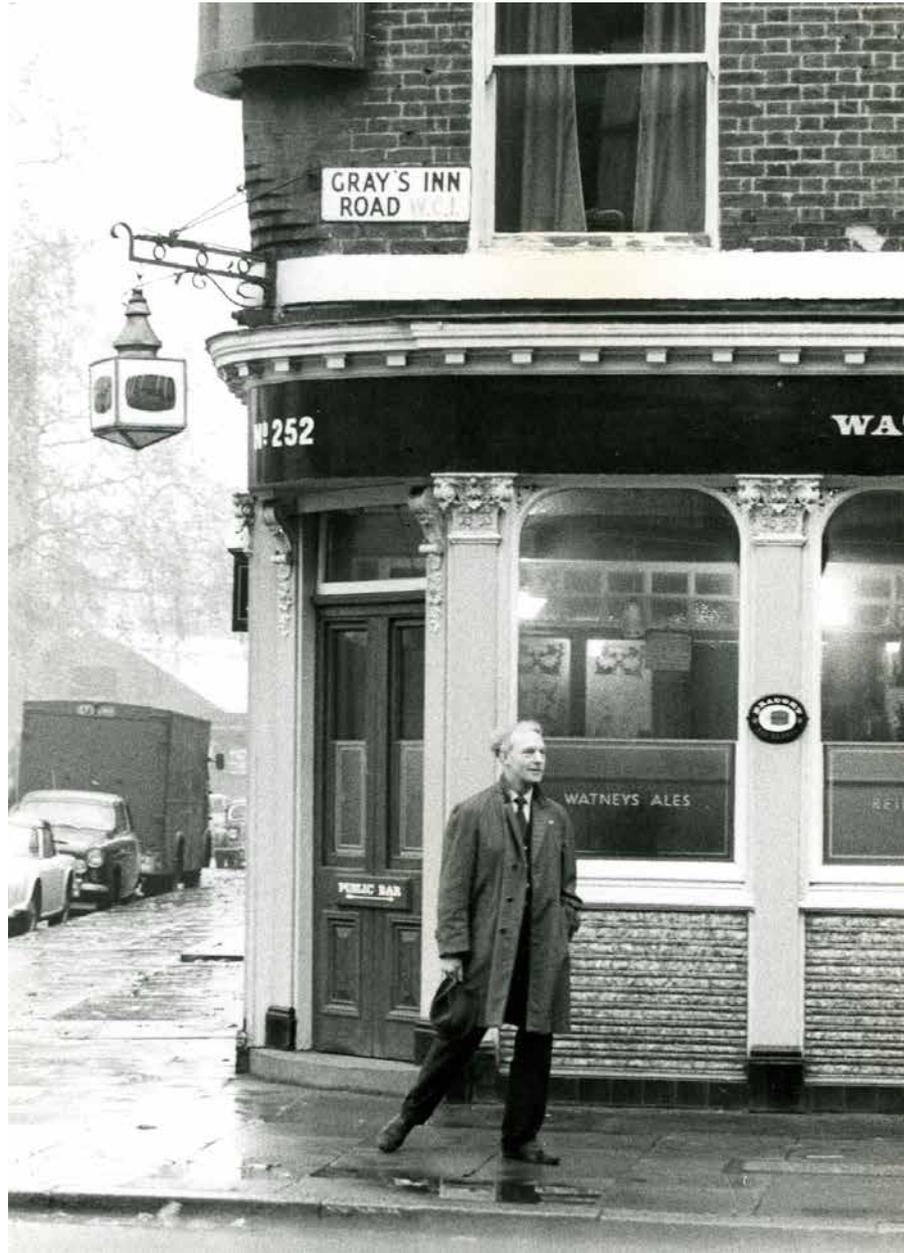
Loving when the dew was foggy—
Study hard and get ahead!
That's what made my back so groggy
Better take a book to bed.

Loving is a lot of trouble.
Study hard and get ahead!
Bed and board will cost you double,
Better take a book to bed.

Lads and lasses in the clover,
Study hard and get ahead!
Get up, or you'll ache all over.
Better take a book to bed.

Loving in a leaky attic—
Study hard and get ahead!
Get romantic, *get rheumatic,*
Better take a book to bed.

Kiss a man, you're sure to rue it.
Study hard and get ahead!
Can't think why the young girls do it,
Better take a book to bed.



LANDLORD AND TENANT (Sydney Carter) Bron 1'47
Sheila Hancock

I kept my money in a old tin chest
till I saw a poster and it said "Invest!
If you want a bank that'll never go bust
then put your money in the Blue Chip Trust.
We welcome the small investor."
Every man a capitalist.

So I wrote to the Blue Chip right away
and back came a letter the following day:
"Four per cent in every quid
if you invest it". So I did.
And I sat back waiting for the dividends.

They came all right, those chips were blue
but along came a letter from the landlord too:
"Your rent is going up" it said
"Two pounds a week". Well I saw red.
I wrote them a letter.

