

WATKINS, David. *Folk Songs for Voice(s) and Harp (or Piano)*. Stainer and Bell, Ltd. (Galaxy Music Corporation), 1984. Score, 25 p.

“Scarborough Fair”

“Barbara Allen”

“Now is the Month of Maying”

“Summer Is A-Coming In” (Sumer is icumen in)

People love to hear them, people love to play them, and people love to sing them. Through years of concertizing with singers, I have found that even the most sophisticated of audiences are consistently receptive to folk songs. British harpist and composer David Watkins offers a lovely song collection, which is sure to be universally appealing.

The inherent challenge in setting folk music is to create enough musical interest to captivate an audience (and the performers!) through several strophes of poetry, while remaining faithful to the simple beauty of the original. Mr. Watkins meets this challenge by developing a three-note motif throughout four stanzas of the ever-popular “Scarborough Fair.” Because of the irregular phrasing in both parts, it is simple, repetitive, and familiar in an unpredictable way.

Through the subtle use of word painting, Mr. Watkins has expertly arranged the bittersweet ballad “Barbara Allen.” One hears in the instrumental part the “death bells knelling,” as well as drum rolls from the funeral procession (albeit infinitely more effective on the harp than on the piano). The final stanza evokes the entwining lovers’ knot of the rose and briar, which grows from the graves of William and his hard-hearted lover, Barbara Allen. Good vocal music serves the poetry, and this incredibly beautiful setting ranks with the very best.

## Summer 1988 American Harp Journal

Welcome springtime with the playful and dance-like arrangement of “Now Is the Month of Maying.” This arrangement of the 16th century part-song by Thomas Morley is crisp and lively and sparkles from beginning to end.

The late Medieval piece “Summer Is A-Coming In” was originally a four-part canon over a two-part ostinato. Mr. Watkins uses the folk-like tune over his own ostinato bass in the first stanza, and sets the tune over dissonant harmonies and quartal chords in the second. The closing glissando is far too ordinary for this unusual arrangement. With all the glissandi to choose from, creative David Watkins could have found a more interesting one with which to end this joyous and invigorating arrangement.

Vocally, the songs are quite simple; phrases are short and the range is narrow. Because these works are strophic, the singer needs more depth and interpretive skill than virtuosity. The technical level of the instrumental part is variable. “Scarborough Fair” is easy, but even with the *assist*, I found “Summer Is A-Coming In” to be quite tricky.

There is something for everyone in this collection. For singer, harpist, or pianist, amateur or professional, these arrangements are accessible, usable, and most of all, enjoyable.

Barbara Chapman