To Tentacle Limited (that was the name)
I wrote damn quick and said it was a shame.
But Tentacle said "well don't blame us
we only cat for the Blue Chip Trust.
They own the property.
We only collect the rent".

To Blue Chip, E.C.1 I went
to ask them why they were putting up the rent.
A young man said "well it distressed us
but we must think of our investors".
"I do" I said.

To pay myself my four percent
it seems I've got to raise my rent.
I can't afford the rent
and so I told myself I've got to go.
A small percentage of myself has never had it so good.

CAROLE 0'31
Sydney Carter

Lifting and loving you
that I am not
and yet your body is
my bone and blood
I wonder at the maker
who can be
before I was and yet
come out of me.

Round in the everlasting
carole go
my end and my beginning:
I can see
the circle I am part of.
Son and mother,
father or daughter follow
one another.

Now is the time and place
of Bethlehem:
wearing my body now
you caper high
for each and all of us.
I laugh to see
this dancer leaping in
and out of me.

COME, LOVE, CAROLLING (*Sydney Carter*
Galliard)

Come, love, carolling along in me!
Come, love, carolling along in me!
All the while, wherever I may be,
I carry the maker of the world in me.

Lifting and loving you that I am not,
thought your body is my bone and blood.
I wonder at the maker who can be
before I am and yet a child of me.

I lift and I carry you to Bethlehem,
I lift and I carry you to Galilee.
I'll carry you wherever I be,
I carry the maker of the world in me.

In the beginning you were there, I know,
and you will carry me wherever I go.
I'll carry you wherever I be,
I carry the maker of the world in me.

THE DANGER 0'39
Sydney Carter

I am the danger that you crucify.
Bury or burn me, but I will not die.

I am the danger you are sure to meet
When walking to Emmaeus; and though sweet

The name of Jesus Christ may be to you
I am both Jesus and not Jesus, too.

I am the danger coming from the East
Now tame and welcome at your Christian feast:

I am the danger coming from the West,
I am the wild and unexpected guest.

I am the life inside you: lean on me
and say goodbye to your security

And do not look for safety in the sky.
Can you be braver (do you think) than I?

BITTER WAS THE NIGHT (*Sydney Carter*) *Galliard 1'41*
Sydney Carter

Bitter was the night,
thought the cock would crow for ever.
Bitter was the night
before the break of day.

Saw you passing by,
told them all I didn't know you.
Bitter was the night
before the break of day.

Told them all a lie,
yes I told it three times over.
Bitter was the night
before the break of day.

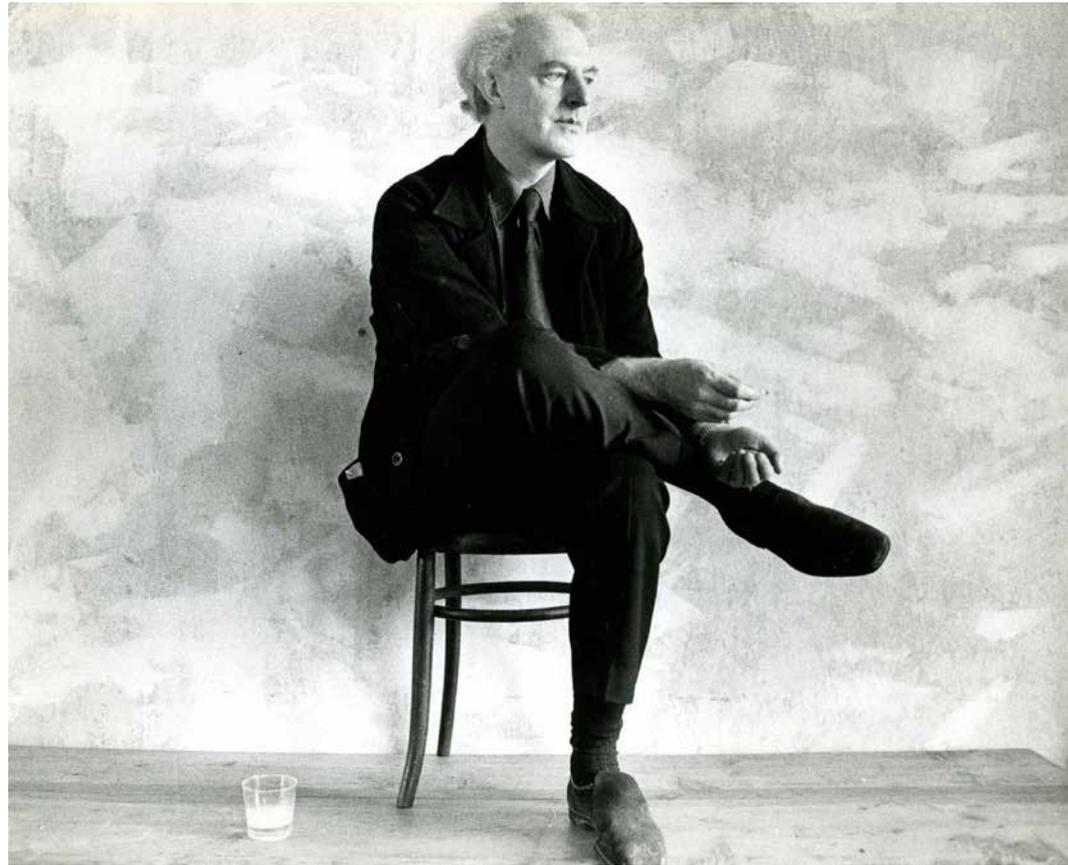
What did Judas do?
Sold him for a bag of silver.
Bitter was the night
before the break of day.

What did Judas do?
Hanged himself upon an alder.
Bitter was the night
before the break of day.

Bitter was the night,
thought there'd never be a morning.
Bitter was the night
before the break of day.

Bitter was the night,
thought the cock would crow for ever.
Bitter was the night
before the break of day.

"A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, leaving him for dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side." Would you? Do you want to get involved with the police? What if the thugs who beat him up are still about. "A youth aged 18, was charged in London last night with murdering Mr Michael Munnelly on Christmas day. Mr Munnelly, who was aged 23, died after going to help a milkman who had been attacked in the street." Would you pass on the other side? St. Peter did on one occasion, and Peter was a saint. Jesus was in trouble. Peter said he didn't want to know about him. Jesus put Peter in a difficult position. Neighbours often do. You think you're kind or brave, or unprejudiced. Along comes a neighbour, and you'll find you're not. "Hell is other people."



SON OF MAN (*Sydney Carter*) *Galliard 1'25*
Sydney Carter

If you are a son of man
you wonder where you're going,
and what will happen when you die—
you have no way of knowing.
They talk about a heaven
and they talk about a hell,
But whether they are right or not
there is no way to tell.

But if I were the Son of God,
and if they crucified me,
I'd think I was luckier
than those who hung beside me.

I'd know that I would rise again,
And all things would be well,
but when you are a son of man
however can you tell?

If you are a son of man
then you can be mistaken;
you hang upon the cross of doubt,
and feel you are forsaken,
and whether you will rise again
is more than you can tell—
if you were the son of man
you've tasted this as well.

TO MY HEART 1'00
Sydney Carter

I will address a poem to my heart;
not the poetic heart:
the real red pump that dances in the dark
and will not stop until the day I die.

The thing that I like most about my heart
is that it goes on beating, day and night,
without my winding it,
unlike that clock I see upon the wall.

The same goes for my toenails and my hair:
they grow although I never plant a seed.
From time to time I cut them
I can stop, but I can never start them.

Green grow the lilac and the gorgonzola;
the great big world keeps turning
blind and deaf with me on top of it.
But why should this be happening to me?

And how will the whole thing finish?
Come to that, how did it all begin?
That anything should ever be at all
it seems to me, is quite incredible.

For either there is nothing all the time
or all things are forever.
Nothingness alone is illogical,
but here I am: a bloody miracle.

Life is a journey, and a lonely journey in a way. However many
friends you have, you must live your own life and die your own
death. Yet this very loneliness is something which we share with
every human being who has ever lived. We're all in the same boat
— all alone, and all together.

I don't know where I'm going when I'm dead, but one thing is
sure — I'm not that dead body in the ground, for I am something
that's alive — and whatever gave me life and being in the first
place will go on. My life, my self, whatever you call it, is rooted
in the source of all reality which christians call God. But Jesus
didn't encourage his followers to think of heaven as something
that only happened after death. Heaven happens all the while,
and here and now is where we must begin to find it. We live in
two worlds — one in space and time, which we call the Earth, one
beyond space and time, which you can call if you like, the
kingdom of heaven. And we travel from the one towards the
other.

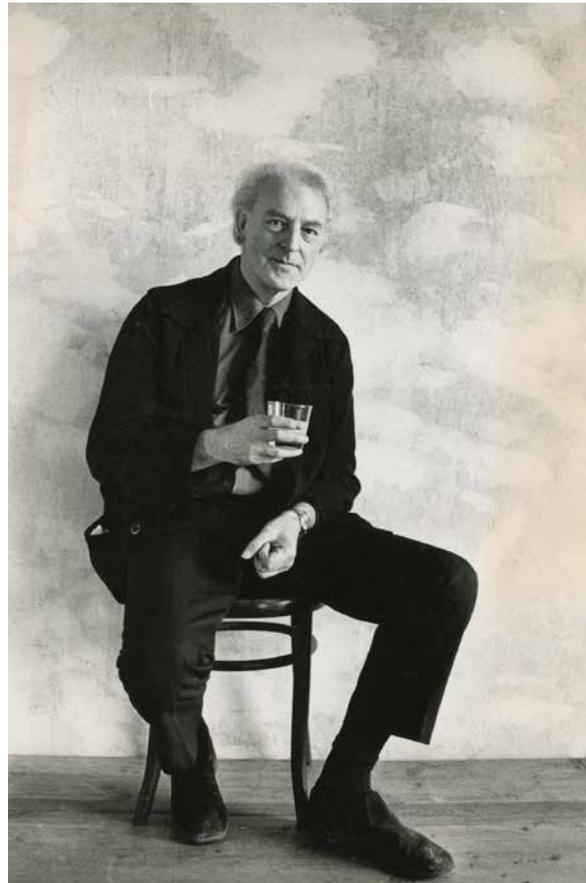
LOOK NO HANDS! 0'34
Sydney Carter

The faith is founded on the rock of doubt,
it's wonderful what you can do without.
"You don't have to believe" the parson said
"that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

You don't have to believe he was born on christmas day
sometime before the dawn;
it could have been the springtime or the fall.
Maybe he wasn't even born at all.

But you can be a christian all the same
(although I don't know why we keep the name).
If God is dead the christian doesn't care
for he can lean upon what isn't there.

"Don't ask me how," the parson gave a sob
"I think I'll go and get another job"



BEFORE WE DRIVE AWAY (Sydney Carter/Jim Minchin)
Galliard 2'00
Jim Minchin

Jolly is to holly
And the mistletoe!
Time to have another drink
before we have to go!

Time to have another drink
for Christ is born today!
And there's time to have another drink
before we drive away.

Whisky in my belly
A carol in my head
I drive across the traffic light
I hope it isn't red.

Drive across the traffic light
for Christ is born today!
And there's time to have another drink
before we drive away.

Thought I saw the parson
coming out of church.
I hit him with the bumper
And I left him in the lurch.

Hit him with the bumper
For Christ is born today
And there's time to have another drink
before we drive away.

All the bells are ringing
for the mighty Prince of Peace.
And they're ringing for the ambulance
And ringing the police.

Ring for the ambulance
for Christ is born today!
And there's time to have another drink
before we drive away.

The holly has a berry
as red as any blood
And we'll see a lot of that about
Tomorrow in the mud.

See a lot of that about
for Christ is born today.
And there's time to have another drink
before we drive away.

MY LAST CIGARETTE (Sydney Carter) Bron 1'56
Sheila Hancock

Tobacco, tobacco, I hate you I do
Like Venus I'd look if it wasn't for you
But I'll give up the habit
I will even yet
when I've had just one more cigarette.

It wasn't the whisky
It wasn't the wine
that made such a wreck of this body of mine
But I'll give up the habit
I will even yet
when I've had just one more cigarette

Under my eyes are a couple of bags
I blame it all onto a packet of fags
But I'll give up the habit
I will even yet
when I've had just one more cigarette.

My teeth are all yellow
and so is my tongue
I breathe through a kipper (I call it a lung!)
But I'll give up the habit
I will even yet
when I've had just one more cigarette.

Nail in my coffin so pale and so thin
I am a fool to keep knocking you in.
You think you can kill me
How much do you bet?
When I've had just one more cigarette.

I'll fling the packet away, away
Fifty times in a week I say
fling the packet away, away
when I've had just one more cigarette.

Cigarettes, they tell us now, can lead to cancer or bronchitis. If I smoke them, who's to blame? The manufacturer, or me? Some Someone told me: 'Eat an apple every time you feel like a cigarette'. I tried it. You try eating 40 apples a day.



MAN WITH THE MICROPHONE (Sydney Carter) Essex 1'40
Sydney Carter

As I went out one morning I was singing a country song.
I met a man with a microphone and oh he did me wrong.
He led me up a leafy lane and whipping out a tape
He had my country ditty down before I could escape.

*Whack fol Peter, a Paul, a Mary
a burly old Ivy and all.*

To Tin Pan Alley he took my song and there he happened to meet
a publisher who cleaned it up and gave the tune a beat
Now it's on the hit parade, now they pay a fee
to the false young man with a microphone and none of it
comes to me.

I'll sell my rock, I'll sell my reel, I'll buy a steel guitar
I'll take a ticket to London town, and in the coffee bar
I'll sing until my name is known, and when I'm on tv
I'll tell the world of that false young man and what he did to me.

So all you pretty country girls that like to sport and play
Be careful of your copyright — that's all they want today
Never trust a roving man whoever he may be
if his hand is on the microphone and not above your knee!

It's very hard for an old Etonian to become a folk singer. You can become a prime minister in one generation (and many do) but it takes three generations working your way down the social scale to get in the right frame of mind for singing folk songs. And your daughter might become a folk-singer, and if she does, here's some advice for her. The real danger in the world of folk song is not the sort you might expect — from men — but from folk song collectors who have their mind on one thing: how to get the copyright. So she's defending one front and they're attacking on another. You must use your imagination — imagine that I'm an innocent girl singing this song.

WORDS, LOVE, MUSIC 0'33

Sydney Carter

Words, love, music;
but that doesn't mean that there will be a wedding.
Love and marriage don't go together like a horse and carriage.

Words, love, music;
but can get along without the matrimony of a song.
Words can be said or chanted
and not bound to any note of music
and guitars can wander off alone for bars and bars.

Though tune and poem travel with each other,
each one may end up married to another.
The altar's not where all true loving ends:
words and music can be just good friends.

RUN THE FILM BACKWARDS 1'27

Sydney Carter

When I was eighty-seven
they took me from my coffin:
they found a flannel nightshirt
for me to travel off in.

All innocent and toothless
I used to lie in bed,
still trailing clouds of glory
from the time when I was dead.

The cruel age of sixty-five
put paid to my enjoyment:
I had to wear a bowler hat
and go to my employment.

But at the age of sixty
I found I had a wife,
And that explains the children.
(I'd wondered all my life).

I kept on growing younger
and randier and stronger
till at the age of twenty-one
I had a wife no longer.

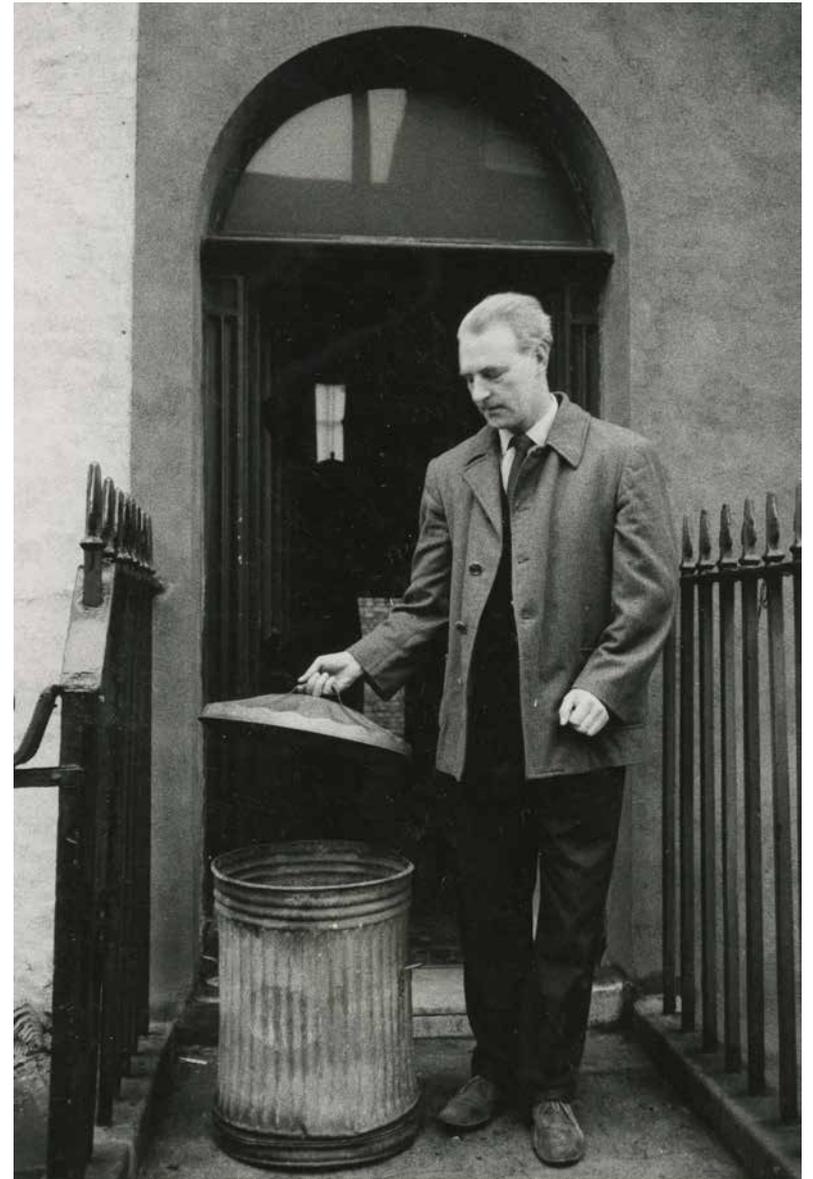
With mini-skirted milkmaids
I frolicked in the clover:
the cuckoo kept on calling me
until my teens were over.

Then algebra and cricket
and sausages a-cooking,
and puffing at a cigarette
when teacher wasn't looking.

The trees are getting taller,
the streets are getting wider.
My mother is the world to me:
and soon I'll be inside her.

And now, it is so early,
There's nothing I can see.
Before the world, or after?
Wherever can I

be?





waiting

Most of your life you spend waiting for one thing or another. What are we waiting for? A lot of girls (not so many boys perhaps) are waiting for the day when they'll be married. Some people are waiting for a house or even a room to live in. Some are waiting for the day when they'll be allowed to vote. When you can work for the thing you're waiting for . . . whether it's freedom or money . . . you can wait in hope and sing about it. But there are times when there is nothing you can do except sit and wait and see your life go slipping through your fingers. In prison it can be like that, or even in the army. What can you do with all the years you spend waiting in a queue or washing dishes? Most of your life you spend waiting. What you do when you are waiting is what you do with your life, or most of it. Waiting is a part of life.

satire

There is plenty to fight against and protest about. One thing is war. Some people don't like songs of protest. They say they're depressing. Songs, they feel, are meant to cheer us up . . . singers ought to keep out of politics. Satire is one form of protest . . . it attacks evil by making it look ridiculous. But it's a two-edged weapon: you can attack good too, and make it look ridiculous. Not all protest is progressive. Hitler protested . . . so did the Ku Klux Klan. Jesus protested about scribes and pharisees and moneychangers in the temple. Song and protest go together in the life and words of Jesus: but the joy is uppermost. A joyless protester is a sinister object. Anyone who dares to laugh and sing and praise life in the face of bullying, or scorn, or pity, helps to liberate us all.

CHILD

I am your laughing, crying
possibility.

I keep on coming
as I did before,

Hoping and hungering
and with no visible
means of support
whatever

Naked need
is all I offer.
My extremity is
your opportunity,

My Bethlehem
is where you can be born.
And will you play
King Herod to your self?

Look in the mirror
of my cradle, see
your laughing, crying
possibility

hoping + hungering
and with no visible
means of support
whatever.



Simeon's Song - from a drawing by Rembrandt

bookshops
Theatres
&
churches
are
in
trouble!

They try to justify the fact that they exist. They are worried by the fact that most people do not seem to care if they exist or not. Most people seem to get along without.

How can people bear to live without a book? Most people can endure it if they have radio and television. Newspapers and magazines give more than they have time for reading anyway. Serious expensive books can easily be borrowed from a library. Paperbacks can be bought at a station bookstall, a supermarket; even from a slot machine. What is so indispensable about a book? Poetry, history and story telling are much older than the book. Books are really only a substitute for voices. Now we have the voices back: on radio, on record, on tv. A book is useful still for reference: but computers may take over that function too, in the end. The printed and the written word will always serve a purpose: they have young and energetic rivals. It is cheaper and easier to telephone your London friends than write a letter. It is also quicker.

How can people live without a theatre? Very easily. Drama is indispensable: but you can get that, not only at the cinema, but on tv or the radio. You can get it in the streets. Going to the theatre has never been a habit of the great majority. It is (in Britain anyway) a habit of the upper classes or educated: except, perhaps, for music hall and pantomime. There was drama, too: church, weddings, funerals and hell-fire sermons. Once there were public executions. Now there are pickets, processions, demonstrations. You can get them all on television.

How can people live without a theatre? Very easily. Drama is indispensable: but you can get that, not only at the cinema, but on tv or the radio. You can get it in the streets. Going to the theatre has never been a habit of the great majority. It is (in Britain anyway) a habit of the upper classes or educated: except, perhaps, for music hall and pantomime. There was drama, too: church, weddings, funerals and hell-fire sermons. Once there were public executions. Now there are pickets, processions, demonstrations. You can get them all on television.

How can people live without a place to worship: how can they do without a church? Only too easily. A church, essentially, is not a building, but a group of people, a community. They have to have a place to meet: hence the building with a steeple. But they can meet in a pub, the open air, or in a private room. And that, today, is where most real community is to be found; and there, no doubt, they worship. They worship what they would not call a god. They see no need to go to church, where they do not meet their kind of people. Their own worship rises from their private or communal activity — sport, music, politics, sailing boats or making love. You cannot do these things in church.

The bookshops, the theatres, the churches were built to serve a real purpose: but the scene has changed. They are like abandoned harbours, from which the sea has long receded or where the river has silted up, or is too narrow or too shallow for the shipping of today. The ships keep sailing but they now go somewhere else. Bookshops, theatres and churches fail to serve the need that brought them into being. The chief purpose they now serve is the perpetuation of their own existence: the upkeep of their buildings and the livelihood of those who work there for a public which is rapidly diminishing. The public can now get the same thing, or something similar, more cheaply, more easily and better somewhere else. And quicker.

SONGSMITH TO THE REVOLUTION

BY PETER FLEMINGTON

Sydney Carter defies labels. He writes songs, yes — and sings them, too. But he's neither a song-writer nor a performer. Both terms are inadequate. You might call him a balladeer, but that term tends too strongly towards the romantic, the sentimental. Poetic he certainly is, but the poetry is laced with slings and arrows, clouds and thunder and lightning. The touch is sardonic, the humour ranges from purse-lipped grin to outright guffaw.

In spite of his influence, I would guess that Sydney Carter's name is not widely known in Australia outside the rarefied ranks of avant-garde Christian educators, "new hymn" buffs, and those who have been introduced to some of his work through Donald Swann's record, 'Sing Round The Year.' He's well known, of course, in his native Britain from frequent appearances on radio and television, in folk-song clubs, concert halls, church crypts, and even, on occasion from the middle of an Ice Rink.

"I was in a pulpit, lit by ghastly lighting, looking rather stark and grizzly . . . I just stood up there and started away, and people applauded if they felt like it and we invited them to boo if they felt like it. We said, 'Try and forget you're in church', whereupon a man neatly lit a large pipe in the back row."

The anecdote, and the relish with which it was told to me, communicates something essential about

Sydney Carter: the total lack of pretension, the slight note of self-deprecation, the hint of warm malevolence, the indication that, for him, anything goes.

One of my first encounters with him took place in a large room over a pub called "The Fox" in the Islington area of London. It was a Sunday morning and he was being filmed for Canadian television. The room we were in served as a folk-song club much of the time. On this particular Sunday it was our church. Carter sees little difference between them. They're the two places, he feels, where almost anything goes in music:

"Elsewhere people are liable to say 'oh, that's religious' or 'oh, that's filthy' or 'that's political' or something." Sydney Carter, was born in London. He read Modern History at Balliol College, Oxford, and taught for a brief period before the outbreak of war. He joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit in 1940 and served in London, Newcastle, Egypt, Palestine and Greece. (This latter experience, paralleling that of his long-time friend and collaborator, Donald Swann, has been a lasting influence on his work.) After the war he served a three-year stint with the Education Department of the British Council, and for the past two decades has free-lanced his way through radio and television scripts, revue material, criticism and

what we'll call (avoiding labels) writing and performing songs of social significance.

The present commentary will, of necessity, be limited to these songs which could be classified as "roughly religious". But I hope that this won't deter anyone from examining Carter's "secular" side — the revue songs, the bits of fluff, the ballads. Fortunately this mission has been rendered painless by the recent publication of the 'Songs of Sydney Carter in the Present Tense', a comprehensive collection in three slim volumes (with music). The chaff is proffered right along with the wheat.

In discussing Carter, it's difficult to separate his songs from the changing worship patterns he has helped to pioneer. Surely there are few churches in our land that have yet to echo to the strumming, or driving chords, of a guitar. Some critics of this phenomenon feel it's a gimmick. The pews may be packed with youngsters for a jazz mass or a folk concert, but what happens to them when the real stuff comes along — the half-hour sermonic monologue, the 19th-century hymns? Real to the critics, perhaps, but to the kids?

Carter and his like certainly are. He sees the sanctuary as an auditorium through which the church can serve the people, even when the people will not serve the church. Perhaps this demands a wider view of what is Christian, or even religious, than some church-goers are prepared to take. But if one starts from the premise that there is more than one way of looking at Jesus; if one agrees that, to some extent, each person is the vessel of a revelation; if one believes that God has a special relationship to each and every creature in the universe; if all these "ifs" are satisfied — then, surely, our concept of worship will include poets, playwrights, composers, and performers of every variety. Perhaps, in the end, every knee will bow to the fact of Jesus — to the essential truth that he proclaimed — but those who bow may know it by another name, and they may come to it by other means than baptism in a Christian church. By the mere fact of having so many buildings, so many concert halls, the churches are in a good position to advance this dialogue.

These new songs, though, these new hymns. How do we know there's truth in them if they haven't withstood the onslaught of the years? Most of them, after all, are being written by the un-ordained — even (ssshhh) the un-baptized. Well, let's not be too alarmed. At the heart of it all is a revolt against the outworn, the phoney and the second-rate. There's an obvious thirst for truth, life and sincerity in this music that can only come from God and which, conversely, can only lead to God. Carter admits, however, that it may not lead there so quickly, so accurately, or, at any rate, so recognizably as some Christians would like. This new music doesn't demand an "Amen" at the end, it doesn't tell you what you ought to feel. It serves the truth more indirectly: raising questions that demand answers, making statements that demand contradiction.

Let's relate this concept, briefly, to 'Friday Morning' — a song of Carter's that has become something of a "cause célèbre". It first became available in Australia through publication in '9 Carols or Ballads'. The words nominally convey an accusation that God was responsible for Christ's death. They're delivered by a thief on an adjacent cross:

"It's God they ought to crucify, instead of you and me,"
I said to the carpenter, a-hanging on the tree.

The song raises a question which demands an answer. It's designed to provoke discussion. Its function is dramatic. If, as Christians believe, the God embodied in Jesus is the real God, then God, in a sense, was being crucified (and also, in a sense, the world was made by a carpenter). In which case he wasn't the kind of God the thief imagined. The "God" he consigned to hell ("To hell with Jehovah!" to the carpenter I said) simply didn't exist.

This could have been said in the song, but wasn't. It was left deliberately incomplete — a one-sided dialogue which forces the listener to complete it himself. It poses the question, "Why does God allow the innocent to suffer?" Surely the device is justified. Yet an unholy campaign of vilification against the song, and particularly against the World Council of Churches, has been waged through segments of the American press. One release distributed by the vilifiers wound up verbatim on a surprising number of editorial pages. The words of the song (4 stanzas plus chorus) were printed along with the following comments:

"We print it not to offend anyone, but rather because we believe our readers will want to know about it, and whether any monies collected at their church are going to the World Council of Churches . . . Would you look forward to having your children or grandchildren sing this blasphemy at a church camp or conference?"

Suitably outraged readers were then directed to write to the World Council and set it back on the "right" path. I find it fascinating that these readers were allowed to escape a personal decision. The question is not "Would you look forward to singing it?" but, rather, "your children or grandchildren aren't intelligent enough to think through and discuss what they're singing. And I have a feeling that if these critics would examine their own hymn books (and that includes ours) they'd find great dollops of blasphemy that they sing, unthinking, each Sunday.

No illustration is completely useless; it can always serve as a horrible example. So be it with the above. It does, however inadvertently, point out a couple of things about the songs of Sydney Carter and his confreres. The first is that a song isn't a song until it's sung. A good performance lifts a song from the page and gives it a life that transcends the literal print. The second has to do with the intent of the song and the context in which it's performed. Yeast — the yellowish, frothy, viscous substance — is pretty dreadful stuff when consumed by itself; it's an essential ingredient, however, in the making of both bread and wine.

Another Carter song 'Every Star Shall Sing A Carol',

has a melody so beautiful that we might ignore the words; and that would be a most unfortunate loss. 'The Devil Wore A Crucifix' and 'Standing In The Rain', two of the more overt "message" songs in this collection, force us (most uncomfortably) to face the gap between our Christian profession and practice.

The 'Songs Of Sydney Carter In The Present Tense' includes these and makes others available for the first time. In one of them, Carter gently scoffs at the phenomenon he has done much to bring about:

"God morning," said the Vicar,
with banjo round his neck.
"We're digging up the crypt," he said,
"To make a discotheque."

So we're writing to the bishop
To say that we are shocked.
The Vicar is a beatnik
And he ought to be defrocked.

Another sets up a dialogue between the minister (pre-New Curriculum style) and his questing flock:

They won't believe in the Bible now,
They want to touch and to see;
But Matthew, Mark and Luke and John
Were good enough for me.

They're good enough for the Pope of Rome
And Billy Graham and you.
But you can't believe what you can't believe,
So what are we to do?

This song is somewhat the reverse of a much broader treatment Carter gave to the "Honest to God" debate. As performed on the late, lamented BBC—version of "That Was The Week That Was," the

dialogue went this way:

Half the things the Bible says
I don't believe are true,
And maybe I'm a bishop but
I think the same as you.

Glory Laud and Honour to
I really don't know who,
But keep on swinging the censer round
The way you used to do.

Say what you like about Carter, you can't deny his provocative nature. And the effects are still largely to be felt on this continent. He forces us to face the sham and the pretence and to ask the right questions.

In a short poem he pleads:

So shut the Bible up
and show me how
the Christ you talk about
is living now.

It's irrelevant, I think, to debate the status of Carter's music in a church context — or to label his songs as hymns, or whatever. The important consideration is that there's a time and place (and it may be in a church) for self-examination, for dialogue; even, it may be, for doubt. Carter, himself, says:

"One role I see is that of Devil's Advocate or God's Loyal Opposition. Against this demon bowler the parson must defend the Christian wicket. If he doubts his batsmanship, he can settle for a boy or girl with a guitar singing something securely Christian to a folksey melody. Even this may do some good, but he may have missed the greater opportunity."

Sydney Carter, demon bowler. There's his label.

SYDNEY CARTER WRITES ABOUT THE RECORD "THE PRESENT TENSE"

There are two kinds of song: those after which you say 'Amen' and those after which you don't. The 'Amen' kind of song, whether it is a hymn, a national anthem or whatever, has to unite people who are singing it. Any song in dialogue which presents two or more points of view without indicating clearly which is 'right' has to be disqualified. Any irony, any ambiguity, is dangerous. There must be no doubt about what you have said 'Amen' to.

This rules out nearly all the songs I write, including those upon this record. But that does not mean that they are not religious.

Most religious songs are hymns — even though you call them psalms or anthems — and therefore they are Amen songs. That does not make them worse or better than any other kind of song. It merely means that they have a special function, like a work-song or a lullaby. The function of a hymn is to unite the singers in an act of worship.

What kind of song (it may be asked) can be religious, which does not do this? The kind of song which I would call 'dramatic'. And drama is essentially ambiguous in that it presents more than a single point

of view. The audience can take sides and identify with one view-point or another. But the drama — as drama — cannot say 'this is right, and that is wrong'. That must be left to the audience. It is possible to make one character so attractive that the audience is pretty sure to back him up and agree that what he says or does is right.

When songs by people like myself are sung in church some ministers have taken the precaution to provide a prologue or an epilogue. **Friday Morning** is an extreme example of what I call 'dramatic'. It is really a dialogue, a one-sided dialogue, for Jesus does not answer. The listener must provide the other half — in silence while the song is sung, or vocally when it is over. As it stands, you could never say 'Amen' to this: not in church, at any rate. Yet it has been used in a religious service, to pose a question. The context has provided the reply.

Another song which could never be used as a hymn is **The Vicar is a Beatnik**. In fact, I wonder if any song on this record could command a safe 'Amen'. They need a context — and this, perhaps, is true of hymns as well — for it is the time and place, the tone of voice, the singer, the listener — the total context — which can make a performance religious or otherwise: not what is printed on a piece of paper.

WORDS
LOVE
MUSIC

originally
released in
1972 by
Move Records

move.com.au

